

**MEMOIR OF  
CHARLES H.  
RUSSELL, 1796-1884**

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Memoir of Charles H. Russell, 1796-1884 by Charles Howland Russell

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BY HIS SON  
CHARLES HOWLAND RUSSELL

NEW YORK  
1903

## I

**C**HARLES HANDY RUSSELL was a son of Thomas Russell, who was an officer of the Continental army in the Revolutionary War and a descendant of John Russell, of Woburn, Massachusetts.

John Russell emigrated from England in the early part of the seventeenth century. He lived at first at Charlestown and subsequently at Woburn, of which town he was one of the founders and earliest inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Woburn was originally a grant of land made, 1640, by the General Court of Massachusetts to Charlestown, and for about two years afterwards was called 'Charlestown Village.' The settlement of Charlestown, which is the most ancient town not only in the county of Middlesex, but likewise (Salem and Dorchester excepted) in the Colony of Massachusetts, as distinct from that of Plymouth, had commenced in 1629. In June of that year, Mr. Thomas Graves, a gentleman from Gravesend in Kent, eminent for his skill in surveying and engineering, and in the employ of the Massachusetts Company in London, came there from Salem, with several servants of the company under his care; laid out the town in two-acre lots; erected a large building for public purposes, called the 'Great House'; and with the consent of Gov. Endicott exchanged the Indian name of the place, Mishawum, for Charlestown, in honor of King Charles I, the then reigning monarch of Great Britain. In the year following, July, 1630, a large and select company of Puritans, who had arrived the month preceding at Salem from England, came to Charlestown, with a view to build and establish themselves there." (Sewall's "History of Woburn," pp. 7, 8.) "In the interval between the gathering of the church and the ordination of its first pastor, Woburn was incorporated as a town [1642]. Its territory was granted originally to Charlestown, on condition that it should be built on

Several of the inhabitants of Charlestown, among them being John Russell, met at the house of Mr. Thomas Graves, in Charlestown, on December eighteenth, 1640, and upon that day agreed upon a series of "Town Orders" for the proposed new town of Woburn; and these "Town Orders" are subscribed by thirty-two persons, including John Russell.<sup>1</sup> He

within two years. This condition had been fulfilled." (*Id.* p. 23.)

<sup>1</sup> Whence Woburn derived its name appears not to be known. Woburn, in Bedfordshire, in England, then was and still is the site of Woburn Abbey, the seat of the Duke of Bedford, whose family name is Russell. Sewall, the historian of Woburn, conjectures that a Richard Russell, who came to Charlestown from Herefordshire in 1640, and later became prominent in the colony, may have been a member of the family of which the Duke of Bedford was the head and that the name Woburn therefore may have been chosen out of respect for him. But this hardly seems probable, and at best is mere conjecture, as necessarily also must be any opinion as to the part which may have been taken by John Russell in the choice of the name. No Russell, other than John Russell, was among the subscribers to the "Town Orders" of 1640, above referred to, in which the new town is called "Woburn." Some of the descendants of John Russell used the goat crest, which is the crest of the Bedford Russells. This crest appears upon Jonathan Russell's seal, accompanying his signature to the treaty of Ghent in 1814 (*infra*, p. 40). Mr. Charles H. Russell in his youth understood, from family tradition, that his family was connected with the Bedford Russells, and he and his brother William from early life used the goat crest. Hastings Russell, the ninth Duke of Bedford, whom Mr. Charles H. Russell knew and to whom he sent a copy of J. R. Bartlett's work on the genealogy of the descendants of John Russell of Woburn (Providence, 1879), in which work no suggestion of any connection with the Bedford Russells is made, wrote to Mr. Russell in January, 1880: "It seems irresistible to infer, when the names of 'Russell' and 'Woburn' appear together as early as 1640, that the families are connected," and referred to

is stated by Sewall ("History of Woburn") to have been by occupation a shoemaker. He was made a freeman of the colony in 1635,<sup>1</sup> and was a landowner; and was one of the leading men of the town and of the community in which he lived. For many years in succession he "was chosen to the responsible office of Sealer of Leather." He was one of the Selectmen of the town of Woburn, from 1652 to 1656 inclusive. In 1664 he "was appointed on a highly respectable and important committee of seven for making distribution among the proprietors of the town 'of plow lands and swamps, and a particular division of the remote timber, according to justice and equity.' He is likewise named in the Town Records of the same year as a deacon of the Church; and, at that time, was doubtless an Orthodox Congregationalist, both in profession and practice."<sup>2</sup>

It was during these and the following years of the seventeenth century that the persecution of the Baptists, which constitutes a very important chapter in the history of Massachusetts and of the United States, was in progress. At that time the control of the Puritan commonwealth was practically in the hands of the clergy. That such should be the case was never the purpose of the Crown in granting the "cousins on this side and on that side of the Atlantic," and in a later letter referred to "branches of a family divided by the Atlantic;" but there is no conclusive evidence to connect John Russell of Woburn with the English family of which the Duke of Bedford is the head. The record of the early emigrants to New England is very incomplete; and it is not as yet known to his descendants from what part of England John Russell came.

<sup>1</sup> N. E. Hist. Gen. Reg., Vol. XXXVI, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> Sewall's "History of Woburn," p. 157.



charter, for it was intended that the franchise should be freely exercised by all who had the freedom of the Company. But the power of the clergy was, from the beginning, very great among the companies of people who emigrated from England to the Colony of Massachusetts Bay; and, undoubtedly, to a great extent, these people made the emigration rather from loyalty to their pastors than from any real inconvenience suffered by them in the practice of their religious faith in the mother country. Toleration and liberty of conscience were not ideals of seventeenth century Reformers of the type of the pastors who led the bands of Puritans to Massachusetts at this period; and there is very good reason to believe that it was their deliberate purpose to establish beyond the seas a commonwealth in which their "orthodox" church should be supreme. By the influence of the clergy, a statute was passed in Massachusetts in 1681 providing that no men should be admitted to the freedom of the body politic except such as were members of the churches.

The clergy thus had for all practical purposes the temporal power; and even the magistrates were subservient to them. But in all such conditions of society, as over and over again has been seen in the world's history, there are men whom no ecclesiastical tyranny can control, and who are fearless to teach the truth as they see it. And the ecclesiastics are thus placed in a situation in which they must crush the heresy or schism, or else lose their own power. Such was the situation of the orthodox clergy of Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, when they found themselves face to face with the Baptists, and met

men ready to die for their faith, whom no persecution could silence.

At what time John Russell's convictions led him to join the Baptists is not definitely known. It was after the persecutions had continued for some years, and after Henry Dunster had been deposed from the presidency of Harvard College because he accepted the beliefs of that sect. He was present, about 1660, at a church trial of Thomas Goold, who was a man of high standing in the community, one of the early Baptists, and later the first pastor of the Baptist Church of Charlestown and Boston; and probably he was a member of the board or committee appointed to examine Goold. One of the meetings was held at John Russell's house ("a meeting was appointed by the church the next week at Mr. Russell's." "Being met at Mr. Russell's house," etc.); and the account of the trial shows that he insisted upon fair play for Goold and endeavored to keep the chief prosecutor within proper bounds; but there is no evidence that at that time he was in sympathy with Goold's opinions.<sup>1</sup>

In 1668, a petition "of sundrie well affected persons" was addressed to the General Court then sitting in Boston, asking for leniency in the cases of three Baptists, who were confined in prison for having formed a church and for holding religious services otherwise than as permitted by law. This petition was signed by over sixty persons, including John

<sup>1</sup> Goold's narration of this trial is given in Backus' *History of the Baptists*, Vol. I (the first edition), pp. 359 *et seq.*, and in Wood's "History of the First Baptist Church of Boston," pp. 42 *et seq.*

Russell; or, as he signed himself, and as he appears then and since to have been more commonly known, "John Russell, senr.," to distinguish him from his son, John Russell, Junior. The list of signers is said by historical writers to include many of the most respected citizens of the time. The petition, after referring to the unhappy condition of the prisoners, says: "The sence of this their parsonall and family most deplorable and afflicted condition hath sadlie affected the harts of maney sober and serious Christians, that in themselves neither approve of their judgm<sup>n</sup> nor practis, yet considering the men are reputed godly and civill, and peaceable in their conversations, and the thinges wherein they differ being circumstantiall and disputable among learned, sober and pious men, and your pore prisoners professing that they cannot in Conscience doe what is required of them, Now therefore that they may not be exposed to sin or suffer for conscience sake we most humbly beseech this honored Court in their Christian mercy and bowels of Compassion to pittie and release these poore prisoners, whose suffering cause being doubtful to maney, and greivous to sundrie of God's people at home and abroad, may crave a further consideration," etc., etc.<sup>1</sup> The General Court was very much displeased by this petition, which the House of Deputies characterized as "scandalous & reproachful"; and those of the signers who were considered to have been the most active in preparing the petition and in procuring signatures to it were fined, while others were forced to express their regrets in writing and to make their excuses and apolo-

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Archives, Vol. X, p. 221.