

SARAH<sup>2</sup> (PARKER) WILLIAMS, WIFE OF HUGH<sup>1</sup> WILLIAMS  
OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS,  
AND BLOCK ISLAND, RHODE ISLAND

By Michael J. Leclerc

Although the majority of prosperous seventeenth-century individuals in New England have been identified, the existence of some still lies buried in original and published documents, waiting to be discovered. In most instances, it takes a combination of reviewing both previously published information and original records to determine the truth.

Savage treats Hugh<sup>1</sup> Williams of Boston and Block Island but incorrectly states that he "probably never married," because Hugh did not mention a wife in his will.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Bellows Wyman in his compendium of Charlestown families states that the wife of Hugh Williams was Sarah Coitmore. While this identification is close, it is not correct. He also states that they had two children: Hugh, servant to N[athaniel] Nichols, who died on 13 June 1687 at Charlestown, and Mary, the wife of Zechariah Hale.<sup>2</sup>

Hugh Williams, "a singleman and an hatter," was admitted to the First Church in Boston on 1 11th month [January] 1641[2].<sup>3</sup> "Sarah Willyams the wife of our brother Hugh Willyams" was admitted on 23 1st month [March] 164[3]/4.<sup>4</sup> This places their marriage sometime in 1642 or 1643. There are no baptismal records for any children of Hugh and Sarah in the published records of the First Church of Boston, the First Church in Charlestown,<sup>5</sup> or the published vital records of New Shoreham (Block Island).<sup>6</sup>

Hugh Williams was of Boston where he died between 21 October 1674, when he signed his will, and 12 November 1674, when it was entered into probate. He left one-third of his estate to the children of his "brother Hilton." The remaining two-thirds was to go to his "sister Haile and her children." His friend John Wil-

<sup>1</sup> James Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England*, 4 vols. (Boston, 1860-62), 4:560; Savage's abbreviations have been enlarged.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Bellows Wyman, *The Genealogies and Estates of Charlestown, . . . 1629-1818*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1879), 2:1033.

<sup>3</sup> Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church in Boston, 1630-1868*, 3 vols., Pubs. Col. Soc. of Mass., 39-41 (Boston 1961), 1:35 (hereafter cited as *Records of 1st Church Boston*): "The 1st Day of the 11th Moneth 1641."

<sup>4</sup> *Records of 1st Church Boston*, 1:40: "The 23th day of the 1st Moneth 1644."

<sup>5</sup> James Frothingham Hunnewell, *Records of the First Church in Charlestown, Massachusetts, 1632-1789* (Boston, 1880).

<sup>6</sup> James N. Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island, 1630-1850*, 21 vols. (Providence, 1891-1912), 4:New Shoreham.

Williams and sister were appointed executors with Edward Drincker and Thomas [blank] overseers. No mention is made of his wife or any children.<sup>7</sup>

John Williams and Mary Hale of Boston were admitted as executors of the estate of "Hugh Williams late of Block Island deceased" on 12 November 1674, the day they brought in an inventory of the estate.<sup>8</sup> This inventory, taken by Thomas Sitch, John Tapping, and Joseph Davies, valued the estate at £16 6s. 3d.<sup>9</sup> Hugh had been a merchant during his life, with land in both Boston and Block Island, but he and his wife Sarah had been mortgaged heavily and sold their property to get out of debt, some of it to his brother John of London.<sup>10</sup>

#### PARNELL<sup>1</sup> (GRAY) (PARKER) NOWELL

The "sister Haile" mentioned in the will is surely the executrix Mary Hale of Boston. The only Hilton family in Charlestown at that time was that of William<sup>2</sup> Hilton (*William*<sup>1</sup>) and his wife Mehitable<sup>2</sup> Nowell, daughter of Increase<sup>1</sup> and Parnell (Gray) (Parker) Nowell. Increase Nowell arrived with John Winthrop in 1630 and was the founder of the First Church in Charlestown. Parnell was the daughter of Thomas<sup>1</sup> and Katherine (Myles) Gray.<sup>11</sup> Thomas died in 1607, and Katherine married secondly, Rowland Coitmore as his third wife.<sup>12</sup>

The family of Rowland Coitmore was first treated in print by William S. Appleton in *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* in 1880. Appleton mentions only two children of Rowland Coitmore: Thomas Coitmore, the husband of Martha Rainsborough, and Elizabeth Coitmore, the wife of William Tynge.<sup>13</sup> The article contains a transcription of Rowland Coitmore's will. Among the legatees is his grandson William Ball, son of William Ball. Appleton posits that the elder William had married a daughter of Rowland's first wife, Christian Haynes.

<sup>7</sup> Suffolk Co., Mass., Probate Records, 6:61 [Family History Library (FHL), Salt Lake City, film #584,128].

<sup>8</sup> John Williams and Mary Hale "appeared in Court 12<sup>th</sup> of 9<sup>br</sup> [Nov.] 1674 & renounced Executorship to this Will as Attest Free Grace Bendall Record" (Suffolk Co. Probate Records, 6:61 [FHL film #584,128]). This entry immediately follows the will. This is followed by "12:9:74 Administration to the Estate of Hugh Williams late of Block Island deceased is granted to Jn<sup>o</sup> Williams & Mary Hale of Boston they haveing brought in an Inventory of s<sup>d</sup> Estate & give security to administer according to law this Done as Attests Free Grace Bendall Record".

<sup>9</sup> Suffolk Co. Probate Records, 5:218-19 [FHL film #584,128].

<sup>10</sup> For more information on Hugh and John Williams, see the accompanying article on the origin of alleged witch Mary Hale by Michael J. Leclerc and D. Brenton Simons.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Charles Anderson, *The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England, 1620-1633*, 3 vols. (Boston, 1995), 2:1342-46 (hereafter cited as Anderson, *Great Migration Begins*).

<sup>12</sup> William S. Appleton, "Gray and Coytmore," *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* [NEHGR] 34(1880):253-59, at 253.

<sup>13</sup> Appleton, "Gray and Coytmore," NEHGR 34(1880):253.



In a 1952 *Register* article, Roderick Bissell Jones treats the family in "Harrises in Boston Before 1700." Jones identifies Sarah, the wife of Hugh Williams, as the daughter of Rowland Coitmore and his second wife Dorothy (Lane?) (Harris). This statement is based on the will of Dorothy (Lane?) (Harris) Coitmore's mother, Dorothy Lane, in which she mentions her "cousin" [probably granddaughter], Sarah Coitmore.<sup>14</sup>

The eminent genealogist John Insley Coddington, FASG, treated the family in a 1956 article in *The American Genealogist*. In his article, he assumes that Rowland's daughter Sarah died without issue, as she was not mentioned in her father's will. No mention is made that she might be the wife of Hugh Williams.<sup>15</sup>

Katherine (Myles) (Gray) Coitmore died in Charlestown in 1659. Her will mentions the following relatives as legatees: the four children of her son Will[iam] Tyng of Boston, deceased [husband of her daughter Elizabeth Coitmore]; the five children of her son Increase Nowell [husband of her daughter Parnell]; and her grandchild Sarah Williams. Sarah was given a specific parcel of land in Woburn that Katherine had received from the town of Charlestown, from which Woburn had separated in 1642.<sup>16</sup> On 22 April 1662, Hugh Williams and his wife Sarah sold this piece of land "which formerly was in the proper Tenure and possession of M<sup>rs</sup> Catherine Coytmore, deceased, and by her as a Legacie given unto the said Sarah, the wife of the said Hugh William."<sup>17</sup>

Clearly Sarah, the wife of Hugh Williams, cannot be the daughter of Katherine's second husband Rowland Coitmore. That Sarah might be the mother of William Ball mentioned in Rowland's will, but that identification is beyond the purview of this article. If Sarah were Katherine's granddaughter, she must be a daughter of one of her children with Thomas Gray: Susan, Thomas, Parnell, or Katherine.<sup>18</sup>

### SARAH<sup>2</sup> (PARKER) WILLIAMS

Two documents would seem to clarify Sarah's identity. On 22 May 1679 at the Suffolk County Court, Mrs. Mehitabel Hilton of Charlestown was joined with John

<sup>14</sup> Roderick Bissell Jones, "Harrises in Boston Before 1700," *NEHGR* 106(1952):15-20, at 15; for the will, see Henry F. Waters, *Genealogical Gleanings in England*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1901), 1:404 (hereafter cited as Waters, *Gleanings*). Note that many of Jones's conclusions in several articles have been superseded by recent discussions by Gale Ion Harris, FASG, in TAG, *NEHGR*, *The Genealogist*, and *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*.

<sup>15</sup> John Insley Coddington, FASG, "A Royal Descent From King Edward III of England to Thomas<sup>1</sup> Coytmore of Charlestown, Mass., Elizabeth Wife of William<sup>1</sup> Tyng of Boston, Sarah wife of Ralph<sup>1</sup> Eddowes of Philadelphia County, Pa., John Quincy Adams, Neville Chamberlain, and Others," TAG 32(1956):9-23, at 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> Middlesex Co., Mass., Probate Records #4769 [FHL film #386,059].

<sup>17</sup> *A Report of the Record Commissioners Containing Charlestown Land Records, 1636-1802*, Boston Records Commissioners' Report, 3(2nd ed.; Boston, 1883):163.

<sup>18</sup> Appleton, "Gray and Coytmore," *NEHGR* 34(1880):253.

Williams as administrators of the estate of her brother-in-law Hugh Williams, deceased.<sup>19</sup> Mehitable Hilton, the wife of William Hilton and daughter of Increase and Parnell (Gray) (Parker) Nowell, must be a sister of some sort to Sarah.

The family of Increase Nowell has been well documented, and no daughter Sarah has ever been identified.<sup>20</sup> Sarah, the wife of Hugh Williams of Boston, "Deposed in Court that the above named Increase Nowell deceased being of sound Judgement and good memory," made his last will and testament.<sup>21</sup> As shown below, Nowell's wife Parnell was married previously to a man with the surname of Parker. Decades of research have never turned up a record of this first marriage. Parnell's elder brother Thomas Gray was of Wapping, co. Middlesex, England, on 15 November 1626, when he signed his will. He died between that date and 6 April 1627, when the will was proved. After several small legacies, he left the remainder of his estate to his sister Parnell Parker, widow, and to her daughter, who is not named. He appointed Parnell and her daughter executrixes. Parnell Parker proved the will, and power was reserved for the other executrix.<sup>22</sup>

Given that Parnell was only about 23 years old at the time of her brother's death, her daughter was probably still a young child, most likely born between 1620 and 1626.<sup>23</sup> It is this young child who is likely Sarah, the wife of Hugh Williams. She would have been the half-sister of Mehitabel (Gray) Hilton. This relationship agrees with the will of Hugh Williams and the administrators of his estate.

It is probable that Sarah died between 16 August 1664, when she and Hugh sold their property to his brother John, and 21 October 1674, when he wrote his will. Although he was a hatter and merchant and came from a well-off family, Hugh's entire estate was valued at only £16 6s. 3d. The lack of any birth or baptismal information for any children of the couple and his failure to mention them in his will casts doubt that he had any children.

Robert Charles Anderson, in *The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England 1620-1633*, dispels Wyman's misinformation regarding Mary, the purported daughter of Hugh and Sarah. The Zachariah Hale, son of Robert Hale, is actually Zechariah Foule. Wyman likely misunderstood the last name in the original record. Zechariah Foule married Mary Paine, daughter of Stephen and

<sup>19</sup> *Records of the Suffolk County Court, 1671-1680*, 2 vols., Col. Soc. Mass. Pubs., 29-30 (Boston, 1933), 2:1024.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, *Great Migration Begins*, 2:1342-46.

<sup>21</sup> Will of Increase Nowell of Charlestown, 1655, in Robert H. Rodgers, *Middlesex County in the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay in New England: Records of Probate and Administration October 1649-December 1660* (Boston, 1999), 231.

<sup>22</sup> Waters, *Gleanings*, 1:404.

<sup>23</sup> Parnell was 84 years old at the time of her death on 25 March 1687 at Charlestown, placing her date of birth around 1603 (Roger D. Joslyn, comp. and ed., *Vital Records of Charlestown, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850*, 2 vols. in 3 [Boston, 1984-95], 1:136). This places the likely date of birth for Parnell's daughter Sarah as between 1620, when Parnell would have been 17, and 1626, when her brother wrote his will and mentioned her child.

Elizabeth (Carrington) Paine, not Mary Williams.<sup>24</sup> As far as Hugh Williams, servant of Nathaniel Nichols, is concerned, there is no evidence to link him with Hugh, the husband of Sarah Parker. It is far more likely that Hugh and Sarah died without issue.

#### GENEALOGICAL SUMMARY

SARAH<sup>2</sup> PARKER was born possibly in Wapping, co. Middlesex, England, probably between 1620 and 1626, daughter of — and Parnell<sup>1</sup> (Gray) Parker. Parnell was named heir and executrix of her brother Thomas's estate, along with her unnamed daughter. Sarah married in 1642 or 1643, probably in Charlestown, HUGH<sup>1</sup> WILLIAMS. Hugh's parentage is unknown at this time, but he was possibly born in Southwark, co. Surrey, or elsewhere in co. Surrey, England.

Hugh and Sarah resided in Boston before removing to Block Island by 1664 when they sold their mortgaged land in Boston and Block Island to his brother John. They returned to Boston, where Hugh died between 21 October 1674, when he signed his will, and 12 November 1674, when it was entered into probate.<sup>25</sup> Sarah likely predeceased her husband, as she is not mentioned in his will.<sup>26</sup>

*Michael J. Leclerc is Director of Special Projects at the New England Historic Genealogical Society and is most recently the coeditor of Genealogical Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Guide to Register Style and More.*

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *Great Migration Begins*, 2:838.

<sup>25</sup> Suffolk Co. Probate Records, 6:61–62 [FHL film #584,128].

<sup>26</sup> For more information on Hugh and John Williams, see the accompanying article on the origin of alleged witch Mary Hale by Michael J. Leclerc and D. Brenton Simons.

#### DAMNING WITH ALMOST NO PRAISE AT ALL

In the past, members of the clergy of the dominant religious sect in a geographic area were too often unwilling to sympathize with those not part of their denomination. The following is the way that one Connecticut clergyman, as late as 1909, acknowledged the gracious aid of another:

The inadequacy is more obvious when I write of ministers in other denominations than my own [Congregational], and it was greatly to my relief that Dr. Storrs O. Seymour kindly consented to prepare a chapter on the Episcopal clergy. No doubt all readers of this work will share my gratitude to him.

From my own point of view I excuse myself in part for the lack of proportion in treatment by assuming that the Congregational ministry was a part of the indigenous element which made Litchfield County [Conn.] to differ from the rest of the world, while those of other name represent the invasion of a cosmic influence that is making us like other people.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Goodenough, *The Clergy of Litchfield County* (Litchfield, Conn., 1909), xiii–xiv.