

= Humphrey Atherton =

Major @-@ General Humphrey Atherton , ( ca.1608 ? September 16 , 1661 ) an early settler of Dorchester , Massachusetts , held the highest military rank in colonial New England . He first appeared in the records of Dorchester on March 18 , 1637 and made freeman May 2 , 1638 . He became a representative in the General Court in 1638 and 1639 ? 41 . In 1653 , he was Speaker of the House , representing Springfield , Massachusetts . He was chosen assistant governor , a member of the lower house of the General Court who also served as magistrate in the judiciary of colonial government , in 1654 , and remained as such until his death . " He was a member of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts and held the ranks of lieutenant and captain for several years before rising to the rank of major @-@ general . He also organized the first militia in Massachusetts .

It is unclear where and when Atherton was born . It is presumed he came from Lancashire , England . He was active in the governance of the colony , taking part in the acquisition of Native American lands , the persecution of Quakers , and the apprehension and convictions of heretics . His accidental death was seen by the Quakers as a punishment from God for his persecution of them , an idea repeated in a play by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow . He was one of the most successful land speculators in the New England colonies . He and his wife , Mary , had a number of children and several New England families have traced their ancestry to them . He is interred at Dorchester North Burying Ground , one of the oldest cemeteries in New England .

= = Origin and emigration = =

Humphrey Atherton 's date and place of birth are uncertain . It has been presumed by some that he was born in Lancashire , England , because the name Atherton is prominent there . However , genealogist Robert Charles Anderson , in *The Great Migration* , states that this " does not come close to constituting proof of origin . " The date of 1608 is sometimes given as his date of birth because Edmund Atherton of Wigan Lancashire , England died in 1612 leaving , as his heir , a four @-@ year @-@ old son named Humphrey . However , Duane Hamilton Hurd , in *History of Norfolk County , Massachusetts* stated that Atherton was 36 years old when he died in 1661 . On the other hand , Charles Samuel Hall in *Hall Ancestry* , pointed out that when Atherton was made freeman and was granted property in 1638 , " he must at that time reached his majority . "

A descendant of his , Charles H. Atherton , said that Humphrey Atherton , his wife and three young children arrived at the colony in the ship *James* , August 7 , 1635 , but there is no record of this . His descendant further said that Atherton and his wife were each about 15 years old when they were married .

There is a record of Nathaniel Wales having voyaged on the *James* . Wales referred to Humphrey Atherton as his " brother @-@ in @-@ law " in his will , so it has been assumed that Atherton 's wife , Mary , was Wales ' sister . However , the term may have been used because Atherton 's daughter , Isabel , was married to Nathaniel Wales , Jr . The identity of his wife is unknown .

= = Political and military life = =

Atherton had a very active public life having power and taking part in the law making , enforcing and interpreting affairs of the colony . Subsequent to his acceptance as a freeman , in 1638 , he was frequently selectman or treasurer , and for several years a member of the Court of Assistants which gave him a say in the appointment of governors as well as judicial power in criminal and civil matters . In 1638 and 1639 ? 41 he was a governor 's assistant in the General Court , and in 1653 , he was Speaker of the House , leader of the Court of Deputies , which was the lower house of the General Court , representing Springfield , Massachusetts . He was also " long a justice of the peace , and solemnized many marriages " . One of the marriages over which he officiated was that of Myles Standish , Jr. and Sarah Winslow .

Atherton was a member of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery and he organized the first trained

band ( militia ) in Dorchester . As Major @-@ General in the Suffolk Regiment , he was the senior military officer in New England. which included the responsibilities of subduing and controlling Native Americans and apprehending criminals , such as those accused of heresy .

In 1644 he [ Atherton ] was sent , with Captains Johnson and Cook , to Narragansett to arrest and try Samuel Gorton for heresy . It is hoped that Gorton 's complaint of his treatment was exaggerated , for he said , in passing through Dorchester . ' A large concourse of persons assembled with several ministers to witness the passage of the troops , and the prisoners were stationed apart and volleys of musketry fired over their heads in token of victory . ' "

= = = Other persecutions = = =

Harlow Elliot Woodward , in Epitaphs from the Old Burying Ground in Dorchester , said that Atherton had believed in witches and " felt it to be a duty which he owed to God and to his Country to mete out to the poor creatures , against whom accusations were brought , the punishment , which , in his opinion , they so richly merited . " Woodward said that , in his capacity as assistant , Atherton had been instrumental in bringing about the execution of Mrs. Ann Hibbins , a wealthy widow , who was executed for witchcraft on June 19 , 1656 . Hibbins was later fictionalized in Nathaniel Hawthorne 's The Scarlet Letter . In that book she was depicted as the sister of Governor Bellingham .

Atherton was involved in the persecution of Quakers and there are two incidents in particular that the Quakers wrote about in relationship to Atherton . First , the case of Mary Dyer , a Quaker who was executed in 1660 after returning to Boston despite banishment . Atherton was assistant governor at the time , and at her hanging he was said to have remarked , " She hangs there like a flag . " The Quakers understood this comment to be an insulting boast .

Secondly , there was the case of Wenlock Christison , a Quaker who had repeatedly returned to Massachusetts despite banishment , whose trial in May , 1661 put an end to the execution of Quakers . He was sentenced to death , but the law was changed soon after , and he was not executed . He was the last Quaker to be sentenced to death in Massachusetts . The Quakers believed that during an altercation between the accused and Atherton at the trial , Christison prophesied the outcome of his trial as well as the circumstances of Atherton 's untimely death . Quaker writer George Bishop wrote , " Yea , Wenlock Christison , though they did not put him to death , yet they sentenced him to die , so that their cruel purposes were nevertheless . I cannot forbear to mention what he spoke , being so prophetic , not only as to the judgment of God coming on Major @-@ general Adderton , but as to their putting any more Quakers to death after they had passed sentence on him . " Henry Wadsworth Longfellow recreated the Christison trial in his play John Endicott which included the damnation of Atherton by the accused .

= = Relationship with Native Americans = =

Ebenezer Clapp , in The History of Dorchester said of Atherton , " He had great experience and skill in the treatment of the Indians , with whom his public duties brought him in frequent contact . He manifested much humanity and sympathy for their ignorant and degraded condition , but exercised great energy and decision of character when necessary . " In 1637 the colonists had sided with the Mohegans in the Pequot War , which wiped out most of the Pequot people . By the early 1640s tensions were building between the Mohegans and the Narragansetts . " In 1645 , the New England Colonies met by representatives to consult upon the Indian problem , and appointed a Council of War ; Capt. Miles Standish , of Plymouth , was chairman . Mason of Connecticut , Leverett and Atherton of Massachusetts , were the other councilors " .

The New England colonies , with the exception of Rhode Island , formed a confederation called " The Four United Colonies of New England " . Rhode Island , according to The Proceedings of the Rhode Island Historical Society , 1881 ? 1882 , was excluded , not for reasons of religious differences , but because its founder , Roger Williams , had been banished from Massachusetts " for denying the right of the magistrates to take the lands of the Indians with out compensating the

owners " . The United Colonies obtained Narragansett lands within the boundaries of Rhode Island by putting in motion a series of events that began with their promise of aid to the Mohegan Sachem , Uncas , whom they had supported during the Pequot War , if he declared war against the Narragansett Sachem , Miantinomo . During the ensuing war , Miantinomo was captured and brought to the commissioners of the Four United Colonies at Hartford . " After obtaining him as a captive , they could find no excuse for putting him to death ; and , to avoid the responsibility , they referred his case for decision to a convention of ministers in Boston ; [ sic ] Winthrop states , ' Miantinomo was killed near Hartford by a blow on the back of his head with a hatchet . ' "

The Connecticut settlers demanded land from Uncas in return for their assistance to him . " Trumbull states , ' Mr. Leffingwell obtained nearly the whole township of Norwich for his services . ' " Miantinomo 's successor , Pessicus , declared war against Uncas and the colonies fined him 2000 fathoms of wampum for causing the hostilities , which he was unable to pay . "

" Humphrey Atherton was sent by the commissioners of the Four Colonies , with twenty armed men , to enforce the payment . As stated in Arnold 's history of Rhode Island ( vol. i . , p . 199 ) , ' Atherton forced his way , pistol in hand , into the wigwam , and , seizing the Sachem by the hair , dragged him out , threatening instant death if any resistance was offered . ' The debt was settled by Pessicus giving a mortgage of all his lands to the commissioners of the Four Colonies . "

In 1658 , Atherton came into contact with Native Americans again when he was appointed by the General Court to the post of Superintendent of Indian Affairs , overseeing the praying Indians ; Nipmuck Indians who had been converted to Christianity by John Eliot . He held that position until his death . " Though a terror to warlike Indians , yet he was the trusted friend of all who were well disposed , helping on their education and Christianizing , and guarding their rights , so that he had immense personal influence with them , and was a successful treaty @-@ maker " .

= = Land speculation = =

Humphrey Atherton was a successful land speculator . The land he owned in Dorchester included a large portion of South Boston . He also owned a share in what became Milton , Massachusetts . The General Court awarded 500 acres ( 2 @. @ 0 km<sup>2</sup> ) to him for his public service , but because some of it impeded the town on Hadley , Massachusetts , he was given a new grant that had an additional 200 acres ( 0 @. @ 81 km<sup>2</sup> ) . Since he had represented Springfield in the General Court , he probably owned land in Springfield as well . When he died , his estate was worth 900 pounds , not including much of his land .

Atherton " played a key role in fighting and removing Indians from land he later owned . " In 1659 , he and some friends , including Connecticut Governor , John Winthrop , Jr . , made some purchases of land from Native Americans on the western side of Narragansett Bay for which Rhode Island had claimed . The group , referred to as the Atherton Company , circumvented Rhode Island 's law by acquiring the land when the Natives defaulted on a loan .

In 1660 , commissioners of the Four Colonies , of whom John Winthrop , Jr. was one , transferred ownership of the mortgage of Pessicus 's land to the Atherton Company for 735 fathoms of wampum . The Company then foreclosed on the mortgage . The land included the Narragansett property within the bounds of Rhode Island . Rhode Island found this transference of land to be illegal and prevented the sale of the land for several years . The company , which changed its name to " Proprietors of the Narragansett Country , " eventually did sell 5 @, @ 000 acres ( 20 km<sup>2</sup> ) of the land to Huguenot immigrants who began a colony there called Frenchtown . The Huguenots lost the land when , in 1688 , a Royal Commission determined the Atherton claim to be illegal .

= = Death = =

Humphrey Atherton died , September 16 , 1661 , from head injuries sustained in a fall from his horse . He was traveling through Boston Common , on his way home after drilling his troops when his mount collided with a cow .

Woodward , aforementioned author of Epitaphs from the Old Burying Ground in Dorchester , said

that because of Atherton 's persecution of the Quakers , " they believed his horrible death to be God 's visitation of wrath . " Woodward credits Joseph Besse , a Quaker author , with the following account of Atherton 's death :

" ' Humfray Adderton , who at the trial of Wenlock Christison , did , as it were , bid defiance to Heaven , by saying to Wenlock , ' You pronounce Woes and Judgements , and those that are gone before you pronounced Woes and Judgements ; but the Judgements of the Lord God are not upon us yet , ' was suddenly surprised : having been , on a certain day , exercising his men with much pomp and ostentation , he was returning home in the evening , near the place where they usually loosed the Quakers from the cart , after they had whipped them , his horse , suddenly affrighted , threw him with such violence , that he instantly died ; his eyes being dashed out of his head , and his brains coming out of his nose , his tongue hanging out at his mouth , and the blood running out at his ears : Being taken up and brought into the Courthouse , the place where he had been active in sentencing the innocent to death , his blood ran through the floor , exhibiting to the spectators a shocking instance of the Divine vengeance against a daring and hardened persecutor ; that made a fearful example of that divine judgment , which , when forewarned of , he had openly despised , and treated with disdain . ' "

Longfellow repeated this sentiment in his account of Atherton 's death in the final scene of John Endicott . In the scene Governor Endicott , while speaking to Richard Bellingham , asks if it is true that Humphrey Atherton is dead . Bellingham confirms that he is and adds , " His horse took fright , and threw him to the ground , so that his brains were dashed about the street . " Endicott responds , " I am not superstitious , Bellingham , and yet I tremble lest it may have been a judgment on him . "

Humphrey Atherton , whose wife , Mary died in 1672 @.@ is interred at the Dorchester North Burying Place in Boston . Engraved upon his tombstone are the following words :

Here lies our Captain & Major of Suffolk was withall ;  
A godly magistrate was he , and Major General ;  
Two troop horse with him here comes , such worth his love did crave  
Two companies of foot also mourning march to his grave ,  
Let all that read be sure to keep the faith as he has done  
With Christ he lives now crowned , his name was Humphrey Atherton .

= = Legacy = =

Humphrey Atherton and his wife , Mary , had twelve children . Jonathan was their first born and was probably born in England , as was Isabel , who married Nathaniel Wales , Jr . Elizabeth was married to Timothy Mather and Margaret was married to James Trowbridge . Mary was born 1636 and married to William Billings and Joseph Weeks . Rest was born 1639 and married Obadiah Swift . Increase was baptized February , 1641 and died at sea . Thankful was born 1644 and married Thomas Bird of Dorchester . Their son , Hope , was born 1646 . He was minister of Hadley , Massachusetts and married Sarah Hollister . Their son , Consider , married Ann Anibal . Watching , who was born 1651 , married Elizabeth Rigbee . Patience , born in 1654 , married Issac Humphrey .

Among the family genealogies that the Humphrey Atherton family are included in are The History of the Dorchester Pope Family : 1634 ? 1888 , by Charles Henry Pope and Hall Ancestry , by Charles Samuel Hall . George Caster Martin traced his ancestry to Atherton in his article Humphrey Atherton : Founder of the Atherton Family of New England in National Genealogical Society Quarterly , Volume 1 , Issue 4 . In the National Genealogical Society Quarterly , Volume 60 , some of Humphrey Atherton 's descendants are included in the Belcher Genealogy . In the same volume , Samuel Edward Atherton 's ancestry was traced to Humphrey Atherton . William B. Task claimed descent from Atherton in the 1899 New England Historical Genealogical Register .

= = = Notable descendants = = =

Susan B. Anthony , woman @-@ suffrage advocate and lecturer

Robert Hutchings Goddard , rocket scientist and space pioneer , inventor of liquid @-@ fueled

rocket

King Leka I , King of the Albanians

Alfred Lee Loomis , physicist and financier

Henry Lewis Stimson , U.S. Secretary of War

Raquel Welch ( AKA : Jo Raquel Tejada ) , entertainer

T. V. John Langworthy , songwriter singer