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THE BUNNELL/BONNELL NEWSLETTER

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INTRODUCTION

For more than twenty-five years I have been collecting information relating to the history of the Bunnell and Bonnell family in America. There are still a tremendous number of loose ends I would like to tie together, but it is clear that if I wait to do so, the history will never be published. Many people have contributed the results of their own research, and it is only fair that their work be made available to others.

Therefore, I have decided to put all this material in shape for publication as soon as possible. So far I have completed the first four generations. In the meantime, I plan to publish this newsletter quarterly a) to introduce myself, b) to stimulate interest in the Bunnell/Bonnell family, c) to serve as a forum for discussion of points of uncertainty, and d) to provide readers an opportunity to submit Queries to other readers.

The history I am preparing is essentially a compilation of the work of many people. During these many years my work in the Personnel Department at IBM's plant at Endicott, NY, along with a variety of other outside interests, severely limited the amount of time available to spend on my genealogical hobby. It has moved forward in fits and starts. I have not had the time nor the opportunity to do exhaustive basic research across the country. Where primary records have been available to me I have used them. But the principal purpose of my work has been to bring together in one place the research that has been done piece by piece by many people over the years. An extensive correspondence, with occasional visits to some of the major libraries in the Northeast, has been the modus operandi. Where I have found discrepancies or conflicting data, I have tried diligently to analyze, compare and clarify the information in order to present a story that is as close to factual as possible.

The preparation of this material was actually begun well before 1900 by John Addison Biles, of Homets Ferry, Bradford County, PA. Although I have been unable to secure a working copy of his manuscript, his granddaughter, Miss Marian E. Biles of Green, NY, generously permitted me to make copies of hundreds of letters that Mr. Biles received from Bunnells

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and Bonnells all over the United States. They range in date from 1895 to 1925. They have been an invaluable resource, frequently providing answers that were unavailable from any other source.

Homer E. Baldwin of Greensburg, PA, also contributed very heavily to this work. We wrote back and forth for years, and in the process he sent me copies of hundreds of pages of genealogical data that he had accumulated in his life-long study of the family, particularly the Bunnell side. Homer was also the source of contact with many, many others who subsequently made contributions large or small.

In the last several years I have been indebted to Mrs. Ruth Duncan of West Simsbury, CT, for her extensive research in the original records of Connecticut. Mrs. Duncan is preparing her own genealogy of the Bunnell family, but has been most generous in helping in my efforts.

Everyone who has provided information will be recognized in the references where appropriate, but I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge at the outset the efforts of a number of people who have done really significant work on major segments of the family history:

Mrs. Iva Bunnell Adams, Midway, UT
Mrs. Adele Andrews, Norwalk, OH
Mrs. Nona Bassett, Merced, CA
Miss Fern Bunnell, St. Regis, MT
Mrs. Clarence H. Bunnell, Winsted, CT
Mrs. Russell S. Cooke, Springfield, IL
Mrs. Rolland Thomas, Westminster, CA

The immigrant ancestor of the majority of Bunnells and Bonnells in America was William Bunnell, who was at Watertown MA, as early as 1630, and at New Haven, CT, before 1650. He left two sons, Benjamin and Nathaniel, to carry on his name. Benjamin remained in Connecticut, as did his descendants for several generations. All of Benjamin's descendants, so far as I know, have spelled their name with a "u". Nathaniel removed to Elizabethtown, NJ, in 1665. Most of his descendants have spelled their name with an "o", although some large branches of the family returned to the use of the "u".

In this issue of the Newsletter, I will review several accounts of the origins of William Bunnell and express my own conclusions based on the evidence I have seen. Much of the evidence is conflicting and even controversial, and I invite correspondence from anyone who might wish to respond. Letters of general interest will be printed in succeeding issues of the Newsletter.

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ENGLISH ORIGINS

William Bunnell was certainly born in England, but neither the date and place of his birth nor his parentage has yet be discovered.

The date of William Bunnell's birth has been given in various given in various family histories as 1605, 1610, between 1610 and 1620, 1610-1612-1617, and most frequently 1617 (many references in the Compendium of American Genealogy). None of these accounts provide any basis for the statement, and so far as I know there is no contemporary record that states his age of date of birth. Any conclusion we come to has to be based on circumstantial evidence.

The earliest record in which William Bunnell appears is dated 1630, when he was old enough to serve on a jury to inquire into the death of Austin Bratcher at Watertown, MA. This certainly excludes a date as late as 1617. He must have been an adult in 1630 and could not have been born after 1610.

About 1650, at New Haven, there are several records which mention "old Bunnell," and refer to tax exemptions based on "his age, poverty and weakness." Granted that people aged faster in those days, this is strange language to use if he were only 40 at that time. If we assign date of birth of 1600 he would only have been 50. This is possible, but just within the range of credibility.

I am inclined, until other evidence becomes available to conclude that he was born "about 1600" in England.

With reference to William's birthplace, it has been asserted by a number of writers that he was a farmer and tanner from Cheshire, England. (Ref.: THE COMPENDIUM OF AMERICAN GENEALOGY, Vol. IV, p. 128; Snell's HISTORY OF SUSSES AND WARREN COUNTIES, NEW JERSEY, pp. 225 and 226; BOSTON TRANSCRIPT query No. 8895, May 31, 1921; GENEALOGY OF THE BONNELL FAMILY AS IT PERTAINS TO EDGAR MARSH GIBBY AND HIS DESCENDANTS, p. 3; manuscript history on THE BUNNELL FAMILY, from the files of the Institute of American Genealogy; WILLIAM BONNELL, by Hubert Baum.) Unfortunately, I have never been able to confirm this statement from any contemporary record. Mr. Baum actually cites vol. I, page 21, of the New Haven Vital Records, as his source, but I cannot find the reference on that page or any other page of the New Haven Vital Records. If anyone can point out the original document from which this statement stems I would certainly appreciate it.

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The Huguenot connection: Several of William Bunnell's descendants have become members of the Huguenot Society on the strength of his supposed descent from Thomas Bonnell, a Huguenot refugee who settled in Norwich, England, where he died in 1607. Thomas's son Benjamin is supposed to have been the father of William, the American immigrant.

Every reference I have been able to track down for this statement seems to come from the same source, a manuscript entitled SYRON-SEARING WILLS, DEEDS AND WAYS, written by Carolyn Syron Valentine in 1925, and filed in the New York Public Library, the Library of Congress, and perhaps others. Mrs. Valentine first provides some background on Thomas Bonnell and his sons. It should be noted that her account frequently conflicts with that of other published accounts of this family. On page 103 of her manuscript, she goes on to say:

“With a family so stable, and so well recorded, we might expect it to be very easy to show William Bonnel's immediate ancestor. Yet, if he had veritably sprung from the sea, his parentage could scarcely be harder to prove. There is no William recorded as a Bonnel in England at the required period, who could possibly have been he.”

It is hard to understand how her conclusions could have won such wide-spread acceptance when she began by saying she had no evidence to prove them. With the resources available today, it is clear that the last sentence in that paragraph is false. Bunnells and Bonnells were living in many of the counties of England at the end of the sixteenth century. I have identified eleven Williams, any of which could have been the man we are looking for, and at least thirty men who could have been his father. More about that later. In her next paragraph Mrs. Valentine goes on to say:

“Moreover, there was only one Bonnel of this group in England, previous to this birth, whose story is not known. The logic of the known facts affirms that William must be the son of that one—namely Benjamin, son of Thomas the English founder. But we know so very little of the personal life of Benjamin Bonnel that proof, in the absence of records, appears impossible. There are, however, numerous pointers which may serve to convince us, even in the absence of records.

“All that we certainly know of William Bonnel's life before his marriage is told in the brief news item which announces his arrival. But enough of Benjamin Bonnel's business life is known to permit us to follow his activities fairly well. Capt Richard

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Lord, who carried some of Benjamin's dispatches, was very closely connected with Hartford activities. William Bunnell or Bonnell's life was connected with New Haven solely, as far as extant records found show. I shall therefore consider Benjamin Bonnell, son of Thomas, the English Founder, as the immediate ancestor of William, the American Founder, so long as no proof appears to the contrary."

With that astonishing leap of faith, Mrs. Valentine grafted the American Bunnell/Bonnell family to the expatriate family of Thomas Bonnell. This line has been accepted for membership in the Huguenot Society in the past, but I understand that the Huguenot society in at least some of the states now rejects this connection. I offer as proof to the contrary the following: Benjamin Bonnell, male child of Thomas Bonnell, was christened on 7 January 1589 at the church of Saint Martin at Palace, Norwich, England. Since christening at the period normally took place in the first few days after birth, I believe that Benjamin would have been too young to have been the father of William.

Mrs. Valentine identifies Benjamin Bonnell, son of Thomas, with the Benjamin Bonnell who was in the service of Sweden or various Swedish companies from 1625 until 1660 or later. Prior to moving to Sweden this man resided in Spain and Portugal for about twenty years. He also seems to have been a merchant in Amsterdam for a time. There is no evidence to show that he ever married. He appears to have visited England at very rare intervals. (ref: THE SWEDISH SETTLEMENTS ON THE DELAWARE 1638-1664, by Amandus Johnson, Vol. II, pp. 676 and 677.) This may have been the same Benjamin Bonnell, but I have seen no evidence of it, and it is really stretching to suggest that he is the father of William.

It would have been helpful if Mrs. Valentine had quoted "the brief news item which announces his arrival," or at least told us where to find it. Does anyone know what she was referring to? Her manuscript includes many similar vague references that can't be identified or confirmed.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR ENGLISH RESEARCH

A year or so ago, at the local Mormon library, I reviewed the International Genealogical Index for all the B'n'l in any spelling for the year 1630 or prior. I used the July 1984 update of the IGI. I found 193 marriages or christenings in 25 countries. Among them were eleven references to Williams each of whom could conceivably have been the William Bunnell we are seeking. The references are as follows:

1. William Bunhill, son of Thomas, was christened 05 Dec. 1602 at All Hallows the Less, London
2. William Bonnell, son of Richard, was christened 22 June 1601 at Tewkesbury, Gloucester.
3. William Bonnell married Elizabeth Underwoode 30 July 1620 at Tewkesbury, Gloucester.
4. William Boneall married Elizabeth Haile 01 Aug. 1604 at Elmore, Gloucester.
5. William Bonel married Luce Newman 16 Oct. 1609 at Little Hornead, Hertfordshire.
6. William Bonell, son of _____, was christened 03 Feb. 1588 at Sibsey, Lincoln.
7. Wyllm Bonnell, son of Nicholas Bonnell, was christened 18 Mar. 1597 at Alvechurch, Worcester.
8. Willm. Bunnell had a daughter Margaret christened 28 Sep. 1623 and a son _____ christened 20 Aug 1626 at Rowley Regis, Staffordshire.
9. Wm. Bonuill had a daughter Isabell christened 25 Oct. 1624 at Whitby, Yorkshire.
10. Willmus Bonell, son of Matthea Bonell, was christened 15 Feb. 1607 at Hutton Bushel, Yorkshire.
11. Willmus Bonell had a son Joannes christened 27 Dec. 1607, a daughter Elizabetha christened 26 Apr. 1610, and a daughter Jane christened 19 Mar. 1611, all at Hutton Bushel, Yorkshire.

William #1 above may have been the same person as the William Bunnell whose marriages and whose children's christenings were recorded in the church of Westminster St. Margaret in London in the 1630's. In that case, we could

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cross him off the list.

William #2 and William #3 were perhaps the same person, #7 and #8 might also be the same person, since Alvechurch, Worcester, and Rowley Regis, Staffordshire, are only ten miles apart.

Any one, or none, of these might be the William we are looking for. Further research in the English records needs to be undertaken to eliminate as many of them as possible. If none of these is our man, the IGI records show 25 or 30 men of this name who were having children before and after 1600 and who could have had an unrecorded son William.

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SOME PERSONAL NOTES

My own interest stems from my wife's descent from William and Ann (Wilmot) Bunnell. Her line is as follows:

William Bunnell m. Ann Wilmot
Benjamin Bunnell m. Rebecca Mallory
Benjamin Bunnell m. Hannah Plumb
Solomon Bunnell m. Mary Holdren
Benjamin Bunnell m. Catherine Barry
John Bunnell m. Mary Place
Amanda Bunnell m. Gilbert Chamberlain
Philo M. Burr m. Sarah T. Chamberlain
Gilbert M. Burr m. Blanche K. Mayer
Clark R. Burr m. Lela C. Ervin
Patricia J. Burr m. William R. Austin

Pat and I have three children, all of whom are now married. On 15 October 1986 our son Bill and his wife Linda presented us with our first grandchild, a beautiful little girl whose name is Ellen Marie.

I retired from IBM at Endicott, NY, in June 1984. Since then most of my time has been spent in remodeling the old farmhouse here at Laceyville, PA. We moved in a year ago, long before the house was ready, so I have had to lay aside most of my genealogical activity. Now, although there is still much to be done, the most pressing work is complete and I can afford to spend some of the time on the family history. The recent purchase of an IBM PC and the ROOTS II program should help to increase my efficiency.

QUERIES

Since this is the first issue of the Newsletter, all of the Queries are my own, although most of them represent searches of critical importance to one or more of my correspondents over the years.

1. AARON BONNELL, son of Benjamin and Eleanor Bonnell, was born 30 march 1749 in New Jersey. On 3 April 1772, in Morris c., NJ, he was married to Ann Brotherton, daughter of Henry and Mercy (Schooley) Brotherton, who was born 7 Sept. 1753. they moved t Pennsylvania, and in 1793 his name appears on the tax rolls of Pike Run Twp., Washington co., PA. On 16 Aug. 1799 he purchased 100 acres in West Bethlehem Twp. on the North Fork of Ten Mile Creek. There he died about 18 March 1814. He and his wife had 13 children born between the years 1773 and 1797. Can anyone identify Aaron's parents, Benjamin and Eleanor Bonnell? The only reference I have ever found to them is in the Hatfield family Bible in which Aaron's birth is recorded.
2. ISAAC BONNELL, son of Nathaniel, son of William, was born at Elizabethtown, NJ, in the early 1670's. He married Elizabeth _____, who was born about 1666. he died on 17 Jan. 1711/12. His will names his wife Elizabeth and the seven children, all under age: Isaac, Abraham, Jacob, John, William, Lydia, and Sarah. The second son Abraham married Mary Shinn 23 Nov. 1731. Their descendants are fairly well documented, but I have never been able to learn anything further about any of the other six children. Can anyone help? I strongly suspect that one of the sons was the father of the Benjamin in Query #1.
3. MILES BUNNELL was born in Connecticut. He married Amelia Doud, daughter of David Doud. In 1800 they lived in Danbury, CT. By 1802 they were living along the Wyalusing Creek in what is now Rush Twp., Susquehanna co., PA. They had at least three children: Martin, b. 1800, Amos, b. 1803, and Sarah N., b. c. 1808. Miles Bunnell is said to have had a brother Hezekiah who moved to Missouri. Who were the parents of Miles, and when and where was he born?

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This first issue of the Newsletter is being sent to everyone I think might be interested whose address I have. If you would like to continue to receive future issues, simply drop me a card to that effect. For now, at least, there is no charge. If you know of others who might also be interested, please send me their names and addresses.