

RONALD COOK
PROJECT SUMMARY
[CookCook2008Apr]
23 June 2008

OBJECTIVES

Identify the parentage and ancestry of William Cook of Berkshire County, Massachusetts

RESULTS

Research on the Cook family of Berkshire County, Massachusetts has learned more about the Abiel Cook who lived there in the mid to late 1700's including information that links him to William Cook of Hancock. Their exact relationship, however, remains unknown.

- Searched Shaker records for Hancock, Massachusetts for mention of Cook family, but found none
- Located court records tying Abiel Cook to Hancock, Massachusetts
- Found record of an Abial Cook of Williamstown, Massachusetts, which neighbors Hancock and Stephentown, New York
- This Abial (also Abiel) Cook married Margaret Kriger in Williamstown in 1790
- They are last of record selling land in Williamstown in 1801
- It is not certain if all these Abiel Cooks are the same man or if any one of them is the father of William Cook

RECOMMENDATIONS

More research on Abiel Cook of Hancock, Massachusetts needs to be conducted to look for connections to William Cook, younger Abiel Cook, and possibly a Job Cook, as well as to see if he is the same person in Stephentown and Williamstown. One record that needs to be obtained is the original court record relating to the lawsuit brought by Abiel Cook against Noah Wheaton – i.e. the loose papers that may contain the names of associates and witnesses. Also, the lease for “Abiele” Cook in Rensselaer County needs to be obtained from the New York State Library. There are tax records and other sorts of court records on microfilm in Salt Lake City that can be consulted for more information.

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RESEARCH REPORT
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Research on the Cook family of Berkshire County, Massachusetts has learned more about the Abiel Cook who lived there in the mid to late 1700's including information that links him to William Cook of Hancock. Their exact relationship, however, remains unknown.

At the end of the last research session, it was noted that an Abiel Cook had ties to the Shakers. Since the Shakers had a community in Hancock, Massachusetts – where William Cook lived at the time of his marriage to Lucy Chapman – this seemed significant, since William Cook was supposed to have had a brother named Abiel.

The references to this Abiel Cook in the last research report were as follows:

“It should also be kept in mind that Hancock, Massachusetts was one of the centers of Shakerism in the northeast United States. A scholarly work on the “Gift of Tongues” which includes information on Shakers, the gift of tongues, and ritual dancing mentions an Abiel Cook whose daughters Hannah and Elizabeth were mistreated by an Elder Whittaker of the Shakers. (Document 19, Report of 26 March 2008) No date was given for these events, but the reference came from Thomas Brown’s Account of the People Called Shakers which was published at Troy, New York in 1812. (Document 20, 26 March 2008) The Shaker Communities at New Lebanon, New York and Hancock, Massachusetts were not far from Troy, and there is reason to think that Brown was writing of events that occurred in or near Hancock.

There was an Abiel Cook listed in the 1790 census of Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York. (Document 21, Report of 26 March 2008) He had only one son under the age of 16. Stephentown and New Lebanon, New York border Hancock, Massachusetts on the east.

In the 1800 Census this Abiel Cook was still in Stephentown, where he was listed as over 45 years old and had three sons, one age 10 to 16, and one under 10. (Document 22, Report of 26 March 2008)”

It is important to review here the nature of the mistreatment of Abiel Cook’s daughter. Elizabeth Cook was punished (whipped) by Noah Wheaton for “for having desires towards a young man.” (Document 19, Report of 26 March 2008). Elder Whittaker did not perform the punishment, but countenanced it:

“Abiel Cook, her father, hearing of it, prosecuted Noah Wheaton for whipping his daughter Hannah Cook, sister to Elizabeth, who was present at the time, was called for a witness. She went to Elder Whittaker and asked him what she should say.”

The questions here are, 1) why would Elizabeth Cook be punished and 2) what gave Noah Wheaton the authority to perform the punishment.

The Shakers were celibate and enforced their celibacy. That Elizabeth Cook would be punished for “having desires towards a young man” implies that she was old enough to have such feelings – i.e. at least a teenager. That Noah Wheaton and Elder Whittaker had any authority over Elizabeth Cook implies that she and/or her family were members of the Shakers.

It was recommended in the last report to seek out more information on Abiel Cook of Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York and his possible connections to the Shakers.

The records of the Shakers of Hancock, Massachusetts are available on microfilm at the Family History Library. The following record series for Hancock were checked for mention of the Cook family:

- Series I Covenants, laws, and legal and land records A6 Hancock, Mass. 1787-1881
- Series II Financial records A6 Hancock, Mass. 1767-1810
- Series III Membership, birth, death, and statistical records A6 Hancock, Mass. 1784-1840

- Series IV Correspondence A19-A20 Hancock, Mass. 1786-1912

No mention of the Cook family of Hancock was found in these records.

Research in the court records of Berkshire County, Massachusetts revealed the following references to Abiel Cook.

In the Berkshire County Court of Common Pleas of February 1785, Betty Cook of “Handcock,” Berkshire County, Massachusetts brought suit against Noah Wheaton of “Handcock.” The entry in the court docket reads as follows (Document 1):

Betty Cook of Handcock in ye County of Berkshire Spinster an Infant under ye age of twenty one years who has by Abiel Cook her guardian and next friend plaintiff against Noah Wheaton of Hancock aforesaid Gentleman Defendant in a plea of trespass, etc see ye writ on file Dated the twentieth Day of Nov^r last past. The Parties appear in Court ???? now continued by agreement to the next Term of holding this court.

The case was continued in the Berkshire County Court of Common Pleas of May 1785 (Document 2):

Betty Cook Plaintiff against Noah Wheaton Def^t in a Plea of Trespass etc see ye records of ye last session of this Court the s^d Betty is now three times solemnly called to come into this court but comes not & sd Noah being also called comes not but makes Default of appearance here – therefore it is adjudged & determined by ye court that in this case neither Plaintiff or Defendant have any further day in court.

This is an interesting case for several reasons. Firstly, it associates a Cook family with Hancock in 1785. Secondly, it specifically associates an Abiel Cook with Hancock.

Betty Cook was an “infant” under the age twenty one. “Infant” was a legal term in this time period used to describe a minor. She could have been as old as twenty. “Next friend” and guardian

was the adult male who acted for her – since as a minor female, she could not have brought the case by herself. Under normal circumstances, it would be her father or perhaps an older brother who would represent her. The plea of trespass against Noah Wheaton could mean almost anything – and it could encompass the “mistreatment” mentioned in the history of the Shakers mentioned above. In that history, the person mistreated was Elizabeth Cook, daughter of Abiel Cook.

Indeed, reference of the history of the Shakers showed that it *was* Noah Wheaton who inflicted the “punishment” on her – and that Abiel Cook, the father of Elizabeth Cook, prosecuted him for it. Betty is a nickname for Elizabeth and the court record shows that she was a minor in 1785 – meaning she could have been born as late as 1765. Given the circumstances leading to the punishment, she was probably an older teenager, so born no later than 1769.

Reference was also found in the court records to an Abiel Cook and his wife Margaret of Williamstown, Berkshire County. They petitioned the Court of Common Pleas in February of 1791 and January of 1792 for the partition of the estate of William Krieger of Williamstown, Margaret’s deceased husband. (Documents 3 and 4) The petition was granted in the April Court of 1792. (Document 5)

Williamstown vital records show that “Abial” Cook married Margaret Kriger on 18 October 1790. (Document 6) The fact that Abiel Cook married in 1790 suggests that he was not a Shaker at the time. The fact that his daughter Elizabeth was mistreated by a Shaker in 1785 may have caused him to part company with them – if he himself ever was a member. Perhaps Elizabeth and her sister Hannah were “investigating” the Shakers and their association with them was brief.

Williamstown vital records also show the marriage of an Elizabeth Cook to a Stephen Scott in 1784, (Document 7) but this could not be the daughter of Abiel Cook, as she was still unmarried and a minor in 1785.

Williamstown borders Hancock, Massachusetts on the south and Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York on the east. There is only one Abiel Cook in the vicinity in 1790 and 1800 and that is Abiel Cook of Stephentown (Document 21, Report of 26 March 2008):

Locality		1790 Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York				
Page	Head of Family	Free White Males 16 and Over	Free White Males Under 16	Free White Females	All Other Free Persons	Slaves
	Abiel Cook	1	1	2		

This census shows that Abiel Cook already had a male under the age of 16 in 1790 and two females. If this is the Abiel Cook who married Margaret Kriger in Williamstown in October of 1790, this census implies that he, like Margaret, had been previously married. If he was a widower at the time of the census, then the two females could represent two daughters – perhaps the Hannah and Elizabeth mentioned in the history of the Shakers referenced above.

The 1800 Census of Stephentown showed the following family for Abiel Cook (Document 22, Report of 26 March 2008):

Locality		1800 US Census, Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York													
Page	Line	Head of Family	Free White Males					Free White Females					All Others	Slaves	
			0 to 10	10 to 16	16 to 26	26 to 45	45 +	0 to 10	10 to 16	16 to 26	26 to 45	45 +			
		Abiel Cook	1	2			1	2	Page torn off						

This census shows that this Abiel Cook was born before 1755. It was previously hypothesized that the two males age 10 to 16 in 1800 could have been William Cook and Abiel Cook – but William Cook would have been in the 16 to 26 age category in 1800. Further reference to Abiel Cook was found in the deeds of Berkshire County, Massachusetts as follows:

On 3 November 1795, Jesse Byam of Williamstown leased to Abiel Cook of Williamstown, a hundred acre lot in Williamstown for the sum of £250. (Document 8) The lease was effective from 18 June 1795 for a term of nine hundred and seventy six years. Such a lease – also known as a “lease for life” – served the purpose of providing a place for a person to live without having to pay

rent. It was often used to provide for elderly or otherwise incapacitated relatives. The lease suggests some relationship between Jesse Byam and Abiel Cook – but it is hard to imagine Abiel Cook being in need of such a lease.

On 21 October 1801, Abiel Cook and Margaret, his wife, of Williamstown, sold to Solomon Giddings of New Fairfield, Fairfield County, Connecticut, the land that was distributed to Margaret as her “dower thirds” from the estate of her deceased husband William Kriger. (Document 9) They received \$453 dollars for the land. A comparison of the 1801 deed with the 1795 lease shows that this was probably the same property. The reason for Jesse Byam leasing the land to Abiel Cook may imply that he too had an interest in it.

In these deeds, this Abiel Cook resided in Williamstown, not Stephentown. Rensselaer County, New York deeds made no mention of Abiel Cook and there was no estate for him in that county. Likewise, there was no estate for him in Berkshire County. The only mention of Abiel Cook in the official records of Rensselaer County, New York is an 1803 mortgage to Joshua Parker of Lansingburgh, Rensselaer County for a lot of land in Lansingburgh. (Document 10). Lansingburgh is a city on the Hudson River – some distance from Stephentown. It is not presently known if this Abiel Cook of Lansingburgh is the same as Abiel Cook of Hancock and Stephentown. There is, however, mention of an “Abiele Cook” leasing almost 63 acres of land in the Manor of Rensselaerswyck in 1791. (Document 11) The manor of Renssealaerswyck covered much of Rensselaer County. This is a private lease found among the Van Rensselaer Manor Papers. The Family History Library does not have the actual papers, just a guide to them. They appear to be at the New York State Library in Albany. This lease should be obtained to see if it concerns Abiel Cook of Stephentown and if it sheds any light on whether or not he was the man of that name in Hancock and Williamstown.

There is no Abiel or Abial Cook in the 1810 census of New York or Massachusetts and it is not presently know what happened to the Stephentown and or Williamstown Abiel Cook after 1800 or 1801.

Still, Abiel Cook of Hancock is a person of interest, even if he is a different person than Abiel Cook of Williamstown or Stephentown. Firstly, he was living in the place (Hancock) where

William Cook was residing when he married in 1810. Secondly, William Cook traditionally had a brother Abiel – an uncommon name.

Abiel Cook of Hancock, since he had a daughter born between 1765 and 1769, was likely born in the 1740s. This means that he could have been the father of Abiel, William, and Job, but if he was the same Abiel Cook who lived in Stephentown, his 1790 and 1800 census configurations do not provide for that eventuality.

More research on Abiel Cook of Hancock, Massachusetts needs to be conducted to look for connections to William Cook, younger Abiel Cook, and possibly a Job Cook, as well as to see if he is the same person in Stephentown and Williamstown. One record that needs to be obtained is the original court records relating to the lawsuit brought by Abiel Cook against Noah Wheaton – i.e. the loose papers that may contain the names of associates and witnesses. Since William Cook would have been a little boy at the time of the lawsuit, he is probably not mentioned, but the more information learned about Abiel Cook of Hancock, the better. There are tax records and other sorts of court records that can be consulted for more information.

Before researching the origins of Abiel Cook of Hancock, however, it is important to determine his relationship to William Cook and the younger Abiel Cook. He may not be their father, but he may be related in another way.

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