

COOK FAMILY ORGANIZATION
PROJECT SUMMARY
[Cook2008July / 0807]
8 September 2008

OBJECTIVE

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

RESULTS

Research on the Cook family of Berkshire County, Massachusetts has uncovered more about the Abiel Cook of Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York who lived there in the late 1700s. It is now believed that he is the same Abiel Cook who lived at Hancock, Berkshire County, Massachusetts. His parents and ancestry have been identified. Whether not he was the father of the ancestor William Cook is still a matter of conjecture, but there is evidence to that effect.

- Found evidence that Abiel Cook of Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York was the same person as Abiel Cook of Hancock, Berkshire County, Massachusetts.
- Located court records tying Abiel Cook to Hancock, Massachusetts
- Proved that Abiel Cook of Williamstown, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, was *not* the same man as Abiel Cook of Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York and Abiel Cook of Hancock, Berkshire County, Massachusetts
- Found that Abiel Cook of Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York served in the Revolution from Tiverton, Rhode Island and that his widow applied for a pension.
- Found mention of this Abiel Cook in the genealogy *Thomas Cooke of Rhode Island*, by Jane Fletcher Fiske. According to this genealogy, Abiel Cook had a daughter Betty whose age fits the age profile of the Betty Cook, daughter Abiel Cook of Hancock who brought suit against Noah Wheaton for mistreatment in 1785. According to this genealogy, Abiel Cook was the son of a Job Cook; William Cook traditionally had a brother Job.
- The 1782 census of Rhode Island for Abiel Cook lists young males in his household, one of whom could be William Cook.
- The Family Group Record for Abiel Cook has been updated to reflect the information found in Jane Fletcher Fiske's genealogy *Thomas Cooke of Rhode Island* but it can't be stressed enough that the father-son connection between William Cook and Abiel Cook is still tentative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further research is recommended on Abial Cook of Tiverton, Rhode Island to see if he could be the father of William Cook. Rhode Island records are good, but they are not always indexed. There may be a warning out in another town that mentions William.

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RESEARCH RESULTS
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Research on the Cook family of Berkshire County, Massachusetts has uncovered more about the Abiel Cook of Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York who lived there in the late 1700s. It is now believed that he is the same Abiel Cook who lived at Hancock, Berkshire County, Massachusetts. His parents and ancestry have been identified. Whether not he was the father of the ancestor William Cook is still a matter of conjecture, but there is evidence to that effect.

At the end of the last research session, correspondence was initiated to obtain documents from Massachusetts and New York relating to Abiel Cook of Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York and Hancock, Berkshire County, Massachusetts.

The first document was the loose court papers relating to Betty Cook of Hancock, who brought suite against Noah Wheaton of Hancock for trespass. She was under the age of 21, so Abiel Cook “her guardian and next friend” brought the suit on her behalf (Document 1).

This document contained some useful information. Firstly, the action of trespass was the mistreatment that Betty Cook received at the hands of Noah Wheaton. The case was brought in the February 1785 Term of Court of Common Pleas of Berkshire County. The suit was originally brought in the name of “Elizabeth Cook,” but throughout the body of the complaint, the name “Elizabeth” was lined through and the name “Betty” written over it. While Betty is usually considered a nickname for Elizabeth, there are instances of it being used as a name in and of itself.

Betty Cook, by Abiel Cook of Hancock, her *father* and next friend, complained against Noah Wheaton of Hancock for three specifics

- On 1 January 1784, at Hancock, Noah Wheaton beat and ill treated her, exposed her naked to the view of many others, and threw her into the water and plunged and kept her there for the space of two hours
- On 17 November 1783, at Hancock, Noah Wheaton subjected her to the same treatment
- On 1 February 1785, at Hancock, Noah Wheaton subjected her to the same treatment

Why this treatment was repeated three times (at least) is not known. The record of this case as found in previous research stated that Noah Wheaton committed these acts because Betty Cook had “desires towards a young man.” Apparently this treatment – being thrown naked into water – was considered by the Shakers a way to keep such “desires” under control. The last reported instance of it among the Shakers took place at Niskayuna, New York in 1793.

There are several important things revealed in this lawsuit. Firstly, all of the incidents took place at Hancock, where both Betty Cook (and her father, Abiel Cook) and Noah Wheaton lived. Secondly, the incidents took place in the years 1783 through 1785. Betty Cook must have been a teenager at the time they took place. Thirdly, Betty Cook was the daughter of Abiel Cook. This was stated in some of the accounts of the lawsuit found in secondary sources, but this lawsuit confirmed it. Missing from this lawsuit, however, is mention of Betty’s sister Hannah Cook, who was supposed to have testified on her behalf, according to the same accounts of the lawsuit previously found in secondary sources.

There are tax lists for Massachusetts for the year 1784 and these were consulted for the town of Hancock. Curiously, Abiel Cook’s name was not found on the 1784 tax list for Hancock – but Noah Wheaton’s name was found. There was an interesting note at the bottom of the page on the last page of the Hancock 1784 tax lists. The note stated that because of the unsettled boundary between New York and Massachusetts, which included part of the town of Hancock, some residents considered themselves to be residents of New York, and thus refused to recognize the authority of the Massachusetts government and pay taxes to it (Document 2).

It will be recalled that there was an Abiel Cook in Stephentown, Rensselaer County, New York in the 1790 and 1800 Federal Censuses. After the last research session, a document relating to this Abiel Cook was ordered from the New York State Library. On 30 June 1791, Stephen Van Rensselaer, Lord of the Manor of Rensselaerswyck, leased to Abiel Cook of Petersburg, Rensselaer County, New York, 62 acres in the town of Petersburg (Document 3). The land that Abiel Cook leased was bounded by Ephraim Jackson and Joseph Rogers. Ephraim Jackson was listed in the 1790 Census of Stephentown (Document 4), as was Abiel Cook. The town of Petersburg was created from Stephentown in 1791. It would seem therefore that the Abiel Cook who leased land in Petersburg in 1791 was the same Abiel Cook listed in the 1790 Census of Stephentown. A list of livestock earmarks for Petersburg indicates that “Bial” Cook registered an earmark there in 1792 (Document 5).

The boundary of New York and Massachusetts was not fully settled until 1787 (Document 6). This may explain why in 1784 some residents of Hancock considered themselves residents of New York. If Abiel Cook of Hancock lived in the disputed area that may explain why he doesn't appear on the 1784 tax list of Hancock. It therefore seems possible that Abiel Cook of Stephentown/Petersburgh was the same person as Abiel Cook of Hancock.

There was an Abiel Cook whose widow Anna applied for a Revolutionary War pension from the town of Castile in Wyoming County, New York in 1844 (Document 7). Documents in the pension file indicated that, as Anna Lee, she was married to Abiel Cook at Stephentown (then called Hoosick), New York on 23 January 1785 by Elder Joseph Barnes. At the time of this marriage he was 45 years old. This statement places Abiel Cook in Stephentown in 1785.

This Abiel Cook served from Tiverton, Rhode Island during the Revolution. This fact led to checking the genealogy *Thomas Cooke of Rhode Island: A Genealogy of Thomas Cooke alias Butcher of Netherbury, Dorsetshire, England, who came to Taunton, Massachusetts in 1637 and Settled in Portsmouth, Rhode Island in 1643*, by Jane Fletcher Fiske. Abiel Cook of Stephentown was included in this book and these further details were given (Document 8):

- He was born at Tiverton, Rhode Island, about 1740, to Job Cook and Ann Bennett.
- He married first, at Dartmouth, Massachusetts, to Susannah Cole of Freetown, on 2 August 1766.
- He died, probably at Hoosick, Rensselaer County, New York, on 11 September 1807. [Probate records for Rensselaer County have already been checked and no mention of Abiel Cook was found.]
- He was a tailor by trade.
- By his first wife he had three daughters, Ann, *Betty*, and Susannah, all born between 1766 and 1773, when they were listed on a “warning out” order from Warren, Rhode Island.

A “warning out” in Colonial New England was a process whereby towns warned people who had moved into a town without permission to leave in order to protect the town from financial liability for persons who fell on hard times. Once warned, the people didn’t necessarily have to leave, but if they stayed, the town was not responsible for their support if they did fall on hard times.

The fact that this Abiel Cook had a daughter “Betty” born between 1766 and 1773 is noteworthy. Jane Fletcher Fisk estimates her date of birth at about 1770. She would have been about fourteen to fifteen years old in 1784/1785 when Betty Cook of Hancock was being mistreated by Noah Wheaton. Her sister “Hannah” could have been either Ann or Susannah, as Hannah was a conceivable variant of both names.

By his second marriage to Anna Lee in 1785, this Abiel Cook had the following children:

- Philemon, born 1786
- Joseph, born 1789
- Daniel, born 1791
- Martha, born 1793
- Sally Ann, born 1798

Jane Fletcher Fiske cites the 1800 census of Stephentown for Abiel Cook and indicates that all of his children by the second marriage are accounted for in this census.

The 1790 census of Stephentown showed the following family for Abiel Cook
(Document 9):

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		

In this census, Abiel Cook should have had two males under the age of 16 – Philemon and Joseph. The two females are probably his wife Anna and a daughter – but which one? There is no male who could represent William, born 1780.

Is Abiel Cook of Stephentown the same man as Abiel Cook of Hancock? Given the above evidence, the circumstantial case seems reasonable. It is also worth noting that the chronology of Abiel Cook of Stephentown excludes him from being the Abiel Cook of Williamstown found in previous research. That Abiel Cook was married to Margaret Krieger in 1790 and still married to her in 1801. Moreover, Abiel Cook of Williamstown was found in the 1800 census of that place indexed as Abiel “Eook.” This census effectively demonstrates that Abiel Cook of Williamstown and Abiel Cook of Stephentown were two separate individuals: (Document 10):

Locality		1800 US Census, Williamstown, Berkshire County, Massachusetts													
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 +			
127		Abiel Cook	2			1		4	1			1			

There is no real chronological conflict, however, between Abiel Cook of Stephentown and Abiel Cook of Hancock.

This brings up the question of how William Cook of Hancock might be related to Abiel Cook of Hancock. He doesn't fit into Abiel Cook's 1790 or 1800 census

configurations – but this might be explained by the fact that Abiel Cook had remarried in 1785. William Cook would have been five years old at the time of that marriage – perhaps he was with other relatives.

Another fact worth noting about Abiel Cook of Stephentown is that he was the son of a Job Cook. William Cook and Abiel Cook were supposed to have had a brother Job Cook.

The question is where was Abiel Cook between his service in the Revolution and his appearance in Stephentown/Hancock in 1785? According to Jane Fletcher Fiske's genealogy *Thomas Cooke of Rhode Island*, Abial Cook's service in the army lasted until at least 20 February 1779.

Rhode Island took a state census in 1782. Abial Cook of Tiverton was listed with the following family configuration (Document 11):

- 3 males age 0 to 15
- 1 female age 0 to 15
- 1 male age 16 to 21
- 1 female age 16 to 21
- 1 male age 22 to 49
- 1 female age 22 to 49
- 1 male age 50+
- 1 male age 50+

If this is Abial Cook, the Revolutionary War soldier, he would be the male age 22 to 49 – being born in 1740, he would be age 42 in 1782. The census accommodates a wife in the same age category, two older adults of both sexes, and four children 15 and under – three of which were males. Abiel Cook's three daughters – Ann, *Betty*, and Susannah – born between 1766 and 1773 would have all been under between ages 9 and 16 – yet there are only two females that fit these age categories. Fiske cites the 1774 State census of Tiverton as showing only one daughter at home. If, however, the Abial Cook living in Tiverton in 1782 is the man who went to Hancock/Stephentown, then his census configuration in that year accommodates William Cook, born in 1780.

It is possible that more work in Rhode Island records will clarify the family of Abial Cook of Tiverton. Fiske did not cover every source referring to Abial Cook in Rhode Island. She did not mention the 1782 census, or the 1777 military census, in which an Abial Cook in Tiverton was listed as age 50 to 60 (Document 12). This excludes him from being the Abial Cook whose widow Anna applied for a pension in 1844 – but means the Abial Cook in the 1777 census could be the man enumerated in 1782 – after all there was a male over 50 in his household in that census.

Abiel Cook of Hancock/Stephentown exhibits the characteristics of someone living on the margins of society in 18th century New England. He never owned land – he leased it. His daughters Betty and Hannah apparently had some association with the Shakers, who were themselves an unconventional group on the margins of society. He was warned out of a town in 1773 – something that was usually done when the Town Selectmen (council) considered a newcomer “at risk” of falling on hard times. He was a tailor by trade – an occupation that lends itself to itinerancy.

Further research is recommended on Abial Cook of Tiverton, Rhode Island to see if he could be the father of William Cook. Rhode Island records are good, but they are not always indexed. There may be a warning out in another town that mentions William.

The Family Group Record for Abiel Cook has been updated to reflect the information found in Jane Fletcher Fiske’s genealogy *Thomas Cooke of Rhode Island* but it can’t be stressed enough that the father-son connection between William Cook and Abiel Cook is still tentative. For this reason only the names of Abiel Cook’s parents have been added as place holders, but not the rest of his ancestry. That can be done if and when the parentage of William Cook is verified.

It has been a pleasure researching and documenting your family history. We look forward to continuing, according to your directions.

GLR/ewa

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