

THOMAS PRENCE

ORIGIN: All Saints Barking, London [EIHC 17:103-04]

MIGRATION: 1621 on *Fortune*

FIRST RESIDENCE: Plymouth

REMOVES: Duxbury by 1637, Eastham 1644, Plymouth by 1665

FREEMAN: In the "1633" Plymouth list of freemen Thomas Prence was just after the councillors, and ahead of those admitted on 1 January 1632/3 [PCR 1:3]. "Thomas Prence, gen.," is in the 7 March 1636/7 list of Plymouth freemen [MBCR 1:52]. In the list of assistants at the head of the "1639" list of Plymouth Colony freemen, but as this list was revised and annotated his name was included in the "Nawsett" portion of the list [PCR 8:173, 177]. In Eastham section of 1658 list of Plymouth freemen, and in Plymouth section of list of 29 May 1670 [PCR 5:274, 8:201]

EDUCATION: His inventory included a long list of books valued at £14 2d., including two great Bibles and "100 of psalm books."

OFFICES: Plymouth Governor, 1634, 1638, 1657-72 [MA Civil List 35]. Assistant, Plymouth Colony, 1632-33, 1635-37, 1639-56 [PCR 1:32, 36,

48, 116, 140, 2:8, 15, 33, 40, 52, 56, 71, 83, 115; MA Civil List 37-38]. Treasurer, 1637 [PCR 1:48; MA Civil List 36]. Council of War, 1637 [PCR 1:60, PTR 1:16]. Commissioner for the United Colonies, 1645, 1650, 1653-58, 1661-63, 1670-72 [MA Civil List 28-29].

In Plymouth section of 1643 Plymouth Colony list of men able to bear arms [PCR 8:188].

ESTATE: In the 1623 Plymouth division of land Thomas Prence received one acre as a passenger on the *Fortune* [PCR 12:5]. In the 1627 Plymouth division of cattle Thomas Prince, Patience Prince and Rebecca Prince are the tenth, eleventh and twelfth persons in the fifth company [PCR 12:10].

In the Plymouth tax list of 25 March 1633 Thomas Prence was assessed £1 7s. [PCR 1:9]. He was omitted from the list of 27 March 1634. His cattle mark was three marks on the outer side of the ear [PTR 1:2].

Thomas Prence received grants of land, 1 July 1633, 14 March 1635/6, 20 March 1636/7 meadow at Jones River; 6 March 1636/7 land between two cedar swamps at Island Creeke Pond; 5 February 1637/8 all the land between Greenes Harbor and South River; 2 April 1638 a garden place; 5 November 1638 ten acres of land "in some convenient place about the town"; 3 December 1638 an acre and a half at Smilt River; 2 December 1639 a parcel between John Barnes's garden and George Watson's field; 16 September 1641 an enlargement at the head of his Joanes River lot; 17 October 1642 an additional six acres at Joanes River; 2 October 1650 granted rights to bass fishing at Cape Cod [PCR 1:14, 40, 51, 56, 77, 83, 102, 103, 136, 142, 145, 163, 2:26, 49, 161]. He exchanged land with John Combe, Phinehas Pratt and John Barnes [PCR 1:25, 30, 12:197].

On 14 September 1638 Mr. Thomas Prence purchased two acres of land on the south side of the second brook from Ellinor Billington and Francis Billington [PCR 12:37]. On 29 May 1643 he contributed 6d. to buy drumheads and £14 to buy bread [PTR 1:14-15]. About 1645 Mr. Thomas Prence acknowledged that he had sold to Mr. Edmond Freeman all his house and garden place and barn in Plymouth, ten acres of upland in the woods and five acres in the second brook, and eleven acres by John Barnes's land and one farm at Joanes River [PCR 12:129-30]. On 11 July 1649 Mr. Thomas Prence of Nawset, gentleman, sold to Jacob Cooke of Plymouth, planter, forty acres of upland in Rocky Noocke with three acres of marsh [PCR 12:175]. On 13 July 1649 Mr. Thomas Prence of Nawset, gentleman, sold to Richard Church of Nawset, carpenter, and to Anthony Snow of Marshfield, feltmaker, upland and marsh at Marshfield and forty acres of upland received by grant dated 5 February 1647 [PCR 12:176].

On 13 June 1655 Thomas Prence of Eastham sold to "Mr. Edward Buckley" of Marshfield five acres of marsh in Marshfield [MD 9:234, citing PCLR 2:1:155]. On 12 July 1655 Thomas Prence of Eastham sold

to John Browne of Rehoboth "my half share with other purchasers situate and being near Rehoboth and Sowamsett" [MD 10:16, citing PCLR 2:1:159]. On 31 August 1658 Thomas Prentice sold to John Cooke of Plymouth two acres of marsh meadow at Jones River [MD 13:44, citing PCLR 2:2:6].

On 5 February 1665 the town of Plymouth granted Mr. Thomas Prentice six acres of upland meadow on the west side of Jones River meadow and on 16 March 1667[8] twelve acres more there [PTR 1:83, 97].

On 8 December 1662 Thomas Prentice deeded to "my son [i.e., stepson] Samuell Freeman and Mercye his wife the house and land Samuel now dwelleth in" [PCLR 3:201]. On 20 September 1664 Thomas Prentice deeded to John Freeman of Eastham "all that his upland and meadow lying on the southeast side of great Namskekett, viz: a parcel of upland containing eight acres ... with five acres of meadow"; also two acres of meadow with ten acres of upland [PCLR 3:28]. On 14 November 1669 Thomas Prentice exchanged one hundred acres "of upland lying upon Pachague Neck on the southerly side of Teticutt River" with "Mrs. Alice Bradford the executrix of Mr. William Bradford," receiving in return "a half share of Purchase Land at Satuckett, be it forty-five acres more or less, and also the one-half of twenty-five acres of meadow" [PCLR 3:171]. On 2 May 1670 Thomas Prentice of Plymouth, Gent., sold to Thomas Paine of Eastham, cooper, "all my one-half share of Purchase Land at Paomett," with the consent of "Mrs. Prentice" [PCLR 5:480]. On 25 July 1672 Thomas Prentice, Esquire, Governor of New Plymouth, deeded to John Freeman Sr. of Eastham "one parcel of land containing thirty acres"; "another parcel of land containing eight acres ... of swamp and upland"; "one other parcel of marshland, containing twenty-four acres"; "also forty acres of upland"; "also [another] forty acres of upland"; "also fifteen acres of upland"; and "also five acres of upland" [PCLR 3:278].

In his will, dated 13 March 1672/3 and proved 5 June 1673, "Thomas Prentice being at present weak in body" bequeathed to "Mary my beloved wife ... such household goods of any kind as were hers before we married, returned to her again, after my decease, and if any of them be much impaired or be wanting, that she shall make it good out of my estate in such goods as she desireth"; to "my said loving wife my best bed and the furniture thereunto appertaining, and the court cupboard that now stands in the new parlor with the cloth and cushion that is on it, and an horse and three cows such as she shall make choice of, and four of my best silver spoons, and also during her natural life, I give her the rents and profits of my part of the mill at Satuckett, and of the lands adjoining, and my debts and legacies being first paid, I do further give unto my said wife a full third part of my personal estate that remains"; to "my daughter Jane the wife of Marke Snow my silver tankard"; to "my

daughter Mary Tracye a silver wine cup and a dram cup"; to "my daughter Sarah Howes my biggest beer bowl"; to "my daughter Elizabeth Howland my silver salt"; to "my grandchild Theophilus Mayo and to the heirs of his body lawfully begotten, the one half of my lands and meadows at or near Namassakett in the township of Middleberry"; "I give unto my grandchild Sussanna Prence the daughter of my deceased son Thomas Prence, the other half of my above mentioned lands and meadows at Middleberry aforesaid"; in the absence of an heir of these grandchildren, the abovesaid lands to revert to "my daughters, or such of them as shall be then surviving, or their heirs if all my daughters should be dead"; "to my said grandchild Theophilus, and to his heirs forever, my part of the mill and lands adjacent at Satuckett after the decease of my wife, and this I give for his encouragement to proceed in learning"; residue divided between "my seven daughters, Hannah, Marcy, Jane, Mary, Elizabeth, Sarah and Judith, and my above mentioned grandchild Susanna Prence"; Mary "my beloved wife sole executrix"; "my loving friend Major Josias Winslow to be helpful therein." A codicil to the will bequeathed "to Mr. John Freeman *Speed's Cronicle* and *Wilson's Dictionary* and the abridgement, and *Simpson's History of the Church* and *Newman's Concordance*"; to "my daughter Elizabeth Howland a black heifer"; a little yellow heifer to Lydia Sturtivant; to "my daughter Jane a bed, and another bed to my daughter Elizabeth Howland"; to "my grandson Theophilus Mayo all my books fit for him in learning, and if he carry it well to his grandmother I then give him a bed"; also "I desire my brother Thomas Clarke to be helpful to my wife as need may require" [MD 3:204-06, citing PCPR 3:1:58-59].

The inventory of "Thomas Prence Esqr. lately deceased" was taken 23 April 1673 and totalled £422 10s. 7d. [MD 3:206-16, citing PCPR 3:1:60-70]. Real estate was listed at the end of the inventory, but unvalued: "one hundred acres of land lying in the town of Middleberry at or near Winnapaukett pond and the brook going from it"; "one share of meadow lying in a certain tract of meadow called the Major's meadow that lieth upon Namassakett River, betwixt the pond and the weir"; "one hundred acres of land lying on the northerly side of Teticutt River"; "a considerable tract of land that lieth on the easterly side of Namassakett River between Winnapauckett pond and a tract of land called the Major's purchase"; "eight acres of land on the westerly side of Namassakett River"; "a grant of ten or twelve acres of land and a small parcel of meadow at Jones River meadow in the township of Plymouth"; "ten acres of land lying on the south side of a cart way that goeth to Lakenham, called Prence bottom in Plymouth"; "the one half of fifty or sixty acres of land and three acres of meadow between him and Major Winslow in Middleberry"; "twenty acres of land and three acres of meadow at Tonsett in the township of Eastham"; "eight acres of land lying on Pochey Island in

the aforesaid Eastham"; and "one fourth part of a mill at Satucket and lands adjoining to it" [MD 3:215-16].

On 10 June 1673 John Freeman, Jonathan Sparrow, John Tracy, Mark Snow, Jeremiah Howes, Arthur Howland and Isaac Barker receipted to "our mother-in-law Mrs. Mary Prence late wife and executrix to our father Thomas Prence Esquire deceased" for their shares of the estate of Thomas Prence [MD 33:97-100 (with photograph of the unrecorded original)].

On 10 June 1676 Josiah Winslow, Esquire, "attorney for ... Susanna Prence at Catheren Gate near the Tower in London ..., singlewoman"; and John Freeman in the right of Mary his wife and as attorney for "Mary Prence, relict and executrix of the last will and testament of the honored Thomas Prence, late Governor ... deceased," and of Jonathan Sparrow and Hannah his wife, Marke Snow and Jane his wife, and Jeremiah Howes and Sarah his wife, daughters of the said Thomas Prence; and John Trasye and Mary his wife, Arthur Howland and Elizabeth his wife, and Isacke Barker and Judith his wife, daughters also of the said Thomas Prence, sold to Constant Southworth, treasurer and agent of Plymouth Colony, "all that our dwelling house, messuage or tenement" in Plymouth "at a place commonly called Plain Dealing"; signed by Josiah Winslow, John Freeman, John Trasye, Arthur Howland and Isack Barker [PCLR 4:124].

BIRTH: About 1600 based on age at death, son of Thomas Prence, carriage-maker, of Lechdale, Gloucestershire. In his will, dated 31 July 1630 and proved 14 August 1630, Thomas Prence, carriage-maker, of Lechdale, Gloucestershire, left a legacy to his son Thomas Prence "now remaining in New England in the parts beyond the seas" [EIHC 7:103-04, citing PCC 70 Scroope].

DEATH: Plymouth 29 March 1673, in his 73rd year ("Thomas Prence, Esquire, Governor of the jurisdiction of New Plymouth, died the 29th of March, 1673, and was interred the 8th of April following. After he had served God in the office of Governor sixteen years, or near thereunto, he finished his course in the 73 year of his life. He was a worthy gentleman, very pious, and very able for his office, and faithful in the discharge thereof, studious of peace, a wellwiller to all that feared God, and a terror to the wicked. His death was much lamented, and his body honorably buried at Plymouth the day and year above mentioned" [PCR 8:34; see also MD 3:203-04]).

MARRIAGE: (1) Plymouth 5 August 1624 Patience Brewster [Prince 229], daughter of WILLIAM BREWSTER; she died late in 1634 (in a letter to his son John Winthrop Jr. dated 12 December 1634, JOHN WINTHROP reported that "the pestilent fever hath taken away some at Plimouth, among others Mr. Prence the governor his wife ..." [WP 3:177]).

(2) Plymouth 1 April 1635 Mary Collier [PCR 1:34], daughter of WILLIAM COLLIER; she died perhaps by 1644.

(3) After 1 July 1644 (when she witnessed Rev. George Phillips's will as Apphia Freeman in Watertown [NEHGR 3:78]) and certainly some considerable time before 8 December 1662 (when Thomas gave land to her son) Apphia (Quick) Freeman, former wife of SAMUEL FREEMAN, daughter of William Quick of London [TAG 11:178].

(4) After 26 February 1665[/6] and by 1 August 1668 Mary (____) Howes, widow of Thomas Howes [MD 6:157-65, 230-35]. She died 9 December 1695 [MD 6:230, citing YarTR 3:328].

CHILDREN:

With first wife

- i REBECCA, b. say 1625 (living at time of cattle division in 1627 [PCR 12:10]); m. Plymouth 22 April 1646 Edmund Freeman [PCR 2:98].
- ii THOMAS, b. say 1627 (in the 1627 Plymouth division of cattle is a second Thomas Prence, inserted at the end of the tenth lot; this may be the son Thomas Prence, born at about the time this list was compiled, and added separately from his family); m. _____ (an appendix to the fifth edition of Morton's Memorial refers to letters from the widow and daughter of this Thomas Prence, in London, to his father, the immigrant [pp. 424-25]; these letters have apparently never been published, but copies of some of them are held by the Massachusetts Historical Society).
- iii HANNAH, b. say 1629; m. (1) Eastham 13 February 1649/50 Nathaniel Mayo [PCR 8:26]; m. (2) by 1671 Jonathan Sparrow [MD 14:193-203].
- iv MERCY, b. say 1631; m. Eastham 13 February 1649/50 John Freeman [PCR 8:26].

With second wife

- v JANE, b. Duxbury 1 November 1637 [MD 6:230]; m. Eastham 9 January 1660[/1] Mark Snow [PCR 8:28], son of NICHOLAS SNOW.
- vi MARY, b. say 1639; m. by about 1661 John Tracy [Tracy Gen 26].

Perhaps with third wife

- vii JUDITH, b. say 1645; m. (1) Plymouth 28 December 1665
 Isaac Barker [PCR 8:31], son of ROBERT BARKER; m.
 (2) after 1693 William Tubbs [PPR 1:168; PLR 2:123].
- viii ELIZABETH, b. about spring 1647 [WP 5:169]; m. Marshfield 9 December 1667 Arthur Howland [MarVR 10], son of Arthur Howland [NGSQ 71:90-91].

- ix SARAH, b. about 1648 ("departed this life March the 3d 1706 in the 60th year of her age," tombstone, Yarmouth, which conflicts with YarVR [NEHGR 59:217]); m. by about 1669 Jeremiah Howes (birth of child estimated by child's date of marriage), her stepbrother [MD 6:233; NEHGR 59:217-18].

COMMENTS: For many years it was believed that Prence had married only three times and that his last wife was "Mary" Freeman, but this was straightened out in 1904 by Ella Florence Elliott, who divided the erroneous construct into its proper wholes, revealing divorcee Apphia Freeman and widow Mary Howes as Prence's last two of four wives [MD 6:230-35].

Establishing the probable date of marriage for Apphia and Thomas Prence has significant implications for the parentage of Prence's last three children. Apphia is last seen as a Freeman 1 July 1644, about a year before the birth of Prence's seventh child, and at the end of a six-year hiatus in the birthdates of his children. She is called "Mrs. Freeman" as late as 15 October 1646 in a deed where she appears as an abutter, but this does not necessarily imply that she had not remarried by this date, since it was not unusual for archaic bounds to be used in this sort of description [SLR 1:78].

In a letter dated at Plymouth 8 June 1647, Thomas Prence wrote to John Winthrop that "since my parting company [with you] I have almost met with Jacob's trial in his travel between Bethel and Ephrath: God's having been heavy upon my wife and that for diverse months and is not yet removed" [WP 5:169]. In Genesis 35:16-19 Jacob's favorite wife Rachel died between Bethel and Ephrath after giving birth to a son she named Benoni, but he called Benjamin. Prence here is referring to the birth of his own daughter Elizabeth, apparently a difficult childbirth.

On 6 March 1637/8, having been elected governor, Thomas Prence was excused from the requirement that the governor live in Plymouth, and was permitted to retain his residence in Duxbury [PCR 1:79]. When he was again elected governor, in 1657, he was allowed to maintain his residence in Eastham, but in 1663 the court ordered that the governor's house at Plymouth be enlarged, and by 1665 Prence again became a resident of Plymouth [Dawes-Gates 2:684].

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE: Perhaps due to the fact that Thomas Prence had no grandsons that carried the Prence surname, little attention has been directed to this family. A very brief account of his family was prepared in 1852 by David Hamblen and a more substantial treatment was published in 1931 by Mary Walton Ferris [Dawes-Gates 2:682-94].