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EDWARD COLCORD, REBEL *

By JOANNA C. COLCORD, of Mount Vernon, New York.

[*Note on English origin.* The parentage and birthplace of Edward Colcord are mysteries which years of searching have failed to unravel. He was undoubtedly of English birth. At one time he returned to England and, according to his own testimony, was in "tingmouth" (Teignmouth), Devon, in 1646.

The name in various spellings was common in south of England. Libby, quoting probably from the Banks Manuscripts, shows that at Bovey Tracy, on the Teign above Teignmouth, one Edward Colchard, son of Richard, was baptized in 1635, after our subject was known to have come to New England. The Banks Manuscripts¹ give the marriage license of a John Colchard, Jr., of Brudninch, co. Devon, and Joanna Moore, on May 24, 1610; and also the marriage of an Edward Colscott of Devon and Joane Gubb on January 28, 1614/15. In the probate registry of the Bishop of Exeter, under date of 1647, the will of Edward Colscott of Goodleigh is on file, bequeathing to wife Joane, but mentioning no children.² Dudley, in a pamphlet entitled "In Whelewright's Day," asserts that Edward Colcord "has been connected with an inheritance" near Exeter in Devon, but no evidence is available to support this statement.

In early Colonial records, the name Colcord was often written Colcott, and there are indications that the name was pronounced thus, or even "Colkit," in those days. It may be a variant of either Collacott or Colquitt, names widespread in England. One Richard Collicut, who married Joane Thorne in Barnstaple, co. Devon, in 1627, was an early New England settler; but there is nothing in the records to associate his family with that of Edward Colcord. Leaving these clues to future historians of the Colcord family, we let Miss Colcord tell her story.—*M. B. C.*]

Edward Colcord, the New Hampshire settler, was the ancestor of all of the Colcords in America, and, through his eight daughters, of countless numbers who do not bear the family name. He has received scant and somewhat contemptuous treatment at the hands of such historians and genealogists as have mentioned him, and no adequate exploration has been made of the causes which might underlie his erratic and unconforming behavior.

¹ The Banks Manuscripts at the Rare Book Room in the Library of Congress.

² Other wills are listed in Fry's "Devonshire Wills and Administrations" (British Record Society), and are not known to have been read by American genealogists.

Dow, in his *History of Hampton, N. H.*, in writing of the dispute over the division of the town's common lands in 1646, says of Colcord:

Great bitterness of feeling prevailed, originating, indeed, from different sources, but fomented and cherished, to a considerable extent, by a single individual, a person of acknowledged ability, shrewd, calculating, of indomitable energy—but, in the estimation of many, an unprincipled demagogue; one who knew the *law* well, as his friends claimed—for he had both friends and followers—but who, in the estimation of his opponents, was so fond of litigation, and so constant in his attendance upon the courts, as a party witness, a litigant or an agent, that, in their quaint language, he was said to be “more meeter to follow the courts than to follow his work.”

As a basis for these strictures, Dow picks out one of the minor incidents in Edward's turbulent career, which was consistent enough with his lifelong pattern of resistance to what he felt to be injustice and oppression, but which seems insufficient on which to build up such a structure of condemnation.

Alonzo Quint, the New Hampshire historian, disposes of Edward briefly as “in lawsuits pretty much all the time. He was in bad odor with all parties by turns . . . but was liked by some very respectable people.”

Dudley³ says “he was the violent character of the Piscataqua region during its early years of settlement, with unsocial manners that became more objectionable as he grew older. . . . A natural rebel against authority . . . ever shifting from place to place, he seems to have created trouble wherever he went;” and Libby⁴ calls Colcord “one of the best, and to many most unfavorably, known New Englanders of his day.”

Fitts, in his *History of Newfields*, is a little kinder. “Some of the trouble arose,” he says, “from the fact that he was a sturdy opponent of Massachusetts, up to a certain date. . . . Notwithstanding his litigiousness, he was one of the most prominent men in the Province.”

There is ample evidence in the court records of the day to support this chorus of animadversion. Unfortunately, they are the only records extant, since letter-writing and journal-keeping belong mostly to a later era. Any attempt to examine Edward Colcord's career in the light of modern theories of human behavior must rest, therefore, on incomplete and more or less biased documentation.

He first appears in 1631 as a very young man in the vicinity of the Piscataqua in New Hampshire, when, according to Hubbard, the earliest historian of New England, there were but three houses in all that region. He seems to have received a good education for the times in the old country; although not a

³ Dudley, A. T., “In Whelewright's Day.”

⁴ Libby, C. T., “Genealogical Dictionary of Maine and New Hampshire.”

lawyer, he was fond of drawing legal papers and was often called upon or deputized himself to represent others in court. The petition in Volume XVII of New Hampshire State Papers⁵ is one of the few holograph documents which he left. It shows in handwriting and phraseology a degree of education which could scarcely have been acquired in the backwoods community to which he came.

He is said to have come over as a minor employee of the "Bristol Merchants," and may have accompanied Capt. Thomas Wigin in the *Pide Cow* on the occasion of the latter's first visit as agent to the Hilton station at Dover Point. No records exist of Edward's early years there, but by 1638 he was an experienced scout and Indian trader, able to conduct negotiations with the Indians in their own language.

Much uncertainty exists as to the date of his birth. His depositions as to his own age may be tabulated as follows:

Year deposed	Age given	Birth date	Age in 1631	Authority
1647	43	1604	27	Dover Court Records; in New England Hist. and Gen. Register 23: 167
1659	43	1616	15	N. H. Probate Records, Concord, N. H.
1669	54	1615	16	Pope, Pioneers of Massachusetts
1673	56	1617	14	Coffin, in NEHGR 6: 248
1674	59	1615	16	Coffin, in NEHGR 6: 248
1676	61	1615	16	Coffin, in NEHGR 6: 248
1676	67	1609	22	N. H. State Papers Vol. XVII, 522

The last two depositions are evidently taken from the same source, and one printed version or the other is in error. As reproduced in the N. H. State Papers, the deposition went on to say that he had "been in the country 46 years"—or since about 1630; and this checks with the known facts. Many indications point to his having been born earlier than 1616; his good education for the times could hardly have been acquired if he had come to the wilderness a lad of fifteen, and he must have been of age to perform some useful service if he was employed at the Hilton station in 1631. He must have been a man of some maturity and experience by 1638; for in that year he conducted negotiations with the Indians for the Rev. John Wheelwright, and witnessed the deed between him and the "Sagamore of Pascataqua" for the site of Wheelwright's Antinomian colony at Exeter.

On the other hand, boys matured early in those days; and a young man of 22 may have had experience which warranted entrusting him with such a responsibility. His marriage, occurring about 1640, fits in with the theory of the later birth-date; and finally there is his own several-times repeated testimony

⁵ Page 607.

which would indicate that he was under seventeen in 1631. The stronger probability appears to be that he was born about 1615.

We have then, a lad of vigor, ability and promise, who had been given a fair education by whoever brought him up, and then shipped off to the wilderness alone and at an early age to fend for himself. Under what circumstances he came is not known. Whether some sense of injustice, of friendlessness and lack of emotional security had already been implanted in childhood, cannot be discovered at this date. We can only say that disturbances as prolonged and deep-seated as those displayed by Edward Colcord are usually found in modern experience to be rooted in deprivations of status, security or affection in early childhood. If Edward was a boy whom no one wanted to remain as part of a family group, it would go a long way toward explaining his subsequent divergent behavior.

To understand the arena in which his life was passed, it is necessary to know something of early New Hampshire government and land tenure. The Piscataqua settlement, where Edward first appears in 1631, was established under the Plymouth Company at Dover Point in 1623 by Edward Hilton, called the "Father of New Hampshire." It was probably intended as headquarters for a fur-trading and fishing industry, Hilton and his brother William being members of the Guild of Fishmongers in London. It proved to be not a paying proposition as an outlying factory; and in 1630, after a reorganization of the Plymouth Company by a group commonly alluded to as the "Bristol Merchants," Captain Thomas Wiggin was sent as their agent to look into the possibilities of colonizing the place as a new settlement.

In the meantime, overlapping grants, particularly the Laconia grant to Captain John Mason in 1629, had clouded the title to the property. In order to protect the occupants on the Piscataqua, a new charter was sought and secured in 1630 by the Plymouth Company, which was called the Swampscott Patent. Under this charter, Wiggin went to England and returned in the *James* in 1633, bringing a party of thirty settlers, most of whose names are unknown except by inference. Wiggin and Hilton proceeded to grant out the lands for settlement, but the date of partition cannot be established, since the early records of Dover have been destroyed. In 1642, the records show Edward Colcord and 23 others in possession of 20-acre farms 40 rods wide, running back from the Piscataqua River for 80 rods.

According to Scales' History of Dover, Edward Colcord's first home was on the eastern shore of Dover Point, a few hundred feet from the "Fore River." It was next to that of Philip Chesley, and stood about half a mile north of the cove where

the *James* landed her immigrants in 1633. This low-lying tract is now thickly overgrown with alders.

It was chiefly altercations regarding the title to these lands, and to those later acquired by himself and his friends, which made Edward Colcord so many bitter enemies, and kept him in hot water for the rest of his life. He seems to have been the organizer of one group against the subsequent claims of other settlers who secured titles under other auspices, or who simply "squatted" on the land and defied anyone to dislodge them. In those days of rapid settlement, "claim-jumping" was rampant, and it is unnecessary to point out the vindictive nature of disputes which arise over the possession of real-estate.

Hubbard, who disliked him greatly, says that Colcord was "for want of a better, for some years together, [after 1631] chosen governor of the plantations about Dover," but no evidence has been found to support this statement. In 1642, he served as Deputy to the General Court at Boston, and he was appointed one of a commission of three magistrates to "end differences under 20s,"⁶ but was replaced by another in the following year, and thereafter appears to have held no public office in Dover.

Previous to this, however, in 1640, he signed the "Dover Combination," the first instrument of self-government on the Piscataqua, as one of the grantees of Dover Point. The following year, he signed the petition of the men of Dover not to be annexed by Massachusetts Bay. The New Hampshire colony was not religious or sectarian, but purely commercial in its foundations. Exeter, although a religious colony, represented a liberal movement, and a secession from Puritanism. Massachusetts' domination of government by religion found no echo in New Hampshire; the Hiltons were supporters of the established Church of England, and Wiggin sided with Massachusetts for political gain rather than from religious conviction. In signing this petition, Colcord took sides against his former chief, Wiggin, and the ground was laid for the later enmity between the two men.

Colcord probably resided for a short time in the new settlement of Weconnet, now Hampton, which was founded in 1638 by the Massachusetts Bay Colony about twelve miles south of Dover Point. Thither had come from Salem Robert Page and his wife Luey, together with their children and Ann Wadd (or Nudd).

Years later, in June, 1673, Edward calls Robert Page "my brother":

Edward Colcord of Hampton, in consideration of great care, love and respect which my brother, Robert Page, deacon of ye church of Hampton, hath manifested to me, my wife, and children in receiving my housing and

⁶ N. H. S. P. Vol. I, pages 161-171.