

Humbly sheweth,

That whereas it hath been much observed and a long time taken notice of, that Edward Colcord, a man netoriously—hath many years vitiously lived, to himself, and disorderly toward others, what by vexatious suits and fraudulent dealings in severall respects, by cheating and cozening, by wresting mens estates out of their hands, by collar of law, by revileing their psons, by fomenting of strifes, by raising discord among neighbors, by false swearing before a court, by takeing all advantages to insure—men, whereby to get something for himself, it may seem strange, that this man hath runn this course, without any restraint, unlese being debarred from pleading & being made incapable of giving in testimony, but what by his fair speeches deluding many by subtle contrivanees and underhand practices he hath hitherto evaded the hand of justice, the time was, that proceeding so farr as to lash out against the Worshipfull Captaine Wiggin in casting foul slanders upon him, there was an intent by some to have wrought out these villaines to a ——— before authority, which the same Edward Colcord fearing and foreseeing his condign punishment, made an escape and rann away from the town wherein he lived, & the places adjacent quickly perceived by their peace and quietness what a blessing it was to be freed from such an incendiary, hee travelling from place to place till every place was weary of him, supposing that by length of time injuries might be forgotten and the heat of our spirits somewhat allayed, he returned again & for a short season applied himself to some orderly living; but a man habituated in all manner of wickednesse is not so easily reclaimed, he taking up his former wont persisting in the same and that no thing might be wanting to fill up his measure, he hath anew vilified the chiefest of our magistrates and abused them by opprobrious terms.

The subscribers to this complaint & having a deep sense of these mischiefs and expecting no end thereof from him, that their ——— might be secured and the names & goods of others preserved, have drawne forth a portrature or charge of this Colcord & present to the wise ——— of that much honored Court, not knowing any other way ——— remedy of the aforesaid evils.

The subscribers hereunto will be ready to make good what charges are given in this complaint.

Thomas Coleman,
Timothy Dalton,
John Brown,
John ———
William Godfrey,
Robert Tuck

Thomas Filbrook,
William Fiffield
Humphrey Wilson,
Will Ffulbrook
Robert Nason(?)

The General Court referred the petition to the County Court at Hampton, which, nothing loath, handed down a decision which in its failure to specify the offenses charged, shows clearly the lack of protection which a person who had rendered himself obnoxious to powerful interests might then expect at the hands of the law.

Att the Court held at Hampton, ye 8th, 8th mo. 1661, upon the complaint preferred against Edward Colcord at the General Court & referd to this court to hear and determine—This Court having found him guilty of many notable misdemeanors and crimes, some agt Authority and some agt persons in authority, some cheeting of men in their estates, some in causing needlesse and vexatious suits in law & other disturbances among the people: He is sentenced as followeth, viz., to pay a fine of five pound to ye Treasurer of this County; 2ly to bee comitted to the house of correction att Boston, and there to be discharged, unless there bee bond taken to the vallue

of ——— with sufficient sureties for his good behaviour, and in particular that hee sue no man at any time hereafter without putting in good security to satisfye ye partie sued what shall be recovered of him by authority from time to time & costs.¹⁷

It is evident from these documents that Edward Colcord had offended by laying claim to property which others wished to retain; that he had assailed the powerful and pompous Capt. Wiggin; and that he had been too outspoken in his criticisms of other magistrates. But to condemn a man to prison for the causes alleged, with no more proof than was advanced, is a barefaced miscarriage of justice.

He resisted the court order, and his behavior when haled to court is thus described in an affidavit by the constable of Dover:

June 27, 1661

Philip Chesley constable of Dover concerning Edward Colcord to be undertaken with drinke in time of the Courte sitting, and taking him to bring before the Courte to answ^r it, the s^d Colcord gave the s^d constable a thrust from him wch^h was testified by Jno Moulton and Thos. Ffootman, and confest by ye s^d Colcord; together with violent and uncomely speaking to Captain Wiggins in and before the Court, whene he was comanded silence, discovering much contempt therein. The court sentence is that for his excess drinking and his carriage above said to pay a fine of 10(?) shillings or sett in ye stocks one hower and halfe and fees of Court 2s/6. Captain Parks ingaged to Constable Thos. Rock to satisfie for this fine.

But Colcord was not without friends of some influence in the community who arranged that he should be "let go by his keepers in the night." The Court visited its displeasure on its unfaithful servants by ordering that the constable at Hampton "for his neglect, shall loose all his chardges for bringing the said Colecot to Boston."¹⁸

No record has been found that the prison sentence imposed on Colcord by the Court was ever served; he probably left the jurisdiction and returned to Saco till the matter blew over. His eldest son, Jonathan, died in Hampton in June, 1661; but he remained in Maine. In July of that year he was "convicted for drunkennesse upon his own acknowledgment and the testimony of Mr. Samuel Hall" and fined 10s in the York County Court. Two years later, he was bound over for good behavior after Major Lasher complained to the York County Court that he had "abused Capt. Wiggin by unseemly words," and Nathaniel Maysterson and Robert Wadleigh testified that he had said that "Yorke men were a company of pittiful roges & rascalls; namely Mr. Rishworth & Capt. Raynes & all the assotiats that acted in the case about Jere: Sheeres, his punishment at Wells Court."

In 1667, the Court at Hampton denied a further petition of

¹⁷ N. H. S. P. Vol. I, pages 236-238.

¹⁸ N. H. S. P. Vol. I, page 241.

Ann Colcord to have a committee appointed on her behalf to settle several cases between her husband and others.

In 1670 and again in 1672, Colcord was prosecuted in the York County Court, on the latter occasion for "abusing Capt. Gooderings by scoffing and abusive languadge." He was ordered to pay "£5 in silver down upon the nayle or forthwith be carried to the post and there to have ten strips given him upon the bare skine." He paid the fine; an enormous one for the times and for the offense alleged. Free speech came high in the Colonies.

In 1676, he was in Boston, testifying as an "antient inhabitant" of the region against the claims of the Mason heirs under the Laconia grant, a service for which he later petitioned in quaint language for £10 recompense. The following year he signed the petition of the men of Hampton to be continued under the government of Massachusetts Bay¹⁹—the first instance of conformity which he had shown in many years. He was an old man; he had given up the battle against Massachusetts and Captain Wiggin.

In 1677, his second son, Edward, was killed by Indians during King Philip's War, leaving only Samuel to carry on the name. Debts began to overwhelm him. In 1679, Henry Dow, "marshall of Norfolk," reports that he has "said Colcord locked in fast" for the satisfaction of a claim against him for £200 by Richard Bradley, who alleged that Colcord had unlawfully disposed of a ketch in which Bradley was part owner.²⁰ Land belonging to Colcord in Hampton was "drestreigned" in 1680, probably in satisfaction of this rather large claim. The estate left by his son Edward, amounting to £85, was settled at this time on Samuel, an arrangement in which the father concurred, probably to keep it from being involved in the distraintment proceedings. At the same time or a little later, Edward transferred to Samuel his own property, or what remained of it.

In April 1681, he petitions the court for the return of his distrainted property, naming as friends to act for him some of the leading citizens of the community. The phrase in which he hopes that his request will be considered rational indicates that his sanity may have already been in question.²¹

To ye much honored President & Council of his Majesties
Province of New Hampshire.

The petition of Edward Colcord humbly sheweth.

That whereas yor petition^r & Henry Williams having a case depending in Court referred ye final issue thereof to yor honors equal judgement; yor petition^r rests in yor judgement & is ready to fulfill ye Conditions thereof, if yor honors shall see meet to cause my self to be once possessed of ye estate yor honors judge mine, without which yor sentence cannot be attended,

¹⁹ N. H. S. P. Vol. XVII, page 527.

²⁰ N. E. H. G. R., Vol. 28, page 373.

²¹ N. H. S. P., Vol. XVII, page 607; original document in New Hampshire State Historical Society.

& therefore my humble & I hope rational request is; yor honors wou:ld be pleased to appoint Capt: Gilman, Capt: Haussey, & Samuel Dalton Esquires ye Reverend Mr. Saml: Dudley and Mr. Seaborn Cotton to give me peaceable possession of my estate violently detained from me that I may both enjoy myne own & justly pay others their due & according to yor honors appointment I shall magnifie yor Justice & remain

Yor humble suppliant
Edward Colcord

Aprill 20, 1681

Meanwhile, the difficulties between himself and his wife had reached the point of being a public scandal, as shown by the following document in the Collections of the N. H. Historical Society.²²

22 April, 1680. Edward Colcord and Ann, his wife, being brought before us, the subscribers, and accusing each other for scratching and fighting, and the said Edward Colcord being bloody on his face, and Ann on one of her hands, which she said was done by her husband, and he also offering that those scratches on his face was done by his wife, and they both inveying bitterly one against the other, are both bound to appear before the President & Council at Portsmouth, upon the second Tuesday in June next, to answer for their disorders, & to keep the peace in the meantime, on penalty of the offending party being committed to prison that shall be convicted of breaking the peace during this bond.

Addendum:

Ann Colcord acknowledged in court that she bid her daughter Deborah take the pot of butter from her husband.

Records of President and Council:

At a meeting of ye Council ye 10th June 1680 In portsmo.

Edward Colcord & Ann his wife being bownd ovr to appeare before ye Council for yr disorderly living. Upon a full hearing of ye case, the Council doth order that ye sd Edw: Colcord & Ann his wife shall stand bownd to ye Tressr of this province in ye sume of 5/11 apeece to be of good behavior each to ye other during the pleasure of ye Council, & that ye said Ann do attend her duty toward her husband in the Use of the marriage bed according to ye rule of gods word, weh if she refuse so to do upon complaynt to ye next Court at Hampton, the Council doth order she shalbe whipt to the number of 10: stripes: the consil takes his owne: bond.²³

Both must have been about 60 at the time, the parents of eleven children, the last born in 1667, so that the conventional adjurations to Ann seem a work of supererogation. The court's orders were not effective, and a year later, it becomes evident that Edward's entire family was arrayed against him.

29th June, 1681. The case of Edward Colcord for abuse offered to his wife att divers times as Doth appear by Evidenc, the Presedent and Council doth order that the sayd Edward Colcord shall continnow in prison till Hampton Court next, unless he Gitt baile to the vallue of fortie pounds to keepe the peace towards all persons and special towards his wife and children till the Court take further order Concerning him.

²² N. H. S. P. Vol. VIII, page 40.

²³ N. H. S. P. Vol. XIX, page 670.

30th June, 1681. Edward Colcord moving the Council (who hath sentenced him to prison, there to be kept till can give Security of £40 for his Good Appearing to his wife and family that stands in fear of their lives if he be att liberty) which by reason of his restraint Cannot find what to answer, as if he had some time allowed him to Attaine the same, the Council further doth order thatt he have three weeks or a month's liberty to procure sufficient sureties to the said some of £40, and if in the mean time he shall Committ any outt Rage or any wise abuse his wife and children upon any of their Complaints to authority made by them that then he shall forfeit to the Treasurer of this p'vence all that Right he hath or ought to have into all or any part of thatt maintenance the Council hath allotted him for his support During his life out of whatt Ever Estate he hath or pretendeth to have, and be forthwith committed to prison without baile or monie prize there to be kept During the Council's pleasure to be Committed by such of the Council as the Complaint be made unto.²⁴

An entry in the Hampton town records closes his unhappy story:

"Oulde Edward Colcord died February 10, 1681-2." His wife survived him by seven years; the Rev. John Pike of Dover writes in his journal on January 24, 1688-9, "Mrs Colcord died of an Appoplex."

When we examine the career of Edward Colcord in the light of modern knowledge, we must realize that we are regarding a psychoneurotic. It is a mistake to suppose that the early pioneers were all simple, rugged individuals with minds and personalities adjusted to their environment. The history of the times shows many aberrants, though the pattern of their lives does not often stand out so clearly.

Edward Colcord was a man of superior mental equipment, but with marked emotional imbalance and maladjustments of personality which brought all his ambitions to nought. His chief aims seem to have been to gain security through the acquirement of land, and status through leadership conceded by his fellows. Like many neurotics, the efforts he put forth to attain those ends were those least calculated to secure them. His desperate need to register the superiority he felt found expression in scorn and contempt toward those who differed from him. His failure of sustained purpose, the readiness with which he left one thing uncompleted and turned to another, prevented his securing or at all events retaining, such wealth as the period offered. His violent and bitter tongue alienated many influential contemporaries; and his unreliability and double-dealing made it impossible for him to secure the leadership which he craved, and which his mental powers would probably otherwise have warranted.

His life was a long warfare against society. He insisted, in season and out, in pressing his claims against a community which had set its mind against him and courts which let pass no opportunity to condemn him. If fair means did not succeed, he felt

*N. E. S. P. Vol. I, page 367.

justified in trying foul. It is not claimed for him that he was an espouser of unpopular causes on others' behalf. His own interests were always involved; and a deep sense of personal injustice appears to have been the force which guided his career, led to his loss of standing, and drove him finally to a condition of mental disorder which in those days passed unrecognized for what it was.

The same self-absorption which defeated his own interests made it impossible for him to make a good matrimonial adjustment. The only glimpse we get of his wife is a sorry one; but living with Edward and bearing his eleven children may have made an originally normal girl into the shrew with the pot of butter. Neurotics often manufacture their own mis-matings.

Others of Edward Colcord's contemporaries may have suffered loss of goods and repute; felt injustice, passionate anger, and revolt; reviled the worthy in high places; taken to drink as a way of escape; returned again and again to the assault of entrenched privilege; seen their wives and children turn away from them, and known that it was with cause; and in the end lost their hold on reason and life together; but they left in the documents of the times no such vivid case-histories of their personal tragedies as did Edward Colcord.

Issue, births of some recorded at Hampton:

2. i. JONATHAN, b. 1641, d. Aug. 31, 1661 in 21st yr. He pleaded guilty of defending his father in a suit at a time he was too young to practice law.
3. ii. ELIZABETH, b. 1643 (?), m. by 1664 ROBERT EVANS of Dover.
4. iii. HANNAH, b. ca. 1645, d. July 17, 1720; m. Dec. 28, 1688, THOMAS DEARBORN.
5. iv. SARAH, b. ca. 1647; m. Dec. 30, 1668, JOHN HOBBS.
6. v. MARY, b. Oct. 4, 1649, d. Nov. 23, 1741; m. Dec. 28, 1670, REV. BENJAMIN FIFIELD.
7. vi. EDWARD, b. Feb. 2, 1651/2, slain by the Indians, June 13, 1677.
- + 8. vii. SAMUEL, b. ca. 1656; m. MARY AYER.
9. viii. MEHITABEL, b. ca. 1658, m. Oct. 20, (Dec.?) 1677, NATHANIEL STEVENS of Dover.
10. ix. SHUAH, b. June 12, 1660/62; m. (1) RICHARD NASON, (2) Sept. 16, 1687, JOHN DOUGLASS.
11. x. DEBORAH, b. May 21, 1664; m. ca. 1684, TRISTRAM COFFIN.
12. xi. ABIGAIL, b. July 23, 1667, apparently died young.

(*Apologia*: It may be questioned why a descendant of Edward Colcord should spread such a history upon the record. When I first turned to the books, it was with no idea other than to glean a few general facts about another dead-and-gone pioneer. The first shock of discovery was succeeded by extreme interest to learn what materials could be found and utilized to throw light upon a highly complicated personality, vanished these three hundred years. Then, as I sensed the acrid passions still steaming up from the antiquated words, I became fascinated to observe the character that was unfolding—no weakling, but a sick soul; a man of enormous, frustrated energy which always recoiled upon itself.