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THOMAS CORNELL

Innkeeper, Boston, Massachusetts, 1638

[from a work in progress entitled *Y^e Olde Lookinge Glass*, by Alexander Bannerman, and previously published in modified form in *The Lively Experiment*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2007)]

THOMAS CORNELL hailed from County Essex, England, possibly being born there in or very near the year 1595.* His wife's name was Rebecca, but her family name remains in dispute.† Their family of seven (or possibly eight) sons and six (or possibly seven) daughters follows. The baptisms of ten of their first eleven children are recorded at Saffron Walden, Essex:‡

Sarah bapt. 30 Mar 1623; m. (1st) 1 Sep 1643 at New Amsterdam to Thomas Willett (d. c. 1645); m. (2nd) 3 Nov 1647 at New Amsterdam to Charles Bridges [corrupted into Carel VerBrugge by the Dutch] (d. 5 Aug 1682 at New Amsterdam); m. (3rd) (lic.) 20 Nov 1682 to John Lawrence, Jr. (b. c. 1644; d. c. 1697); 3 ch. (1st marr.).

William bapt. 4 Apr 1625; bur. 7 Jan 1627/8 at Saffron Walden, Essex.

Ann b. c. 1626; probably identical with her of that name bapt. 2 Aug 1635, and called "second daughter" in her mother's 1664 will; m. (1st) by 1659, but prob. earlier, in RI to Thomas Kent (d. 2 Jun 1678 at Perquimans Pct., Albemarle Co., NC) [this marr. is sometimes err. ascribed to Ann's youngest sister Mary]; m. (2nd) "the 17th of" (record torn, but year is prob. 1679, as evid. by records

* See BG John Ross Delafield, *Delafield, The Family History, Vol. II* (priv. pub., 1945), app. 45, in which the author identifies Richard Cornell of Steeple Bumpstead, Essex, England, as the probable father of "Thomas Cornell, who came to Boston . . .," being identical with him of the instant sketch. A strong case can be made for Thomas's identification with this family: Baptismal records for some of Thomas' children appear in Saffron Walden, Essex, a nearby parish, and the names Richard and Mary (the purported parents), as well as the names of the known children of Richard and Mary, all appear among the children of Thomas. Richard Cornell, carpenter, made his will 22 June 1631, proved 5 Sep 1631, in which he names his sons Daniel, Samuel and Thomas, and names Thomas his executor. See *NEGR* 53:433 (1899). There was perhaps also a son named William who appears to have died by 1629. More recent information, however, seems to negate any such connection. See the bible records of Richard Cornell, reproduced in *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, vol. 98. It is more likely that Thomas of the instant sketch is the son of George Cornwell of Earsted and Terling, by his third wife, Susan Casse, and if so, Thomas was bapt. at Terling 24 Mar 1593/4. See Prentiss Glazier, "Thomas Cornell (or Cornwell) (1594-1655/6 of Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island, His English Origin and His Family in America," (Sarasota, FL: 1975) (NY State Libr. MS H/929.2/qC814/77-21947).

† She previously has been identified as Rebecca Briggs, variously being called the daughter of Henry Briggs of Clerkenwell, London, England, for which there is no sound evidence, or of William Briggs and Sarah Gore, daughter of Sir John Gore of London. Her identification with any Briggs family remains in dispute by modern genealogists. The strongest authority of her identity with any Briggs family presently rests on a statement in the court case of her murder in which John Briggs, identifies her as his "sister Cornell." Such identification is vague, however, and could easily mean his sister-in-law, being either his wife's sister or his wife's brother's sister. Or it could refer to her in the religious sense as his sister, as these families were Quakers.

‡ These families are compiled from numerous resources. The baptisms of ten and the burials of two of the first eleven children are given in *The American Genealogist* 58:78 (1982).

surrounding the rec. of their marr.) at Perquimans Pct., Albemarle Co., NC to Thomas Leper; known ch. from 1st marr., 5 dau.*

Thomas bapt. 21 Oct 1627; hanged for his mother's murder 23 May 1673 at Portsmouth, RI, and accused of witchery; m. (1st) Elizabeth __ [not Fiscock, as prev. asserted];[†] m. (2nd), as her 1st husb., to Sarah Earle (b. in MA or RI; d. 1690 at Tiverton, RI; she m. 2nd c. 1677 to David Lake, with whom she had iss.); ch. from 1st marr., 4; ch. from 2nd marr., 3.[‡]

Richard b. 1628 in England; d. 1694; of Rockaway, Long Island in 1693; m. c. 1655 to Elizabeth __, who survived him; they rem. to New Amsterdam; 12 ch.

Rebecca bapt. 31 Jan 1629/30; bur. 5 Feb 1713/4 at New Amsterdam [said to be aged 91, but this is err. based on her bapt.]; m. 9 Dec 1647 at New Amsterdam to George Woolsey, Jr. (bapt. 27 Oct 1610 at Bristol, England; d. 17 Aug 1698 at New Amsterdam); 7 ch.

Elizabeth bapt. 1 May 1631; d. soon.

Kelame [identified in the church records as a son, but poss. in error] bur. 19 Oct 1632, and perh. identical with sister Elizabeth, who d. soon.

William (again) bapt. 9 Dec 1632.

John bapt. 6 Jun 1634; d. 1704 at Cow Neck, LI, NY; m. Mary Russell (b. c. 1645, prob. MA; d. aft. 1699/1700); 5 ch.

Elizabeth (again) bapt. 15 Jan 1636/7; d. after 1708; m. 9 Jul 1661 at Portsmouth, RI to Christopher Almy (b. c. 1631 in England; d. 30 Jan 1712/3 at Newport, RI); 9 ch.

Samuel b. c. 1639; d. betw. 15 May 1699 (will dtd.) and 24 Jan 1714/5 (w.p.) at Dartmouth, MA; m., as her 2nd husb., to Grissell Strange (wid. of Thomas Fish, Jr.; b. c. 1650; d. bef. 15 May 1699); 3 ch.

Joshua b. c. 1640; his mother conveyed to him in 1664, and he conveyed to his brother Samuel soon thereafter, and further record of his life does not come to light.

Mary, err. said to have m. Thomas Kent, and further record of her life does not come to light.

* Ann and Thomas Kent were deeded 10 acres by her mother in 1659, thereby establishing their marriage by that time, but it seems likely, given the order of the births and times of the marriages of their known children, that they were married earlier, perhaps as early as 1655. See John Cornell, *Genealogy of the Cornell Family...* (New York: T. A. Wright, 1902), p. 23; *Perquimans Precinct North Carolina Births, Deaths and Flesh Marks, 1655-1820*, NC Dept. of Archives and Hist., Raleigh, NC, Arch. and Mss., microfilm C.077.60001.

[†] See *NEHGR* 51:218-19 (1897).

[‡] The children of Thomas Cornell (Jr.) by his second wife, Sarah Earle, have always been asserted to be three in number. Only two, Innocent and Sarah, have previously been positively identified, and Sarah often has been said to have died young. See, however, *The American Genealogist* 58 (2):79 (1982), which shows Sarah survived to age 80, was twice marr., her second husb. being John Cole. In reviewing the Newport, RI marriages culled from probate records, the following entries are found under the surname Cornell: Ju __, sister of Thomas, Stephen, & John AND MR. BORDEN, mentioned in the will of Thomas Cornell (d. 1713) [Newport Rec. Bk. 3A, p. 3]; Mary, sister of Thomas, Stephen, & John AND MR. CRANSTON, mentioned in the will of Thomas Cornell (d. 1713) [Newport Rec. Bk. 3A, p. 3]; Sarah, sister of Thomas, Stephen, & John AND MR. COALE, mentioned in the will of Thomas Cornell (d. 1713) [Newport Rec. Bk. 3A, p. 3]. Because we know that Innocent married Richard Borden and Sarah married John Cole, and they had brothers named Thomas, Stephen and John, and given the correct date of the will for their brother Thomas, we are able to conclude that the Mary Cornell shown in the same record is the previously unidentified sister.

Thomas was a Puritan, coming to Boston in late 1637 or early 1638 with his wife and seven surviving children. On 20 Aug 1638, the Town Meeting voted to permit him to buy “William Baulstone’s house, yard, and garden, backside of Mr. Coddington, and to become an inhabitant.”^{*} On 6 Sep 1638, he was “licensed upon tryal to keepe an inn in the room of Will Baulstone till the next General Court.” However, on 4 June 1639 he was fined £30 for “several offences selling wine without license and beare a 2d. a quart.” He was fined and ordered to cease operation.[†] Seemingly disgruntled with Puritanical practices in Massachusetts, Thomas appears to have left Boston, joining with Ann Hutchinson, Roger Williams and the rest of their party, who had associated themselves with the Society of Friends. By 4 Feb 1640/1 he had removed to Portsmouth, RI where Quakerism was tolerated. On that date he was granted a piece of meadowland, and on March 16 following, he was granted free status.[‡] In 1641 he was appointed constable, and in 1642 and for two years thereafter, he was an ensign in the colonial militia.

In 1642, Thomas and a group of Portsmouth men, including William Hutchinson and John Throckmorton, removed to the New Netherland colony, where they settled in the Bronx on the shores of the Long Island Sound. On 2 Oct 1642, the local Dutch government granted permission to Thomas Cornell and John Throckmorton to settle “within the limits of the jurisdiction of their High Mightinesses to reside there in peace.”[§] After obtaining a survey and map, Cornell and his associates were granted a tract of land in what is now the town of Westchester. The party did not long remain, however, for in February 1643/4 the white settlers were attacked by the natives at Throgg’s Neck. Some were murdered, many fled to New Amsterdam, but Cornell and others in his party returned to Portsmouth soon thereafter.^{**}

^{*} Rev. John Cornell, *Genealogy of the Cornell Family*, *supra*, p. 17.

[†] Records of the General Court at Newtowne, 2. 9m. in 1637, as cited in *Genealogy of the Cornell Family*, *supra*, p. 18, n.*. As noted, the law was repealed 23 May 1639. Thomas asserted that he was ignorant of the law, which stated that it was unlawful for anyone keeping a common victualling house to sell wine or strong waters and established a price of not more than one penny per quart for beer. In light of his plea for mercy, the court reduced his fine by £10.

[‡] Margaret Parks Ewing, *Langfitt and Davis, British and Colonial Ancestry* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, Inc., 1987), p. 23; *cf.* *Genealogy of the Cornell Family*, *supra*, p. 18, which makes the date 6 Aug 1640, but is likely in error.

[§] *Id.*, p. 19.

^{**} Contrary to speculation by some family historians, it is unlikely that the individual named Thomas Cornell who was an ensign in the militia was Thomas’s son Thomas because of the circumstances of the father’s removal to the New Netherland colony. A lengthy discussion of the removal of Cornell, together with John Throckmorton, Roger Williams and William Hutchinson, can be found in *Genealogy of the Cornell Family*, *supra*, pp. 18-22, and in *NEHGR* 98:67-68 (1944).

On 4 Feb 1646 Thomas was granted one hundred acres of land at Portsmouth, upon which he built a home called “The Homestead.”* The home remained in Cornell hands until the late 19th century, when it burned. On 21 July 1646 Thomas also had a grant of land from Gov. William Kieft in Westchester Co., NY, which he called Cornell’s Neck. This was only the third private land grant in Westchester County of which there is any record. In 1654 Thomas was a commissioner at Portsmouth. There, he died in or near the year 1655. He is said to have made his will 5 Dec 1651, but that document does not appear to have survived.† His widow, Rebecca, survived him for many years. Portsmouth town records show that on 25 Apr 1668 she registered her 28-year-old earmark, it being described as a crop on the left ear, and a slanted piece cut off behind the right ear.‡ Rebecca lived until 8 Feb 1673, when she was found dead in her bedchamber, having been burned to death. Quaker records state that she was “killed strangely.” From the colonial records of Rhode Island, we learn that her son Thomas was tried and convicted of her murder and was hanged.§ Unfortunately, the evidence was weak by today’s standards, and the poor man, who was hanged 23 May 1673, may have been put to death unjustly. The event of Rebecca’s death is the subject of an excellent book entitled *Killed Strangely* by Elaine Forman Crane.

Among the descendants of Thomas and Rebecca Cornell are two Presidents and a First Lady of the United States—Richard Milhous Nixon, Jimmy Carter and Frances (Folsom) Cleveland (wife of President Grover Cleveland).** Other descendants descendants of note include Cornell University’s founder, Ezra Cornell (1807-1874); the notorious Lizzie Borden; William Ellery, signer of the Declaration of Independence; former New York Governor Alonzo B. Cornell (1879-1883); Revolutionary War General Ezekiel Cornell, and actresses Marilyn Monroe and Katherine Cornell.

Alexander Bannerman, #97-23

* As Rev. John Cornell points out in his Cornell genealogy, the 100-acre grant was found to be nearly double that amount when ultimately surveyed. *Id.*, p. 20, n. ‡.

† The date is according to a memorandum by Stephen B. Cornell of Portsmouth made in the early 1800s in which he states that, “Thomas Cornell, by will dated Dec. 5, 1651, gave to his wife Rebecca all his real estate; also that Rebecca, by will dated Sept. 2, 1664, gave to her son Thomas all her land lying on the west side of Rhode Island...” *Id.*, p. 22. Although the will has not been found, because Stephen B. Cornell accurately stated the date of Rebecca’s will, this author is inclined to ascribe some veracity to Cornell’s statement regarding Thomas’s will.

‡ *The Early Records of the Town of Portsmouth* (Providence: E. L. Freeman & Sons, 1901), p. 276, citing p. 227 of the orig. records.

§ See, e.g., Jane Fletcher Fiske, *Rhode Island General Court of Trials, 1671-1704* (Boston: by the transcriber, 1998), pp. 19-33.

** These connections qualify their descendants for membership in the Hereditary Order of the Families of the Presidents and First Ladies of America.