

CHARLES TOWNSEND OF DUTCHESS COUNTY Some Thoughts by Harry Macy - August 2001

Were all the Townsends in lower Dutchess County from Oyster Bay?

The first Townsends to appear in the tax lists for the Southern Precinct of Dutchess (now Putnam County) are:

Daniel	1742
Robert	1744
Thomas	1745
Uriah	1746
Elihu	1746
Charles	1748

The first five all appear in the Oyster Bay Town Records and in other sources which establish their links to the O.B. Townsend family. Daniel and Robert are the sons of Daniel-2, John-1. Thomas is the son of John-3, Thomas-2, John-1. Uriah is the son of Henry-2, Henry-1. Elihu is the son of Daniel-3. In his 1912 history of Putnam County, Pelletreau, who had interviewed descendants and also presumably had access to family records, stated that Charles was supposed to be Elihu's son. Regardless of whether this relationship is correct, Pelletreau's statement does indicate that Charles' descendants considered themselves part of the same family as the rest of the local Townsends.

Many settlers of this Dutchess-Putnam area came from New England, including Massachusetts where there were other Townsend families. However, I'm not aware that anyone has found any New England records which indicate Townsend links to this part of Dutchess County, nor has anyone reported a Charles Townsend in New England who disappears off the map at the right time to be the one in Dutchess.

After 1748 there is a four year gap (1749-52) for which the Dutchess tax lists do not survive. In 1753 when they resume, these additional Townsends appear for the first time, all of them sons of the settlers from Oyster Bay:

Robert:U	The "U" indicates this is Uriah's son of the name, his eldest.
Zebulon	The second son of Uriah.
Benjamin	The eldest son of Robert.
Daniel Jr.	The second son of Robert.
Robert Jr.	The third son of Robert, later also called Robert:R.
Daniel - Senrs son	The son of Daniel, later also called Daniel:D.
Thomas Jr.	The eldest son of Thomas.

The significance of the entry for "Daniel - Senrs son" seems to have been overlooked by almost everyone who has tried to sort out these families. This Daniel-4 is not called Daniel "Jr." because there already was a Daniel Jr. in the community, his older cousin Daniel (Robert's son). When the latter was born he was called Jr. even though he wasn't the son of a Daniel Sr.; this was common practice among English families in New York at this time, when there were men of the same name in a community. So when Daniel-4 arrived there already was a Jr., and he could have been called "3rd" but instead we just find him as Senr's son or Daniel:D.

The existence of Daniel-4 proves that Elihu was not the only son of Daniel "Sr." We have two good pieces of evidence that Daniel Jr. (Robert's son) was born in 1721. Daniel-4 was born after that, at least 19 years after Elihu was supposedly born. Surely Daniel-3's wife had other children in the interim, possibly all daughters, or sons who died young, but the list could also include Charles.

Where could Charles fit into the early Dutchess Townsend families?

Charles first appears on the lists in February 1747/8, indicating he was then at least 21, and from the likely ages of his known children he probably married at about that time as well (son James was born 1756, and Elijah may have been several years older). Charles was therefore born no later than 1727, making it theoretically possible for him to have been the son of any of the Townsends who preceded him on the tax lists. However, records clearly show that Robert had only three sons, Benjamin, Daniel, and Robert. Thomas' sons have been identified from various sources and it appears impossible for Charles to have belonged to that family. In the case of Uriah, we have a complete family record, and there is no mention of Charles. That leaves Daniel-3 and his son Elihu, and of course Pelletreau said that Elihu was Charles' father.

If Elihu was as old as claimed, he would have been 25 in 1727. If Elihu's mother was only 19 when he was born, she could have had children as late as 1729 or 1730, so Charles could also be her son if born 1727. The existence of Daniel-4 proves that Elihu's mother was still having children in the 1720's. If Charles were her son, he would have been born before Daniel-4, as he appears on the tax lists before him.

Does the name Charles have significance?

Among the English settlers of New York and New England the name Charles was extremely rare, and it continued to be rarely used in the first few generations of their descendants. In Oyster Bay, there was a Charles Ludlam, born in 1691; the name does not appear elsewhere in his father's or mother's families, so why they gave the name to this child is unknown. As I showed in my recent article "Three Elizabeth Ludlams of Oyster Bay" (*NYG&B Record*, April 2000), this Charles was the son of Joseph Ludlam and Elizabeth-2 Townsend, daughter of John-1 (her second marriage). Therefore he was a first cousin to Daniel-3 Townsend.

In addition to being sons of an Elizabeth, Charles and his brother Joseph Ludlam Jr. both had wives named Elizabeth (hence the title of my article). Both of these wives have been called Townsends, but there has been disagreement about their parentage. I was able to show that Joseph's wife was Elizabeth-3 (Henry-2, Henry-1). I could not prove that Charles' wife was a Townsend. However, my colleague Barbara Barth noted that of the names of Charles' children, all could be attributed to the Ludlams except two, Daniel and Susannah. She therefore has speculated that Charles Ludlam's wife might be a previously unknown daughter of Daniel-2 and Susannah (Forman) Townsend. This would have meant that Charles married his first cousin, but there were other such marriages in Oyster Bay at the time. It would also mean that Daniel-3 had both a first cousin and brother-in-law named Charles. In any case, even without the second relationship Daniel-3 did have a close relative named Charles.

Before becoming too concerned about the rarity of the name Charles, we might also consider that Daniel-3 named his eldest son Elihu, the first male in Oyster Bay known to bear that name.

Let's go back to the beginning of the Daniel line.

I have thought that John-1 Townsend was probably born no later than 1615. He had a son Thomas baptized in 1642, and his son John is known to have been older, born 1640 at the latest. English law (subsequently adopted in New York) required that males be 21 and females 18 in order to marry. Various studies have indicated that most couples were slightly older. A study I'm currently making of New Yorkers in the 1680s for whom we have birth and marriage dates shows the average male marrying at 24-25 and female at 20-21.

John-1's wife Elizabeth may have been born about 1620. Typically she would have borne children until she was 44 or 45, or 1664-5. Her third child, another Thomas, was born in 1645, and if she had the rest of her children at typical two-year intervals and didn't lose any more of them, then Daniel would have been born no earlier than 1659 (after Elizabeth, James, Rose, Anne, Sarah, and George). One might suspect that the children did not arrive at such perfect intervals or that there was one or more not lucky enough to survive, so chances are Daniel was born a bit later.

However, if born in 1659 and married at the typical age, Daniel would have married about 1684-5. This is interesting because his older brother George married in 1684. We only know for sure that Daniel was married by 1695 when he and his wife Susannah are involved in the settlement of her father's estate.

If Daniel was married in say 1683-4 his sons Robert and Daniel could have been born later in the 1680's. We first find them on record in 1714 when Robert gave part of their father's land to Daniel. The records strongly suggest that Robert was the elder of the two. Robert's oldest son Benjamin was born in 1718 and if Robert was married in 1717 at the typical age he would have been born about 1693, which would also make him 21 in 1714. However, the fact that his younger brother had a son Elihu born before any of his own sons certainly suggests that Robert was born before 1693.

Was Elihu Really Born in 1704?

Oral tradition said that Elihu died in 1804 at 102 (another version says 1805 at 101), meaning he was born about 1702 (or 1704). If Daniel-3 was 25 when Elihu was born, he would have been born in 1677, which is totally impossible. If Daniel-3 was only 18 when Elihu was born (forced to marry under age because Susannah was pregnant, for example), then he would have been born in 1684. This is barely possible, because Robert-3 then would have been born about 1682 and Daniel-2 would also have had to marry very young. Under this scenario Robert-3 wouldn't appear on record until he was 32 and his first child would have been born when he was 36, both a bit late for the time.

I am very suspicious about the alleged age of Elihu. Many cases have been uncovered in both the colonial period and the 19th century, where the ages of very elderly people were exaggerated. They were reported to be 100 or more when in fact they were still in their 90s. Whether their precise ages were not known or there was some prestige to be gained from making them older is

not clear, but it did happen. The story about Elihu is just that; we do not have any contemporary record of his death that I have seen.

Elihu first appears on record when he witnessed a deed in 1726. According to the 1702 birthdate he then would have been 24. But under New York law a male only had to be 14 to be a witness.

Elihu's son Uriah is said to have been born in 1732; no exact date is given. Uriah first shows up on the tax lists in 1759, and his children appear to have been born after that. If he was not born in 1732, he must have been born soon after that year. If he was born in 1732 and Elihu had married at the typical age of 24, he (Elihu) would have been born about 1707. I rather suspect that this is closer to the mark. It wouldn't make any difference at all in Elihu's subsequent history, but it would give more time to fit his father and grandfather into the picture. On the other hand, if Elihu was a few years younger than claimed, it becomes more difficult for him to be Charles' father.

Unlike most of the Townsends in lower Dutchess, who were tenants of the Philipse family, Elihu owned his land. Late in life he deeded it to his grandsons, the sons of Uriah. Charles was clearly older than Uriah, and it seems very unlikely to me that Elihu would have passed over the heirs of his eldest son and conveyed his real estate only to Uriah's family. On the other hand, if Charles were a younger son of Daniel-3, it would make sense that he became a Philipse tenant, since his father's property was probably not sufficient to support more than Elihu's family, and Elihu clearly was Daniel-3's eldest son. Daniel's (youngest) son Daniel-4 also became a Philipse tenant.

Note: the Oblong lot where Elihu (and his father) owned land was in the southeast corner of Dutchess County, bordering Connecticut on the east and Westchester County on the south. At least one record indicates that the lot actually extended into Westchester. That part of Westchester was later part of the Town of North Salem, which explains Elihu's residence there. It is possible that Elihu did not appear on the Dutchess tax lists until 1746 because he previously had been taxed in Westchester. Since we don't have Westchester lists for the period we can't prove that.

My Conclusion:

For reasons set forth above, my feeling is that Charles has to be Daniel-3's son. Daniel-2 was most likely born in the early 1660s and his sons Robert and Daniel-3 in the mid to late 1680s. For whatever reason, Daniel-3 married say around 1705, long before his elder brother and probably well below the average age for marriage. His wife (Mary) was still bearing him children in the 1720's and this allows ample time to include Charles, who was probably born a few years before the 1727 date suggested above. On the other hand, for Charles to be Elihu's son requires a very tight squeeze in terms of dates, and raises the question of why he didn't inherit his father's land.

Who Were Daniel-4's Children?

Sources noted above indicate that Charles had five sons. When Martha Burke wrote about Charles' family, she tried adding on some more sons who were among unplaced Dutchess Townsends, but she recognized that this was making Charles' family suspiciously large, at least on the male side.

The appearance of Daniel-4 opened up a new line to which to attach at least some of these men. A prime candidate is Lt. Isaac Townsend, who married Hannah Wixon, had sons named William, Daniel, Charles, James, and Isaac, names which certainly suggest a connection to the same branch of the family. He was supposedly born about 1742, as when he died in 1803 he was reported to be in his 62nd year, but he does not appear on the tax lists until 1775 and his children all appear to have been born after that date, so it is possible his age at death was reported incorrectly and he was a few years younger. Other candidates for Daniel-4's sons are Levi, Amos, Zephaniah, and Gilbert, but all this requires further study and doesn't affect the question of Charles's placement.

About Dutchess County Records.

I feel the need to say a word in defense of Dutchess County records. You say "The old wooden Dutchess County courthouse was destroyed by fire in 1883 and again in 1888 whereby most of the old records were lost. The remaining records have never been indexed and seemingly are unavailable for research and observation."

There may have been fires in the courthouse, but they certainly didn't destroy any of the records that one expects to find in a New York county. Dutchess in fact has as complete a set of records as can be found in any of New York's colonial counties. It also has all the usual indexes for these records, and all of the surviving records are either available for examination at Poughkeepsie or have been microfilmed and are available through the Family History Library.

The bit about records being unindexed and unavailable sounds like comments that I have seen about the so-called Dutchess "Ancient Documents." These are a huge collection of the loose papers of the County Court of Common Pleas, dating back to the colonial period. I don't know of any other New York county that has such papers, as they are the type that were routinely destroyed, the court only being required to retain its minute books (which survive for Dutchess as well). However, the "Ancient Documents" did survive, and they have been filmed by the Mormons on over 300 reels of film. Some have claimed that these films are unreadable. Portions may be difficult to read, but I have used many of the films and found no difficulty in reading them. There is also an extensive index to these documents which has been filmed; it may not cover all of the documents but it covers a large percentage of them.

And it must be kept in mind that these "Ancient Documents" are not something one would expect to find in a New York county. The records we do expect to find are all still there for Dutchess: the deed and mortgage books, probate records, tax lists, court minutes, and a lot of lesser resources as well. For an understanding of the kinds of records that exist in Dutchess and what can be done with them I would recommend Frank Doherty's current series *The Settlers of the Beekman Patent*, especially volume 1. The Beekman Patent of Dutchess County was immediately north of the area where most of the Townsends lived.

In spite of all the Dutchess County records that do exist, there is still a problem with the Townsends prior to the end of the Revolution, because most of them were tenants (on the Philipse Highland Patent) and therefore did not leave deed or mortgage records, nor were they likely to leave probate records. The question is whether there might be more information on them in the private records of their landlord, the Philipse family. Sung Bok Kim, in his book *Landlord and*

Tenant in Colonial New York (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1978) covers the history of the Philipse Highland Patent. His note on sources indicates that Historic Hudson Valley (a nonprofit educational organization in Tarrytown, NY, which operates a number of historic sites and has a research library) has many of the surviving papers of the Philipse family, although it isn't clear how many of them pertain to the Highland Patent as opposed to the family's Philipsburgh Manor in Westchester County. The Philipses lost their land at the end of the Revolution because they had been Tories, and a lot of their papers may have been lost as a result. Most of the surviving papers were only made available to researchers in recent years and they are not a resource utilized by many genealogists. It is possible, but by no means certain, that they might hold Townsend information.

Getting back to Dutchess County government records, there are, of course, no vital records before 1847. This is standard for New York. It was expected that such records would be kept by families in their bibles, or by churches. And unfortunately, this is where the problems arise for Dutchess, if you are researching an English (non-Quaker) family like the Townsends. The church records are virtually non-existent, especially for the Southern Precinct (now Putnam County) where most of the Townsends lived. If you were researching a Dutchess County Dutch or German family, or a Quaker family, there wouldn't be this problem, but whatever churches served the English in lower Dutchess have left almost no records at all.

Sometimes someone from this region will pop up in a church record from an adjacent town or county, though that's rare. In this connection, you mentioned the British burning of Danbury, and it may be that a few Townsend records were lost as a result. Only residents would have been listed in the town (civil) vital records, and we have no evidence of Townsends living there until after the Revolution. The church records might have included some outsiders.

Speaking of church records, the same problem affects Oyster Bay in this period. We are fortunate to have every other kind of record for Oyster Bay, but the only church records that survive are those of the Quakers. A Baptist church existed in the village of O.B. from an early date but it has virtually no records until after the Revolution. The nearest Presbyterian church was in Huntington and some Oyster Bay people went there to be married, though the records don't start until about 1725. The nearest Anglican church was in Hempstead, and the minister from there sometimes visited Oyster Bay and recorded marriages and baptisms in his register, but those records also don't start (with a very few exceptions) until about 1725. There were no other churches active in the town except the Dutch Reformed which starts in 1732. The net result is that before about 1725 we only have the Quaker records and most of the Townsends were not Quakers. Like most of the people of Oyster Bay there simply are no church records for them. And while the colonial government made an attempt to get the towns to keep civil records of births, marriages, and deaths, this never caught on, and there are only a few such entries scattered in the Oyster Bay town records.

Sorry to carry on like this. It's a subject I've often lectured or written about, so once I get started it's hard for me to stop.