CAPTAIN JOHN

Frank G. Davis, Esq.
Honorary Governor
Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Ohio

I know now that he is going to die. At James's departure from Swansea we talked quietly of when we could safely bring him back to Barnstable, but it was a wish only, as we both knew but neither would give voice to. It was hard to see him lying so still, bathed in his own sweat and breathing so heavy through his teeth and plucking from time to time at the bloody rags pulled about his hip and thigh. Yet I have no regret at coming to Swansea with James, though God forgive me I would have better liked to remember Captain John as I saw him last in his health, riding off gaily on the grey stallion to join Major Bradford's force at Rehoboth.

Then when our son Jack came riding up to the house with a face as long as a poker, his breath and his horse's breath swirling together about them, the cold closed over my heart like a winter fog, and I knew even before he spoke that here were ill tidings indeed. Mother, he says, I fear to tell you that father has taken a ball in the hip at a fight in the great swamps about Petaquamscot below Wichford and is laid up at Swansea with only a few troops and Aunt Lydia's people to look after him.

Here was a cleft stick for a certainty -- to go post haste to his side as my heart cried out for, or to stay and mind the farm and the young ones and set guard lest the savages break through and destroy all. Jack begged me to stay. The paths are hardly safe even now, he says, and a woman, even with a few companions, is at risk to be cut down like another Ann Hutchinson should the savages go again adventuring on the ways.

But my place is at the Captain's side; I can put the farm in care of our servant Tooto, and trust Almighty God that the neighbors and townsmen can stand guard against attack when it should come. So off we go, James and Jack and I, and the coming into Swansea was a fair shock: the neighborhood farms as we drew near burnt out or wasted from last summer’s savage raiding, skeletons of dead cattle by the roads, and everywhere the dim whiff of stinking smoke and death, but we won through at last to Miles's garrison house with the barricado still firm and manned by the neighbors too stubborn or bold to flee the town. My sister Lydia and James Browne her good husband were still there likewise and it

was they who had set a good bed in one of the lean-to rooms and there we find my Captain John as I have said, and what little I can do to give him comfort I have done.

He knew me from the start I am certain-sure, for he grasped my hand and tried a smile that was more a ghastly grin. He has had some good days and more bad since, and like a guttering candle will flare up a while and sink away again, but ease him as we can, he slips from us little by little, or so it seems.

All this while my sister Lydia and the others have pressed me to return to Barnstable: first with my son James when he took leave as I have said, and since, when partys have gone out in the bitter cold to mend what they can at their burnt-out farms. But I reply that James is a leader in Yarmouth and Barnstable and with Jack's help and my brother John's people can keep all to rights. But still Lydia presses me. Return, she says, before the savages take heart again and we dare no longer take to the roads. You must go back, she says, and as soon as the Captain is enough recovered we will send him home in a good cart with careful guard.

But my place is at this side, and so I have sent James and Jack back to Barnstable, where Jack's firstborn was expected any day, God willing. So I saw them off home on an iron-hard January morning, breaths smoking from man and horse alike, and watched their dwindling black figures against the pewter sky till they went over the rise and out of my sight, then back I went to sit by my good Captain's side till God's side will be done.

I have heard much talk and no little repining amongst the men at Swansea, how Colonel Ben Church and the captains planned and led the attack on the bloody savages at their fort in the great swamp below Wichford; how my Captain John was leading a foot charge into the barricado and was shot down with a ball where his powder horn swung; how the fight went to our Plymouth men and the savages devastated and put to flight. But some held we were too hasty in withdrawing the wounded to their detriment: better to have tended the at the fort than drag them through the muck and snow back to Wichford and burning the fort and all in it.

But it is all one to me now. If God has willed to take him from us (and all the signs are there) what matter if he die in the snow at Pettaquamscot or on a bed of pain at Swansea?

This whole ill business started at Plymouth with a falling out between our people and the Chief Man or Sachem of the Wampanoags named Metacomet, whom we also called King Philip. The divers ins and outs of the matter are too

tangled to tell but it came to a head with Metacomet swearing revenge on all New England, stirring up the Naragansett and the Nipmucks to the end of driving all God's people into the sea. We have been at it now for above seven months. My John being Captain of the Second Company of the Plymouth men was in due time sent off to Mendum in the west of the Bay Colony. I have by me a copy of his dispatch to Gov. Leverett from Mendum which Jack gave me with John's other trifles when we reached the Garrison house at Swansea. He wrote in haste to this effect:

'Mendum, October th 1: 1675

Much Honored: My service with all due respects humbly presented to yourself and unto the rest of the Council hoping of your healths. I have made bold to trouble you with these few lines to give your honors an account of our progress in your jurisdiction. According unto your honors order and determination I arrived at Mendum with fifty men, and the next day Lieutenant Upham arrived with thirty-eight men, and the day following we joined our forces together and marched in pursuit to find our enemy, but God hath been pleased to deny us any opportunity therein; - though with much labor and travel we had endeavored to find them out, which Lieutenant Upham hath given you a more particular account. Our soldiers being much worn but having been in the field this fourteen weeks and little hopes of finding the enemy, we are this day returning toward our General, but as for my own part, I shall be ready to serve God and the country in this just war, so long as I have life and health, not else

John Gorun.'

Little wonder that at even such a time John would make his copy of this dispatch. My father early impressed on him the need for copies of all things sent off elsewhere, and in his later years father talked to the point of boredom of the early troubles of Plymouth, sprung as he said from Gov. Bradford's failings in copying the books of account et cetera

One bitter morning as I sat by the fire stirring a little porridge for the Captain lest he should wake and be in sorts to take a little nourishment, I think I fell into a sort of doze, for it seemed that a pale light loomed through the cold and dark, as if the serge had slipped from the windows of my mind where it was hung against the chill, and my heart was lifted and my whole mind and soul turned as it were to the grateful past and all God's goodness to us and ours. In my reveries as saw young John Gorum as I first beheld him, he coming into the

Plymouth meeting house with his old father. Not much older than I he was, a handsome face and fine figure, and something of my father about him for size and bearing. Our eyes met, and before I could drop mine in maidenly decorum, there was such a flash between us as warms me even now in this bare room in Swansea. His father, Rafe the Joiner, they called him, was a carpenter and maker of fine chests and presses and the like. Indeed, being of a quizzic turn, he kept in his lean-to-room his own coffin, beautifully joined , and, to the wonder of all, stored with apples until, as he said, he have better need of it. Contentious he was, too, quarrelsome and high of spirit. A true Northhampshireman, my father said, but why I never knew.

There were six of us Howland children then, and I as the oldest being 16 or thereabouts was already thinking toward husbands and families of my own. My brother John (how many Johns I have had about me!) was as yet the only son of my father (Joseph not as yet born) and I recall Rafe Gorum saying to my father by our fireside one day: "John, you have need of another son, with all those women about you, and only your son John to share your burdens in the fields and haymaking and all else. My own John, as I have seen, looks kindly on your daughter Desire and (he says quizzically) if so be you could suffer yet another John about you he would be right glad to take her hand. My son is of good family - the Gorums of Churchfield are of some standing in Northhants - he was put to common school in Benefield, he is strong as an ox, and my only heir."

Now I knew that my father looked kindly on John Gorum as a young man of promise, well inclined to the militia, an excellent hand with musket and long gun, diligent in the fields and with the cattle; and I knew too that he had already got my father's leave to court me.

But my father was not one to be hurried, and, I thought, took some small offense at the remarks on his family. So he replied that his Bess (my mother) was even then carrying another child, which with God's will might be a son, and that Rafe indeed had more need for sons than did my father. "Ah," says Rafe, going off on another tack, " 'tis true that my work keeps me over-occupied, and with the falling off of farm prices in Boston my farm in Marshfield is, like your own and all of Plymouth's, of little profit." Again my father made the stiff rejoinder that he had kept a large share in the Kennebec trading house, and was well anchored to windward for his own future and his family's.

Now I knew my father's temper well and could see plain enough that he was more at play then in earnest in all this, and soon the two fathers were settled with their pipes by the fire and agreeing that my marriage with John Gorum was like to be a blessing to all.

With that memory I fell to thinking how we had come to where we then were. I remembered how as a young girl I had lived at the Kennebeck trading houses with my parents, father being then in charge of the place, and my brother John and my sisters Hope and Elizabeth. They being small it fell to me to help my mother in their care and the household chores - cooking at the hearth, gardening in proper season, and the endless cleaning and washing of the clothes. My mother spoke often of Desire Minter, for whom I was named, who had gone back to England, leaving my mother with all the house to manage, and a good and loving friend lost into the bargain.

I remember the day that my father strode into the house, still with his musket in the crook of his arm, his face like iron, and said to my mother "we had to kill that thieving rascal." I thought that another of the savages had broke into the stores, and wondered that he had to be killed, but mother somehow knew. "Hocking," she cried. "I feared it would come to this." I found long after that Hocking was a Piscataqua man, determined to overreach our Plymouth patent and intercept the Abanaki coming down the Kennebeck to trade. There was a great to-do on the river, one of our men shot by Hocking, and Hocking then killed by musket fire. It fell out that they of Massachusetts, learning of the battle, saw it fit to intermeddle in the affair and demand a showing by what right we had withstood the Piscataqua men. And Captain Standish showing at Boston our patent giving us full charge at the Kenebec, the Bay men were abashed and withdrew their complaints.

Nevertheless, certain great English lords having their hands in the Piscataqua Plantation, it was thought best that Plymouth make some composition therein, and my father and some of the others were relieved from Kennebec in due time and returned to their farming at Plymouth. My father never tired of relating how Capt. Standish met him at the shore, clapt him on the shoulder, crying "'twas well done John - like Wessagusset. If we need fight to defend our rights, so be it." It was thus that when my father told Rafe Gorum of his share of the Kennebec venture it all came back to me in a rush; morever, my childhood memories of the tall somber savages stalking about the garrison house on the Kennebec are with me still.

Scarce had our fathers agreed on our marriage contract than old Rafe Gorum fell into a decline, and, lingering awhile, timely was carried off. It seemed that having arranged his son's affairs to his satisfaction that contentious old man lost his zest to live and sought the coffin he had kept so long and sweet with his apples. My John, in the full flush of his strength and youth, in good suitable time claspt my had before the magistrate, and we became thus husband and wife, with all the world opening before us. We took up the Gorum house in

Plymouth, and with its lands and garden made a good start to building our future and our family as well, and little Desire, our first-born came quickly (but decorously and after suitable time) thereafter. John had a little learning from his father in joyning (atop his common schooling in England) and this with the grain and cattle we compounded and sold in Boston, with the little one and the house and the garden kept us busy from dawn to dark and beyond.

My father, being stronger for book learning than most in Plymouth, had taught me reading and writing and some cyphering after a fashion, for he oft said that a good helpmeet must accommodate her man in keeping the household records - keeping the books being an obsession with him all his lifetime. Indeed, he had taught my mother and all us children much the same, and as for Plymouth Plantation, he said ever that the illness of the record-keeping and fair-copying went far to the never-ending troubles with the London Adventurers and that rascally Allerton.

However that may be, in the first years of our marriage my husband and father and some other forward-lookers kept close watch on trading at the Bay, where the Boston merchants were ever searching out markets for grain and the like, all New England now growing more than could be used, and prices, as old Rafe Gorum forsaw, falling daily. But what he had not forseen, the Azores and Maderia had need of grain and even richer markets lay in the Plantations of the Caribbees. In those hot climes the planters all planted sugar, and stood in short supply of grain and beef. So when the harvest time came round there we were on the road to Boston, carting the new grain and driving the dry cattle to market, and returning with the iron tools, cloth, hats, knives, buttons, and all we wanted in our own places.

To be closer to the Bay markets we had removed ourselves to Marshfield where John's father had left him a parcel of land, and soon bought of my father another parcel which he before had of the Governor. We thrived some years in that place, and God blessed us with our daughters Temperance and Elizabeth, and then at last with the two applies of my eye, James and little John who we call Jack, who with my sister Lydia have been my props and support in these last harsh days.

Then on another day when he seemed more in his wits we talked idly but with joy of our days at Barnstable: how we had removed from Marshfield and took our growing family first to Yarmouth where we took up another farm John had from my father and then built at Barnstable where we have prospered for nigh on twenty years: Our farm so rich that John built a grist mill for our use and

for letting out to our neighbors, and then a bark mill and tanning vats that our Jack has made to prosper.

From our upland and meadows we have raised and fed much cattle, some driven to market at Boston, some slaughtered in the fall, the flesh smoked or salted against the winter and the hides to our tannery with those of the horses not judged fit for breeding, work or riding. The swine also yield bacon and hams for salting or smoking and hides likewise for our tinning. Truly I am not drawn to the tannery, the stench and awkwardness of the hides being hardly to my liking. Indeed from my girlhood on the Kennebec I have been most content with the household tasks, most learned at my mother's knee: care of the little ones, cooking about the great fireplace with its spits and kettles and trivets and pots, and later, when our trade increased we had a swinging crane to serve in the stead of the great old lug pole for hanging the trammels and pots. How we children loved to sit in the chimney corner of chill winter nights, toasting our toes by the ashes and watching the sparks snapping out of the roaring logs and twinkling up the chimney into the glittering stars! And so it is in these days when the last of our infants, little Shubael, he scarce eight years and Hannah and our Lydia (she named for my sister Lydia who harbors us here at Swansea), something older than Hannah and Shubael, still love to sit by the fire when their tasks are done.

And so round again to the moment, Captain John wandering off from our rambling discourse, and drifting into a heavy breathing doze, and I steal out to the fire room to join Lydia in our cooking here at the great fire, and I am again in the midst of the strings of leeks and onions and garlicks, and the carrots and cabbages from the cellerage, as if I were again in my own home. It is hard to believe that for more than twenty years we have prospered at Barnstable and our family has likewise grown and spread. Our oldest, Desire, married with John Hawes the same year our Lydia was born, she now with little ones of her own in Yarmouth. Indeed, our first five have all married and our Jabez even now making eyes at pretty Hannah Gray, John Gray's young widow. Jabez too is off with the troops, and as I watch over my poor Captain withering away on his bed of pain and fever, my heart wrenches again when I think on our Jabez risking life and limb against the pitiless savages in the field. My little brother Isaac Howland too has fronted the savages at Middleboro where (as we heard) he shot down a howling savage at near half a mile with his log gun.

The savages have ever been puzzle and terror to me. When a child on the Kennebec I feared and shied like a colt from those cold dark eyes, thinking them truly the devils our Elder Brewster spoke on so often, and as I grew older and heard that they had for the most part refused our Lord Jesus Christ (except the few, like Sassamon, we called the "praying Indians") I thought and believed, and

still believe in some part that they are indeed imps of Satan and none of the Lost Tubes of Israel as some hold. We have tried to deal fairly with them, paying fair price for lands we dealt for, seeking out and paying good wampum and trade goods for their furs, and holding back only liquorous spirits and firearms, neither of which they can use with proper reserve. But still they lie and cheat and steal and kill among their own kind and us as well and now turn their whole hate and spite against us. Our preacher John Cotton tells from the pulpit that God has let them loose upon us for our sins and the ill carriage of our children, and this may be, so far as I in my ignorance can tell. I only know that my father before his death warned against the savages and the impending doom. He said that while Massasoit, the great Sachem of the Wampanoags, lived, he could keep rein on the savages, Massasoit's life having been once saved, as he believed, by our Mr. Winslow. But on Massasoit's death his sons raised trouble and complaint and at last the one, Metacomet, (or Philip as we call him) raised the Naragansetts and the Nipmucks and turned all against us with fire and blood, swearing to drive us all into the sea My Captain, being in the militia even from our days in Marshfield, kept well advised of all the tortuous turnings of the savages over the years, and there has ever been a dark cloud hanging on the quiet side of my mind, foreboding evil from the devils.

It was a little after our marriage word came of the slaughter of Ann Hutchinson and her family at Pelham Neck in New Amsterdam by the savages on one of their vicious outbreaks. That Ann was ever a secret heroine of mine, I having seen and heard her some years before as she passed through Plymouth after being warned out of Boston for wrongful preaching in and about the Bay. "Antinomian," they called her, she holding that faith alone secures our salvation, and works are worthless to that end. Though some were drawn to this, the divines were outraged, as much (so I think) by her womanly audacity as by her creed. This Ann was a tall strong woman, with a fire in her eye, and I was much taken with her, though I durst not say so among my elders, and to learn of her taking off by the savages was a great blow and burden to me, happy young wife though I then was.

I have thought on her often this last winter particularly on learning that her eldest son Edward was cut down by the Nipmucks in Massachusetts country last fall. This came to me from Captain John when he had ridden with his company and others to Mendum in bootless search for savage raiders.

Now on another dreary afternoon, with a dull red looming into the west, comes our faithful servant Tooto, riding up on one of our best roans, his white teeth flashing in a gaping grin. "Ah mistress," he cried, "best of good news. Master Jack he got him a strong little boy. Now he coming back to join Captain's

company again." He lept from his horse and trotted in the door and we went in to John, who smiled' weakly and touched Tooto on the hand. Tooto fell to his knees at the foot of the bed, clasped his hands, and looking to Heaven said firmly "Lord Jesus be good to his man like he been good to me. Amen."

As he stood up and turned away, I saw two large tears coursing down his cheeks, and he went out into the fireroom, shaking his wooly head. Ever since John had bought Tooto in Boston and brought him down to be our servant, Tooto had ordered his God about thus. Even as he has learned the true Christian way at home and at the meeting house, he is still learning the true humility of prayer. As oft as John has chid him, he says that in his own country they ever told the gods what to do, or how would they know?

Good Tooto, he has been a strength to us all, and I know he will learn in God's good time. So this day he has risked the knives and clubs of the savages to ride through all the way from Barnstable to bring us word of Jack and Mary's firstborn.

He had hoped, too, to be of some service to me in caring for the Captain, but when he saw him I could tell he was altogether cast down. Lydia and I, seeing John from hour to hour saw not how he weakened and faded daily, and that flame which rose and fell like the guttering candle was each time a little less. But Tooto, minding him only in his health as he rode gaily off on the gray to Rehoboth, was smitten to the heart to see him now, that he had hoped to bring home in triumph.

But putting on a brave face, he begged me (as did Lydia so often) to return home with him and help with Mary's newborn and my own children at home. "Soon he be better, and Mr. Jack, he come to bring him home" said Tooto. "Little Shubael and the girls too they need you." And Tooto is right, I fear. If the savages break through, I will die in my home with my little ones about me as did noble Ann Hutchinson. And if the enemy are destroyed altogether (as it seems both sides can never live together save the savages tum to Jesus Christ and forsake their vicious ways) then my family must be tended as Captain John would wish. He has ever said, and I with him, that Shubael should have fair learning beyond the mere dame's school, and go up at last to John Harvard 's school hard by Boston.

So at last I see my duty clear. I shall hie home as soon as Jack returns from Barnstable and before the roads thaw into muck.

But I see, too, that Captain John will not be coming home. I know now that he is going to die.

The Literary Club
Cincinnati, Ohio
December 2, 1991

NOTE:

The Old Colony, as Plymouth Plantation came to be called before its absorption by Massachusetts in 1691, was a sprawling collection of farm villages in what is now southeastern Massachusetts, spreading out from Plymouth, the original settlement in 1620. The land was allotted by committees of the Mayflower elite to various settlers, according to family size, and, I suspect, personal influence. John Howland and his son-in-law, John Gorhan, were not behind the door when the lands were parceled out. The Old Colony was agriculture-centered: largely farms of arable land and upland meadows, worked by close-knit family groups on separate farmsteads. Large families like the Howlands and the Gorums were sprinkled throughout the Colony - Howland children with their offspring, - Gorum children with theirs.

All the named characters in this paper were real people, reported in contemporary documents of one sort or another. The principal events outside the immediate families are likewise documented.

Whether John Howland's young family went with him to the Kennebec trading house, however, is speculative, but I think probable, for too many reasons to set down here. it is also speculative whether Desire Gorum ever went to Swansea to see her dying husband, but I think a case could be made for that too. What is known is that after the Great Swamp Fight, Captain John was brought back to Swansea where he died on February 5, 1676 (or 1675 by the old calendar which until 1752 started the year at about the spring equinox instead of the winter solstice). He died intestate, but the division of his estate is recorded in the colony's will records.

By hindsight we can see that the Great Swamp Fight of December 19, 1675, was the turning point in King Philip's War, but even into the summer of 1676 Indian raids continued all over New England, and with the capture of King Philip in the late summer of 1676 the war finally ended in total disaster for the Indians.

Desire Gorum's attitude toward the Indians is hardly politically correct by our standards, but it was certainly well earned and generally shared in the New England colonies of her time.

I was surprised to learn that there was some slavery in 17th Century New England, but it seems more comparable to Roman household slavery than to the Southern plantation type. Tooto is mentioned in the settlement of Captain John's estate as reported in the Plymouth Colony records. (Wills, V 3 Pt. 1pp. 162-64): "Desire, the relict of the said Captain Gorum to have the improvement of the negro during her life." Probably at her death in 1683 he was freed, and like many Roman slaves he had accumulated quite an estate of his own. His will, recorded in Barnstable in 1691, left a house, land, personal property and livestock to various members of the Gorum family, and he asked to be buried "as neer his mistress feet as may conveniently be."

As you probably guessed, Captain John's report to Governor Leverett is bona fide, and is preserved in the Massachusetts records.

As is obvious by now, Desire did get back to Barnstable, but in spite of her efforts then and later, little Shubael never got his higher education. He seems to have foregone his chance at Harvard in favor of a career in and about Barnstable as a carpenter, tavern owner and enterprising business man. But that, as Kipling was wont to say, is another story.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bradford, William - *Of Plymouth Plantation* 1620-1647. Samuel E. Morrison, Editor 1952, Modern Library Edition 1967

Church, Benajamin - *Diary of King Philip War* Alan & Mary Simpson Editors. The Pequot Press, Chester Conn. 1975

Cranmer, Leon E. - Cushnoc: *The History and Archaeology of the Plymouth Colony Traders on the Kennebec*, Maine Archeological Society, Augusta Me, 1990.

Edmunds, Walter D. - *The Musket and the Cross*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1968.

Katz, Stanley N. - Editor *Essays in Politics and Social Development*, Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1971

King, H. H. - *Some Descendants of Captain John Gorham etc.*, Walker Printing Service 1955.

Langdon, Geo. D. Jr. - *Pilgrim Colony, a History of New Plymouth 1620-1691*. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven 1966.

Miller, John C. - *The First Frontier: Life in Colonial America* Paper Edition Dell Pub!. Co. Inc., N.Y. 1966

Rutman, Darett - *Husbandmen of Plymouth* Beacon Press Boston 1967

Simon, Thom. H. - *A Clash of Cultures - King Philip's War 1675- 76* Ms., Xavier U. Cincinnati, Oh.

White, Elizabeth Pearson - *John Howland of the Mayflower* Vol. 1, Pictor Press, Grunden Me 1991

Willison, Geo, F. - *Saints and Strangers,* Renal & Hitchcock, N .R.1945

Society of Colonial Wars, 75th Anniversary Publication, The Winchell Co. Philadelphia, PA 1967