

THOMAS HATCH¹ of Dorchester, Yarmouth, Barnstable, Massachusetts (before May 1634)

(1603?-1661)

by Laura Wayland-Smith Hatch

Family folklore weaves a story that Thomas Hatch came from near the village of Biddenden, Cranbrook, Kent, England. The town lies in the diocese of Canterbury and the deanery of Charing and on the road from Tenterden to Ashford. Numerous oak trees lined the roadways of the area. All Saint's Church, constructed in the 1400s, overlooked the small village and was a source of pride to the villagers with its three chancels and three aisles.

It was supposed that in the village of Biddenden that Thomas Hatch learned the trades of tailor and farmer. At a local fair held on St. Jude's and St. Simon's Day (November 8th), folklore has it that Thomas met his future wife, Grace. It is probable that she was the daughter of a Welsh farmer named Lewis, who had traveled to the town to sell his farm produce at the fair. Grace was described as being a very pretty and popular young woman, with many of the local men vying for her attentions. It was a lucky Thomas who won her attentions on that day, and eventually her hand in marriage, in a reaping match of grain held during the fair. (Please remember that this is only a story. No documentation has been found to prove this.)

Thomas Hatch emigrated from England with his wife and his two children to the Colonies in approximately 1634. It is very possible that Grace Hatch was not the biological mother of Jonathan and Lydia, but was Thomas' second wife. As the children grew, they became estranged from their father and were not welcome in the home, a situation not likely to have taken place if Grace had been their natural mother. Throughout Jonathan Hatch's turbulent adolescent years, Grace demonstrated little concern for his welfare. Because of his disruptive and rebellious behavior, Thomas apprenticed Jonathan out at the age of twelve, and he was left behind when the family moved on to Yarmouth.

Circumstantial evidence that Grace was not the Hatch children's natural mother is that her name was never passed on to any of the grandchildren. A tradition of those times was to name children for their grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles. Both Jonathan and Lydia had daughters named Lydia, but none named Grace. It is possible that their mother died giving birth to Lydia, or shortly thereafter, so Lydia was given her name in remembrance of her.

Thomas Hatch was declared a freeman of the Massachusetts Bay Colony on the 14 May 1634. There he was described as being a public-spirited man, influential in the community, and with much business ability. He was very religious and of a high moral character.

Mr. Otis, in "Barnstable Families" testifies, "Thomas Hatch was a church member and a freeman, a man whose life was a living testimony of his fidelity to the principles which he professed. He was not a man of note, yet he was an honest man and good neighbor."

Tradition pictures Thomas Hatch as "rather feeble and effeminate." Perhaps it was Thomas's love of music in general, and the violin in particular, that prompted those comments. In his later years, he also appeared to have been rather sickly, hence not very active, which contributed to the feeble characterization.

On the 7 Jan 1639, Thomas Hatch's name appears on a grant, along with the names of twenty-five other families, allowing them to leave the Bay Colony and to purchase land and form a new township at Yarmouth, Massachusetts. The move was made in 1640.

Barnstable is one of three towns formed in 1639, the other two being Yarmouth and Sandwich. Barnstable still retains the land boundaries that are closest to the original land grants. Cape Cod Bay and Barnstable Harbor bound it on the north, which developed into a bustling seaport, being more protected than Plymouth. A salt marsh extends across the northern portion of the town to the sound, bounded on the south by a high ridge that runs east and west. Over seventeen hundred acres of ponds cover the township, the largest being Great Pond. Boulders are scattered in large numbers over the plain, extending from the sound to the ridge. This land is the most fertile in the town. South of the ridge, there are fewer boulders and the land is more sandy. In the valley area, the soil was a rich loam, being a heavier loam on along the north shore. Stone fences marking the boundaries of farms were very common in the northern part of the town, but scarce in the southern part. These fences still dot the countryside of Barnstable and the surrounding areas. A combination of rich, fertile soil, and its strategic location to fresh and salt waters for fishing and shipping made Barnstable an ideal location for a new settlement.

On 1 Jun 1641, probably due to a land dispute among settlers in the Yarmouth township, the Thomas Hatch family moved on to Barnstable, Massachusetts. There, Thomas was a landowner and a member of the Reverend John Lothrop's church. Rev. Lothrop's home still stands, having been incorporated into the Sturgis Library. The library houses a large local history and genealogical collection and is used by many researching their New England roots.

In 1643, Thomas was listed on a roll of men "able to bear arms." Neighbors in Barnstable called him "a man of exemplary character and a very pious man."

In 1650, according to town records, Thomas' daughter Lydia married Henry Tayler. They had two children; Lydia, born 21 Jun 1655; and Jonathan, born 20 Apr 1655. The couple remained residents of the town of Barnstable.

When Thomas died in 1661 his estate was valued at £14 18s and included working tools, timber, and his beloved violin. It was to be three years after his death before Jonathan and Lydia were eventually named executors of Thomas' estate, further testimony to the fact that all must not have been well between the children and Thomas' widow, Grace. Δ

* The "proof" of Grace being a second wife is not supported by the apprenticeship of Jonathan, as that was standard custom back then. It would appear that Otis was applying the norms and customs of his time to the facts from that time and may have misinterpreted. However, the fact that none of the children names include Grace would still seem to support the theory. - Carl Akins