

The First Knights in America

By Diane L. Mangum – For the Knight Family Reunion, June 2020

The first Knights in our family line to come to America were John and Mary Pickering Knight and their four children, Mary, Joseph, Samuel, and John, who came to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Knight family left Romsey, England, where the Knight family had lived for many generations, and sailed in the 1630s to America as part of the what is called the Great Migration.

Ship records from that time period show two different John Knights left England headed to the Boston area. One John Knight was a tailor, from Romsey, who sailed to America with his brother in 1635. The other John Knight was a carpenter, who left South Hampton in 1638. But looking at the posterity of those two men confirm that neither is the right John Knight who became the great-great-grandfather of Joseph Knight, Sr., our ancestor.ⁱ



Between 1630 and 1640 dozens of ships sailed from ports including London, Southampton, Weymouth, and Isle of Wight, taking about 20,000, mostly Puritan, emigrants to New England. The Knight hometown of Romsey was only about 10 miles up the Test River from the port of Southampton.

The Right Knight

The people of New England were record-keepers. Old historical records show there are at least three different adults named John Knight who lived within 35 miles of Boston in the 1630s. Some significant genealogical research indicates the John Knight who died in Charlestown, Massachusetts in 1674 is the right man, even though we have no solid ship record of his arrival. There were 70 ships that sailed from England to America in 1635 aloneⁱⁱ, and a few appear to

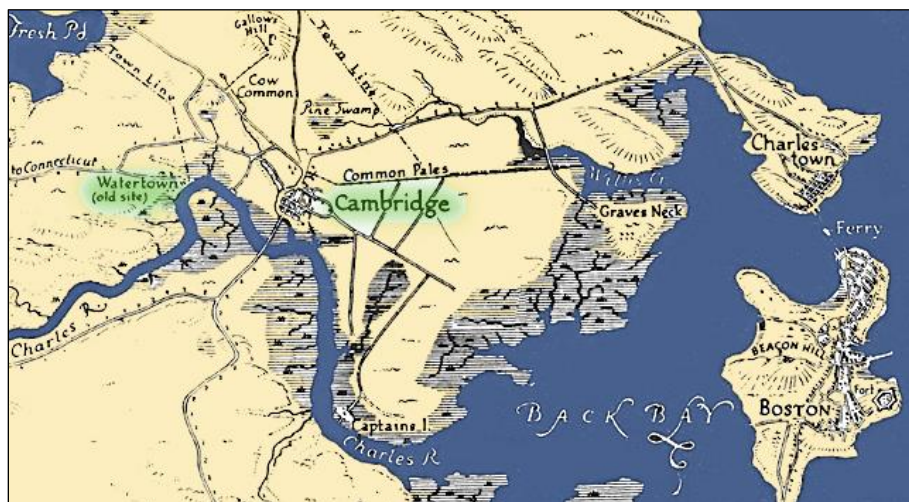
have incomplete passenger records. One of those ships with an incomplete list must have carried John and Mary Knight.

The surge of English families leaving their homeland was spurred on by King Charles I of England, who dissolved parliament, enhanced the pomp and spectacle of religious worship and persecuted Puritans, so named because they wanted to “purify” the Church of England. The Massachusetts Bay Company had a joint agreement with the crown to create new tax-yielding communities in the newly founded colony. The company found willing recruits among the Puritans, sometimes whole congregations, eager to leave for America.ⁱⁱⁱ The Pilgrims of Plymouth had created a successful colony and others were ready to try.

The journey from England to America took about six to eight weeks, depending on the weather, and Boston and the Charlestown harbor were a common place to land. New immigrants usually fanned out around surrounding communities as they arrived. The Massachusetts Bay Company was quite involved in getting newcomers settled. The company at times would declare a town “closed,” meaning the town already had residents with all the necessary skills and the initial division of land left little room for newcomers. New immigrants would then be encouraged to go to new villages opening up.^{iv}

In the Massachusetts Bay Colony towns, Puritan citizens usually built churches quickly, and had a deep level of religious conviction. There was an underlying hope that they could build a new land based upon religious principles and moral strength. They left England for more than just cheap land in America, and economic opportunity.

In their old age, John and Mary Knight eventually ended up in Charlestown, but it appears they made their first home in Watertown, eight miles up the Charles River. A town monument in Watertown lists the name of John Knight as one of the town’s original founders. Watertown was established in 1630, and presumably John Knight was there in the very earliest years to be considered a founder. The two other John Knights ended up in Newbury, Massachusetts, and in Wells, Maine.



In 1629 the Massachusetts Bay Colony began with 400 people and by the mid-1640s it had a population of over 20,000 in many towns.^v John and Mary Knight probably landed at Charlestown harbor, but made Watertown their first home.



The Watertown Founders Monument

The 109 Founders are listed alphabetically. The man honored with a statue is Richard Saltonstall. Watertown was built in 1630 on the Saltonstall Plantation land.^{vi}

Knights in Watertown

John Knight, of Watertown, who we believe is the John Knight born in Romsey in 1601, was admitted to the town church in 1636 and then acquired “status as a freeman.”^{vii} The status of freeman was determined by the General Court and it required a white, adult man who had been formally admitted as a member of the Puritan Church in the community where he lived. Later that status also required proof of taxable property with taxes over 10 shillings. Local officials were elected, and community decisions were made by the vote only of those with the status of Freeman.^{viii} John Knight’s assigned lot appears on the first town map.



John Knight’s name for a home appears on the lot on the left corner of town near the river. His name is on two additional lots added in 1640 at the top of the map.

The map appeared in Henry Bond’s book, Genealogies of Watertown.

A home lot was generally 4-5 acres in size, sometimes more if the land was not as good. That size was considered necessary to have the space for a family to grow a garden for home vegetables and fruit trees and perhaps keep some chickens, or a few animals. In addition, there were either common meadows, or assigned meadow spaces for grazing the family's cows and horses, etc. There were fines for anyone who allowed their pigs to get loose to eat their way through someone else's garden.

John Knight in February of 1634 was allotted 16 ½ acres of meadows. In 1640 it is reported that he had 55 acres of lands at the gravel pit. The Watertown history reports that in 1642 John Knight was the "proprietor of a homestall, and 14 other lots of land in Watertown."^{ix} The proprietor of a homestall appears to be someone who boards large animals for a fee for someone else. The requirements for having a homestall included a source of water and shelter, and it was closer to the center of town than meadows farther out where the animals might otherwise graze. If John Knight was boarding animals, it would explain his need for more acreage.

The Move to Sudbury

It appears that John Knight lived less than a decade in Watertown before moving to Sudbury, a town due west of Watertown. Modern maps report Sudbury is 12 miles from Watertown. An early map reports the Sudbury town line was five miles west of Watertown.

The history of Sudbury, once the "Sudbury Plantation," lists the names of 56 men who were in Sudbury by 1638 or 1639. Some of them are specifically mentioned as coming from Watertown, including John Knight.^x

In creating a new town, the author of Sudbury's history reports the first tasks were three-fold:

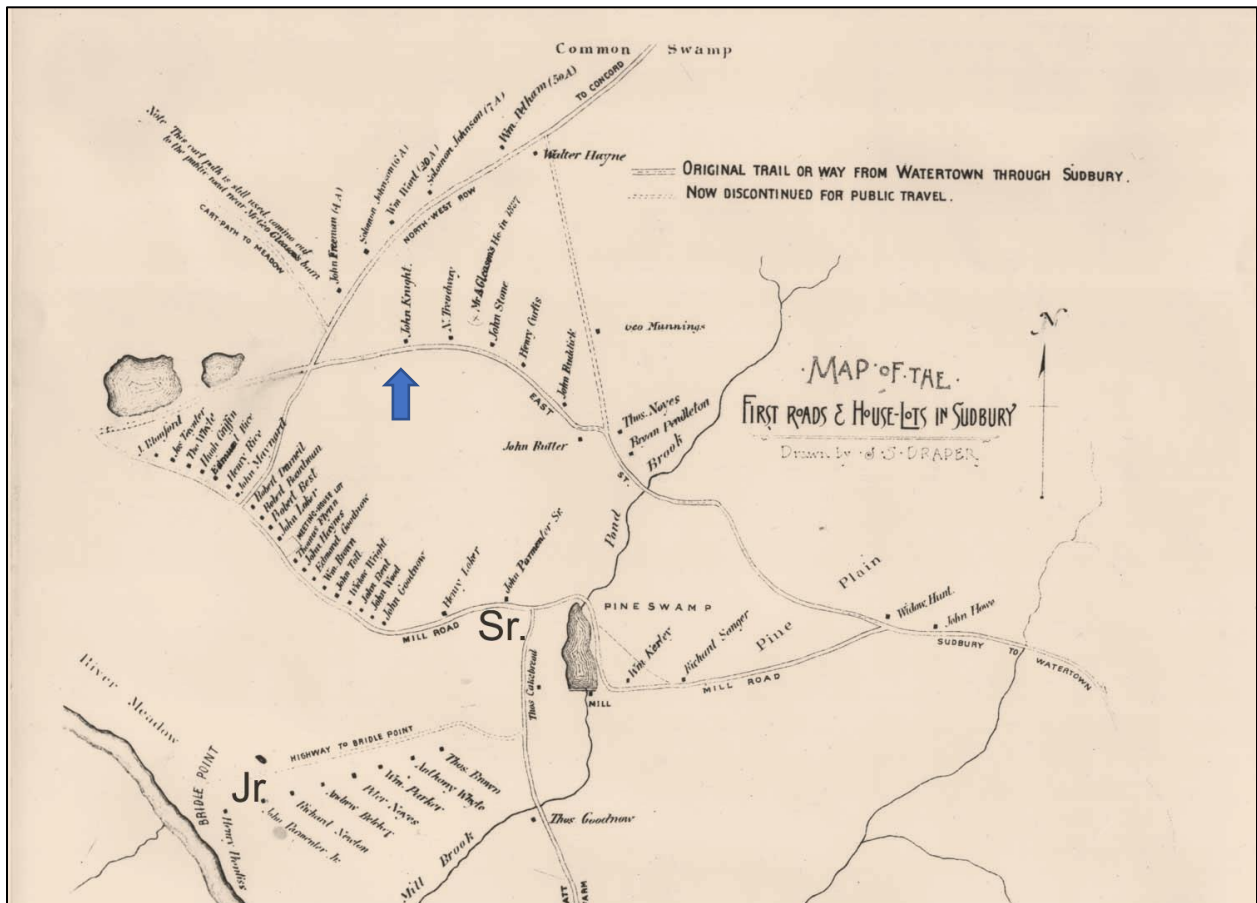
1. Acquisition of the property. Usually this involved both agreements with local Native American tribes and paying those men holding prior ownership, grants or rights from the crown.
2. Assigning house lots. First individuals were given a home site and a 1637 law required new dwellings be built within ½ mile of the town meeting house.
3. Layout of principal highways, with a plan on how to build those highways.^{xi}

John Knight's home lot appears to be a lot on the west end of East Road. In a further allotment he was given 16.5 acres, and in a third division of land in November of 1640 he had 55 acres in his allotment.^{xii} There was a rather complicated formula used to determine how much land individuals would receive in their allotment. Individuals still were responsible for paying for the land, but at a relatively inexpensive rate. In most towns a man could not sell his land to a "stranger." In 1651 John Knight bought the home of John Wetherill in Sudbury, and that same year he and his wife Mary sold to Thomas Underwood ten parcels of land in Watertown. It is unusual that Mary Knight's name appears in the sale of the property.^{xiii}

The historian of Sudbury, Alfred Hudson, reports roads were built as a community group effort. Individuals were assessed the time they were required to work on the public highways based on the amount of property they owned, one day's work for every 6 acres of land. Even a poor man

with no land was assessed one day's work. Hudson, the Sudbury town historian, reports that the roads were barely a footpath through the woods when the town was founded.

There was a strong sense of community in early Sudbury. Most decisions were made by a vote at town meetings. Voting took place by putting in the bowl either a kernel of Indian corn to vote no or a bean to vote yes. The town cared for their poor by taking a collection. The citizens wanted education for their children. Most Puritan immigrants were literate and came with middle-class trades and skills. Sudbury voted that the families lived too scattered for a school, and a river divided them, so two "School dames" were chosen for each side of the river to assist in teaching children to read and spell, and beyond that parents were responsible for their children's education.



**Map of the First Roads and House Lots of Sudbury
Home of John Knight is on the East Road**

It appears that John was made a Freeman in Sudbury in May of 1843. Perhaps he had to relinquish his Freeman status in Watertown before receiving it in Sudbury. But by 1843, he was able to vote in town matters.

Our presumed ancestor, John Knight, born 1601 in England, and who died in Charlestown, seemed to have kept property in Sudbury even after moving to Charlestown. John Knight's occupation in Charlestown was listed as maltster, someone who used barley and other cereal grains to make the malt used in brewing beer. Perhaps not coincidentally, John's son John had

the occupation of a cooper. He was a barrel maker who might made containers to hold beer. And John Knight's grandson Samuel, listed "of Sudbury" was given administration of John Knight's lands in Sudbury in 1716, and in 1717 Samuel sold a malt-house.^{xiv}

One historian reports that after a decade or so in Sudbury, the Knight family moved on to Woburn, where a John Knight bought a house and 18 acres of land.^{xv} Our relationship to that John appears dubious, based on the posterity of the John Knight listed.^{xvi} However, one Joseph Knight living in Woburn, appears to be the son of John Knight, born 1601, and the brother of the John through whom our line of Knights descend.^{xvii} Joseph Knight and his wife Hannah Lamb had a large family, and he died in Woburn at the age of 63. Woburn was a new community added at the request of Charlestown leaders in 1640.

John and Mary Knight's family

In the old documents there is little mention of John Knight's children or wife, Mary. Names of women and children were rarely recorded in that time in anything other than church records of marriages and baptisms. Puritan records in New England also record when women were admitted as members to the town church. We presume that the John Knight who lived in Watertown and then Sudbury was the same John Knight born in 1601 in Romsey, England. His wife, Mary Pickering, was born in 1598, also in Romsey, Hampshire, England. They married about 1619, and their first child was a daughter Mary.

Thomas Wyman, a Charlestown genealogist, reports that John Knight of Watertown, Sudbury, and Charlestown had a daughter, Mary Knight, who was 56 in 1676,^{xviii} which would mean she was born about 1620. Romsey records reported on FamilySearch have Mary Knight born July 14, 1621. Wyman's book about Charlestown families reports Mary married Robert Pierce at the age of 23, and Robert was mentioned in John's will as John's son-in-law, with John's children.

Mr. Wyman's records also report that the second child of John and Mary was John, who was admitted to the Charleston church in 1668 at the age of 46, which would make his birth about 1622, although modern Knight family records report that John, the son of John born in Romsey in 1601, was christened in Romsey in 1630.^{xix} And FamilySearch lineage shows John Knight, Jr. as the fourth child of John and Mary, not the second.^{xx}

The same Charlestown historian also wrote that John and Mary's third child was son Joseph Knight, of Woburn, was 34 in 1658, or born in about 1624. My conclusion is that the children of the Knight family were Mary born in 1620/21, Joseph born in 1624, Samuel born in 1626, and John born in 1630. We know little about John and Mary's son Samuel, other than he was born in 1626 in Romsey and died in Sudbury in 1721.^{xxi}

The Family of John Knight, Jr.

Our ancestor, John Knight, the son of John and Mary, who came to America as a young child, became a cooper, a church member, a husband to five consecutive wives, and father of 14 children. Records show John bought a house in Charlestown from J. Andrews in 1657 three years after he married Ruhamah Johnson on 25 April 1654. Over the years it appears he bought several different houses and shops where we assume he made barrels.

John, Jr., and Ruhamah were the parents of five children. Only one, Elizabeth, lived to adulthood. After his first wife's death he married Abigail Stowers. She gave birth to two children, Abigail and John, both of whom died within a year of birth, and she passed away within a month of her second child.

John Knight Jr.'s third wife was Mary Bridge. They married on 22 June 1668 in Charlestown. Mary's parents were William and Persis Bridge. Mary's first child, who died as an infant, was a daughter Persis, named after Mary's mother. Then came Mary, another Persis, John, Samuel, and Rebecca. Mary died in 1678, the same year her daughter Mary died at age 8, her son John at age 5, and infant daughter Rebecca. Her second daughter Persis lived to age 29. Mary's son Samuel, our ancestor, lived to marry and have a family. Of John Jr.'s 14 children, only 3 lived past the age of 30.

John, Jr.'s fourth wife was Mary Clements, a widow, who lived only 4 years after their marriage. And lastly, John married Sarah Rowlin's Holsworth. Fifth wife Sarah outlived John, and in his will he left her a "chamber." What this means exactly isn't clear. Usually a chamber refers to a room. But if it was a chamber pot instead, perhaps their marriage didn't end happily. John left legacies to his daughters, meaning some money or items, and the "residue" to his sole surviving son, Samuel.^{xxii}

John Knight, Jr., who came to America as a child, died in 1714, and so lived to the age of 84 based on a birthdate in 1630.

Samuel Knight, and the next three generations

Samuel, son of John, Jr., was the first Knight in our line to be born in America. He was born in 1675 in Sudbury, Massachusetts, his father's 13th child. He married Rachel Chase, and they named their first daughter Mary, after his mother, and second daughter Persis after his maternal grandmother. The third child was Abigail, and his 4th child was Samuel, our ancestor, and then a son John, named after his grandfather.

Samuel Knight, the only surviving son of John, handled the family financial matters after his father's death and took care of selling the family land in Sudbury, the malt house. He died at the age of 52 in Charleston in 1727.

Samuel's son Samuel Knight, was born in Charlestown, but appears to have lived as an adult in Sudbury, where he died at the age of 92. Samuel, Jr., first married Mary Rice and had six children. When she died, he married Anne Eames, the mother of our ancestor, Benjamin Knight,^{xxiii} who was born in 1744 in Sudbury, the middle of five children.

Benjamin Knight was the only child in the family to move away. By the time he married Hannah Crouch in 1771 at the age of 27, he was living about 60 miles west of the rest of the family in Oakham, Massachusetts. In Oakham, Benjamin and Hannah bought the "Brimhall Place," about 70 acres, for 100 pounds. Benjamin served in the Revolutionary War, as one of 129 soldiers who served in the Oakham, Massachusetts militia in 1777.^{xxiv} By occupation he was a farmer and operated a saw mill, a skill he taught his son.^{xxv} Benjamin and Hannah Knight's first child was Joseph Knight,^{xxvi} born in 1772 in Oakham, Massachusetts. By 1780 Benjamin had moved his

young family to Marlborough, in the southeast corner of Vermont. Benjamin's oldest son Joseph grew up in Vermont where he met and married Polly Peck. They already had five of their seven children when Joseph and Polly decided to move the family to Colesville Township, New York, near many of Polly's family members. In Colesville, Joseph Knight and Polly and their seven children all joined the new church that later became known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Less than a year later they all left farms and homes to gather with other members of their church in Kirtland, Ohio.

The Lineage from John Knight to Joseph Knight, Sr.

The first Knight to come to America was John Knight of Romsey, born 1601, who left his home and family to go where Puritans could worship as they chose in a community of fellow believers, free from harassment. John begat John Jr., who begat Samuel, who begat Samuel, Jr., who begat Benjamin, who begat Joseph Knight, Sr. In 1831, Joseph Knight, Sr., did just what his great-great-grandfather John did; he left his home and occupation and started a new life where he could worship as he chose in a community of fellow believers, free from harassment.

ⁱ Packrat-Pro Ship List by Date, <https://www.packrat-pro.com/ships/shiplist.htm>,

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Great Migration 1620-1640 passenger portal, <https://www.geni.com/projects/Great-Puritan-Migration-1620-1640-Passenger-Ship-Portal/42414>

^{iv} Ibid.

^v https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts_Bay_Colony

^{vi} https://familypedia.wikia.org/wiki/Watertown_Founders_Monument

^{vii} Bond, Henry, M.D., *Genealogies of the Families and Descendants of the Early Settlers of Watertown, Massachusetts, including Waltham and Weston; Second Edition, Boston, M.E. Historic-Genealogical Society, 1860, 328.*

^{viii} Wyman, Thomas Fellows, *The Genealogies and Estates of Charlestown in the County of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1629-1818, Boston, David Clapp and Sons, 1879, 85.*

^{ix} Ibid., 328.

^x Hudson, Alfred Serano, *History of Sudbury, Massachusetts, 1638 – 1889, published by the town of Sudbury, 1889, p. 26-27.*

^{xi} Ibid., 83.

^{xii} Ibid., 113.

^{xiii} Bond, *Genealogies and Estates of Watertown, 328.*

^{xiv} Wyman, *Genealogies and Estates of Charlestown, 591.*

^{xv} Ibid., 590.

^{xvi} Sewell, Samuel, *The History of Woburn, Middlesex County, Massachusetts,* Boston, 1868, 624.

^{xvii} FamilySearch, 29 May 2020, Joseph Knight, Sr. LZ24-43R

^{xviii} Wyman, *Genealogies and Estates of Charlestown, 590.*

^{xix} FamilySearch, 29 May 2020, John Knight, KCLX-DBQ

^{xx} The Charlestown historian may have had an incorrect age for John. Or perhaps John was born in 1622 and christened in 1630, but that seems quite unlikely for a Puritan family. The later birth date makes more sense compared to the ages of John Knight, Jr.'s wives ages.

^{xxi} Bond, *Genealogies and Estates of Watertown, "Editor's Notes", vii.* Variation on birth years may be confusing because of a calendar change. Birth years in years prior to 1752 may be confusing. "Prior to 1752 the year was computed as beginning on the 25th of March instead of the first day of January, as at present .A dual date of the

year was employed only during the interval between these two days, and March was reckoned as the First month. . . For instance, May 14, 1680 would be in the original as 14 (3) 1680.”

^{xxii} Wyman, *Genealogies and Estates of Charlestown*, 591.

^{xxiii} FamilySearch, Benjamin Knight, LD4Z-XD4.

^{xxiv} Hartley, William G, “*They Are My Friends,*” *A History of the Joseph Knight Family 1825 to 1850*, Grandin Book, Provo, 1986, 6.

^{xxv} FamilySearch, Benjamin Knight memories on 29 May 2020.

^{xxvi} FamilySearch, Joseph Knight, LDTG-SQK