

INTRODUCTION

Captain Thomas Fleet, *paterfamilias* of the Long Island Fleets, belonged to that “Larger than Life” breed of men who colonized much of the Eastern Seaboard in the 1600’s. These men were forged in the fires of the civil and religious strife taking place throughout their European homelands in the 17th Century. They were men of their times, and unfortunately their times were harsh. While there were certainly early settlers on Long Island who came in search of religious freedom, there were others whose goal in coming here was more pragmatic: to escape from a political environment they no longer found hospitable, and to secure land, wealth and influence for themselves and their families. In time, they would also play an important role in the intricate power struggle then taking place between the English, Dutch, Spanish and French governments for control of the “New World.” These men and their families were settlers, adventurers, entrepreneurs. They could also, depending upon your viewpoint, be described in words not quite so complimentary: conqueror, privateer, and opportunist. Nevertheless, I, for one, consider them quite extraordinary. They took off in their relatively small ships and sailed into the virtual unknown, with only as many supplies as they could pack into the hold to depend upon. In the end, to quote Lincoln, they “brought forth a great nation.” The following is the story of one of these hardy men: Our ancestor, Captain Thomas Fleet.

I. ENGLISH ORIGINS OF THOMAS FLEET

The one fact that seems to be universally agreed upon by all the researchers who have undertaken this task before me is that Thomas Fleet came to America from England; beyond that, we are sadly lacking in documentation of

any kind regarding his early years. We do not know the date or place of his birth, nor the names of his parents. (An educated guess as to the date of his birth would place it between 1620 and 1630.) A look at the sources of the time show families by the name of Fleet concentrated mainly in three counties in England: Kent, Lincolnshire and Worcestershire. Somerset County may also have been Capt. Fleet's place of origin; more on that will follow. The Thomas Fleet who was a printer in Boston in the 18th Century (and also the son-in-law of Mother Goose of nursery rhyme fame) came from the Lincolnshire branch. Capt. Henry Fleet, who settled in Virginia circa 1621, was the son of William and Deborah Scott Fleet of Chartham, Kent. To date, I have found no mention of American settlers by the name of Fleet who hailed from Worcestershire. The late Herbert Furman Seversmith, genealogist extraordinaire, whose entry on the Fleet Family in his Colonial Families of Long Island, New York and Connecticut is an absolute "must-read", gives a thorough accounting of his findings in this area. Also, Elizabeth Hawes Ryland, a descendant of Capt. Henry Fleet who wrote an extensive genealogy of her family, includes the histories of the various early Fleet families in her excellent work, available from the Library of Virginia.

However, before commencing any in-depth search for our Captain Thomas Fleet (or "Thomas" as I shall occasionally refer to him), we have to ascertain whether "Thomas Fleet" was actually his name at all, or whether he was born "Thomas Fleetwood." This speculation pops up in several sources, including the Town Records of Huntington, New York. Although it sounds ridiculous to question someone's name, there is a reason behind it: Thomas would have been a young adult during the years of the English Civil Wars (1642-45 and 1648-49). King Charles I was executed in 1649, and Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector of the Commonwealth. There were many previously obscure families who came to prominence during this time, one of them the Fleetwoods. I think the possible Fleet/Fleetwood connection is best explained in the History of Kings County, under the "Medical Biographies" section, where

Samuel Fleet Spier's listing reads as follows: "Samuel Fleet, the grandfather of S. Fleet Spier, was a lineal descendant, in the fifth generation, from Captain Thomas Fleet, who was the American ancestor of the Fleet family, and who came to this country about 1650, and settled at Northport, near Huntington, Long Island. The English patronymic was Fleetwood, the latter part of the name having been dropped by Captain Thomas Fleet on his arrival in this country. His father was Sir William Fleetwood, an admiral in the English Navy and a person of prominence in his day. A brother of Captain Thomas Fleet (or Fleetwood), nee Charles Fleetwood, who died at Stoke-Newington, England in 1692, occupied a large share of public attention during his lifetime. In 1645, he was a member of Parliament, and was one of a body of commissioners, appointed to treat with the king. He subsequently became an adherent of Oliver Cromwell, and took an active and leading part during the days of the Protectorate, both in military and civil affairs. He married for a second wife Bridget, the widow of Ireton, who was a daughter of Cromwell. Captain Thomas Fleet, previous to coming to this country, was an officer in the British navy and possessed of ample means."

This all sounds very authoritative; however, I myself have found no evidence to back up this theory. Also, Seversmith (whom I will quote frequently!) gave no credence to this connection, nor did Kay Priestley, a British researcher I retained in 2002 to find documentation for me. (While Ms. Priestley was very thorough and helpful, I only retained her services for a short while. I could see that such work can take a very long time and be quite costly, so I determined to do as much research as possible on my own.) However, in the interest of thoroughness, I would not completely discount this theory until more work has been done. An interesting side note is that, in the Genealogy of the Van Wyck Family, Samuel Van Wyck Fleet is listed as being born at "Fleetwood" in Oyster Bay, Long Island. However, for the purpose of this report, we will operate under the theory that our ancestor's name was, in fact, Thomas Fleet.

II. CAPT. FLEET'S SERVICE IN CROMWELL'S NAVY

The first solid evidence that we find of our Thomas is in the List of English Naval Captains, 1642-1660, compiled by R. C. Anderson in 1964 for the Society for Nautical Research in London, England. According to this list, Thomas Fleet was captain of the merchantman "Supply" in 1650, the flyboat "Falcon" in 1654-58, and the 38-gun man-of-war "Success" in 1659-60. I'll let Seversmith have the first word in recounting Thomas' voyages: "The first record discovered of Thomas Fleet is that he, as captain of The Falcon, was in Jamaica, in the West Indies in May, 1656. He was a merchantman and sailed from Jamaica on 2 May of that year, bound for Portsmouth, England. The ship met with a violent windstorm on the high seas, and was so disabled that it had to make for Boston in the Massachusetts Bay in company with another ship, The Church. On 27 August it is recorded that he set sail from Piscataway, and eventually got to Portsmouth, for on 20 October, 1656, he contracted with Benjamin Gillom for repairs. He is spoken of as late commander of The Falcon, 18 December, 1656, when the repair accounts were audited. Nevertheless he was again in charge 28 May, 1657, when he transmitted to the English Admiralty two muster books and an account of provisions distributed to the English fleet; he was therefore in the naval service of the Commonwealth."

"He is next found sailing from Lisbon, Portugal, 27 November, 1657, by order of Admiral Stoakes, and was still commanding The Falcon, which was a flyboat (a small variety of gunboat). He was this time forced by another storm to take refuge in the Scilly Islands, where he stayed until 23 November, 1657; he then sailed for Downs, where he came to anchor 27 December of the same year. On 27 February, 1658/59 he was Captain of the Success, a man-of-war of 38 guns and a crew of 50; and was then stationed at Gravesend, England. On 22 September, 1659, it is recorded that he would sail for Portsmouth as soon as ordered, and on 3 October he was at Portsmouth, fitting up to sail for St. Helena

and wanted a carpenter. Sometime after this last date (which is the last time that he is recorded on the high seas) and before 7 August, 1667, he had come to New England.” (Seversmith’s sources for this information are listed as The Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, (Great Britain), America and West Indies, 1675-6, Addendenda 1574-1676, and also The Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series (Commonwealth), 1656/57.)

(At this point, I would just like to insert some information I found in J. J. Colledge’s Ships of the Royal Navy: A Complete Record of All Fighting Ships of the Royal Navy and in a website about Pepy’s Diary regarding the ship “Success”. There were two ships during Thomas’ time that had this name. The first was “a 34-gun ship, previously the French ship Jules. She was captured in 1650, renamed HMS Old Success in 1660 and sold {as a hulk} in 1662.” I found notes online indicating that the “Old Success” was dry-docked in November of 1658, which means that the ship Capt. Thomas sailed to St. Helena was possibly “a 24-gun ship launched in 1655 as HMS Bradford. She was renamed HMS Success in 1660 and was wrecked in 1680.”)

Thanks to the Internet, additional information on Capt. Fleet’s naval voyages has come to light. I found excerpts of a book entitled, War of the Americas: A Chronology of Armed Conflict in the New World, 1492 to the Present, by David Marley. There is an account in this book of Oliver Cromwell sending an English fleet to “conquer a major stronghold in the West Indies.” The admiral in command of the operation was William Penn, father of the founder of Pennsylvania. 36 ships are listed as sailing from England on Christmas Day of 1654, including the “24-gun flyboat Falcon of Thomas Fleet.” Additional ships and men were picked up along the way. On the 23 April 1655, the fleet attacked Santo Domingo with 9,000 men and 120 horses. This endeavor did not go well for the English, and they were beaten back by the Spanish defenders. By mid-May of 1655, the English had left Santo Domingo and invaded Jamaica, where they fared better and were able to defeat the Spanish. However, tropical diseases took a heavy toll on the invaders, so Penn left 12 ships to guard the

island and returned to England with the rest, including Falcon, in July of that year. As can be seen by Seversmith's records, Thomas Fleet in Falcon then returned to Jamaica in May of 1656. (Although it does not mention Thomas Fleet directly, another excellent book concerning this general subject matter is No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690, by Carl Bridenbaugh.)

There are additional references to Thomas Fleet which can be found in various sources. In Cromwell's Navy, The Fleet and the English Revolution, 1648-1660, Bernard Capp notes that, "Capt. Thomas Fleet reported that when he refused to sign his steward's books, because they were fraudulent, the man 'threatened he would pick a hole in my coat before the term of the voyage be ended'." (Capp was writing about how "... a captain had to earn respect, rather than assuming unquestioning obedience. It seems beyond doubt that the regulations governing behavior at sea were widely ignored, and that each company worked out it's own rough-and-ready pattern of social relations.") In A Calendar of the Court Minutes, Etc. of the East India Company 1655-59 by Ethel Bruce Sainsbury, there are entries on 28 October and 24 November, 1659 concerning provisions for the trip to St. Helena mentioned by Seversmith. On 6 August, 1660, Thomas arrived back at the Downs with "seven East India ships, which have proceeded with a fair gale to London." (He apparently had acted as a military escort for the merchant vessels.)

During Capt. Fleet's sojourn to St. Helena, England had experienced a great political upheaval. In May of 1660, Charles II had been restored as King of England. Being an astute fellow, Thomas adjusted his sails to the winds of change and sent the following letter to His Majesty immediately upon his return to England. (Note: I transcribed this letter from a copy of the original, which was obtained for me by Kay Priestley. The many gaps are words which I could not decipher.)

Most Gracious Sovereigne:

May it please your Majesty, I being ordered by yr. Commanders in _____ at my departure to go unto ye Island of St. Helena, to meet ye East India fleet, did accordingly proceed and after my arrivall there did meet with ye ship London, Mr. Bowin Commander, and with ye Discovery, Mr. Gosnell Commander, and with ye Constantinople, Mr. Brown Commander, and with ye Coast (?), Mr. Risbey (?) Commander, and with ye Society, Mr. Bushell Commander, and with ye Merchant's Delight, Mr. Andrews Commander, and with ye Marigold, Mr. Carmis (?) Commander, in all _____ Bay Co., which I have conveyed as ffarr as ye Isle of Wight, and shall make what speed I can unto ye Downes as soon as ye wind shall favour us; Near ye Lands End upon ye second day of this instant August, we met with ye Henrietta (?), frigate (?) Holmes Commander, who did _____ of ye Most Joyful Newes of ye settlement of yr. Majesties Most Royall person in yr. Kingdom; And ye all were at home in _____ condition which we left at our departure in much distraction; I have nothing else at present to trouble yr. Majesty withal, but Ye is to heartily aspire and _____ of all Happiness to you; it being ye earnest prayers of

*Yr. Loyall and True _____
Subject and ser: Tho: Fleet*

*Successe, August ye
05th, 1660.*

This letter is, to date, the last known record of Thomas Fleet in England. Obviously, many Parliamentarian families decided that the Restoration was a good time to seek new horizons. Whether this was the case with Thomas is unknown, but it is certainly possible, for following this letter to the King, Thomas effectively disappears from the archives for six years.

III. SHIPS

In The Town Records of Huntington, New York, Charles R. Street states that "Thomas Fleet was here as early as 1660, and there is a tradition in the family that he came here direct from England, bringing his family with him *in his*

own vessel ...” I have seen many other such references over the years, and have always been fascinated by this theory. I believe it’s possible that the aforementioned ship Supply and perhaps even the Falcon were owned by Thomas Fleet. However, to back up my claim, I first have to address the problem of 17th Century spelling. Throughout this report, I have used the common spelling of the name “Fleet.” However, in various documents of the time, the name is also spelled “Fleete”, “Flete” and even “Fleat.” It is also very easy for someone transcribing old documents to mistake “Fleete” for “Flute.” I have seen this often, particularly in documents concerning the Virginia Fleets. The reason I bring this up is because, in The Complete Book of Emigrants, 1607-1776, there is an entry which states, “17 June, 1658 - Copy of bond by Joseph Barton of Southampton, Merchant, to Armiger Warner of London, merchant, for goods adventured in the Supply of London, Mr. Thomas Flute, to Barbados.” As I stated earlier, Thomas Fleet is listed as captain of the Supply in 1650, before moving on to the Falcon. It’s possible that he owned the ship and continued to book cargoes for it while he himself moved on to command larger vessels. (In the same book, there is also the following notation which might be helpful in future research: “31 December, 1659: William Bower, citizen and scrivener of London, aged 33, deposes that on 15 June, 1658, Thomas Flute, mariner, Jonathan Flute, gent and David Flute, all of Ratcliff, Middlesex, signed a financial obligation to John Soame, citizen and merchant tailor of London. Richard Dennis, Master of the John and Katherine of London, and John Searle of Barbados appointed attorneys.”)

In regard to the Falcon, in Ships of the Royal Navy: The Complete Record of all Fighting Ships of the Royal Navy, J. J. Colledge states that, “Falcon was a 24-gun ship purchased in 1646. She was gone by 1659.” Colledge is usually very explicit in detailing what happened to the various vessels, ie. whether they were sold, captured, wrecked, etc., so, although saying the ship was “gone” doesn’t tell us much, it leaves open the possibility that the ship was taken out of active military service and sold for private use.

One other interesting tidbit should be pointed out regarding ships. When Thomas sailed to Lisbon aboard the Falcon in 1657, he was in company with a ship named the Taunton. Taunton is the name of a town in Somerset County, on the south coast of England. Four miles away from Taunton is a town named Thorne-Falcon. Seversmith, in his Supplemental Information, Vols. 1 & 2, states, "It should be noted that in Taunton, Somersetshire, a Thomas Fleete married Elizabeth Fell, 19 July, 1579, in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene at that place (Phillipmore's Somerset Marriages, vol X). As one of the ships in the group commanded by Thomas Fleet was named the Taunton, this circumstance may have more to it than coincidence." Colledge, in the above-quoted Ships of the Royal Navy, states that Taunton was "a 40-gun, fourth rate frigate of the Royal Navy, originally built for the navy of the Commonwealth of England at Rotherhithe and launched in 1654. After the Restoration in 1660, her name was changed to HMS Crown ... Crown was wrecked in 1719."

IV. FAMILY

Before picking up Thomas' trail in America, I feel I should address the question of his wife and children. Unfortunately, no one has located a single document containing the name of Thomas' wife. She remains, sadly, a complete unknown. We're a bit luckier with his children, whom Seversmith lists as follows:

1. Thomas, married Esther Parrott (on November 1, 1681);
2. (Probably) Mary, who married by a license issued 22 June, 1675, Shedrake Manton of Rhode Island;
3. A daughter, listed in the 1686 Census; perhaps to be identified as Sarah, wife of Thomas Smith, son of Nicholas and Mary (Tibbals) Smith or Seversmith;
4. A daughter, listed in the 1686 Census of Huntington, NY."

More on Thomas II will be forthcoming in the next chapter of our family history, as we are descended from his line.

V. EARLY HISTORY OF HUNTINGTON, NY

To quote from the official HuntingtonTown website, "The Town of Huntington was founded on April 2, 1653, when Richard Holbrook, Robert Williams and Daniel Whitehead, all of Oyster Bay, bought from Raseokan, the Sachem of the Matinecock Tribe, a parcel of land that is now known as 'The First Purchase.' The Oyster Bay men immediately turned the land over to a group of white men who had already settled within it's boundaries. This first purchase was bordered on the west by Cold Spring Harbor, on the east by Northport Harbor, on the south by what is now known as Old Country Road, and on the north by Long Island Sound. As time went on, other land was purchased from the Indians, gradually extending the limits of the town from Long Island Sound on the north to Great South Bay on the south, and from Oyster Bay on the west to Smithtown and Islip on the east. In 1872, the town was divided, the southern portion becoming the Town of Babylon. Most of the early settlers were English people who came to Huntington by way of Massachusetts and Connecticut. As a result, they felt more of a kinship with New England than with their Dutch neighbors to the West in New Amsterdam. The Town in fact voted in 1660 to place itself under the jurisdiction of Connecticut to gain some protection from the Dutch."

The History of Suffolk County, 1683-1882 states, "Among the settlers were many persons of considerable note in their day, men of no ordinary ability and experience. Of such we may mention Thomas Wickes, Thomas Fleet, Thomas Scidmore, Jonas Wood, Jonas Holdsworth, Isaac and Epenetus Platt, Rev. William Leveritch, Thomas Benedict, John Conklin, Robert Seeley, Thomas

Scudder, Henry Scudder, Henry Whitney, John Strickland, Samuel Blackman, Thomas Jones and John Corey. These were men all in, or a little past, the prime of life, with a large experience. Born in the stormy times attending the conflict between the Cavaliers and the Puritans in England, they had learned to be self-reliant, bold, active and enterprising. They were persons 'with a prefix to their names', were called either Mr. or Goodman, titles of respect in that age, and most of them held places of dignity in the church and the government which they helped to found."

There is one other interesting fact that should be noted here. Thomas Fleet rose to be a naval commander during Cromwell's administration, and later settled in Huntington. The name of Cromwell's birthplace in England was Huntingdon. It's possible that the men who founded Huntington, Long Island had served under Cromwell in England.

VI. THOMAS' ARRIVAL IN HUNTINGTON

As stated earlier, there is a space of six years between the time of the Restoration in England and Thomas' arrival on Long Island. Where he went and what he did during these years makes for very entertaining research. I have done quick searches for him in the records of Newport, RI, the West Indies and St. Helena; however, to date I have not been able to find any trace of him. In the future, the records of these and the other early colonies should be looked into more thoroughly.

The first solid evidence of Thomas in the New World is in the records of New Amsterdam, as a plaintiff in a lawsuit. Once again, I will let Seversmith have the first word: "His homestead was at one time, probably at the first, in the Manor of Queens Village {now Lloyd's Neck or Lloyd Harbor}, although he was no tenant farmer. He resided adjacent to Richard Waring. The chief residences of the family, however, were in Huntington's East Neck. The next

record of

Captain Fleet is to be found in the records of New Amsterdam. On 7 August, 1666, he was a plaintiff in an action against John Garland; and a cross-suit was filed the same day by Thomas de Lavall against John Malby, John Garland and Thomas Fleet, defendants. It is evident that all of these men were traders. On 9 April, 1667 Thomas Fleet demanded execution of John Garland, and a warrant was issued on the 12th of the same month.”

It is apparent that Thomas either was comfortably well-off when he arrived on Long Island or that he did quite well in his maritime trading business. (More on that will follow.) He purchased large tracks of land here, and held several important positions in the Town government. Seversmith goes on to state, “Thomas Fleet is recorded subsequently, 24 December, 1667 as a resident of Huntington, New York, when he held land adjacent to that of Simon Lane. He became Overseer, 4 April, 1670; and was the wealthiest man in the town in the assessment of 1673. He had liberty to take up allotments of land 23 May, 1681; on 7 July, 1682 held land west of the Annuskemunnica river at the south; next, he bought land from Richard White, 11 June, 1683, in the Old Mill Pond Swamp; deeded land to John Sammis, 20 May, 1684; and on 12 June, 1685, he bought the house and home-lot of John Mitchell. His land holdings appear to have been so extensive that he petitioned the provincial government, 5 April, 1685, that the inhabitants of the town of Huntington might be required to deliver up his lands within the boundaries of the said town, and that the same might be surveyed in order to secure confirmation by patent. He was deputy for Huntington, 27 July, 1681, to protest acts of the Andros administration; was appointed commissioner for the town 7 April, 1684, but because of his differences with the inhabitants because of delay of survey of his lands, he refused to serve. In the 1685 assessment he maintained his high tax rating; only Epenetus Platt was worth more. He was chosen to be assistant to the commissioners of the town when desired by them, 4 April, 1687, which indicates that his differences of opinion had been adjusted, and also that his judgment was respected by the town in political

matters. This last is confirmed by the fact that upon the accession of

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William and Mary he was authorized to go on the town's political business 3 May, 1689, to New York, and as representative of the town ... On 3 June, 1689 he was to act for the town, along with others; and on 12 March, 1694, he again received land from the town fathers." (Seversmith's sources are quoted as The Town Records of Huntington, New York; Land Papers, New York; and The Records of New Amsterdam, edited by Berthold Fernow.)

Thanks to the help of a very knowledgeable researcher at the Suffolk County Historical Society in Riverhead, NY, I found three further mentions of Capt. Fleet in Huntington. On the 20th of May, 1670, "Thomas Fleitt" was a plaintiff against Andrew Messengar in a lawsuit to recover three pounds shilling. On 1 February, 1674, during the brief period when the Dutch retook New York, he was brought before a Council because he "did, contrary to the published proclamations of this Province, trade with the neighboring Colonies of New England, and brought a letter from there, etc." He claimed this was done before "the proclamation" was issued, and the case was dismissed. (Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, Procured in Holland, England and France, Vol II, by John Romeyn Brodhead, Esq.) There is also a wonderful booklet published by the Huntington Historical Society in 1982 entitled, Mustering and Parading, Two Hundred Years of Militia on Long Island, 1653-1868, which states that, "Captain Seeley commanded the militia until 1668, when he was replaced by Captain Thomas Fleet."

VII. CAPTAIN FLEET'S BUSINESSES

A case can be made that when Thomas Fleet arrived on Long Island, he was already financially secure. However, he was obviously an "entrepreneur", and was involved in at least two businesses that we know of. His primary occupation was as a maritime trader. In The History of Suffolk County, 1683-1882, it states, "Having anchored opposite Lloyd's Neck, he discovered the

advantages offered for his contemplated business by the favorable position of

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Huntington Bay, with it's convenient approach and well-protected harbor. He located himself near its head, and soon commenced his trading operations between the places on this coast and the West Indies, exchanging his exports there for cargoes that could be disposed of in New York and elsewhere. As the commerce of the country increased, he enjoyed its advantages, and some idea may be formed of his commercial operations by the fact that as early as 1675 he was assessed on the rate list of this town for forty vessels, besides land and stock." (It is my personal belief, as well as that of the aforementioned researcher at the Suffolk County Historical Society, that the "40" listed in the column for vessels in the 1675 tax assessment probably refers to a few ships totaling 40 tons, rather than 40 separate vessels. In this age when ships were all crafted by hand, it seems unlikely that one person would own 40 of them.)

It is at this point that I have to get up on my soapbox for a minute. When researching an ancestor engaged in the "maritime industry" in the 17th Century, one feels rather like Pandora opening her box. What comes out of the box, words like "slavery", "whaling" and possibly "privateer", are VERY difficult concepts for people of the 21st Century to deal with - and rightly so. However, it is vitally important to judge Thomas and his contemporaries *in the context of their times*. These men lived at the very faint dawn of the Age of Enlightenment, a good 200 years before the Emancipation Proclamation and 300 years before the Civil Rights Movement. (Even in the late 18th Century, William Floyd, Long Island's signer of the Declaration of Independence, owned many slaves and apparently didn't see the irony.) People in Thomas' time were so harsh to their fellow man that, in 1692, 20 people in Salem, Massachusetts were executed for *witchcraft*, of all things. These were NOT enlightened times, and it was in this era, sadly, that the notorious maritime "Triangular Trade" was begun. In very simplified terms, this meant that dealers would load a ship with agricultural produce, livestock, wood products, and later manufactured goods, sail to the west coast of Africa where they traded these products for slaves, sail to the

Caribbean where they would sell the slaves and purchase sugar products, and

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then sail home. According to my research, Newport, Rhode Island, just a few short hours sail away from Huntington, became one of the largest centers of this type of trading activity on the East Coast in the early 18th Century. However, according to a “local expert on early Huntington history” quoted by the Huntington Town Historian in an e-mail dated April 16, 2008, the traders from Huntington apparently did not engage in the first leg of this triangle. The expert states, “Several of our early settlers were engaged in the mercantile trade with the West Indies, including Thomas Fleet, Thomas Matthews, John Matthews, Edward Higbie and Jonas Wood (of Oakham). They prepared shipments of loose barrel staves and hoops, as well as barrels packed with preserved beef, pork, mutton, grain, vegetables, apples and other fruits, which they traded to plantation owners in exchange for sugar, molasses, rum, sack (brandy) and slaves.”

A copy of a newspaper article which I believe came from the Huntington Historical Society, dated June 8, 1961, with the notation “Long Islander?” on it, gives a history of brick making in Huntington. It states, “Less than two decades after the so-called First Purchase of 1653 ... the early settlers excavated clay and, following the Biblical advice to use straw in the mixture, produced crude but extremely durable bricks which went into foundations, open fireplaces and chimneys. Next to fishing and cordwood, the manufacture of bricks was Huntington town’s earliest industry. By 1660 a number of local vessels were transporting full cargoes of Huntington bricks to New Amsterdam (which was soon to become New York), across the Sound to New Haven and up the coast to Boston. Captains Fleet and Higbie (Higby) sailed further afield, carrying bricks to the West Indies and, returning, brought molasses, mahogany, cocoanuts (sic) and, it must be admitted, large shipments of Jamaica and Vera Cruz rum.”

(The Fleets apparently continued to sail to the West Indies for some time. I have found mention that there was a Simon Fleet who died in Jamaica in the West Indies in April of 1732, although I have not confirmed this. Also, in Notes from Oyster Bay, A Sketch by Frances Irvin, revised by Jane Soames Nickerson,

it says, "Like most old families the Fleets had their own cemetery, located on rising ground on the west side of Cove Road behind the main house ... There is one unusual double inscription, the first part is now illegible, the second part records the death of 'Thomas Fleet, who departed his life in ... March, 1802 in passage from Saint Lucia to Saint Helena, Latitude 25 S. Longitude 6 W. in the 25th year of his age'." Finally, there is one further connection which should be looked into. On September 19, 1665, a woman named Elizabeth Fleet married John Connington in St. John, Barbados. We should also see if the groom's name was by any chance actually Coddington, the name of the founder of Newport, who traded in the West Indies.)

In addition to his maritime trading business, Thomas Fleet was also involved in shore whaling. In From Canoes to Cruisers, The Maritime Heritage of Long Island, Joshua Stoff states, "The early English settlers on eastern Long Island found a profitable trade almost at their feet - whaling. The colonists used whale blubber for greasing and protecting their metal tools and whale oil for lighting. At first the colonists could obtain blubber and oil only from the whales that had been washed ashore during storms. But before long, they learned to go out Indian-style to force whales onto the beach or kill them offshore ... Whaling 'companies' were formed in the communities of Eastern Long Island. These companies were simply groups of a few men who owned small boats and tools. These companies usually hired Native Americans to man the boats, and competition for experienced Indian whalers was heavy." An article published in the Long Islander on July 5, 1956, states, "Captain Thomas Fleet ... also invested in shore whaling, which his boats carried on along the south shore of Huntington town, now the town of Babylon."

The last non-politically-correct subject to be addressed is privateering. I do not mean to infer that Thomas was a pirate; however, the late 17th Century was the era of the REAL "Pirates of the Caribbean", and of the real Pirates of Long Island as well. There is a wonderful article about the early maritime traders of Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island at

www.providenceri.com/narragansettbay/maritime_commerce.html. In this article, it states, "Narragansett Bay ship captains and owners were involved in numerous other ventures of questionable nature, including smuggling, piracy, and quasilegal privateering. They were never averse to making a profit, and the constant wars of the European powers frequently blocked them from open, legitimate trade ... privateering, risky but profitable, became an acceptable form of business, and it helped sustain the maritime merchants when earnings were lean from more prosaic commercial operations. It was often possible to combine the two. Some of the more lightly armed merchant ships carried 'letters of marque', which gave them the right to capture an enemy merchantman if they could. The true privateers were more heavily armed ..." I'm sure the same theory applied on Long Island as well, and apparently the population was more than willing to turn a blind eye to such activity. In 1699, Lord Bellomont, the Governor of New York, wrote to England that, "about 30 pirates came lately into the east end of Nassau {Long} Island and have a great deal of money with them; but so cherished are they by the inhabitants that not a man of them is taken up. Several of them I hear came from Madagascar I too hear that Capt. Kidd dropp'd some pirates in that Island ... Arabian Gold is in great plenty there." (From Canoes to Cruisers, the Maritime Heritage of Long Island.) We Long Islanders are still covering up for our local rogues. The entry in A Hawkins Genealogy for another of my ancestors, Capt. Eleazer Hawkins (1688-1768), declares that he "came across an abandoned ship which he boarded with his crew to see what could be salvaged. They found a large heavy chest filled with so much gold and other valuables that even after his crew were given their proper share, Captain Eleazer had enough remaining as his portion that he was able on his return home to buy large farms for each of his {nine} sons." I have spent a great deal of time afloat, as have many friends and relatives, and I can vouch that none of us has ever found an abandoned ship with huge chests of gold just floating around the sea!

VIII. CAPT. FLEET'S LATER YEARS

I have seen mention in several places that Capt. Fleet might have been a Quaker. If so, I believe that he, like the son of his former commander William Penn, may have changed his religion later in life. I wrote to the Library of the Religious Society of Friends in London in October of 2010, and received a reply from their Senior Library Assistant stating, "I have checked the Directory of Quaker Biography and a couple of other sources and there is no entry for Thomas Fleet ... there is more likely to be references in the records of a US Yearly Meeting." She then advised me to contact the Haverford College Library as well as the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College. This should be followed up on in the future.

Seversmith states that the last official mention of Thomas Fleet is when he received land from the town fathers on March 12, 1694. He further states that "Thomas Fleet senior died between 12 March, 1694 and 4 October, 1694, when his son Thomas Fleet had assumed all of the property and the prerogatives. He was probably buried at Huntington, New York. No will or administration of his effects was ever filed of record." To me, this seems very odd. Thomas was a very wealthy man and a prominent citizen, and yet there is absolutely no mention of his death in the records of either the Town of Huntington or the State of New York. Possibly the records have been lost, or perhaps he just turned everything over to his children before his death so no will was necessary. If Thomas was born circa 1630, he would have been 64 years old in 1694, which was certainly a ripe old age at that time. However, to be thorough, I think I should just mention two further references that I found to a Thomas Fleet after 1694. These are in all likelihood references to a completely different individual, but they should perhaps be looked into in the future:

1. From the Librarian at the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, who found this in Joanne Saunders (Sanders?) list of Wills and Administrations III, page 34: "BOND, Peter of St. Paul Shadwell, London, mariner ... Wf

Elizabeth Bond, Xtrx, Atty and legatee, to asl, demand, and receive from Right Hon. Tho: Fleet Cmdr. of his Majesties fleet and for prize money payable to me by declaration of 23 May 1699, also to collect pensions, salaries and smart money due from my service in their Majesties ships ... Proved 5 Aug 1701.”

2. Will of Thomas Fleet of London, Mariner, which I found in the British Archives, dated March 8, 1699, probated 1701, whereby he arranges for payment of debts for the ship “Ann and Sarah of London whereof I am Commander”, with the balance of his estate going to his wife Sarah and her children. (I know this is a real stretch, but it’s not totally inconceivable that Thomas was widowed, remarried late in life, and named a ship after his two wives, Ann and Sarah.)

And so, in conclusion, my Family, I think it’s safe to say that this very long chronicle contains everything we know about our ancestor, Captain Thomas Fleet, to date. As more records become available, it’s possible that more on his life and travels will come to light. I’ve done my part; now you do your’s. Enjoy the search!

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