

## The Descendants of John & Martha (Steele) Handerson of 17th Century MA & CT

This work represents the result of an effort to identify the descendants of two of our ancestors from 17th century Massachusetts and Connecticut. It builds on works by several cousins; to wit, Dr. H. E. Handerson's "*Genealogy of the Handerson Family*" (1885) and Marion Henderson Reynolds' "*Descendants of James and Sarah Handerson*" (1976). Many dead-ends were encountered in our research which involved personal contacts, vital records, census records and family history. No claim is made as to the completeness of the listings.

The exact origin of John Handerson is unknown. We surmise he was a Scotsman on the basis of statements made by his contemporaries as discussed below. The spelling of his surname appears in the records of Springfield MA, Haddam CT, and Hartford CT variously as *Handerson*, *Hanison*, *Hannison*, *Henrison* or *Henryson*. John Winthrop in his medical journal calls him *Handerson*, *Henderson* or *Hinderson*. His only son, James, used the spelling *Handerson* and his descendants continued to do so until the mid 19th century when most of them switched to *Henderson*. We have no record of any of them still using *Handerson*.

The first record we find of John is in 1659 when "*John Henrison*" is assigned to the 10th seat in the Springfield MA meetinghouse. In the records of the Nov. 1659 session of the Springfield court we find: "*John Henryson complayning against Thomas Miller*". In this complaint John says Miller called him "*Scottish dogg*". (This indicate Thos. Miller thought John was of Scots origin but in of its self does not prove it.) Then on 19 Feb. 1661/2, John was granted land in Springfield MA.

His next court appearance was in March 1661/2 when "*John Henryson*" of Springfield was tried for hosting card games at his home on a regular basis (which was illegal in those Puritain times). In the course of the trial it comes out that his wife, Martha, liked to play cards and had brought a deck with her when she came up from Hartford. John indicated that Martha was melancholy and so he had had a few friends in to play cards to amuse her and raise her spirits. John admitted he had brought back more cards for her on one of his trips down river (to Hartford). (It was probably on an earlier one of these trips that he had met Martha.) Before the trial, Martha had denied to one of their neighbors that she had ever played cards. The court then fined John for this breach of the peace (playing cards) and moreover fined Martha, his wife, for lying to her neighbor.

From this affair we can infer that John and Martha were married about 1661. (If we assume her age at marriage to be between 17 and 24, the age at marriage of 90% of my female ancestors born in that era, then her birth would have occurred between 1637 and 1644. This fits in well with what is discussed below.)

But what of Martha's origins. We know she came from Hartford but there is no record of their marriage there or at Springfield. However, everyone who has studied the ancestry of Martha agrees that she was undoubtedly a grandchild of George Steele of Hartford. This is proven by his will of 1663 in which he calls her "*my grandchild Martha Hanison*". No one, however, has been able to establish just who her parents were. We will attempt to answer this question by examining the known facts of the case as stated below in approximate chronological order.

From the church records of Fairsted, co. Essex in old England, we find a George Steele - bapt. 1 Mar 1580 (son of William Steele) - married Margery Sorrel in October 1608. George and Margery had baptized there the following children: Margery - 1612; John - 1615 [d.y.]; John - 1618; Mary - 1620; James - 1622 and Elizabeth - 1628. (Another son, Richard, b. abt. 1610, is postulated on the basis of the land record noted below.)

The Steele family came to America in 1631 and first settled in Cambridge, Mass. Unfortunately no actual passenger list has been found containing the names of George's children; thus we can not be sure if they all came to this country. Charles Edward Banks in his *Planters of the Commonwealth* states that both George Steele and his brother John came on the ship Lyon in Nov. 1631 but says his basis for this is that "*they appeared in Cambridge shortly after*". He lists their wives and children also but doesn't say what his source was. Obviously he had incomplete information because he omits Richard and Elizabeth and he lists a "Joan". (Richard was old enough to have come on his own and the "Joan" is probably a typo for "John").

George Steele along with his brother John and their families were among the first settlers of Hartford CT in 1635 and both were leading men there. The early land records of Hartford survive only in the form of the handwritten notes of the Secretary of the General Court which are preserved at the Connecticut State Library. In 1912 the Connecticut Historical Society published these notes as *Original Distribution of Land, Hartford CT*. In this publication, the description (written sometime after February 1639/40) of one of George Steele's land holdings states that the property described did "*sometime belonge to Richard Steele lately deceased and now belongeth to George Steele his father*".

It has been said that George served in the Pequot War in 1637. This was apparently based on the fact that he held land in the area known as "Soldiers Field" where land had been granted to veterans of that war. Since George would have been 57 years old at the time of this conflict, it is doubtful that he was a soldier. More likely his son Richard, who was then in his 20's, was the soldier to whom the land was granted. Presumably when Richard died, the land was transferred to his father (probably to hold in trust for Richard's heirs.) Hence the confusion.

The land description noted above tends to prove Richard Steele, son of George, did come to NE; there is no doubt that James and Elizabeth came as they are both mentioned in their father's will (and their names appear frequently in the Hartford records); there are no records in regard to John, Margery or Mary. Margery, the oldest could have been already married by 1631 when the Steeles came to New England and may have chosen to remain in England. John and Mary probably either died young or had no issue. As will be shown, the evidence is clear that Martha is not the child of either James or Elizabeth and therefore must belong to John, Richard, Margery, Mary or some other unidentified child of George Steele.

In his will dated the year before his death, George Steele does not mention his wife or any of his children other than Elizabeth and James; presumably the others had died before he wrote it. However, it is usual to leave a bequest to the heirs of any children that predecease the testator. Curiously George does make a bequest "*unto Moses and Micah Mudge 10 shillings apeece*" but he does not call them his grandchildren. Their names appear in the will immediately after Martha's (whom he calls his grandchild) and just before "*my grandchildren James and Mary Steele*" (children of his son James). Can we infer a relationship between Martha and the Mudge boys? Possibly half siblings - one parent in common but not the other? More on this later.

In 1662 a settlement was founded at Thirty Mile Island in the Connecticut River (later called Haddam) and a John "Hannison" was listed among the 28 original proprietors from Hartford. Apparently John and Martha didn't move there immediately because we find the birth of their daughter Elizabeth recorded at Springfield in Jan. 1662/3 and a year later John "Henrison" is on a list of "*the admitted Inhabitants [of Springfield] who they are present Febr. 1664*". (Presumably this is Feb. 1664/5).

They were still "of Springfield" when, on 25 Jan. 1665/6, John Winthrop notes on page 619 of his *Medical Journal* as follows:

*“Elizabeth, [age] 3 years, daughter of John ‘Henderson’ of Springfield hath vomiting and looseness”.*

By October of 1666, however, they must have moved to Haddam and lived there until after 1673 because we find the births of three daughters recorded there as follows:

Martha, 26 Oct. 1666; Miriam, 24 Sept. 1670 and Bethyah, 12 May 1673.

In October 1668, John Winthrop again mentions the Hendersons (twice) in his medical journal:

*“Hinderson, Martha wife of John a Scotchman of 30 Mile Iland”* and

*“Hinderson, Eliz: 6 y: daught: of John”.*

(Note “a Scotchman” - why would Winthrop say so unless he was certain?)

In Jan. 1668/9 another entry - *“Hinderson, Eliz: 6 y. daught: of Henderson Scotchman of 30 Iland hath complant ..... married [to] Mary Mudge her sister, kinswoman of Sergt. Watts wife.”* This is very useful in proofing that Martha wife of John Henderson was indeed the same Martha mentioned in Thomas and Elizabeth Watts wills mentioned below. The phrase “Mary Mudge her sister” is understood to mean Henderson’s wife was the “sister” of Mary Mudge. (In those days generally no distinction was made between blood siblings and siblings by marriage - you would refer to your blood brother, your half brother, or your wife’s brother equally as “my brother”. The phrase “in-law” was seldom used except in regard to what we now refer to as a “step” relation; for example, your wife’s children by a previous marriage would be called your “children in-law” rather than your “step-children”.) Thus Martha was a sibling of Mary Mudge or her husband.

Here’s the name Mudge again; what do we know about the Mudges? The immigrant ancestor was Jarvis Mudge who shows up first in the MA Court Records in Dec. 1638 and next in Hartford CT in March 1640. He then appears in the Hartford records on and off in various court cases, land allocations, etc. through 1649. We know he then married the widow Rebecca Elsen (wid. of Abraham Elsen of Wethersfield who had died in 1648). There is no record of Jarvis having any children by her. Jarvis moved to New London in 1650 and obtained land there. (Some of this property was adjacent to Mr. John Winthrop’s Farm explaining why he would be acquainted with the Mudges.) Jarvis died in New London in 1653 and shortly thereafter the Court Records speak of his widow having an illicit affair. She was then forced to sell her property in New London and return to Wethersfield where she remarried to Nathaniel Greensmith.

That Jarvis was the father of Moses is proven by a 1683 deed in which Moses disposes of property in New London which he identifies as having belonged to his father, Jarvis Mudge. Moses’ age is established by his acting as a witness to legal papers in 1663 and his involvement in a suit in 1664. These acts would necessitate him to be over 21 at the time and hence born before 1642. Because John Winthrop in his January 1668/9 journal entry mentions that John Henderson was married to a sister of Mary Mudge, we also know that Moses Mudge already had a wife Mary by then.

Since Micah is mentioned in George Steele’s will after Moses and was married to Mary Alexander in Northampton MA in April 1670, he is probably the younger of the Mudge brothers by two or three years. We can estimate that he was born about 1645. The Mudge boys were thus born before 1648 and could not have been Jarvis Mudge’s children by Rebecca Elsen (as the Mudge Genealogy states) since she did not become Jarvis’ wife until after she was widowed in 1648. The Mudge boys then must have been born to an earlier wife of Jarvis. All of this would lead us to believe that, since George does not call the Mudge boys his grandchildren, Jarvis Mudge had married Martha’s mother (the widow of George Steele’s son, Richard) and had by her Moses and Micah. (Another possibility is that Jarvis could have had Martha by a daughter of George Steele (possibly Mary) and then upon her death, remarried, and had Moses and Micah by yet another unknown wife.)

In 1683, Capt. Thomas Watt, husband of Martha's Aunt Elizabeth, wrote his will. He mentions no children but makes a number of bequests to his many nephews and nieces. He also bequeaths much of his real property "*to my brother's son Samuel Hubbard, whom I have brought up from a child*" and "*to Martha Hannison to her own proper use 7 1/2 acres of land called by the name of Pesiponck; also £20 in other of my estate*". His will was proven in Dec. 1683, but the land was not transferred to Martha until distribution was made to all legatees by action of the General Court in March 1686/7.

Martha's Aunt Elizabeth Watt made her will on 14 Feb. 1684/5 and died 11 days later. She left her estate to her numerous relatives on both her and her husband's side of the family. In it she refers to her various nieces and nephews as "cousens" and includes "*my cousen Martha Henderson*" to whom she bequeaths much clothing and household items. The nature and quantity of her gifts to Martha indicate they were very close. None of the other "cousens" fare so well, not even her brother James' children (whom she specifically names as such thus proving that Martha was not a daughter of James).

Sometime before 1686 John and Martha Henderson must have moved to Hartford, because in April that year John Henrison of Hartford sells his lands in Haddam to John Scovil. "*John Hennyson of Hartford, Husbandman*" wrote his will in May of 1687, but fails to name his children, and leaves everything to his wife Martha.

Martha was received into the 2nd Church of Hartford on 17 Aug 1687 and in September 1687, she had four of her children baptized there, namely: Miram, Mary, James and Sarah. The last three apparently were either born after John and Martha left Haddam (or simply were not recorded there) and had never been baptized. Perhaps they were born in Hartford but as John was a "Scotchman" and not a member of the church there, his children weren't baptized until Martha was received into the Church.

Note - To the best of our knowledge, the children of John and Martha were as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birth Date</u>	<u>Probably Named for:</u>	<u>Married to:</u>
Elizabeth	1662/3	Elizabeth Watt [Martha's aunt]	James Hadlock - 1679
Martha	1666	Martha [herself]	not in mother's will; prob. d.y.
Miriam	1670	unkn. [possibly Martha's mother ?]	Roger Orvice of Farmington - 5 Dec. 1692
Bethyah	1673	Bethia Steele [wife of uncle James]	not in mother's will; prob. d.y.
Mary	c.1676	Mary Steele [dau. of uncle James or possibly Martha's mother ?]	George Wright - Oct. 1694
James	c.1679	James Steele [Martha's uncle]	Mehitable Grave - 1701/2
Sarah	c.1681	Sarah Steele [dau. of uncle James]	unm. 1699 (time of mother's will)

All of John and Martha's children (listed above) were apparently named for known relatives with the exception of Miriam. Is it possible that her mother was a Miriam? If so then Martha could be the daughter of Richard Steele (whom we know died by 1640) and his wife Miriam (maiden name unknown). Richard's widow, Miriam, could then have married Jarvis Mudge and herself died in turn leaving 3 children, Martha, Moses and Micah. This would explain Martha's relationship to the Mudges. (Note that all these names begin with an "M"!

In her will of Sept. 1699, Martha names only son James and daughters Elizabeth (Hadlock), Miriam (Orvice), Mary (Wright) and Sarah Handerson. (This will wasn't proven until 5 Feb. 1711/2.) In 1703, in return for care for the rest of her days, she conveyed all her land, by deed, to son James. The description of this land includes the 7 1/2 acres she received from Capt. Watt and another 2 1/2 acres in the South Meadow of Hartford also noted as having formerly belonged to Capt. Watt.

(How she acquired the latter is unclear; perhaps, since her parents were deceased, her grandfather may have paid Capt. Watt for the land to be conveyed to Martha as part of her dowery.)

In summary, we can postulate several possible scenarios for Martha's parentage. However the one that seems to best fit with the known facts is as follows: Richard Steele came with his parents to Hartford in 1635. Not long afterwards he married some unknown woman (first name possibly Miriam). He had by her about 1638 a daughter Martha. Richard had served in the Pequot War in 1637 and was granted a lot in Soldiers Field as a result. Sometime about 1640 he died and left a widow and an only child, Martha. His widow was married about 1641 to Jarvis Mudge. Any land belonging to Richard was given to his father, George, to hold in trust for his daughter.

By Mudge, Richard's widow had two sons, Moses (b. abt. 1642) and Micah (b. abt. 1645). About 1646 Martha's mother died also (probably in childbirth) and left Martha an orphan. It is possible that the Steeles did not trust Jarvis Mudge to look after Martha properly, and that Martha went to live in her grandparents home. At this time James was still at home and Elizabeth, a newly wed, lived nearby. Martha was undoubtedly very close to her Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle James.

Jarvis Mudge married Rebecca Elsen so his sons had a step-mother. When he died in 1653 the Steeles may have considered her not to be a very good woman (she was executed for witchcraft in 1663), so the Steeles may have taken these orphans in to live with their half-sister, Martha, until they were old enough to be on their own. As the Mudge boys would have been about 8 and 11 in 1653, they may have lived with the Steeles for several years. George Steele remembered them in his will, as they were once members of his household.

Why do we consider Richard to be the most likely parent of Martha? First, he is the only child of George Steele (besides James and Elizabeth) whose name ever shows up in the colonial records. Second, the fact that he had real property which should have passed to his heirs and Martha did receive real property from Capt. Watt which we can surmise he held in trust for her. If she were the child of a daughter of George Steele, there would be less likelihood of a real property transfer from the Steele side. Her mother's property, if any, would have gone to the mother's husband and thence to her. There is no record of any Mudge property going to Martha.

Also, the naming of her children suggests she was not Margery's child. As the name Mary was not used until the 5th daughter, it is not likely she was Mary's daughter either. Last but not least, if a daughter of George's is her mother and yet the Mudge boys are not George's grandchildren, Jarvis Mudge would have to have had 3 different wives (the mother of Martha, the mother of Moses & Micah and Rebecca Elsen) within in a span of ten years; a possible but unlikely sequence of events!

We can only postulate the origins of John and Martha and we can't say whether their daughters Martha, Bethyah and Sarah had any children. We have traced numerous of their descendants through daughters Elizabeth, Miriam and Mary and through son James. The results are given in 4 Appendices:

Appendix A - Descendants of John & Martha (Steele) Handerson

Appendix B - Descendants of Roger & Miriam (Handerson) Orvis/Orvice

Appendix C - Descendants of John & Elizabeth (Orvice) Andrews

Appendix D - Descendants of James & Mehitabel (Graves) Handerson