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**MATTHEW WATSON, AN IRISH SETTLER OF BARRINGTON, R. I., 1722.**

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The town of Barrington is picturesquely located in eastern Rhode Island. It has a fine outlook on Narragansett bay and also borders on the Warren river. It was incorporated by Massachusetts in 1718. In 1746-'47 the territory came under the jurisdiction of Rhode Island, and Barrington was merged with Warren. In 1770 Warren was divided and Barrington was again incorporated, this time by Rhode Island. There are several historic sites in the town, many pleasant drives, and a number of interesting caves, woods, and districts. The present population is between 1600 and 1700.

One of the earliest Irish settlers in Barrington was Matthew Watson. He was located there over 175 years ago and reminiscences of his life and times are still current among the people. Matthew was born in Ireland in 1696. His people are believed to have been Presbyterians, an element that has given many sturdy patriots to the cause of Irish nationality. The family left Ireland for America in about 1712. They landed in Boston.

What induced them to leave the old country can only be conjectured. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that it was due to causes that compelled thousands of other Irish Presbyterians to emigrate. These causes were the result of English oppression. The Irish Presbyterians were treated with great harshness[47] by various successive governments in England. At one time edicts of banishment were issued against their ministers; at another, we find the government wickedly declaring their pulpits vacant and filling them with clergymen of the Established church. When England had a policy of church or state to carry out in Ireland it could be made to bear heavily on the Presbyterian as on the Catholic. England's repeated suppression of Irish industries also caused great numbers of Presbyterians and Irish Protestants, generally, to emigrate to America.

The Watson family here mentioned consisted of Matthew, his father and mother, four brothers, and one sister. Sometime after arriving in Boston, the family removed to Leicester, Mass. Matthew came to Barrington in 1722, being then in his 26th year. He entered the employ of John Read, a brickmaker, and rapidly attained great proficiency in the business, winning the confidence of his employer and the esteem of his associates. In the course of time, he fell in love with his employer's daughter, Bethiah. His affection was reciprocated and the two soon became engaged. The fact becoming known, Bethiah's father earnestly opposed it. She was his only daughter, and he eloquently represented to her the "folly" of throwing herself away on "a little poor Irishman." His arguments were of no avail, however, and she and Matthew were

married at Barrington in 1732.

It was a happy marriage and her father lived to bless the day when the “little poor Irishman” became his daughter’s husband. Subsequently, Matthew purchased the farm of his father-in-law and conducted the brick-making business on an extensive scale. He erected a commodious brick mansion house which became known to the country roundabout as the “Great Watson Mansion,” embellished the grounds, and amassed a fortune of \$80,000.

By some, it is held that Matthew’s father had also located in Barrington. The original Watson property comprised a very large part of the town. The homestead has since been greatly reduced, however, by dividing it among the children, by bequests, and by extensive sales to newcomers. The estate at present comprises about fifty acres, tillable and woodland, held by descendants of Matthew. The land is very productive. There is one six-acre lot, nearly as level as a floor, which produces rich crops of hay, although it has not been dressed in the past thirty years. Underneath 132the greater part of the estate is a stratum of the best quality of blue clay within four to six feet of the surface.

This stratum underlies nearly the entire town, cropping out on the bay and river shores. The principal industry of Barrington is brick-making, which has been carried on for an indefinite period. At present 30,000,000 are produced annually. The labor in the old brick yards of the Watson family was done chiefly by slaves of whom Watson owned nearly fifty. All these he manumitted some time before his death. The continuous transportation of brick to the bay, by these slaves, for shipment gradually wore a roadway more than six feet in depth. By plowing and cultivation, this has long since been mostly filled in, though there are still places where the old roadway shows two or three feet deep. Sometime in the eighteenth century, a law was passed ordaining that bricks should be made of certain specified dimensions. Matthew Watson, the settler, considered this requirement as very unjust, and so decided not to change the size of his product. In order to escape prosecution, however, he ceased calling his goods brick, but instead styled them “Watson’s ware.” As there was no law regarding “Watson’s ware” the plan succeeded, and the old gentleman continued making and selling bricks at their former dimensions.[51] The “Great Watson Mansion” was for a long period visited by people who had heard of its dimensions and sumptuous furnishings and who desired to feast their eyes upon so much grandeur.

It is said to have possessed some of the earliest wallpaper used in America, outside of Boston. The jambs, mantels, and hearth were constructed of marble and imported from Amsterdam. The carpet was made from the wool of sheep raised on the farm, and being the first carpet used in those parts attracted visitors from points even forty miles away. A part of the mansion was recently still standing, and occupied by descendants of Matthew. The present is the sixth American generation of the family. Matthew, born in 1696, died in 1807; having completed 110 years of life and started on his 111th.

It is said that up to the day of his death, his faculties were unimpaired, except for blindness. On the day that he was 100 years old, he called for his saddle horse, mounted without assistance, and rode off briskly for a couple of miles. Upon his return, the negro servant being absent, and the great gate unopened, he touched up his horse and cleared it at a bound.

Further interesting facts regarding Matthew Watson are found in an article published[52] some years before his death. It was written at Barrington and reads as follows:

“There is now living in this town Matthew Watson, Esq., in the 105th year of his age, in a pretty good state of health, and in the enjoyment of his faculties, except being blind. He was born in Coleraine in the province of Ulster, in the north of Ireland, in March, A. D. 1696, from whence he, with his father and mother, four brothers, and one sister, migrated and arrived at Boston, A. D. 1712, from whence they removed to and settled in Leicester, in the county of Worcester (Mass.), where he hath one brother, Deacon Oliver Watson, now living. Mr. Watson came to this town A. D. 1722, whereby industry he acquired a pretty handsome fortune. He hath sustained the office of a Justice of the Peace in the town and was formerly a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas for the county of Bristol. He hath been a member of the Congregational church in this town between seventy and eighty years without censure. He hath ten children now living, the youngest of whom is fifty-three years of age, all in a married state, except his eldest and youngest daughters, who are widows. He was born in the seventeenth, lived through the eighteenth, and is now progressing in the nineteenth century.”

The foregoing extract was found, in 1893, by the writer while engaged in examining files of the Providence Gazette in the rooms of the Rhode Island Historical Society in Providence. As the article was written at Barrington during the lifetime of the centenarian, some, at least, of the facts were probably obtained from his own lips. The extract may therefore be considered as authoritatively settling certain data which have long been in dispute.

Matthew is said to have had fifteen children, ten of whom were living at the time of his decease. The names of these ten were Abigail, Mary, Rachel, Mercy, Bethiah, Matthew, Lydia, William, John, and Samuel. There were also many grandchildren and great 134grandchildren. In Arnold's "Vital Record of Rhode Island" appears an entry under Barrington which states in substance that "Robert Watson and Mary Orr married at Londonderry, Ireland, 1695." They were probably the parents of Matthew, the Barrington settler, who had the names recorded for purpose of reference; or they may have been so recorded by some other member of the family. The centenarian was twice married. Bethia, his first wife, died in 1778, leaving ten children. One of Matthew's descendants, John Watson, married Ann Waterman, daughter of Capt. Asa Waterman, of Rhode Island, was assistant commissary-general during the Revolution. She was related to Governor Cooke of Rhode Island.

Among the centenarian's descendants were the following: Robert S. W. Watson who wedded Patience Bligh. He was born in 1804; Annie Cooke Watson, born in 1831; Dr. S. T. Watson, born

1832; John W. Watson, 1835; Mary H. Watson, 1837; Henry H. Watson, 1839; Robert S. Watson, 1843; Emily F. Watson, 1845; Robert S. Watson, 1846; Charlotte A. Watson, 1850.

Nearly every generation of the family has had a Matthew in it. A second Matthew Watson was born in 1741. A Matthew Watson of a later generation married Abby B. Wheaton, of Providence, in 1818. The Providence Directory for 1844 shows "Matthew Watson, manufacturer, rear Roger Williams Bank," and gives his residence as Angell street. In February 1892, the following interesting communication appeared in the Providence Journal. Its author is thought to have been Matthew Watson, of Providence, a recent representative of the name.

The Cup That Cheers. To the Editor of the Journal: The first time that tea was brought to Barrington, Rhode Island, is not known to the writer of this article, but the second time it was brought by Matthew Watson something over a hundred and fifty years ago, before the famous Boston tea party.

Matthew Watson sold brick which he manufactured from the clay on his own property, which was extensive, even for those days, in Newport. On one of his trips there he bought the teapot, a sketch of which appears in this article, and six teacups.

As tea had never been used, of course, there was no tea kettle, and water to make this was boiled in a dinner pot hanging from a crane over the wood fire. The teapot now is in possession of one of Matthew Watson's descendants and is a quaint little affair of some ancient style of crockery. It stands on three legs, which adds to its unique appearance.

Once it was broken into eight pieces, but was so cleverly mended that it is almost impossible to detect this as it stands, with other heirlooms, looking down on the china and glass of later dates.