

FIRST GENERATION

1 WILLIAM¹ WITTER, the first American ancestor of the Witter family of the United States and Canada, was born in England about the year 1584, as he was seventy-five when he died in 1659. His surname is one of the earliest found in New England and appears in various forms in the old records of this country and of England,—as Witter, Whitter, Witton, and Whitton. One branch of the Whitter, or Witter, family was of Broomehall, in Sussex, England, in the reign of Edward IV. A descendant of this family was Thomas Whitter of Exeter, Devonshire, who was an officer in Cromwell's army. This affiliation with the Parliamentary Party, and hence with the Puritan movement, which contributed largely to the settlement of New England, may indicate a probable connection between the Devonshire family and the Witters of early Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, of which William Witter, as above stated, was the first American ancestor.

He was living in Massachusetts as early as 1639, at which date he was probably of Swampscott, near Lynn. At a later period he was a resident of Swampscott, although he is mentioned in some of the records as of Lynn. The record of his arrival in New England is preserved in an old manuscript, written by his descendant, Samuel Witter, of the sixth generation, entitled: "The Genealogy of the Witters from their first arrival from England to America, drawn from the Original, March the 20th, AD 1773 by Samuel Witter," and the first entry is as follows:

"William Witter in his voyage from old England to America with his wife his son Josiah & daughter Hannah, arrived at Lynn in the Massachusetts Bay, where Josiah married Elisabeth Wheeler and Hannah married Thomas Bardan. Said William Witter died at Lynn. his Widows Name was Hannah. She came with her Son Josiah to Stonington and Lived to a Great Age."

Much of the material relating to the descendants of Ebenezer Witter, grandson of William Witter, has been obtained from this manuscript.

William Witter's wife also appears with the Christian name, Annis, probably a form of Anna or Hannah. Her maiden name is said to have been Churchman, and it has been thought that she was a daughter of Hugh Churchman, an early settler of Lynn, Massachusetts. A well-known authority on early New England genealogy states that Hugh Churchman of Lynn, 1640, died in 1644, that his will was probated July 9, of that year, and that Ann Churchman, perhaps his daughter, married John Rogers on April 16, 1639, at Weymouth. In Hugh Churchman's will he mentions Josias, son of William Witter, leaving the latter his homestead in Lynn, which, on William Witter's death, is to pass to Josias Witter. (Josias was often used interchangeably with Josiah in old records.) It may be that the wife of William Witter was a sister of Hugh Churchman instead of his daughter.

Hugh Churchman's will, from the Essex Court files, is here given in abstract in the quaint old orthography of the original document: "I Hugh Churchman of Len do make this my last will . . . first my howse and Lot in Len . . . and all other appurtenances there unto belonging to wilyam Wenter (*sic.*) tel his son Josias shae atayn the age of twenty one years and then to his son Josias and his Ayeres for ever; with this condicon that . . . he shale paye to his sister hannah winter (*sic.*) ten pounds within one hole year . . . And if Josiah and hannah shall both dy before they shale atayen the age of twenty one yeres that then William Winter or his now wif or the longer liver of them to have it. . . ." He makes William Witter his Executor.

William Witter's homestead at Swampscott was on "the spot where Joseph Blaney's house now stands,"—or where it was standing in 1844, about two miles from Lynn. The land on which it stood was purchased by William Witter from an Indian, according to the following deposition made by him, and recorded in the files of the Salem Court, under the dates April 15 and 27, 1657:

"Blacke will, or duke william, so called, came to my house (which was two or three miles from Nahant), when Thomas Dexter had bought Nahant for a suit of clothes; the said Blacke will Asked me what I would give him for the Land my house stood vppon, it being his land, and his ffather's wigwam stood their abouts" and he adds that he "bought Nahant and

Sagomer Hill and Swamscoate of Black William for two pestle stones."

At the time of the controversy between the Massachusetts Bay Colony authorities and the leaders of the Baptist movement, William Witter was one of those whose adherence to the Baptist tenets brought him into disagreement with the former. He was haled to Court more than once because of his opposition to infant baptism. He also gave offense because of his entertainment of the Baptist leaders, Obadiah Holmes, John Crandall and John Clarke, the first-named being an ancestor of Abraham Lincoln. In the narrative of their journey to Rhode Island, because of the persecution of the Massachusetts government, John Clarke wrote: "It came to pass that we three . . . came into the Mathatusetts Bay about the 16 day of the 5th Moneth 51; and upon the 19th of the same, . . . we came into a Town . . . called Lin, where we lodged at a Blind-man's house, neer two miles out of the Town, by name William Witter . . ." From this we see that William Witter, in his old age, had become blind.

William Witter's will was dated August 6, 1657. In it he bequeathed to his wife, Annis, half of his estate, and to his son, Josiah, the other half. Of his daughter, he says: "Hannah shall have a yew and lamb this time twelf mounth." He died two years after making his will, in 1659.

The births of his children are recorded at Swampscott, near Lynn, Massachusetts, although the old record, above mentioned, states that they accompanied him and his wife from England.

Children of William and Annis (Churchman?) Witter:

- 2 i Josiah Witter.
- ii Hannah Witter; married, first, Robert Burdick, whose surname is also given by a Witter descendant as Hurden or Burdett, by whom it is said that they were married in Malden, in November, 1653 (it is also said that she married Thomas Bardan); married, second, as his second wife, Edmund Chamberlain, on June 22, 1670, at Chelmsford, Massachusetts; both called of Malden; she died at Woodstock, Connecticut, in 1696.

SECOND GENERATION

2 JOSIAH² WITTER (William¹) was probably born at Swampscott, near Lynn, Massachusetts, where his birth is recorded, in 1638. (The old Witter genealogy says he came from England.) He was living there in 1661, when he married his first wife, Elizabeth Wheeler, the daughter of Thomas and Mary Wheeler. It is also said they married February 25, 1662. She was born in 1648, at Lynn. He removed to Stonington, New London County, Connecticut, before February 26, 1666, as on that date Thomas Minor, of Stonington, wrote in his diary: "The Twelfth moneth is februarie & hath 28 days saterday the 16. I begun the reek Witer brought the canoow;" On August 15, 1667, at a town meeting at Stonington, "it was voted that Goodman Witter shall have four score acres of land where it may be found and to take it according to order." He built a house near that of his father-in-law, Thomas Wheeler.

The name of Josiah Witter appears in a list of inhabitants of Stonington, on December 29, 1670, and in the town records, later than the foregoing entry, but without date, he is noted among the Freemen of Stonington.

On April 12, 1670, Thomas Park of New London, sold to "Josiah Witter of Stonington" one hundred acres of land which had been granted to the said Park by the town of Stonington. It is said that Josiah Witter's first house in Stonington was a little north of the modern residence of Colonel James Brown.

An item from the curious old journal of Thomas Minor, above quoted, suggests the perils of those far-off Colony days, when savages lurked in the forests and it was dangerous to stray far from one's home save as one of a party well armed. "1671. The Seventh moneth is september and hath 30 days . . . Tuesday the .10 good-wife witer was Lost." Whether shock resulting from this incident hastened the death of Elizabeth (Wheeler) Witter, we do not know, but she died on August 5, 1672, and was buried two days later. Thomas Minor writes in his diary:

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"1671 The sixth moneth is Agust and hath .31. days the 7th. day wensday Elizabeth Witter was buried"

Josiah Witter married, as his second wife, Sarah, daughter of Reverend John Crandall. Her father was living in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1635, and is believed to have been of Welsh ancestry. He was one of the original purchasers of the land comprising Westerly, Rhode Island, from which Hopkinton was later formed. The townships of Westerly, Hopkinton, Charlestown, and Richmond, as they now are, were a tract called by the Indians "Misquamicut," and on August 27, 1661, John Crandall was one of the nine signers of a petition to the Court of Commissioners for the Colony of Providence Plantations, in session at Portsmouth, for the purchase of that part of the tract which became Westerly. He was the first Baptist Elder at Westerly and held a number of public offices at various times, being a Commissioner and Deputy to the General Court in 1667, 1670, and 1671, representing Westerly in the two latter terms. Prior to his settlement at Westerly he had lived at Newport, coming there probably soon after his apprehension by Massachusetts officers, in 1651, when he held a religious meeting at the house of William Witter, at Swampscott, for which he was imprisoned for a time at Boston.

Josiah Witter is said to have died in 1690. In Salem, Massachusetts, the seat of Essex County, his will is indexed with date November 24, 1685. The document itself is not on file at Salem, and its whereabouts is unknown.

Children of Josiah and Elizabeth (Wheeler) Witter:

- i Elizabeth Witter; born on March 15, 1662 (or 1663).
- ii Mary Witter; born February 20, 1665.
- 3 iii Ebenezer Witter.

Children of Josiah and Sarah (Crandall) Witter:

- 4 iv John Witter.
- v Sarah Witter; born February 7 (or 9), 1679-80.
- 5 vi Hannah Witter.
- 6 vii Abigail Witter.

THIRD GENERATION

3 EBENEZER^s WITTER (Josiah,² William¹) was born at Stonington, Connecticut, March 25 (or May 28), 1668. He was of Preston, Connecticut, where he built a grist mill in 1695. On May 5, 1693, aged twenty-four years, eleven months, and seven days, as the old Witter genealogy states, he married Dorothy Morgan, who, at the time of her marriage, was aged seventeen years, two months, ten days, daughter of Lieutenant Joseph and Dorothy (Park) Morgan. She was born February 29, 1675.

Ebenezer Witter was one of the twelve founders of the Congregational church in Preston and a Deacon. His grandson, Asa Witter, writes of him: "He was a strict observer of the Sabbath and in the faithful performance of all the duties God requires of us as parents and children on His holy day. My mother, Elizabeth Brown Witter, began with her children before they could read. We had to say the catechism after her on Sabbath evenings, and, if we were sleepy sitting, we had to stand up. This was the case until we left the home mansion. Grandfather was always so very punctual in family worship that, when confined to his bed with a broken limb and on his back, he lead the family prayers morning and evening."

Ebenezer Witter died of "pluretic fever," January 12, 1712, at Preston, "his dwelling place." His gravestone and that of his wife, in the Avery Cemetery at Preston Plains, are inscribed: "To the memory of Deacon Ebenezer Witter who departed this life Jan. the 12th, 1712, in the 44th year of his age. Seake for the kingdom of Heaven Deal justly Love mercy Walk humbly." "In Memory of Mrs. Dorothy, the wife of Ebenezer Witter she died March the 9th, 1759, in the 84th year of her age."

Children of Ebenezer and Dorothy (Morgan) Witter:

- i Elizabeth Witter; born March 3, 1694; married — Brewster.
- ii Mary Witter; born March 2, 1696; married — Tracy.

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- iii Josiah Witter; born June 12, 1698; died "1798" (probably an error for 1698.); called twin of Joseph.
- 7 iv Joseph Witter.
- 8 v Ebenezer Witter.
- vi Dorothy Witter; born December 11, 1702; married — Brewster.
- vii Hannah Witter; born February 26, 1704.
- 9 viii William Witter.
- ix Abigail Witter; born January 24, 1711; died in 1714; called twin of Josiah, which probably indicates that was a second Josiah, born January 24, 1711, and twin of Abigail, and that the above Josiah, born June 12, 1698, who is stated to have died in "1798," died in 1698, the year he was born.
- x Josiah Witter (?); probably the twin of Abigail, above mentioned; may have died young.

4 JOHN^s WITTER (Josiah,² William¹), the son of Josiah Witter by his second wife, Sarah Crandall, was born March 11, 1677-78, in Stonington, Connecticut. He removed to Westerly, Rhode Island, where his maternal grandfather, Reverend John Crandall, was an early settler, and on February 28, 1710, received a grant of two hundred and three acres of land there. On January 24, 1715-16, he mortgaged one hundred and one and a half acres, and, on December 22, 1743, deeded ninety-two acres to his "Son John Witter Junr."

John Witter's home was in the present Washington County, Rhode Island, then known as King's County. Westerly was incorporated on May 14, 1669. Its Indian name was Misquamicutt. For a brief period it was called Haversham, but the name of Westerly was restored in 1689, this name having been given because it was the most western town in the Colony. It is probable that the ninety-two acres of land, which, as above stated, John Witter gave to his son, John, was in the part of Westerly, which, on March 19, 1757, was incorporated as the town of Hopkinton, named in honor of Governor Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island.

FOURTH GENERATION

7 JOSEPH⁴ WITTER (Ebenezer,³ Josiah,² William¹) was probably born at Preston, Connecticut, where his father lived. In the old record before referred to, his birth date is given as June 12, 1698, and he was twin of his brother, Josiah. He is stated to have married when he was aged "twenty-four years, two months, and one day." His wife was Elizabeth Gore, born January 12, 1703-4, who, at the time of her marriage, was aged eighteen years, one month, and one day. Their marriage took place August 13, 1722, which would make her birth date in 1704. Her parents were Captain Samuel and Hannah (Draper) Gore of Roxbury. Elizabeth (Gore) Witter died April 9, 1761, "with the long fever." Joseph Witter married, as his second wife, on April 9, 1762, Amy Meech, a widow. By her he had no children. His date of death does not appear in the manuscript.

Children of Joseph and Elizabeth (Gore) Witter:

- 14 i Samuel Witter.
- 15 ii Joseph Witter.
- 16 iii Ezra Witter.
- iv Elizabeth Witter; born April 22, 1729; died August 20, the same year.
- v Hannah Witter; born October 8, 1730.
- 17 vi Ebenezer Witter.
- 18 vii Elijah Witter.
- 19 viii Eunice Witter.

8 LIEUTENANT EBENEZER⁴ WITTER (Ebenezer,³ Josiah,² William¹) was born November 30, 1699, and lived at Preston, Connecticut, representing the town in the General Court. On March 26, 1729, aged twenty-eight, he married Elizabeth, daughter of John and Elizabeth Brown of Preston. She was born in 1708 and was aged twenty at the time of her marriage. It is stated that she died August 27, 1754, and also that she died in 1759. After her death Ebenezer Witter went to Canterbury,

FIFTH GENERATION

14 SAMUEL⁵ WITTER (Joseph,⁴ Ebenezer,³ Josiah,² William¹) was born May 28, 1723. At the time of his marriage, he was of Norwich, Connecticut, and was age¹ twenty-three years, six months, five days. He married, December 3, 1746, Sarah Calkins of Preston, who was aged eighteen years, three months, twenty-nine days when she was married, and was, therefore, born in 1728. She died February 3, 1757, in the twenty-ninth year of her age. Samuel Witter married, second, Eunice (Way) Maples, a widow, daughter of Thomas and Jane (Lee) Way of the North Parish, New London, Connecticut, on February 9, 1758. She died July 12, 1759. His third wife was Anna, daughter of Captain Joseph Prentice of New London, whom he married June 9, 1761, at "Lakes pond." He died February 22, 1767, in the forty-fourth year of his age, "at Horton his dwelling place."

Samuel Witter made several voyages which are noted in the quaint old record of the Witter family written by his son, Samuel Witter, Junior, as follows:

"May 28th1760
 Sd Samuel Witter, with his daughters Sarah and Ame and son Samuel set out in their voiage to Nova Scotia, landing there the 4th day of June.....1760
 1760 in the fall, Sd Samuel set out in his voiage to New England; and was married to Anna prentis his third wife: June the 9th.....1761
 She was the daughter of Captain Joseph prentis of New London: at Lakes pond.....
 Sd Samuel Witter with his wife Anne and daughter Elisabeth set out in their voiage to Nova Scotia in the year.....1761"

Children of Samuel and Sarah (Calkins) Witter:

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| 33 | i | Sarah Witter. |
| 34 | ii | Amy Witter. |
| 35 | iii | Samuel Witter. |

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- iv Ezra Witter; born August 4, 1754; died the same year.

Child of Samuel and Eunice (Way, Maples) Witter:

- 36 v Elizabeth Witter.

Children of Samuel and Anna (Prentice) Witter:

- vi Anna Witter; born April 3, 1762.
vii Hannah Witter; born April 27, 1764.
viii Joseph Prentice Witter; born January 11, 1766.

15 JOSEPH⁵ WITTER (Joseph,⁴ Ebenezer,³ Josiah,² William¹) was born December 15, 1724. He was of Preston, Connecticut. He married Hannah, daughter of Jonathan Davison of Preston, January 3, 1754, at which date he was aged twenty-nine years, eighteen days, and she was aged twenty years, three months, eleven days. She died January 14, 1776.

Children of Joseph and Hannah (Davison) Witter:

- i Jonathan Witter; born November 20, 1755; died "the 14th 1756."
ii Elizabeth Witter; born July 18, 1757.
37 iii Dorothy Witter.
38 iv Joseph Witter.
v Hannah Witter; born March 9, 1765; died in her fifth year.
vi Lucinda Witter; born January 25, 1768.
vii Septimus Witter; born January 14, 1771.
viii Lucy Witter; born March 5, 1774; died December 9, 1785.

16 EZRA⁵ WITTER (Joseph,⁴ Ebenezer,³ Josiah,² William¹) was born January 22, 1727. He died March 9, 1761, of fever. Ezra Witter married, aged twenty-five years, twenty-one days, on February 12, 1752, Anna, daughter of David and Dorothy Morgan, of Preston, Connecticut. She was born in 1735, as, at the time of her marriage, she was aged seventeen years, eleven months, sixteen days. She died March 17, 1761, of a fever in her twenty-seventh year.