

The Regicides

The following is an account written by a Mrs. Eleanor Smith Teesdale in 1953. As far as I know, this is the only account that was ever written on the subject, and consequently, whenever the subject came up, it was this recollection that was put forth. If you repeat something often enough, eventually it becomes accepted as the gospel truth, regardless of whether it is factual or not. This causes ruffled feathers with people who totally believe the original version and refuse to entertain any other viewpoint when and if it is raised. The story told here falls into this category, as does the Colebrook Cave, the Colebrook dinosaur tracks and the Winsted Wildman (who actually should have been known as the Colebrook Wild Man).

This story of the Regicides, or more specifically one of the three, William Goffe, has several serious flaws in it, which I will point out as the story unfolds. This no doubt will not sit well with two or three of my friends, who insist that they have seen the gravestone and are frustrated that they have not been able to relocate it. Here is the story, at least as far as I am able to ascertain, beginning with Mrs. Teesdale's account:

“The fascinating story of the Regicides in Connecticut is in a way connected with my ancestral home near New Haven, Connecticut.

Major General Edward Whalley, Major General William Goffe and Colonel John Dixwell were three of the members of a high court of justice in England, which tried and condemned to death King Charles I of England. Whalley and Goffe were cousins of Oliver Cromwell and had distinguished themselves during the years of the Protectorate. Edward Whalley had been responsible for the King's person and was a man of unimpeachable integrity. Goffe was a son-in-law of Whalley's and a graduate of Oxford University with a Master's degree. John Dixwell was a wealthy gentleman of Kent [in England], and had been elected to Parliament.

During the reign of Cromwell, all three of these men held positions of high importance and prominence. When King Charles II ascended the throne after the overthrow of Cromwell, he condemned all 63 members of the High Court of Justice to death. 48 were executed in short order, and those who had fled to the Continent were hunted and brought back for execution. Under assumed names, Whalley and Goff sailed from England for America, arriving in Boston in May, 1660. John Dixwell fled to Germany, but made his way to America about five years later and joined the other two men in Boston.

They were courteously treated by Governor Endicott of Massachusetts and because of their evident educations and brilliant personalities, were well treated by the citizenry. However, an edict arrived in Boston from Parliament in February 1661, offering a reward for the men, dead or alive. Governor Endicott reluctantly issued a warrant for their arrest, whereupon the two men, Whalley and Goff, fled to Connecticut, which was the most remote of the colonies. They were received by Governor Winthrop of Connecticut and by other prominent families of that colony. Two royalist agents, Kelland and Kirk, set out from Boston armed with the warrant and letters to Governor Winthrop asking for his assistance in apprehending the fugitives, only to find that Governor Winthrop had died and Governor Leete was head of the colony. From that time on, the

regicides were whisked from place to place, as deputy after deputy arrived with orders for their arrest.

Among those who gave refuge to the regicides, besides Governor Leete, were a Mr. Davenport of New Haven, a Mr. Jones of New Haven and a servant maid of Governor Leete's, who zealously carried supplies to them in their hideout under the Governor's mansion. At one time their pursuers crossed over a low bridge over a small stream, while the men were hidden under the bridge.

Governor Leete was accused by the Royalists as being lukewarm in aiding in the capture of the fugitives, and there was even some talk of treason. A Mrs. Allenton, second wife of one of the Mayflower passengers, hid the men in a closet off her kitchen and when a search was made of her house, she had "brasserie and elegant furniture" hung over the doorway, which was undetected. As soon as the deputies left, she let the men out of the back door, and after walking off a bit, they returned to her kitchen hiding place, and she was able to salve her New England conscience with the statement later to the deputies that the men had been in her kitchen, but she had let them out the back door. The search went as far as New York City, but without success.

By this time, John Dixwell had joined the other two, and their flight went on with weeks and months spent in cellars and caves. Many of the hiding places have been marked with tablets; Hatchet Harbor, Guilford, Woodbridge, Governor Leete's house and barn, etc. Part of the time, the men went about openly, preaching, giving fencing lessons, fighting Indians with the colonists, and always with help, esteem and love. Finally they found a safe haven in the home of a Mr. Russell of Hadley, Massachusetts, and here they remained undisturbed for 12 years. An interesting event took place in Hadley during this period; in the summer of 1675 the towns of Brookfield, Deerfield and Northfield were burned by the savages, and many of the colonists perished. A band of soldiers, led by Captain Beers was ambushed near Deerfield and almost all were killed. The Indians then attacked Hadley, and while the villagers were fighting desperately, it was said an aged man with flowing white hair and beard appeared and took command of the battle, and the savages were soon driven off. It later proved to have been Goffe, who was then in hiding in the village. One of the historic clues as to the truthfulness of this person having been Goffe was the skill he had shown with his sword. He had mowed down the native warriors like ten pins and put the survivors in flight for their lives almost singlehandedly. In Europe, when he was a young officer, he had been judged the most superb swordsman on the continent. This alone left little doubt as to the true identity of the mystery man.

Edward Whalley was the first of the regicides to die. He was buried in back of Mr. Russell's house, and his grave is marked and is visited by tourists as one of the important spots in Hadley, Mass.

We will conclude this article next week.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg

