



MAJOR HILKIAH GROUT OF WEATHERSFIELD, VERMONT

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MAJOR HILKIAH Grout¹ of Weathersfield, Vermont, who was born July 23, 1728, in Lunenburg, Massachusetts,² was a fourth generation grandson of Richard Groutt of Walton, County Derby, England, who, on May 28, 1586, in the twenty-ninth year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth was knighted and given the title of Sir Richard Grout Esq., and was certified to be a descendant of an ancient and honorable family of that name in the west of England.³

Captain John Grout of Watertown and Sudbury 1640, and William Grout of Charlestown, Massachusetts 1665, were the sons of Sir Richard Grout above referred to.⁴ A tradition has descended, with a copy of his will, that a father by the name of Grout, with two sons, fled to this country from Cornwall upon the breaking out of the plague epidemic, and died soon after, leaving two sons in their minority with claims to an estate in England which was never prosecuted.

From this it has been calculated that they came at seventeen or eighteen years of age. When and where these orphans completed their minority is not certain, but when John was 68 years of age he testified, under oath, before Governor Simon Bradstreet, that he had been closely associated with Governor Winthrop, and his deposition at that time, attentively considered, renders it possible that John might have been taken into the family of Governor Winthrop, where he attracted attention and secured the confidence of the Governor and his family. It also shows for what trust of difficulty and danger he was early qualified.⁵ He is recorded as arriving "with his gun in his hand". This old long gun, handed down from Father to son, and carried by Hilkiah, is now in the possession of a tenth generation Grout in New England—John Grout of South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

John Grout was twice married. After the death of his first wife, Mary, he married in 1643, Sarah (Busby) Cakebread, widow of the renowned Captain Thomas Cakesbread.⁶ To them eight children were born. In this narrative we are concerned, as we work down to

Major Hilkiah, with only the son Jonathan, who was born August 1, 1658, and married to Abigail Dix, December 10, 1701.⁷

To Jonathan and Abigail eight children were born. Of these, John, born October 14, 1704,⁸ married November 23, 1727, Joanna Boynton,⁹ second child of Hilkiah and Pricilla Boynton of Lunenburg, Massachusetts. John and Joanna had fifteen children, only thirteen of whom are recorded. Their first born being Hilkiah, the subject of this paper.¹⁰

Hilkiah Grout married in 1750, Submit Hawkes¹¹ of Deerfield, Massachusetts, daughter of Nathaniel and Hannah (Belding) Hawkes.

Major John Hawkes, an uncle of Submit, was employed by General Amherst, in building the western part of the Crown Point Road in 1759. On one of his expeditions in 1716, he encamped at Weathersfield, Vermont, on the height of land since known as Hawkes Mountain.¹² Hilkiah and Submit were no strangers to the frontier nor frontier life, with its ever present menace from the Indians. Having pioneering spirit, they took up one of the "pitches" near Conway, Massachusetts, when it was first opened up, but later moved to that part of Hinsdale, west of the river, called Vernon.¹³ Three children had been born to them, all in Winchester, New Hampshire: Hilkiah Jr., 1751; Asa, 1753; and Martha 1754. Orlando Bridgeman had built a fort at Vernon in 1754. Hilkiah moved his family there to live, together with the families of Caleb Howe and Benjamin Gaffield.¹⁴ On July 27, 1755, the three wives with their children, eleven in all, were alone at the Fort. Their men were in the cornfield near the river. They had started to return to the Fort, when twelve Indians fired from ambush. Hilkiah escaped by swimming the river. Gaffield attempted that feat but was drowned. The two older Howe boys were captured, and their father, Caleb, was scalped, his body pierced by a spear, was left for dead. He was found alive next morning by a party from Fort Hinsdale, but died soon after.¹⁵ Some old records state that the Indians had by keeping watch, learned the signal given at the outer gate by the men returning from the fields, and so were able to gain an easy entrance. The women had heard the guns, and anxiously awaiting the return of their men, heard in the early evening dusk, a rapping at the gate and a tread of feet without. Supposing their men had returned safely, they opened the gate. What horror and anguish must have been theirs as the hideously painted Indians burst in upon them. The three families were made prisoners, the fort was plundered and fired, the Indians then proceeding into the woods about a mile and a half where they en-

camped for the night. Early the next morning they set out, with their prisoners, for Crown Point, and after nine days of travel reached Lake Champlain. Imagine the suffering that must have been theirs during the long hours and miles. Through woods and swamps, across hills and streams, half clothed, barefoot, exposed to the pitiless midsummer heat, the vicious sting of black flies, mosquitoes and other insects with which the northern woods abound at that time of year. Their mental agony as to the fate of their loved ones, and what the future had in store for them, for they could expect nothing better than sorry captivity or death.

At Lake Champlain the Indians took to canoes, and soon after they arrived at their destination, Crown Point. After remaining at Crown Point about a week, they proceeded down the lake to St. John's and ended their journey at St. Francis.

There has always been an unsupported tradition that Hilkiah followed the Indians and their captives for three days, saw that his wife and children were alive and not being treated brutally, and knew that a pot shot from him would be hazardous to their welfare. From a vantage point on the Black River meadows, where he later settled and built a home, he saw them disappear into the forest. He then returned and enlisted for Indian warfare. The usual termination of an Indian raid was that those who survived the long march were sold, the boys to Indians, the women to the French as household servants. Submit and Martha were so fortunate as to be sold together to a French gentleman, M. LeRoy DeMille, Asa and Hilkiah Jr., to the Indians in the St. Francis region. Submit and Martha were captives for three years. October 9, 1758, Colonel Zadoc Hawkes presented a petition to the General Court of Massachusetts, praying them to obtain a release for Submit Grout, the petitioner's niece. Money for the ransom was contributed by General Israel Putnam and others. The release was not long delayed, and sometime in the next Spring, Submit came home, but was compelled to leave her children in Canada.

Three years later Martha and Asa were recovered,¹⁶ but Hilkiah Jr., was not to return to them. They never saw their first born son again, and for a long time mourned him as dead, naming another little son Hilkiah Jr., II. Evidence was afterwards brought forth that he had been adopted by the Cattaraugus Indians in western New York, grew up with them, and as he came into manhood became their chief counselor.

It is not recorded when Hilkiah decided on Weathersfield as a per-

manent home. He was first elected to town office in 1774, and it is likely that he had been clearing land, bargaining for titles for some years previous, but, none of his children was born in Weathersfield until 1771. Submit had lost nearly four years in Canadian widowhood, and as large families were expected, even considered a responsibility, upon her return from captivity, she again took up her duties as wife and mother. Eight children were born in the thirteen years that followed: Elihu, 1760; Hilkiah Jr. II, 1761; Bridgeman, 1763; Seth, 1765; DeMille, 1767; Oliver 1769; Orlando, 1771; LeRoy, 1773.

Submit was now forty-five years old, with one daughter and ten sons. The names of the children are indicative of those years preceding their birth. Orlando and Bridgeman in memory of the destroyed Fort. LeRoy and DeMille for the kind and gracious French master of her years in captivity. Even in those troublesome times letters were preserved and records of visits exchanged between Montreal and Vermont, with reference to Canadian courtesy shown.

With the French and Indian war over, and the State established, Hilkiah turned his attention to his acres, and to civic affairs. He was always elected to town office, and his influence was such that he always found himself on the most important committees. As early as 1761, he was becoming a well known figure while still residing in Winchester. It was at his home, December 15, 1761, there convened what appears to have been the first meeting of the Windsor, Vermont, proprietors. Family tradition has given Hilkiah the honor of engineering the procurement of the Windsor Town Charter. But the minutes of this first meeting contain evidence that the honor really belongs to Colonel Josiah Willard, a native of Lunenburg, Massachusetts. Colonel in command at Fort Dummer from 1750, he had become something of a political power among the Connecticut Valley settlements. The second and third meetings were also held at the house of Hilkiah, April 12, 1762 and August 24, 1763.

While the Revolutionary war was in progress the affairs of the settlers were managed by committees in the various towns, who when the occasion required, met in general convention to provide in common defense and general welfare. The decrees of these conventions were regarded as law, and violations were severely punished.¹⁷

These old proprietors had a rather loose manner of recording the transactions of their meetings, minutes being made on any convenient scrap of paper, and it was not until 1769 that any move was made in the matter of procuring books in which to enter their proceedings, and

minutes are found on scraps of paper until the year 1771. Hilckiah is recorded, together with his son, Corporal Asa Grout, as signing the New York Association Test on December 21, 1775.¹⁸

A Military Committee of Safety was named in 1775 to take charge of all preparations with "Hilckiah Grout as Captain to have charge at Perkinsville."¹⁹

The original Crown Point Road led over the heights from Joshua Upham's to Joseph Woodbury's, but the hills were steep, the road down to the river by Hilckiah Grout's was good and the Major hospitable. So it appears that the road used in the days of the Revolution, left the old road at Josiah Upham's, passed below the Upham schoolhouse and down the brook to the ford and Grout's log house near the so-called Luther Warren bridge, and then joined the old road again upon the Plain.²⁰ This changed road was one of the first accepted by the town at the town meeting and was recorded in January 1777, while in 1782 the town voted to accept and care for the Crown Point Road, with alterations; one being that it should run by the house of Hilckiah Grout "as now traveled." Over this road Stark and the Bennington soldiers passed and John Calfe wrote in his diary, February 12, 1777, "From Charlestown we marched to Hobbs in Springfield, [Eureka] seven miles. Marched then to Major Grout's at Weathersfield, four miles, and tarried all night."²¹

The frequent appearance of Hilckiah's name in town records shows how deeply he became involved, and his astonishing energy. Moderator; Town Clerk; Overseer of the Poor; Commissioner of Highways; Grand Juror; Assessor; Lister; Selectman; Assistant Judge of Inferior Common Pleas; Justice of the Peace; and Surveyor. To him and two others was given power, as Commissioners, to administer the oath of office to all civil and military appointees. In 1775 he represented the town at Legislature.²² He had acquired money and property, buying largely of the proprietors, until he owned all of the Black River meadow land south of lower Perkinsville.²³ He built his log house at the depression east of the highway, 20 rods north of the covered bridge. The brook from the western plain crossed at this point, and the intervalles were covered with wild rank grass. He cleared pastures, built barns, and then a frame house which stood through the years, though doubtless remodeled many times.²⁴ He loved his farm, establishing his own burial ground just over the garden wall, and that row of family grave stones, inscriptions increasingly clouded with lichen deposit, withstood the elements of 168 years in

the place he had laid out, and are still standing at the new cemetery site, which relocation was made necessary by the construction of the North Springfield Flood Control Dam in 1959. Hilksiah's lands extended to the Kendrick's Corners road where he had a great bubbling spring, known for years as "The Major's Spring".

His children lived with him or around him, marrying into Weathersfield families. All these married sons had children, and as the older sons came of age they established themselves upon farms of their own. *The Second Census, State of Vermont, 1800*²⁵ lists nine children of Hilksiah and Submit, one with a family of five, two families of six each, three of seven, one of eight, one of nine, one of ten. Sixty-five souls in all, in a town where four weary, frightened Indian captives of the Grout family had passed the night forty-five years before. Hilksiah died December 19, 1795, and was buried in the place which he had chosen. He was but 68 years old, years that had been rich and full. Without formal education, as we think of it today, he is written of as "being clear in hand writing and correct in spelling". Preserved papers show wide reading, good logic and clever expression. Records show that he was a capable speaker, a man ready to be in the minority or even alone. As a Surveyor he laid out town roads, and with extra care made certain that all that led from his house were correctly entered in the town books.

The solidarity of his family is expressed by one writer thus, "From that day to this there is no record known where a man with eight farmer sons and son-in-law marched united to a Town Meeting to cast their ballots." And when he came to die, eight sons and a son-in-law bore his body to its grave, where men of town estate and position marked his passing with dignity and simplicity.

For the aging Submit this was a new world. Each night she saw the sunset or the thunderheads over Hawkes Mountain where her Uncle John Hawkes had watched for Indian smokes. Each day she saw peaceful farmers pass along a road that had once been an Indian trail.²⁶ To the new generation Indians were something in their history books at school. Submit remembered the days when the Indians were a terror and a fireside menace for four generations.

After Hilksiah's death she lived with Roy and Orlando until the sale of the farm in 1810 to Captain John Sherwin of Pepperill, Massachusetts. Still later the farm came into the possession of the Butterfield family, bringing about a local corruption of the name of the cemetery Hilksiah had laid out for his family use in 1781. It became the Sherwin,

and then the Butterfield cemetery, the Grout title being almost lost over the years, until in 1959, with its relocation, it became once more *The Grout Cemetery*.

Submit had become an historical figure—the school books told about her; she had been an Indian captive and a slave. Then came the years of the spotted fever epidemic. Submit, now 84, died May 7, 1813. She had not an enemy in the world, and though death had recently visited many homes in the community, all of the town was present at her funeral, presided over by the great and good Reverend James Converse.²⁷

When the service was over that sunny afternoon in May, eight stalwart sons raised the coffin and bore their mother's body to its appointed place.

NOTES

¹ John E. Goodrich, ed., *Rolls of the Soldiers in the Revolutionary War, 1775-1783*, Tuttle Co., 824, 825; B. H. Hall, *History of Eastern Vermont*, New York 1858, 657.

² Certified copy of Birth Certificate from Daniel P. McGuirl, Town Clerk of Lunenburg, Massachusetts, 1949.

³ Abner Morse, *Genealogies of Certain Puritan Families*, I, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Elizabeth B. Jones, *Grout and Allied Families*, Waterloo, Iowa, 1922, 15.

⁶ Alfred Sereno Hudson, *History of Sudbury, Massachusetts*, pub. by the Town of Sudbury, 54.

⁷ Forrest D. Bradshaw, Town Clerk of Sudbury, Massachusetts, April 8, 1949; *Sudbury Vital Records to 1850*, 61.

⁸ *Sudbury Vital Records to 1850*, IV, 16, 208.

⁹ *Early Records of Town of Lunenburg*, Massachusetts, 249.

¹⁰ John Farnham Boynton and Caroline (Harriman) Boynton, *Genealogy of the Descendants of John and William Boynton*, 1, 54.

¹¹ George Sheldon, *History of Deerfield, Massachusetts*, II, 189-190; Albert, Annett and Alice E. E. Lehtinen, *The Generations of Jaffrey, N. H.*, 355.

¹² Ernest W. Butterfield, *Early History of Weathersfield, Vermont. An Address Delivered August 16, 1921, at the Centennial Exercises of the First Congregational Church, Weathersfield, Vermont*, 5.

¹³ J. H. Temple and George Sheldon, *History of Northfield, Massachusetts, for 150 years, 454-455*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Lehtinen, *op. cit.*, II, 355.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Henry Steele Wardner, *Birthplace of Vermont, A History of Windsor to 1791*, 35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36-37, 41; Butterfield, *op. cit.*, 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²² Lewis Cass Aldrich and Frank R. Holmes, *History of Windsor County Vermont*, 701. (In this volume the name Hilkieah is several times printed as *Hezekiah*).

²³ Butterfield, *op. cit.*, 6.

²⁴ Information derived from Marshall D. Grout of Brattleboro.

²⁵ *Heads of Families, Second Census of United States, State of Vermont 1800*, pub. by Vermont Historical Society, 1938, 178.

²⁶ Butterfield, *op. cit.*, 4.

²⁷ Butterfield, *op. cit.*, 18-19, has this to say about Converse. "The Reverend James Converse, born in Rindge, and a graduate of Harvard College. Weathersfield Center, his first and only church, and from 1801 for thirty-seven years until his death, he served the church and the town as prophet and Man of God.

This town today bears his impress. His nearby home, the church and town hall still stand. He brought in the first blooded stock and established the first apple orchard . . . he planted in this town family ideals of the value of education which in generation after generation have their fruition.

He was familiarly called Priest Converse [and] his grave [is] in the Plain Cemetery."