

## **First Church History Role Fact Sheet: Joseph and Hannah Fairbanks**

Joseph and Hannah were the children of John Fairbanks and Sarah Fiske. Sarah and John were married in 1641 and John signed the town Covenant, permitting them to settle in Dedham in 1642. They had nine children; Joseph was born in 1656 and Hannah in 1657. The birth of a child was a joyous occasion when parents gave a special cake to all who came to see the new baby. The names given to babies showed how happy and proud parents were of their offspring. For example, Puritan parents gave children names associated with hoped-for virtues like "Hope", "Faith", and "Charity". They also gave them Hebrew names from the Old Testament. Hannah's name meant "Grace" in Hebrew and Joseph could be translated from the Hebrew as "God will increase."

Parents assigned children like Joseph and Hannah to do chores when they were young. Boys and girls were able to make their own clothes, by learning how to knit and sew by the age of four. Every little girl produced a sampler, a framed piece of cloth on which she had embroidered her name age, some important information like the alphabet, poems, and Bible verses, along with the date when the sampler was completed. Young girls also helped their mothers cook and keep house. Young boys chopped firewood, gathered corn, and fed livestock. Discipline for children was strict sometimes involving beatings with a switch. In New England, the well-known saying, "children should be seen and not heard" was the general rule. This in many New England homes children ate while standing where their parents sat. They could not talk during the entire meal and had to be courteous and mannerly.

Joseph and Hannah were brought up in their parents' new house on 12 acres of sloping plain next to Wigwam Pond. Initially, their house was about 16 feet long and 14 feet wide and composed of two rooms, a hall and a parlor on either side of a chimney. The house had a second story loft, reached by a ladder, where children slept under a shingled roof. Floors were either dirt or wood. Each Dedham family had kept several fire buckets. If a fire occurred each neighbor would hurry to the blaze to put it out with their buckets. John dug a well near the kitchen to lessen the distance that water had to be carried for cooking. The Fairbanks made do with an outhouse located in the barn. Bathing was infrequent, about once a month, because of the belief that water could infect the body with disease.

John Fairbanks wore a linen shirt and a tight fitting jacket called a doublet. He also wore long woolen stockings and high, wide-brimmed hats, and starched collars. Sarah wore linen blouses and woolen skirts that came to her ankles. Over her blouses she wore a tight bodice, a vest-like piece of clothing. On her shoulders Sarah wore a white neck cloth and around her waist. In addition, she always wore an apron. Joseph and Hannah dressed in exactly the same types of clothes as did their parents.

Corn grown in the fields behind their house was the basis of Joseph's and Hannah's diet, the main ingredient in their hasty puddings, johnnycakes, and pancakes. On the Fairbanks farm John and his sons grew pumpkins, squash, beans and sweet potatoes which the family ate. John hunted game like turkey, pheasants, rabbits, geese, pigeons, and deer in the forest. He hung his six-foot-long flintlock musket from a ceiling beam for easy access in an emergency. John had also planted an orchard to raise apples and other fruits like cherries and apricots that were used to bake tasty pies and puddings. John owned a meadow and the right to use common grazing land for his cows and thus was able to provide butter,

cheese, and milk for his family. Sarah and her daughters pressed the cheese and churned the butter in a lean-to next to the house. At meals, the Fairbanks family members drank this milk, as well as cider from their orchard, out of wooden mugs. Households did not have forks, so food was served on wooden plates, called trenchers and eaten with the fingers or wooden spoons. When the meal was finished, napkins, trenchers, and mugs were placed in a bucket to be washed in preparation for the next meal.

Joseph's schoolhouse was built in 1649 next to the meeting house. It was a wooden building with high windows, a fireplace, raised platform for the teacher, and plank benches for students. This school was funded by taxes on all families with boys in Dedham and on all property in town. Classes were only taught by male teachers and attended by boys who would chop up the firewood that townsfolk provided the school. At school starting when he was 4 or 5 years of age, Joseph learned to write, read, spell, study the Bible, and do mathematics from a variety of teachers. These teachers included two learned Dedham residents Michael Metcalf and Joseph Ellice, a Harvard student named Samuel Man and a new town resident, Jeremiah Burroughs with whom Joseph concluded his schooling in 1679. School was in session for nine hours daily from Monday through Saturday. Teachers were paid 20 pounds a year for one winter and one summer sessions of roughly two months each. This salary would be \$2750 today's dollars which was paid in farm good, for example in bags of corn and wheat.

Hannah went to dame school which was conducted by an elderly widow in her home. In dame school girls learned the alphabet, studied reading, did simple arithmetic, and developed homemaking skills like sewing. Their written materials were very basic, usually hornbooks, which were flat boards with a handle that had the alphabet printed on one side and the Lord's Prayer on the other. To protect the paper, a thin sheet of horn was placed over both sides of the board. The dame school teacher emphasized memorization, giving lessons in rhyme like "Thirty Days hath September, April, June, and November. February hath twenty-eight alone. And all the rest have thirty-one". Dedham leaders thought that two years of schooling was sufficient for girls and that too much schooling might drive girls insane!

For Puritans in Dedham in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Sunday was a day of complete worship. No other activities like cooking, cleaning, plowing, or playing, were permitted. Once at First Church meeting house, Joseph and Hannah had to sit on hard wooden benches through two long services in a building that was unheated and uncomfortable in the winter. The service would begin with a long prayer, followed by a sermon that lasted for several hours. Families sat in pew boxes that they reserved annually depending on their importance in the community. If a congregant fell asleep during the service, a tithingman was on duty with a long stick. On one end was a hard knob and at the other a foxtail or a cluster of feathers. If a woman or girl dozed, she would be tickled awake: the knobbed end of the stick was reserved for rapping nodding males.

Hannah grew up to marry Samuel Deering from nearby Milton in 1688. She and Samuel lived together in Dedham and raised two children, Sarah and Hannah, before Hannah's death in 1707. In his will Hannah's father John left her many household items like linen, dinnerware and other furnishings, as well a large amount of money. Joseph, along with his younger brother Benjamin, inherited the Fairbanks house, barns, land, cattle, and furniture which they later divided between themselves. Joseph married Dorcas

Humphreys and had two children with her. He worked his land as a farmer and acquired more property and was honored to be selected as a deacon in First Church. Joseph died in 1738.