

Family Group Sheet for John Vassall

Husband: John Vassall

b: Abt. 1548 in Normandy, France
d: Sep 1625 in Stepney, Middlesex (London), England; St. Dunstan's church records state he died of the plague.
Burial: St. Dunstan's Parish Church, Stepney, London
m: 4 Sep 1580 in St. Dunstan's, Stepney, England
Military Service: May 1588 ; at his own expense, John fitted out two ships, the Samuel and the Little Toby, which he commanded against the Spanish Armada; for this assistance he was rewarded with a grant of Arms by Queen Elizabeth I.
Relationship: 10th great grandfather

Father: John "Jean" Vassall
Mother:

Wife: Anne Russell

d: 1593
Burial: 5 May 1593 in Stepney, Middlesex, England
Relationship: 10th great grandmother

Father:
Mother:

Children:

1 Name: Judith Vassall
F b: 1582

2 Name: Samuel Vassall
M b: 1586
d: 1667

3 Name: William Vassall
M b: 1592 in Stepney, Middlesex, England
d: Bet. 31 Jul 1655–May 1656 in Barbados, West Indies
m: 9 Jun 1613 in Cold Norton, Essex, England
Religion: 1635 Roxbury, MA; after a short stay at Roxbury Church, removed to Scituate in Plymouth colony, where, on 28 Nov. 1636, he joined the church of John Lothrop
Will: 1655 in Barbados, West Indies; his will is dated July 31, 1655, and he describes himself as "now resident in this Island." It was proved June 12, 1657 [BarbPR 365]
Relationship: 9th great grandfather
Spouse: Ann King

Notes:

John Vassall

John Vassall was a Huguenot mariner and refugee from Normandy. He was granted a coat of arms by Queen Elizabeth I for his role, and services against the Spanish Armada. By the early eighteenth century, the family was claiming descent from the Plantagenets.

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The Vassall Family And Resolved White

By Alton Rogers

The Vassalls link Resolved White descendants to the founding of Jamestowne and the Massachusetts Bay Company and the sailing of the Winthrop Fleet in 1630. John Vassall is our qualifying ancestor to join the Jamestowne Society and William Vassall our qualifying ancestor for the Winthrop Society. The Vassalls were an ancient Catholic family of Normandy, which included two cardinals and a marshal of France; but

Notes: (con't)

John Vassall became a Huguenot (Calvinist Protestant) and fled to England a few years before the massacre of Huguenots by Catholics on St. Bartholomew's Day in 1572. In France, the Vassall family's origins were south of the Dordogne River, especially at Fraysinnet-le-Gourdonnais, Vaillac, and Creysse. It is in the Bordeaux area of south-west France. In England the Vassalls were against the authority of King Charles in the early 17th century and in America were loyal to the British Crown during the American Revolution. In consequence of being Loyalists, Vassall families were exiled to England and their estates confiscated. After their return to England in 1776, members of the family distinguished themselves in the British army and navy.

Sources:

Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press; Volume: Vol 20; Page: 155-158

Dictionary of national biography
by Stephen, Leslie, Sir, 1832-1904
Vol 58, pp 155-158

<https://archive.org/details/dictionaryofnati58stepuoft/page/154/mode/2up>

Calder, Charles M. 'John Vassall and His Descendants.' Hertford, Hertfordshire: Stephen Austin and Sons, 1921.

Fact Notes for John Vassall

Military Service (May 1588): Arms granted by Queen Elizabeth : Arms - Azur, in chief a sun, in base a chalice, or, Crest - A ship with masts and shrouds, ppr. The family Motto, "Saepe pro Rege, semper pro Republica" ["Often for the king, always for the republic"]

Samuel Vassall

Samuel Vassall was an English merchant, London importer of Chesapeake tobacco, an incorporator of the first Massachusetts company in 1628, a politician, and slave trader. Vassall financed slave ships in the 1640s and was the majority shareholder of the Guinea Company, founded in 1651 to transport enslaved Africans to European colonies in the Americas [Dictionary of National Biography, vol. lviii, p. 157]. In 1766 his great grandnephew, Florentius Vassall, erected a monument in his memory in King's Chapel, Boston, Mass., on which is inscribed the following:

Sacred to the Memory of
SAMUEL VASSALL Esq. of London Merchant
one of the original proprietors of the lands
of this Country
a steady and undaunted
assertor of the Liberties of ENGLAND
In 1628
he was the first who boldly refused to submit to the Tax
of Tonnage and Poundage
an unconstitutional claim of the Crown
arbitrarily imposed
For which (to the ruin of his family)
his goods were seized and his person imprisoned by the
Star Chamber Court
He was chosen to represent the City of
LONDON
in two successive Parliaments, which met Apr. 13 & Nov. 3
1640
The Parliament in July 1641 voted him
£10,445 12S. 2d.
for his Damages,
and resolved that he should be further considered
[Second panel]
for his personal Sufferings;
But the rage of the times & neglect of

Notes: (con't)

proper applications since,
have left to his family only the honour of that
Vote and Resolution.
He was one of the largest Subscribers
to raise money
against the Rebels in IRELAND:
all these facts may be seen in the Journals
of the House of Commons.
He was the Son of
the gallant JOHN VASSALL
who in 1588
at his own expense, fitted out & commanded two Ships of War
with which he joined the Royal Navy
to oppose
The SPANISH ARMADA.

Note: 2017, new interpretive signage is displayed during tourism hours regarding the role of slavery in the growth and development of King's Chapel and Boston. A sign displayed at the base of the monument of Samuel Vassall reads, "Slavery and King's Chapel" with 4 photos of men next to several paragraphs of text written under the caption "Tied to the Trade"

William Vassall

William Vassall (my 9th great grandfather), a leading figure in Scituate, was a wealthy and educated man who publicly supported freedom of religion. He was an assistant in the Massachusetts Bay Company, and one of the original patentees of New England lands. He became a man of great wealth in Massachusetts, becoming one of the richest settlers in Plymouth Colony, as well as later on the island of Barbados in the West Indies. He was a prominent supporter of the Massachusetts Bay Company and a signer of the Massachusetts Bay Charter and the Cambridge Agreement of 1629.

"William Vassall was an advocate of religious freedom who proposed that all members of the Church of England be admitted to communion in the New England church. He was quite outspoken against those who might have opinions in politics and religion differed from his own, and often agitated against the autocratic methods of colonial government. He was a man of great convictions in the rights and freedoms of his fellow Englishmen and worked very hard for religious tolerance. He was responsible for the religious disputes that split the Scituate Church. In 1645 the church of Plymouth sent him a message about his outspokenness hoping he would desist from such activities and noted he would be censured if he did not." Engaged in a literary war of words with Edward Winslow; books and pamphlets, *Hypocrasie Unmasked* (1646 Edward Winslow), *New-England's Jonas cast up at London* (1647 by John Child, but said to be the work of William Vassal, a pamphlet of his grievances), and *New England's Salamander Discovered* (1647; Edward Winslow's reply to 'New-England's Jonas cast up at London'; the slanderous "salamander" apparently being William Vassall).

Edward Winslow stated in his 'History of New England', that Vassall was "a busy and factious spirit, and always opposite to the civil governments of this country and the way of our churches." He describes Vassall's several petitions to the Bay Colony and Plymouth courts, and to Parliament, as asking that "the distinctions which were maintained here, both in civil and church estate, might be taken away, and that we might be wholly governed by the laws of England." *Society News The Pilgrim William White Society*, January 2020, Vol VIII, Number 1, p.7.

John Winthrop (Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony) spoke of William Vassall as "a man never at rest, but when in the fires of contention."

Slavery was embedded in the society and economy of the New England colonies and directly connected to slavery in the Caribbean. Brothers Samuel and William Vassall were "active in nearly all aspects of English Atlantic colonization during the first half of the 17th century," and slavery was an integral part of the Vassalls' colonial operations. William established the family's first Caribbean slave-labor plantation in Barbados in 1648. Between 1675 and 1833 Vassall family descendants enslaved thousands of individuals

Notes: (con't)

on their sugar plantations in Jamaica and ranked among leading planters. For nearly 200 years "the [Vassall] family built its wealth by running slave-labor plantations in the Caribbean" where they were among the "leading planters." In time, the Vassalls owned 18 slave-labor plantations in Jamaica where they enslaved a minimum of 3,865 people per records held by the Center for the Study of the Legacy of British Slavery. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>

Bequests from Vassall descendants whose families made much of their fortune in the slave trade, made possible the founding of Kings Chapel and Trinity Church in Boston, and Harvard Law School in Cambridge (bequest from Isaac Royall Jr., his sister was married to Henry Vassall, a great-grandson of William Vassall.) Mansions they built later became homes of notable people; Presidents John Adams and John Quincy, the Cambridge Longfellow House used as George Washington's headquarters and later home of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In efforts to recognize its early ties to slavery, Harvard University has a memorial to honor the enslaved with a plaque that reads, "In honor of the enslaved whose labor created wealth that made possible the founding of Harvard Law School May we pursue the highest ideals of law and justice in their memory". King's Chapel displays signage during tourism hours regarding the role of slavery in the growth and development of King's Chapel and Boston. A sign displayed at the base of the monument of Samuel Vassall* reads, "Slavery and King's Chapel" with 4 photos of men next to writing under the caption "Tied to the Trade".

*Samuel Vassall, William's older brother, (my 10 great uncle), was an English merchant, London importer of Chesapeake tobacco, incorporator of the first Massachusetts company in 1628, politician, and slave trader who financed slave ships in the 1640s and was the majority shareholder of the Guinea Company. Samuel is honored at King's Chapel in Boston with a monument erected in his memory by his great grandnephew in 1766, Florentius Vassall (one source refers to Florentius as Samuel's great grandson).

John Vassall II (my 3rd cousin 7x removed), wealthy landowner, Jamaican planter, and a 2nd Great Grandson of William Vassall; baptised in Boston's Christ Church, now known as Old North Church, Boston's oldest church building and one of the Freedom Trail's historical sites, known for "One if by land, and two if by sea," and the midnight ride of Paul Revere; member of the Anglican church (Church of England) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, although his earliest ancestors in Massachusetts were Puritan dissenters; in 1761 the Boston Evening-Post identified him as "first Major of his Excellency's Troop of Horse Guards." John built his home in Cambridge Massachusetts in 1759 and in September 1774, because of revolutionary unrest, and loyalty to Britain, John and his wife Elizabeth (Oliver) and their six children were forced to flee Cambridge. They moved into Boston where army troops offered protection for friends of the royal government, leaving their house and estate abandoned, confiscated, and later used as home and headquarters to General George Washington and his military staff during the Siege of Boston, July 1775 - April 1776. Later it was the home of 19th century American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow for almost 50 years. The National Historic Site preserves the home, The Longfellow House - Washington's Headquarters, also known as the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House, at 105 Brattle Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Sources:

- National Park Service video, Slavery at the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House <https://www.nps.gov/articles/slavery-at-the-vassall-craigie-longfellow-house.htm>
- Early History of Bondage and the Building of 105 Brattle Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts <https://www.nps.gov/long/learn/historyculture/early-history-of-105-brattle-street.htm>
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- George Washington's Headquarters and Home, Cambridge, Massachusetts <https://www.nps.gov/long/learn/historyculture/upload/Washington-Headquarters-HRS.pdf>
- <https://archive.org/details/slaveryfamilygen0000smit/page/6/mode/2up?q=vassall&view=theater>
Cambridge Studies in Economic History - Second Series
"Slavery, Family, and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic"

Notes: (con't)

The World of the Lascelles, 1648-1834

Author: S.D. Smith, University of York

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ISBN: 9780521863384

The Vassall family members, pp 7, 22-26, 32, 40, 42, 54-55, 380.

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- <https://www.nps.gov/long/learn/historyculture/upload/Washington-Headquarters-HRS.pdf>
- The New England Historical & Genealogical Register Volume 17 (1863) pp 56-61
- Calder, Charles Maclear. *John Vassall and his Descendants: By One of Them*. (Hertford: Stephen Austin and Sons, LTD., Printers, 1921) pp 6-7 [<https://archive.org/details/johnvassallhisde00cald>]

Fact Notes for William Vassall

Death (Bet. 31 Jul 1655–May 1656, Barbados, West Indies): His son-in-law, Resolved White, traveled with his wife Judith to Barbados to help settle William Vassall's estate there in 1657. This trip ties Resolved's life to the wider trade in sugar and slaves in the Caribbean among his Vassall in-laws.

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