

Arthur, Susanna, Mercy, Thomas

My Holbridge & Disbrow Family Origins

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Table of Contents:

Holbridge, Disbrow, Barker Lineage.....	3
Arthur, Susanna, Mercy & Thomas.....	4
Footnotes.....	16
Bibliography.....	19
Appendix One.....	21
Appendix Two.....	23
Mercy's Ducking Pond.....	24
Maps.....	25

Arthur Holbridge (1613 - 1648)
is my 8th great grandfather

Mercy Holbridge (Disbrow) (1638 - 1711)
daughter of Arthur Holbridge

Thomas Disbrow 2nd. (1680 - 1757)
son of Mercy Holbridge

Nathan Disbrow 1st. (1715 - 1777)*
son of Thomas Disbrow 2nd.

Abigail Disbrow (Disbrow) (1743 - 1829)*
daughter of Nathan Disbrow 1st.

Meeker Disbrow (1777 - 1849)
son of Abigail Disbrow

Erastus Disbrow (1815 - 1901)
son of Meeker Disbrow

Mary Elizabeth Disbrow (Barker) (1843 - 1929)
daughter of Erastus Disbrow

Arthur Henry Barker (1881 - 1966) My Mother's Father
son of Mary Elizabeth Disbrow

Lena Mae Barker (Tollas) (1907 - 1990) My Mother
daughter of Arthur Henry Barker

Marjorie Louise Tollas Bernard

- Nathan Disbrow 1st and Abigail Disbrow were 1st cousins.
- Their respective fathers, Thomas Disbrow 2nd and Nathan Disbrow 2nd were brothers.

Arthur, Susanna, Mercy and Thomas

Circa: 1613 to 1718

Margie Bernard \ Their Twenty-First Century Ancestor

Mercy Disborough, you have been found guilty of the felonies and witchcrafts whereof you stand indicted. The court now passes sentence of death upon you as the law directs. You shall be carried from this place to the gaol from whence you came, and from thence to the place of execution, and there hung till you be dead. May the Lord have mercy on your soul.

***Verdict of the Special Court delivered by Governor Treat
Fairfield, Connecticut, October 28, 1692.***

I have been unable to find what ship Mercy's father, my eighth great-grandfather, Arthur Holbridge¹, sailed on from England to reach the Massachusetts Bay Colony; however, there is proof he was living in Boston August 4, 1635. On that day, Arthur was in court charged by William Hutchinson with overbilling 6 pence a day above the amount established as a fair wage for carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, sawyers or thatchers.²

The Court held in favor of Hutchinson and fined Arthur 5 shillings for each of the 30 days he overcharged: a total fine of £7.5.0 (£988 in 2011 relative price index—rpi).³ It appears Arthur objected to this for court records then state he was to be 'imprisoned for contempt until he could provide surety that he would maintain good behavior'.⁴ Finally, on September 1, 1635, the Court ended the matter when it held Arthur was to pay 3 shillings weekly (£20.40 in 2011 rpi) to the Marshall of the Court until his fine was satisfied—this would have taken him nearly a year to achieve.⁵

Most people conducting family history research look for ancestors who were historic, prominent, or titled. Arthur was none of these. This forefather of mine, on my mother's paternal side, was simply a salt-of-the-earth laborer; one of nearly 20,000 people who left the old world for the new during The Great Migration 1625 to 1649.⁶

Sometime between 1637-8, Arthur married Susanna who gave birth to their first child Mercy⁷. It is around this time they left the Boston area with the John Davenport and Thomas Eaton plantation company to become founding

members of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven. On June 4, 1639, Arthur was one of sixty-eight men who met as:

*“...free planters assembled together in a general meeting to consult about settling civil Government according to God, and about the nomination of persons that might be found by consent of all fittest in all respects for the foundation work of a church which was intended to be gathered in Quinipieck.”*⁸

The oath these men took declared only members of the church they intended to establish ‘*or those of other approved churches*’ would be considered citizens of the New Haven Colony⁹. On August 22, 1639, the First Church of Christ held its initial gathering in Quinipieck with John Davenport as its pastor.

Davenport had been vicar of the Anglican St. Stephen’s Church, Coleman Street, London but resigned in 1633 after he was converted to Puritanism by John Cotton just before Cotton emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In their correspondence Cotton related how good life was in his new homeplace so Davenport convinced Theophilus Eaton, a long-time friend and wealthy member of his former congregation, to form a plantation company to establish a new colony in the Massachusetts Bay area. Eaton complied and they along with their families left London on the *Hector* and another ship, which reached Boston on June 26, 1637.¹⁰

The Davenport-Eaton contingent arrived at Boston amidst a major turmoil over what form of government should be established in the colony. Four years earlier Roger Williams had been banished from the colony for “*disorganizing conduct in both in church and state*”. An English Protestant theologian Williams was an early proponent of religious freedom and separation of church and state—a belief also shared by Anne Hutchinson the well educated daughter of a silenced clergyman in England. A mother of fifteen, she and husband, William, a wealthy English clothing merchant, migrated with their family to Boston in 1634.¹¹

The Hutchinsons became members of the First Church of Boston and soon thereafter Anne began holding conventicles in her home with other women to discuss recent sermons.¹² During these meetings, she voiced theological views similar to those of Roger Williams and encouraged others to express their thoughts on the matter. Word of these discussions began to attract men who were prominent merchants, magistrates and ministers—two of whom was her brother-in-law Rev. John Wheelwright.¹³

Because of increased attendance at these meetings, John Winthrop, Sr., Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, convened a synod to try Anne for her beliefs charging she had ‘*troubled the peace of the commonwealth and churches [and] maintained a meeting in your house that hath been*

*condemned by the general assembly as a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for your sex . . .*¹⁴

At trial's end Anne was named a heretic and banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony; she and her family and supporters left Boston to join Williams in his Providence Plantation.¹⁵ Although Arthur knew William Hutchinson and perhaps Anne as well, we can only speculate as to how he related to this whirlwind theological debate that led to Anne's banishment. Both Rev. John Davenport and Rev. John Cotton attempted to dissuade Anne of her beliefs but in the end they both agreed to the banishment.¹⁶ At this point Davenport had rejected Presbyterianism and set forth the tenets of Congregationalism.¹⁷

Since establishing the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, Gov. Winthrop and others slowly transformed what was originally a chartered mercantile colony into that of a commonwealth. This provoked Charles I who threatened to revoke their charter. Not wanting to engage in this dispute, Davenport and Eaton decided to move with their contingent to land that Eaton had purchased from Momauguin, sachem of the Quinipieck Native American tribe, which was nearly extinct after years of battles with the Pequots and Mohawks who were encroaching upon their tribal lands¹⁸. In the treaty between the New Haven colonists and the Quinipieck it was agreed that the Quinipieck would continue to live on the territory and freely farm, fish, and hunt as before while enjoying the protection from their enemies by the new settlers.¹⁹

In 1639 Arthur decided to leave Boston with the Davenport-Eaton plantation contingent in their quest to establish the New Haven Plantation Colony. According to Isabel Calder, the New Haven Colony was the smallest Puritan settlement founded by:

*[. . .] ultra-conservative Puritans, unrestricted by royal charter, far removed from the ecclesiastical organization of England. [Thus, this] colony on Long Island Sound served as a laboratory in which Puritan theories of ecclesiastical and civil organization might be tested.*²⁰

In the case of Davenport, these Puritan theories called for church and state to be one entity. However, I strongly suspect Arthur's reason for moving to New Haven was more economic than religious. The Davenport-Eaton plantation seekers were one of the wealthiest to have made the move to the new world; establishing their colony in new territory would require skills of men like Arthur to construct dwellings to house them. In the case of Eaton, his house was a two-story structure in the shape of an E containing twenty-one fireplaces. Davenport's was built like a cross with a chimney in the center. Arthur and Susanna would have lived in one of the common houses—small, one-story structures with sharp roofs, a stone chimney, and tiny diamond windows.²¹

On October 25-26, 1639, Arthur would have voted with the other freemen to elect the twelve men as the governing body or General Court of the New Haven Colony to deliberate on matters of civil government.²² And because it was believed that the word of God took precedent over English Common Law, jury trials were abolished.²³ Instead a magistrate and four deputies were appointed to hold hearings, take evidence, render a verdict and, when necessary, carry out punishment.

Tracking Arthur via New Haven Court Records

- April 14, 1640: it was ordered that Arthur '*shall pay 40 shilling fine for falling trees and selling clapboard, contrary to the orders in that case*'²⁴ This evidently refers to a General Court decision on November 25, 1639 stating: *It is ordered that after this day no man shall cut any timber down but where he shall be assigned by the magistrate, except on his own land.*²⁵
- September 9, 1640: it was alleged Arthur had delivered a batch of lime to the mill which was not the full measure agreed upon:
*Edward Adams testified upon oath that the note of information which he had formerly delivered into the court (concerning the lime which Arther Halbidge, hath delivered to the mill) is true, which when he had done, Arther Halbidge excepted against it, thinking to prove the said Edward Adams a perjured person. But Goodman Pigge, Richard Beach and John Wakefield affirmed the truth of what Edward Adams had testified (though the said Artur Holbidge did conceive they would have contradicted Edward Adams his testimony). It was therefore ordered that the said Arther should pay two fold for all the want of measure that is charged upon him and from hence forth take no work by the great, nor burn any lime to sell.*²⁶
- May 7, 1641: '*Holbridge was [again] allowed to take work by the great upon good behavior.*'²⁷

In 1641, a free school was established in the town of New Haven to provide common education as well a colony-wide grammar school to prepare students for college.²⁸

When taking an inventory of all residents of New Haven in 1643, Arthur:

*Appeared with a household of four, an estate of £20, eleven acres of land in the first division, two acres and thirty-two rods in the neck, three acres of meadow, twelve acres in the second division and, an annual rate paid for land of 7 shillings, 4 pence.*²⁹

His inventory also included ownership of one musket, a sword, a belt, a flask and horn valued at £2.18.2 (these were provided by the colony in their quest

to maintain security of the town). And because Arthur's inventory state he owned two Bibles and other books valued at £2.0.4 it can be safely presumed that either he or Susanna, or both, were literate.”

On May 16, 1643, the Colonies of Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, Connecticut and New Haven formed a confederation of mutual protection henceforth to be called New England. In case of war each colony was to furnish troops—Massachusetts one-hundred men with Plymouth, Connecticut and New Haven, forty-five each.³⁰

Tracking Arthur via New Haven Court Records

- February 5, 1644: *Arthur Holbridge, having been formerly charged by Mr. Browning for stealing from him a bushel of corn to the value of 4 shillings, and a shirt or frock to the value of 1 shilling, which he at first denied with cursing himself but not confessed the fact, and was sentenced to be whipped and to make two fold restitution to Mr. Browning, and to bare all the charges which have been caused by him.*³¹

Perhaps Arthur stole the corn so he could comply with the tithe imposed on each person in the New Haven Colony to give a peck of corn or wheat annually to help finance Cambridge College (later Yale University).³²

- October 6, 1645: *'Arthur Holbridge hath sold to Mr Malbon all his land in the neck containing two acres and thirty-two rods.'*³³ It is safe to assume he did this to pay what he owed Browning and, one would hope, have a little extra to meet his own family expenses.
- June 2, 1646: Mrs. Brewster, Mrs. Moore, & Mrs. Leach were in Court concerning *'several miscarriages of a public nature they had engaged in'*. These alleged wrongdoings had been reported by Elizabeth Smith and Job Hall, servants of Mr. and Mrs. Leach. Arthur was called upon as a character witness for Hall stating *'he had heard Mr. Leech speak well of Job, as [being] satisfied with his service & carryadge [character?]*'.³⁴
- March 10, 1646: Attendance records indicate Arthur was seated on the 9th seat of the hall along with Edward Banister, John Herryman, Benjamin Wilmott and Jarvis Boykin.³⁵
- March 24, 1646: A footnote to Court record noted Arthur Halbridge owed William Illes £1.1.6 for work done at the mill.³⁶
- February 1, 1647: John Lawreneson and wife were charged with selling *'strong waters by small quantities, contrary to a court order'*. During discussion of this matter, Arthur testified, *"he had gone to the house*

*where Goodwife Lawreneson was, and saw persons sit drinking of small quantities of strong water two or 3 times, and that her husband told him she had gained 30 shillings in a week or a fortnights time by the way of selling out strong waters.*³⁷

- March 7, 1647: It was noted Arthur had turned over to John Beech his house and home lot with all his accommodations. He did this to satisfy a debt of £1.1.0 he owed William Iles for work done at the mill.³⁸ Iles was the cousin of Beech, who after Iles died without a will, made claim to Iles' estate. Because Iles had a surviving brother, the court made Beech put up security to cover the value of Iles inventory; Beech complied then went after the monies owed Iles by Arthur and the other debtors.³⁹

Arthur died sometime in January 1648/49⁴⁰, and Susanna *'delivered into the court an inventory of the estate left by her husband, Arthur Holbridge, deceased, amounting to £43.14.10 [\$4,600 in 2011 in rpi] appraised by Roger Allen and Samuel Whithead upon oath, the 31st of January 1648.*⁴¹

As I leave this portion of my family history I will offer a few words on behalf of my eighth great grandfather: Perhaps Arthur was not always honest in his business dealings and once committed petty theft; however, he was never charged with any of the numerous anti-social acts committed by some of his fellow New Haven citizens. He never neglected to perform guard duty; he was never accused of brawling, bearing false witness, filthy dalliance, being unkempt; nor was he charged with drunkenness, gambling, laziness, licentious behavior, not paying taxes, murder, or mistreating his wife or children. He was just a simple working man, who did his best to provide for his family; brave enough to undertake the arduous voyage across an unforgiving ocean to improve his lot in life: for this act alone I proudly claim him as one of my forbearers.

As obscure as is Arthur's early history, that of his wife Susanna is even more so.⁴² Not only is there no inkling as to her birthplace or date of birth, neither do we know her maiden name. We don't know the exact date she and Arthur married but we do know she gave birth to Mercy in about 1638 and John about 1640 and that they both were baptised by Rev. John Davenport on June 30, 1650, at the First Church of Christ in New Haven two years after Arthur's death.

As Susanna had been one of the initial settlers in the New Haven Colony, it appears her welfare was a concern of Governor Eaton who five months after Arthur's death stated he had become aware that Widow Holbridge was in need of relief and ordered Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Wakeman to meet with the treasurer to determine the state of her finances and see to it she and her children weren't left destitute.⁴³ Mercy would have been about 11 and John 8.

We know Susanna was living in New Haven on February 11, 1655/56 as Court records state: “Goodwife Holbridge was one of three women seated before Deacon Miles’ seat”⁴⁴. She was living there still in May 16, 1659 as meeting records noted:

Widow Holbridge having been oft put upon removes, a motion was made on her behalf for a small piece of ground to set a house on, which the town was willing to [do]; it was therefore left with the townsmen to set her out some small piece of land, if any can be found convenient for that purpose, or to purchase [one] to 20 shillings value⁴⁵.

However, sometime after this date Susanna moved to Fairfield where she married Rev. John Jones—a second marriage for both. Mercy would have been around twenty-one, her brother John about nineteen.⁴⁶

Rev. Jones, along with his first wife Susan and their five children, had arrived in Boston aboard the *Defense* in October 1635 and were welcomed at a dinner held at the home of Governor John Winthrop, Sr. The Jones’ were preceded in their journey by Rev. Peter Bulkeley and his family who had arrived in Boston aboard the *Susan and Ellen* a few months earlier. Both men were Puritans who had left Odell, Bedfordshire, England because they refused to comply with the rigid rituals of the Anglican Church.⁴⁷ They were joined in this venture by twelve other Odell families.

After a brief stay in Boston, the fourteen Odell families left to settle Musquetaquid which later became Concord, Massachusetts. At the April 1637/38 founding meeting of the Concord Congregational Calvinist Church, Jones was made Pastor with Bulkeley serving as Teacher. Later, because Concord was too small to support two ministers Jones, along with one-hundred families left Concord for Fairfield, Connecticut; one family was that of Thomas Bulkeley, a son of Peter Bulkeley who had married Jones’ daughter Sarah.

When Mercy was about twenty-four she, along with one Joseph Jeams, appeared at a session of the General Court of Hartford, Connecticut on August 28, 1661 which record stated:

This court doth order and appoint Mr. Gould, Mr. Sherman, Mr. Knowles, Mr. Campfield or any three of them, providing Mr. Gould to be one, to examine and issue ye business respecting Joseph Jeams and Marcy (sic) Holbridge and to inflict such punishment as they judge meet according to law.⁴⁸

I have not been able to find any record of what they were charged with or what was their sentence; however, in a letter he wrote June 3, 1696, Rev. Gershom Bulkeley (son of Peter) stated that during 1661-66 while he was pastor of the Congregational Church in New London, Connecticut, Mercy

Holbridge lived at the parsonage with his family.⁴⁹ Based on the coincidence of dates in this matter, I feel safe in presuming that Mercy was sent by the court to live under the care and supervision of Rev. Bulkeley. I want to strongly note that Mercy lived ‘with the family’ of Bulkeley not ‘lived with Bulkeley’ as some records state—in moral terms there is a vast difference.

When Jones retired from his ministry he was evidently without funds so his community came to his aid as noted in records of the May 1658 Connecticut General Court of Elections:

*This Court approving the pious care of the Towne of Fairfield, in procuring help for Mr Jones by his own consent thereunto, as far as appears by a paper presented by their Deputies to the Court, doe order, that according to their desires the foresaid paper be kept amongst the Court papers and desire the Towne not in any way thereupon to deprive their Reverend ancient Pastor, Mr Jones, in sickness or health, of his comfortable maintenance.*⁵⁰

I can’t help but feel the marriage between Jones and Susanna was one of convenience—hinted at by the stipulation in his will awarding Susanna £50 ‘which he had promised her’.⁵¹ He needed to be cared for—she needed a place to live. Decorum of the day wouldn’t permit her moving in with him, even as a housekeeper, so, like many women before and after her, Susanna did what was necessary to survive: she married Jones.

In 1664, John Winthrop, Jr. recorded in his medical journal he treated the step-daughter of Rev. Jones; daughter of his second wife Susanna⁵². At that time Mercy would have been around 26. There is no indication what he treated her for which, if one looks at his medical journal, he seldom stated for his patients. A noted physician, Winthrop was the eldest son of John Winthrop, Sr., first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and himself the first governor of the Colony of Connecticut.

Sometime around 1670⁵³, Mercy married John Nichols, Jr. strongly believed to be the grandson of Sgt. Francis Nichols one of the founders of Stratford, Connecticut in 1639⁵⁴. Little is known of their life other than Mercy gave birth to their two sons, John and Nathan. Records indicate John Nichols, Jr. died during the King Philip War in 1676.⁵⁵ No probate records were found naming a benefactor, however, his brother Isaac (also the grandson of Francis whose son John was Isaac and John Jr’s father) presented John’s inventory to the court on May 2, 1676 stating he: “*Had interest in cattle in New London; also his wages due him from the Country*”.⁵⁶ However, it is not clear whether Mercy benefited from this inventory. What is clear is that she was granted a divorce from John on grounds of desertion by the Connecticut General Court in May 1677; at the time she and their two sons were living in New London, Connecticut:⁵⁷ Mercy would have been about 40.

Three years later, Mercy married Thomas Disbrow; her second marriage, his first.⁵⁸ They lived in Compo, Fairfield County, Connecticut and their only child, Thomas, Jr., was born sometime between 1680-85,⁵⁹ Mercy would have been between 43-48 years of age.

Again, there is a mystery as to how or when Thomas came to live in Compo. In this regard, an excellent Disbrow family history has been compiled by Michael S. Disborow who is of the strong belief that Thomas may have initially been transported to Maryland under the 'head rights' system:

"Starting about 1620, this system became the standard technique of immigration into seventeenth-century Virginia and Maryland. The established planters of these colonies, in order to fulfill the need for additional land and the labor to work it, were granted fifty acres for each person whose passage they paid for. To quote from "The Atlantic Migration", by Marcus L. Hansen: "Enterprising captains filled their ships with penniless passengers, carried them to the Virginia rivers, and there sold them to planters for the cost of transportation. The planters then filed claim for additional tracts of fifty acres and set about growing still more tobacco."⁶⁰

Michael S. further speculates:

"Is it unreasonable to suppose that Thomas Disbrow, finding himself in a position to come to America, might not have cared what his initial point of contact would be? And, once here, that he would find a way to escape his servitude (some got out of it by claiming to have been forcibly carried off) and – possibly – to make his way northward to where he knew he had friends or relatives (and where Puritanism was long established)? I will leave it up to each one who reads this to draw his or her own conclusion."⁶¹

As for myself, I will continue the search for additional information about these family members but now it is time to return to Mercy's history.

In September 1692, as the Salem, Massachusetts witchcraft trials were coming to an end, they were just beginning in Fairfield County, Connecticut. In April of that year, Katherine Branch, a seventeen year old servant of the prominent Stamford family, Daniel and Abigail Westcot, began acting strangely. For no apparent reason she would begin sobbing, contorting her body into rigid shapes, whimpering, lying immobile and silent on her bed, then go into fits of uncontrollable laughing. She told of strange visions in which cats spoke to her, assumed human form, and threatened to kill her. The local midwife examined Katharine but found no evidence of illness.

The Westcots asked two pastors to counsel their servant. After conversing with her, they felt she might indeed be bewitched, and vowed to observe a day of prayer and fasting as a means of freeing her of her demons.

Over the summer this young girl accused several women in the area of being witches. One of these was Mercy, who in fact Katherine had never met.⁶² Katherine described to Abigail Westcot and Joseph Bishop, a vision she had in which cat turned into a tall woman with big lips wearing the best quality woollen homespun cloth. To which Abigail remarked to Joseph: *I know a woman at Fairfield who was suspected formerly [of witchcraft]; she has thick lips. I suppose you know whom I mean: Mercy Holbridge.* It was shortly thereafter Katherine provided Mercy's name as one of her tormenters⁶³

On May 27, 1692, four magistrates held a preliminary court of inquiry. During their questioning of Katherine she named Mercy and Elizabeth Clawson as her tormenters.

Summoned to attend court the next day, Mercy Elizabeth were told of accusations against them; when Katherine was brought into court to confront them, she promptly went into a fit and when revived looked at Mercy saying, *"It's her! I'm sure it's her!"*⁶⁴ At the end of this inquiry, the magistrates ordered both Elizabeth and Mercy placed under restraint pending trial: Mercy was sent to the jail in Fairfield; Elizabeth was given house arrest;

Over the summer a Court of Oyer and Terminer (to "hear and determine") took two hundred dispositions from Mercy's and Elizabeth's neighbors alleging the two practiced witchcraft. In Mercy's case, claims were made she had bewitched animals and children; had caused the death of calves, cows, lambs, and sheep. Witnesses told of optical illusions she created—a pig that looked well on the table but could not be eaten; of causing a canoe to go upstream by itself; of making a high tide go low. One witness said Mercy could not read one word in a page of the Bible although she could read other books without difficulty.

Based on these and other allegations, a grand jury was constituted and began deliberations on September 14, 1692. This was the week before the last eight of the one-hundred-fifty charged with witchcraft in Salem were brought to trial—nineteen of whom had been hung. Lacking sufficient evidence, the cases against Staples and the Harvey women were swiftly adjudicated and they were freed.

On September 15, 1692, at Mercy's request she was given the water test; hands tied behind her back she was thrown into a pond—she bobbed to the surface—taken as a sure sign of guilt.⁶⁵ The naked bodies of both women were also examined by other women looking for markings and/or hidden 'witches teats' whereby they could give suck to their familiar spirits. In Mercy's case they found *'a teat or something like one in her privy parts, at least an inch long, which is not common in other women, and for which they could give no natural reason'*. A second and then a third examination by different groups of women found:

*“[. . .] concerning Goody Clawson, we find in her private parts more than is common to women, we can’t say teats, but something extraordinary, and Goody Disborough’s is something like it, but a great deal smaller. Goody Clawson’s is a dark red and Disborough’s of a pale color.”*⁶⁶

After hearing all the evidence the jurors deliberated but failed to reach a unanimous verdict and adjourned until October 28, 1692.

At the October meeting, the jury found Mercy guilty; however, her death sentence was delayed while her case was reviewed by the General Court in Hartford. Elizabeth Clawson was declared innocent.

The General Court appointed three magistrates, Samuel Wyllys, William Pitkin and Nathaniel Stanley, to look into a petition filed by friends of Mercy claiming her death sentence was illegal because one of the original jurors, who failed to attend the October session, had been replaced by another person. This gave the magistrates the hook they needed to declare the jury change rendered the trial illegal:

*“It is so inviolable a practice in law that the individual jurors charged with the deliverance of a prisoner in a capital case and on whom the prisoner puts him or herself to be tried must try the case, and they only. . . One man altered, the jury altered.”*⁶⁷

The magistrates also declared that evidence presented against Mercy failed to satisfy the criteria established to prove acts of witchcraft which were held to be either by a confession from the accused or by testimony from two *good witnesses proving some acts or acts done by the person which could not be but by the help of the Devil: There was none of this.*⁶⁸ The magistrates then referred the case to the Connecticut General Assembly with the caveat “how far these proceedings do put a difficulty on any further trial of this woman.”⁶⁹

Finally, wiser heads prevailed and the Connecticut General Assembly, instead of ordering a new trial, acquitted Mercy and released her from her year-long imprisonment in May 1693.

I can only imagine the gut-wrenching anguish and terror Mercy and her family underwent during her incarceration and trial, the cost of which, adding financial injury to false imprecations, was billed to her husband Thomas. Furthermore, as the letter written in 1696 by Gershom Bulkeley to his cousin attests, some people continued to besmirch Mercy’s character. One of her Fairfield neighbors, James Redfin, not content with being one of her accusers during the witch trial, alleged four years later that Mercy had been pregnant and gave birth to a child when she was living with the Bulkeley family in the New London, Connecticut rectory in the early 1660s. In fact, Bulkeley stated in this letter, it was Elizabeth Walker, an unwed Scottish indentured servant who was pregnant when he bought her time; it she who gave birth to a child which died at birth, not Mercy⁷⁰.

The records of Mercy and Elizabeth's trial were kept by Samuel Wyllys among his private papers labeled *Trials for Witchcraft*. These documents were uncovered by William L. Stone as he was going through papers in the possession of the Wyllys family in 1820, while residing in Hartford as editor of the *Connecticut Mirror*. Stone published some of the trial depositions in the *New York Commercial Advertiser* on July 14 & 15, and these in turn were, reprinted in the *New York Spectator* on July 18th, and in the *Times and Weekly Advertiser*, Hartford on August 8, 1820.

Stone also made use of some names and incidents of this trial in a collection of his short stories in *Tales and Sketches*, published in 1823. The first story in that volume, 'Mercy Disborow', can best be described as a fictionalized screed that totally distorts the facts. For starters he has Mercy being the daughter of Thomas Disborough not his wife. He describes Mercy being a young beautiful girl when she was in fact in her late 50s, and it goes downhill from there.⁷¹

Thomas Sr. died sometime prior to April 25, 1707, the date an inventory of his estate was presented to the court by his son, Thomas. The Court appointed Mercy as administrator which, after debts paid, was valued at £337.03.02. (£46,550 in 2011 rpi). Thomas, Jr. inherited the family farm.

There is no official record of when Mercy died, however, according to Michael S. compiler of the Disbrow Family History

*It would appear that she was still living as of 27 May 1713 when she received her part of the [estate] distribution. She died sometime within the following five years, as a document bearing the date 4 June 1718 states: "John Nickols and Thomas Disbrow, sons of Mercy Disbrow, late of Fairfield, dec'd ...", and was probably buried near her husband in the old Compo Burial Place, south of their Compo Hill farm.*⁷²

As stated earlier, I am immensely proud of these Holbridge/Disbrow forbearers of mine! I'm also pleased they were made part of the nation's historical record. Their day-to-day acts of living as best they could, under at times trying circumstances, serve as a reminder to us all that we never know what may lie around the corner as we, their descendents, create our own his-her/story.

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- ¹ (Savage, 1861 VII) p. 329; Savage indicated that Arthur's surname has been variously spelled as Halbich, Halbidge, Halbridge, Holbeech, Holbidge, Holbridge but usage over the years has settled on the latter: Holbridge.
- ² (Nobel, 1904) p. 56 (73); Note: First page number is that of the actual document, the one enclosed in () is the internet document page number. The first meeting of the governing body of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the Court of Assistants, was held on August 23, 1630. Their first item of business was to order housing and food be provided to ministers at parishioners' expense. The next agenda item established wages for carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, sawyers and thatchers at two shillings a day; violation of which would result in both parties being fined two times the amount paid. Idleness would not be tolerated and would be punished.
- ³ (Officer & Williamson) For computing relative worth between previous and current monetary value go to: <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/>
- ⁴ (Nobel, 1904) p. 56 (73)
- ⁵ (Nobel, 1904) p. 57 (74).
- ⁶ (Winthrop Society, 1995-2012)
- ⁷ According to Jacobus: "There are scarcely any vital records for the period before 1700, and the extant church record do not begin until 1694. In consequence, the probate and land records constitute our chief sources of information. Brief abstracts of probate and land records are given, to show record evidence for most statements."
- ⁸ (Hoadly, 1857) p. 11; Quinipieck was the Algonquin word for the area. The names of those attending this meeting were all male so if any women attended their names were not recorded.
- ⁹ (Hoadly, 1857) pp.17-18; Later an addition 48 signed for a total of 111. The oath they took stated: *Whereass there was a fundamentall agreement made in a generall meeting of all the free planters of this towne, on the 4th of the fowerth moneth called June, [1639] namely that church members onely shall be free burgesses, and they onely shall chuse among them selues magistrates and officers to have the power of transacting all the publique ciuill affayres of this plantation, making and repealing laws, deuideing inheritances, decideing of differences thatt may arise, and doeing all things and businesses of like nature. Itt was therefore ordered by all the said free planters thatt all those hereafter should be receiued as planters into this plantation should also submit to the said fundamentall agreement, and testife the same by subscribeing ther names vunder the names of the aforesaid planters as followeth.*
- ¹⁰ (Calder, 1934) p. 31 (39)
- ¹¹ (Anne Hutchinson Biography, 2012)
- ¹² A conuenticler is a small, unofficial and unofficiated meeting of laypeople to discuss religious issues in a non-threatening, intimate manner.
- ¹³ (Lambert); p. 19 (25)
- ¹⁴ (Anne Hutchinson Biography, 2012)
- ¹⁵ Sandwiched between Massachusetts and Connecticut, this later became Rhode Island which was the first of the thirteen colonies to declare independence from British rule, declaring itself independent on May 4, 1776, two month before any other colony,
- ¹⁶ (Calder, 1934); p. 37 (45)
- ¹⁷ (Calder, 1934); p. 37-38 (45-47): An Apologie of the Churches in New England for Church-Covenant.
- ¹⁸ (Quinnipiac): See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quinnipiac> for a detailed history of the Quinnipiac Tribe. The bill of sale, while creating the first Native American reservation, also marked the beginning of ethnic cleansing.
- ¹⁹ (Barber, 1831); pp 23-29.
- ²⁰ (Calder, 1934); p. v, vi (5-6) p.29-30 (37-38): One error Calder makes on page 29-30 (37-38) is listing Arthur Holbridge as one of the Davenport-Eaton Contingent that sailed from London in 1636 on the Hector; however, as attested to in Nobel, he was already in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635. See Nobel p. 56 (73)
- ²¹ (Lambert); pp. 52-3 (58-9): p. 52 contains an illustration of Eaton's house.

- ²² (Lambert); pp. 23-26: The Governing Body chosen were Theophilus Eaton, Governor, Stephen Goodyear, Deputy Governor, Thomas Fugill, Secretary and Thomas Kimberly as Marshall—all of New Haven. Magistrates were Thomas Gregson, New Haven; William Flower and Edmund Tapp of Milford; Thurston Raynor, Stamford. Deputies were: George Lamberton and Nathaniel Turner of New Haven; John Astwood and John S. Herman of Milford; William Leete and Samuel Disborough of Gilford; Richard Gildersleve and John Whitmore of Stamford.
- ²³ (Lambert); p. 28: In April 1644 the General Court (the legislative body of New Haven) adopted Mosaic Law as their legal code which “*coincided with their notion that all government should be in the church, inasmuch as ‘the saints should rule the earth.’*”
- ²⁴ (Lambert); p. 32 (38): £293 in 2011 rpi which was later remitted to a fine of 30s or £219.
- ²⁵ (Lambert); p. 25 (31): This fine would have amounted to
- ²⁶ (Lambert); p. 46 (52): This short paragraph gives examples of the several misspellings of his name in this short paragraph
- ²⁷ (Lambert); p. 56 (62)
- ²⁸ (Lambert); p. 62 (68)
- ²⁹ (Hoadly, 1857); p. 92 (100): This would amount to relative purchasing index of £2,787 in 2011 rpi. His tax in 2011 rpi would have amounted to £980.
- ³⁰ (Lambert); p. 26-27(
- ³¹ (Hoadly, 1857); p. 153: His fine would have amounted to £1130 in 2013 rpi.
- ³² (Lambert); p. 62 (68) See 2nd footnote.
- ³³ (Hoadly, 1857); p. 170
- ³⁴ (Hoadly, 1857); p. 252
- ³⁵ (Hoadly, 1857); p. 302: I presume the 'seat' was actually a bench. Also see: (Bacon, 1839); p. 310 (324)
- ³⁶ (Hoadly, 1857); p. 300
- ³⁷ (Lambert); p. 364
- ³⁸ (Hoadly, 1857); p.300: Footnote at the end of this page lists debts several people owed lles, one of whom was Arthur.
- ³⁹ (Hoadly, 1857); p. 364
- ⁴⁰ Prior to adopting the Gregorian calendar in January 1752, the New Year began on March 25 instead of our January 1. Therefore, using old style dating for the period between January 1 and March 25, the year cited is given as January 1, 1648/49 to March 24, 1648/49.
- ⁴¹ (Lambert); p. 433
- ⁴² (Jacobus); Vol 2, p. 288-9 There has been much speculation about a marriage between one Susan Hollingsworth and Arthur Holbridge; however, Susannah 'Susan' Hollingsworth (nee Woodburry) husband Richard lived until 1645 and she gave birth to their last child, Abigail, in 1641.
- ⁴³ (Lambert), p. 383
- ⁴⁴ (Dexter, 1917), Vol. 1, p. 273
- ⁴⁵ (Dexter, 1917), Vol. 1, p. 403
- ⁴⁶ Numerous records give Mercy's surname as Jones, however, as she was an adult when her mother married Jones, there would have been no reason for her to subsume that surname.
- ⁴⁷ (Jacobus, The Bulkeley Genealogy, 1933); 100 (107) “The English Church at that period was, in the opinion of the Puritans, too much concerned with ritual and ceremonials, and not sufficiently concerned with the inner religious needs of the common man. In brief, the ideal of the Puritans was to get away from formalism, to eliminate the trimmings and trappings, to appeal to the conscience of the individual, and to make the Bible (rather than church doctrine) the basic guide and authority for the religious life.”
- ⁴⁸ (Lambert) Vol. 1, p. 373. It is interesting to note that in the Index of Lambert's book their names are listed as: Holbridge, James, & Holbridge, Marcy. There was indeed a Joseph Jenes/Jeanes living in New Haven as attested to in Dexter, p. 407 & p. 431. And, because of the numerous misspellings of names in these early documents I feel certain this is the same

person.

⁴⁹ (Jacobus, *History and Genealogy of the Families of Old Fairfield*) pp. 300-03. A copy of this letter is provided in Appendix I.

⁵⁰ (Lambert) Vol. 1 p. 316

⁵¹ (Jacobs, 1930), Vol. 1, p. 344 (348)

⁵² (Winthrop) p. 441

⁵³ (Sanborne), p. 193 (211)

⁵⁴ (Jacobs, 1930) Vol. 1, p. 434 (438). Sgnt. Francis Nichols, was put in charge of military affairs for Stamford. In Jacobus' documents the name is variously spelled as: Nichol, Niccolson, Nichols, Nikols.

⁵⁵ King Philips' War began on June 24, 1675, ending August 1676. This was a short vicious war in which Philips, a.k.a. Chief Metacomet, head of the Pokunoket Tribe, sought to drive the settlers out of the colonies. During this war, 5,000 people died, three-fourths of whom were Native Americans. Philips was beheaded. <http://www.history.com/topics/pilgrims>

⁵⁶ (Jacobs, 1930), Vol. 1, p.435 (439)

⁵⁷ (Dayton, 1995), p. 330. *Women before the Bar* is the first study to investigate changing patterns of women's participation in early American courts across a broad range of legal actions—including proceedings related to debt, divorce, illicit sex, rape, and slander.

⁵⁸ (Sanborne), p. 79 (97). In the index to this publication the surname is spelt as:

Desborough/Desborow/Disborough/Disbrow.

⁵⁹ (Jacobs, 1930), Vol. 1, p. 187 (191)

⁶⁰ (Disbrow, 1992 (Reprinted 1996), p. 21 (15)

⁶¹ (Disbrow, 1992 (Reprinted 1996), p. 22-23 (15-16)

⁶² (Godbeer, 2005), p. 6

⁶³ (Godbeer, 2005), p. 38-9

⁶⁴ (Godbeer, 2005), p. 44. This book, issued as one of the *New Narratives in American (sic) History*, gives an excellent account of these witchcraft trials in Connecticut.

⁶⁵ Suspected witches were sometimes dropped into a body of water to determine if they possessed evil spirits. The theory behind the so-called "ducking test" was if the person sank she was innocent but if she floated she was guilty because the pure water would cast out her evil spirit. See Appendix Two

⁶⁶ (Godbeer, 2005), p. 94. I contend what they located were Elizabeth and Mercy's respective cliterous'.

⁶⁷ (Godbeer, 2005), p. 123

⁶⁸ (Godbeer, 2005), p. 124

⁶⁹ (Godbeer, 2005), p. 125

⁷⁰ See Bulkeley's letter in the Appendix.

⁷¹ (Hoadly, 1857), p. 86. The information about Stone and his writings were contained in a footnote on this page. I then did an internet search where I located a copy of Stone's book stored in the University of Michigan Library.

⁷² (Disbrow, 1992 (Reprinted 1996), p. 44 (31)

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Appendix One

June 3, 1699

Loving Cousin,

Yesterday, when I was not at home, somebody (I knew not who) left two loose papers at my house, one was a copy of your and your wife's testimony, attested by Nathan Gold Clark, relating to the scandal cast upon Mercy Holbridge (now Disborough) by James Redfin That his tale, so far as it concerns Mercy Holbridge, is a most malicious lie from the beginning to the end & I cannot but wonder at the bloody malice of some men, who having by a good Providence missed their mark of taking away her life by one project [the witchcraft charge], would now ruin her character by another means Where he says that Mercy Holbridge was with child when she lived with me at New London: I say this; while is it true that she did live a while with me at New London, it is not true. In our conversations she was as blameless & inoffensive, as any person (especially of her years) in the entire Colony. [Mercy would have been about 24]

1. Whereas he says, that she went to Wethersfield with me & was there delivered of a child is a very great lie for Mercy never went with me from New London to Wethersfield. [However,] Elizabeth Walker (a Scotch wench whose time I bought at Boston was indeed was (to my grief), with child while she lived with me at New London, & she went with me to Wethersfield, & was there delivered of a child: But what is this to Mercy? In this regard, Redfin is in a great error.
2. Whereas he says, that the child died & this was kept quiet because the supposed father was a great man I answer
 - a. It is true that Elizabeth Walker's child born at Wethersfield did die and because we weren't sure why it died I requested a Jury to be panelled This was done by Capt. Wells (who was then a Commissioner in Wethersfield) and one of the jurors was Thomas Buxton (Bulkand?) of Hartford. The Jury heard the evidence about the death of the child and gave their Verdict. I also remember this was done on a Saturday night but I don't remember more than this.
 - b. James Redfin claims he knows the name the child's father whom he indicates is well known. In fact, the man [Elizabeth Walker] said was the father of the child was not a very great

man and he appeared at the next County Court at New London, held after the child's birth to answer to her accusation, where (as I remember) he denied the fact. This, I suppose, the Record of the Court at New London will show.

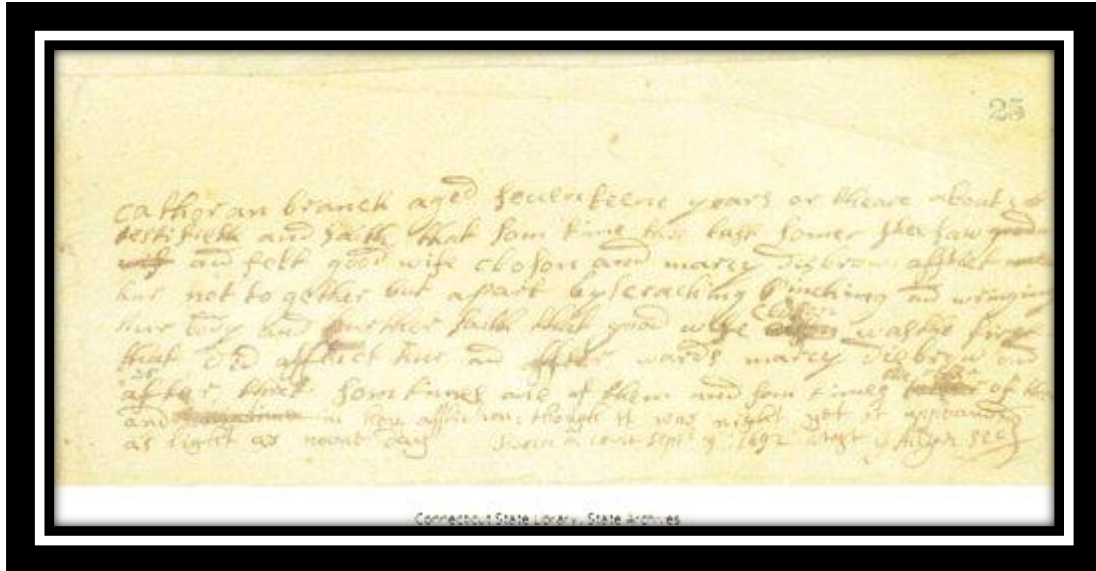
Lastly, I am of the opinion that Redfin knows he lies. He did not see Mercy go with me from New London to Wethersfield because she never did. He never saw her delivered of a child there because she never was. No, no Redfin hath needs forgiveness of the God of truth and of Mercy & to make good recompense for such a heinous & wilful wrong.

For my own part, I value not a thousand such tongues, I am so well privy to my own innocence in this matter & I have other fish to fry than to regard the tattle of malice. But it behoves wise men to take heed how they treat such malicious liars, lest they also be partakers of their sin. This I thought good to write for the satisfaction of friends & if it may be any way beneficial, you may show it to whom you please. I shall stand by it to the last. Let Redfin muster up all the forces he can to the contrary.

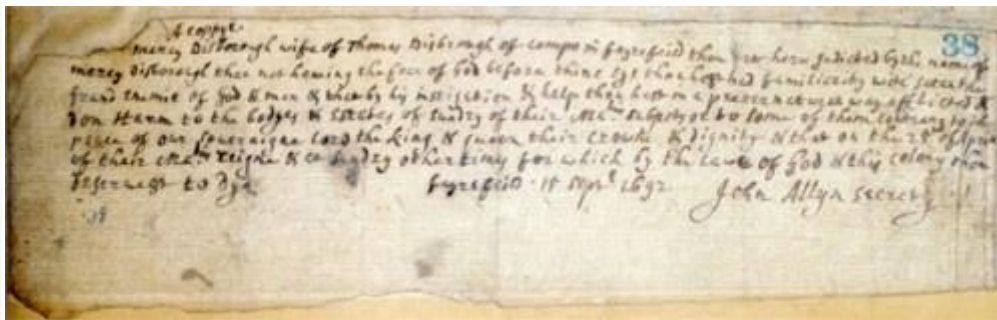
I send my love & respect to yourself & your wife & so commending you all to God, I am

You're Loving Uncle
Gershom Bulkeley.

Appendix Two



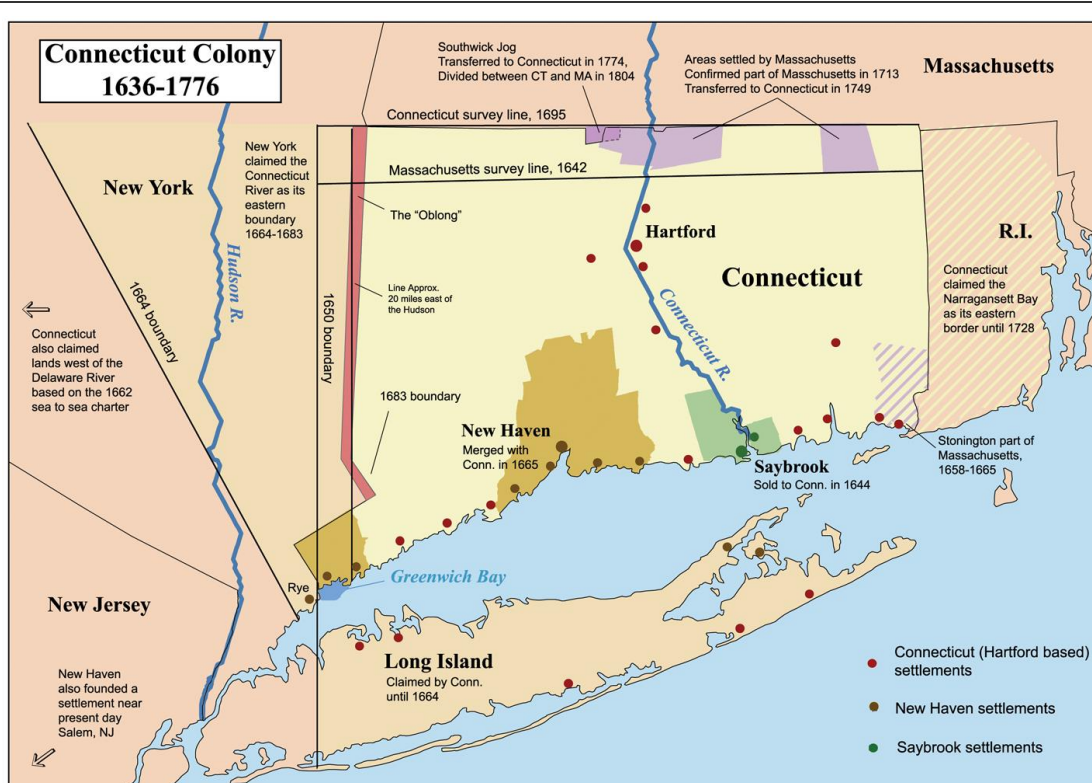
Catherine Branch's disposition given at Mercy's Trial - September 14, 1692



Mercy's Bill of Indictment: *Mercy Disborough, wife of Thomas Disborough of Compo in Fairfield, thou art here indicted by the name of Mercy Disborough that, not having the fear of God before thine eyes, thou hast had familiarity with Satan, the grand enemy of God and man, and that by his instigation and help thou hast in a preternatural way afflicted and done harm to the bodies and estates of sundry of their Majesties' subjects or to some of them contrary to the peace of ye sovereign Lord the King and Queen, their crown and dignity and that on the 25th April in the 4th year of their Majesties' reign and at sundry other times, for which by the law of God and the laws of this colony thou deservest to die.* 15 September James Allyn, Secretary



Edward's Pond (dry bed) located on the Green at the corner of Old Post Road & Beach Road in Fairfield, Connecticut. This is the pond Mercy requested she be ducked into to prove she wasn't a witch.



Colonial New England Map