

A History of One Branch of the
Fairfield, Connecticut, Gray Family

Compiled by

Mary Sibyl Gray May

Grace Gray Hoch

and

Richard Holman May

Godfrey Memorial Library

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FAIRFIELD, CONN. GRAY FAMILY

OUR EUROPEAN BACKGROUND

In the 9th century a Norman chief named Rolf or Rollo invaded France and established himself there. One of his descendents was made chamberlain to Robert Duke of Normandy who rewarded his underling with the Castle of Croy and all its appurtenances. The family was known as DeCroy which later became DeGray. Later the De was dropped and the surname was simply Gray.

The castle of this family was in the department of Haute-Saone in Burgundy, France, a town deriving its name from the family stands on the bank of the Saone was founded in the 7th century. The fortifications were destroyed by Louis XIV.

On the Battle Abbey Roll is the name of one I. de Gray who accompanied William the Conquerer to England and was rewarded with great holdings. This was the foundation of the distinguished English families of Gray, Grey or de Gray. The name is listed in the Domesday book. Various families of importance sprang from this root and are found not only in England but also in Scotland and Ireland while younger sons and more remote connections eventually made up the large family named Gray which is to be found over the face of the earth. But it is conceded that almost all their early roots began with the one who moved across the Channel with the Conquerer.

There were at least twenty lines that emigrated to America and the descendents in most cases have been accounted for. A few isolated cases have no recollection of their forebears.

We belong to the Puritan family of Fairfield, Connecticut who came over from England sometime before 1638 and are descendents of John Gray who with his brother Henry emigrated from Hackney Parish, Middlesex. They were of the yeoman class. Their father William Gray was of the well to do, owning considerable property at Harrow-on-the-Hill and in Hackney Parish. The class from which they sprang was vigorous and sturdy. They were free men, some were copyhold tenants who paid yearly taxes to a manor. Some rose to the gentry; other preferred to remain yeomen as freeholders whose taxes to the government were less than the gentry and otherwise just as free and independent. They lived well and had a pride and self-respect equal to those above them. They have been called the backbone of England. The life of the yeoman is well represented in the novels of Thomas Hardy and George Eliot. Also see Mildred Campbell, The English Yeoman.

WILLIAM GRAY

The first ancestor of which we have any present knowledge was William Gray, yeoman, of Harrow-on-the-Hill, Middlesex, England. Harrow-on-the-Hill was once about twelve miles from London. Now both have grown until they have grown into each other. We have only William Gray's will to tell us about him but it tells us much.

From Henry F. Waters Geneological Gleanings in England in the New England Historical and Geneological Register v. 47 p. 403 we have the will in full. This will was made 27 January 1647 and proved 1648:

"To my son John Graye twenty pounds. To son Henry twenty pounds. To son Isaac that cottage or tenement now or lately in the occupation of Michel Anderson lying and being in Hobgoblin Lane near Sudbury Green in the parish of Harrow-on-the-Hill etc. being freehold etc.

To my daughter-in-law Susanna Gray the wife of my son William five pounds as a token of my love to her.

To my grandchild Abraham Gray son of William forty shillings, and to Josiah forty shillings and to Rebecca daughter of my son William all my pewter, and to his youngest daughter Priscilla all my brass, as one pot, one kettle, etc.

To my sister Rose Wight five pounds out of a greater sum she oweth me which five pounds I give her as a token of my love to her.

To my cousin Thomas Ashwell and Mary his wife five pounds to be distributed among their three children as a token of my love.

To Elizabeth Corda that three pounds that is in the hands of John Page of Aperton, yeoman.

To William Peache, son of John Peache of Greenford twenty shillings to be deducted out a greater sum his father John Peache oweth me.

I make my son William Gray of London, merchant taylor full and sole executor and give unto him all and singular my moneys, cattle, chattels, goods and lands and whatsoever is mine that is not heretofore disposed of etc. I further will that the five pounds I gave my sister Rose Wight after her decease shall be given to Thomas Ashwell's children."

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The law of primogeniture is upheld in the above will.

Mr. Waters says: "The first two sons named in the foregoing will were doubtless the John and Henry Gray who were found in Fairfield, Connecticut A.D. 1643." He says also "See the Will of their Brother William Gray oldest son of the testator." (See New England Historical and Genealogical Register v. 42 p. 72.)

The following is that portion of the will which has to do with his brothers the emigrants:

William Gray citizen and merchant tailor of London made his will Sept. 1, 1657. Proved 18 November, 1663. He leaves to his son Abraham the copyhold house and orchard in Hamerton in Parish of Hackney. Hackney is the parish from which John and Henry Gray came. He leaves to these two brothers "of New England" the sum of five pounds as an expression of his love. He spoke of his brother Isaac Gray and mentions his daughter and wife with the same names as William Gray of Harrow used thus proving the relationship of the family.

WILLIAM GRAY'S CHILDREN

William married Susanna _____ died 1663
John married - 1st Elizabeth Frost (Watson)
 2nd _____ Ramsden died 1665 or 1666
Henry married Lydia Frost
Isaac _____

JOHN GRAY

John Gray's name together with his brother Henry's is on a ship passenger list that was compiled by Banks, "Topographical Dictionary of 2885 English emigrants to New England 1620 - 1650", p. 110. The name of the ship is not given but their destination, Fairfield, Connecticut is, and also their residence previous to embarkation, Hackney Parish, Middlesex Co., England. The Grays had lands in Hackney and in Harrow-on-the-Hill. On the same list is the name of the brothers' father-in-law, of Nottingham, England, also bound for Fairfield, Connecticut, William Frost. Mr. Frost, a man of good family and of advanced years emigrated to New England it is thought to secure religious peace. He too was a Puritan. He came with all his family excepting a daughter, Mary Rylie who stayed in England. Henry Gray married Lydia Frost and John Gray married her sister Elizabeth Frost (Watson) widow of John Watson of Boston. She had three children, Luke, Johanna, and Susanna. It is important to remember the name of Luke Watson as he became a great builder of the Commonwealth but also because of his constant association with John Gray his step-father, and through the movements of Watson we trace the identity of our John Gray as against others of that name.

John Gray and Elizabeth Watson were married in May 1639. They were all in New England by 1638 as Lechford says he met his old acquaintance Master Frost in Boston in 1638 with his sons Henry and John Gray.

There are various accounts of their movements before they went to Fairfield but it seems they may have been confused with others, the conclusive evidence is that in 1639 before Sept. 28th they were all in Fairfield, Connecticut where they held extensive properties as may be seen on consulting old records. John was granted 2-1/2 acres on the South West of Frost square where he lived and which he sold a few years afterward. He was in Fairfield for ten years when he emigrated with his family to Flushing Long Island. Henry, his brother stayed on in Fairfield and his descendants have been accounted for in the Gray and Frost genealogies.

Henry was in middle life at the time of his emigration and in all probability John was not exactly young.

William Frost made his will in 1644 and a part is given below.

"I give and bequesth to my daughter Elizabeth and John Graye the sowe the same that he hath to winter and all her increase and the third part of my household goods: and to Luke (Watson) the two yeare old blacke heifer that goodman Close hath to the halves for fower yeares, the profite to be for the said Luke, and to Susanna and Johanna Watson daughters to Elizabeth, one blacke heifer that John Graye hath to the halves for fower years and the profite to them both equally. And the red heifer that Daniell Froste wintereth I give to John Gray's owne two children"

He left all his goods and lands that he had in England to his daughter Mary Rylie and her children. And to the town of Fairfield fifty pounds toward the building of a church. This was the first Puritan church built in the town and was called Church of Christ which is what the early Puritans named their churches. They were of course Independents not Pilgrims as at Plymouth.

If only William Frost had mentioned the names of John Gray's owne children he would have saved genealogists a lot of searching. Mr. Frost died in 1645.

When John Gray went to Long Island in 1649 he was not going out of Connecticut territory as it was still under the Plymouth Colony grant of 1620. But the Dutch had made claims, and settlements by Dutch pioneers were being established, so that there were constant clashes between

SUPPLEMENT

Since this manuscript was concluded, further investigation revealed the fact that the family is entitled to use a coat of arms that was granted to William Gray merchant taylor of London and that he made request that the same right be granted to his brother John and Henry Gray who had emigrated to New England.

The New England Historical and Genealogical Magazine v. 61, p. 386 in the section devoted to Genealogical Research in England, communicated for the Committee on English Research, by Joseph Gardner Bartlett, Esq. submits this statement:

William Gray of Hackney being uncertain what arms his father was entitled to and showing that he was of the lineage and one of the heirs of Robert Gray, late of London merchant, deceased, to whom Sir Edward Bysshe, Garter, granted arms, the same arms duly differenced were confirmed to the said William Gray and his brothers; viz. Barry wavy of six, argent and azure, on a bend gules three garlands or. Nothing is said about the crest which we are acquainted with from another source. The quotation goes on to say that "The brothers" of the William Gray who shared in this confirmation of arms and crest were Henry and John Gray early settlers of Fairfield, Connecticut, consequently their male descendants bearing the name are entitled to bear these arms. (The original grant it will be seen gives all their posterity the right to bear these arms.)

From John Guillim's A Display of Heraldry, page 405, is this item on Robert Gray:

Granted to Robert Gray of London and Sheriff of London and Master of the Company of Merchant Taylors and to his nephew Thomas Gray by Richard St. George, Clarencieux. Dated April 1635 in the reign of King Charles the First.

This grant of arms to Robert Gray is recorded in two documents in Harleian manuscripts 1470 which are preserved in the British Museum, ff. 10, 11.

For further confirmation of our right to bear arms this writer appealed to the highest authority on such matters the College of Arms in London, England E.C. 4 and had an extended correspondence with Captain Robin de la Lanne-Mirrlees, Rouge Dragon, of the Officers of Arms, pursuivant. He sent me the following copy of the grant of arms.

COPY OF GRANT OF ARMS.
EXTRACTED FROM MISCELLANEOUS GRANTS 8, p. 4

Whereas William Grey of Hackney in the county of Middlesex is uncertain what arms his father did beare and hath made it appear that he was of the kindred and lineage of Robert Gray late of London, Merchant Taylor, deceased, who did bear the arms and crest above depicted, Barry of six argent and azure on a bend gules 3 chaplets or. Crest on a mount vert a Badger or. Now I Edward Bysshe Esq., Garter Principal King of Arms of Englishmen in regard of the promises that there is no issue remaying of the body of the said Robert Grey do assign the said arms and crest viz:

Barry wavy of six pieces argent and azure, on a bend gules over all, three chaplets or. And as crest: Upon a helmet on a wreath argent and azure, a Badger or, unto the said William Grey and his brethren and his and their posterity, with due differences. Dated at the Office of Arms the 7th day of May in the year of our Lord 1652.

Signed E. Bysshe, Garter
Principal King of Arms of
Englishmen.

In Heraldry the following meanings will help us to understand our arms and crest. Barry, the divisions of our shield into six parts alternating in colors blue and silver. Wavy, the dividing lines are waved lines.

Azure, means blue.
Argent, is silver.
Or, is gold.
Gules, is red.
Chaplets, wreaths.
Helmet, this has the usual significance.

Wreath, once the wreath was wound about the shield, but it came to have a different treatment. In this case, it is a sausage shaped figure on which the helmet rests. It is like two pieces of cloth twisted over each other to show the two different colors alternately. The Grey wreath shows silver (argent) then blue (azure) consecutively for six equal divisions.

Badger, passant. Another source says the Badger is passant. This was left out of the copy of the Grant of Arms that Captain de la Lanne-Mirrlees sent to me. However, we can accept it as a part of our authentic crest.

Passant, then, means the Badger shown walking. Only one ear and one eye is visible and it faces the left with the right paw raised. The Badger is done in gold (or).