

Epes Merchant

(1780 - 1859)



Epes and Sally (Thomas) Merchant

Epes Merchant was a fisherman, master mariner, outfitter, member of the Coast Guard during the War of 1812 and Captain in the Militia. In 1803 he married Sally Rowe Thomas (daughter of William and Martha Rowe Thomas). They had been married for 45 years at the time of his death and were the parents of ten children.

Family history indicates that Epes was born in the part of Gloucester known as Pigeon Cove. When his father William died in 1802, Epes and three of his brothers (William, Nathaniel and James) moved to Gloucester where they engaged in hazardous work as boat fishermen. During this time, he resided at what was known as the (Dean) Elizer Grover house at north Main Street. This is where he and Sally set up housekeeping after they married, and their first son George was born here. [*It is related that an Englishman by the name of Qualls or Cwalls who had been a soldier in Burgoyne's Army, offered to finish off the house if Epes would board him for the winter. The offer was accepted and the work was completed in a manner of which a workman of today, even with modern tools need not be ashamed. About 1834-5 an addition was made to the northern and earlier end.*]

During the War of 1812, when he served with the Coast Guard, a story is told that he and some of his comrades once followed an English schooner from Eastern Point to Long Beach in order to prevent its crew from landing. During this walk of six miles, he and his men were obliged to ford what is known as "the river" at high water, carrying their powder on their heads.

In January of 1815, Epes bought land and dwelling thereon from the corner of what was known as Point Hill to the top of the hill for \$140.00, and it was here that he made his home until his death in 1859. [*The property was purchased from Ingatious and Sarah Sargent and was described as "southerly by the Eastern Point Road, 19 rods 11 links, to an old cross road, thence easterly by said cross road, to Eleazer Grovers land, thence by said Grovers northerly 19 rods, more or less to a stake upon Little Good Harbor Road thence westerly 6 rods by said road to the corner first mentioned, containing 1 1/2 acre more or less formerly of Daniel Sargent.*] This seems to have also included land at the head of the harbor, which became home to several Merchant family fishing enterprises. In 1854 Epes was granted permission to build and maintain a wharf, to be known as Merchant's Wharf, extending 150 feet from a bank wall which incloses the upland at Leighton's Hill, at the head of the harbor, in the town of Gloucester. The special statute also provided him the right to "lay" vessels at the end and sides of the wharf.

It is not known when Epes decided to abandon the sea life for the home life of an outfitter, but In 1825 he began a partnership with his son Epes William (Epes Merchant & Son) with the vessels the Hornet, Volant and Emblem, all about 45 tons. This firm was continued until about 1848 and was primarily a fishery outfitting enterprise. An 1831 advertisement in the Gloucester Telegraph notes that the firm has just recently moved to their new store on Jackson Street and now offered for sale the following items: family groceries, china, crockery, glassware, hollow ware, knives, forks, pen knives, jack knives, percussion caps, coarse and fine salt, lines and twine.

Upon the dissolution of this firm, his sons Gorham, Addison and Samuel joined together in the same line of business. Gorham died shortly after this business got underway and it was continued by Addison and Samuel until Samuel died in 1860. At that point in time, Samuel's son William T. Merchant and son-in-law James L. Shute, who had joined Samuel and Addison in the business, opted to form the partnership of Shute & Merchant.

Sally Rowe Thomas Merchant, the wife of Epes was the daughter of William and Martha (Rowe) Thomas. She was born Aug. 4, 1782 in Gloucester Mass. and was baptized on Aug. 10, 1782. On Dec. 1, 1803 she married Epes Merchant when she was age 21 and he was age 23. After a long life and surviving several of her children, Sally died in 1869.

The children of Epes and Sally (Thomas) Merchant

Epes William	1804 - 1887	Samuel	1812 - 1860
Henry (Harry)	1805 - 1870	Benjamin William	1814 - 1831
George	1807 - 1899	Addison	1816 - 1867
Sarah Eliza	1809 - 1889	Emeline	1819 - 1852
Mary Ann	1811 - 1863	Gorham	1822 - 1849

Vessels owned and operated by Epes Merchant

1824	Volant	Capt. Epes W. Merchant
1825-26	Hornet	Capt. Epes W. Merchant
1827-28	Emblem	Capt. Epes W. Merchant
1829	Brilliant	Capt. Henry Merchant
1830	Emblem	Capt. Epes W. Merchant
1831	Emblem	Capt. George Merchant
1832	Clarion	Capt. Samuel Merchant
1833	Brilliant	Capt. George Merchant
1834	Paul Pry	Capt. James Elwell
1835	Richmond	Capt. Samuel Merchant
1836	Paragon	Capt. John Robinson
1837-38	Clinton	Capt. Samuel Merchant
1839-40	Emblem	Capt. William Davis
1841	Warrior	Capt. Samuel Merchant
1842	Clinton	Capt. William Davis
1843	Clinton	Capt. Gorham Merchant
1844-45	Clinton	Capt. William Davis
1846	Hannibal	Capt. George Thurston
1847	Republic	Capt. George Thurston
1848-49	Banvard	Capt. William T. Smith
1850	Lucy Ann	Capt. John Tolpy

much of this history came from the
House of Jabez -- Chronicles of the Merchant-Merchant Family by Frank R. Merchant

if you are interested in more detailed information about any of these Merchant families, please use the contact link on the web page -- a pdf with more data for all the Merchants who are known to have descended from Jabez Merchant (1695-1773) is available