

James Mugford was a Revolutionary War hero in Marblehead. He was the first husband of Sarah Griste. The widow Sarah Griste Mugford married Arnold Martin, the son of our direct ancestor Knott Martin and his wife Sarah Arnold. The newspaper probably has most of the facts correct. In reality, the Mugfords had been married for six years before he was killed.

The Boston Weekly Globe (Boston, Massachu... · 27 Sep 1890, Sat.)

OLD HOMES, OLD FAMILIES.

Historic Houses Dear to Yankeedom.

Hearths That Still Blaze When Wintry Breezes Blow.

Sturdy Stock That Has Survived Generations.

Fraught with great historic interest to the people of Marblehead is the large gambrel-roofed house next to the Unitarian church on Mugford st. It was the home of Capt. John Grist, who bought it in 1764.

Here, in 1775, his only daughter Sarah was married to the gallant James Mugford. Her wedded life was short. Almost before the honeymoon was over a press gang prowling about the streets of Marblehead seized the young man and impressed him into the British naval service on board the sloop-of-war Lively, then lying in Marblehead harbor.

The young wife appealed tearfully to the commander of the sloop-of-war telling him of her recent marriage and her agony of mind at being separated from her husband. Her artlessness and grief touched the heart of the sturdy Briton, and Mugford was released.

But it was an unfortunate impression for the British. While confined on the sloop-of-war Mugford heard his captors boasting that a "powder ship" was soon to sail for England with ammunition and stores for the British army.

Immediately upon his release he communicated the important intelligence to the proper authorities and requested permission to attempt the capture of the transport. After much importunity his request was granted.

Without delay the intrepid commander collected a crew, and fitting out the Continental schooner Franklin, then lying in ordinary at Beverly, pushed into the bay.

He had not long to wait. On the 17th of May, 1776, the British ship Hope of 300 tons, 6 guns and 17 men hove in sight. Notwithstanding the fact that a British fleet lay at anchor in Nantasket roads, only a few miles off and in full sight, Mugford at once bore down upon the ship and carried her by boarding.

While the crew of the Franklin were engaged in taking possession of their prize the captain of the Hope ordered his men to cut the topsail halyard ties, with a view to impede the sailing of the ship, and thereby give the boats of the squadron time to come

The prize was taken through Pudding Point gut—a channel then but little known—beyond the range of the guns of the British squadron, and arrived safely in Boston harbor.

This was the most valuable capture that had been made during the war. The cargo consisted of 1000 carbines, with bayonets, several carriages for field pieces, 1700 barrels of powder, and a complete assortment of artillery implements and pioneer tools.

Having seen his prize safely in port, the gallant commander of the Franklin took a supply of ammunition, and on the following Sunday put to sea.

In sailing through Pudding Point gut, the same channel through which the prize was brought up, the vessel grounded.

This being perceived by the officers on board the ships of the British fleet, 14 boats, manned by 200 sailors, fully armed, were sent to capture the unprotected schooner. Mugford, however, was prepared to meet them.

Waiting until they came within range of his guns, he fired, and with such deadly effect that two of the boats were immediately sunk.

The men in the remaining boats now surrounded the schooner and attempted to board. Seizing pikes and cutlasses, and whatever implements they could obtain, the heroic crew of the Franklin fought with desperation in defence of their vessel.

Many of the British were shot as soon as the boats came alongside, while others had their hands and fingers cut off with sabres, as they laid them on the gunwales of the schooner. The brave Mugford, who throughout the conflict had been fighting wherever his presence seemed most needed, encouraging and animating his men by voice and example, was shot through the breast by an officer in one of the boats. With the utmost composure, and with that presence of mind which ever distinguishes heroes, he called to his lieutenant and exclaimed:

"I am a dead man: don't give up the vessel: you will be able to beat them off!"

In a few minutes he expired.

The death of their gallant commander nerved the crew of the Franklin to still greater efforts, and in a short time the men in the boats were repulsed, and gave up the attack.

The engagement lasted half an hour. The British lost 70 men, while the only person killed on board the schooner was its heroic captain.

With the advancing tide the Franklin floated from the soft ground where she had struck, and, taking advantage of a fresh

breeze that had sprung up, the crew brought her into Marblehead harbor. The news of the capture of the powder ship, and of the death of the captain in the contest with the boat, had preceded the arrival of the schooner, and the wharves and headlands were thronged with people as the victorious seamen sailed up the harbor.

The body of the hero was conveyed to his sorrowing young wife, and laid in state in the house of her father, which forms the subject of this sketch. On the following Wednesday the remains were carried into the "new meeting-house" next door, where Rev. Isaac Story conducted the services.

Amid the tolling of bells and the firing of minute guns the body was conveyed to its resting place on the "Old Burying hill," where a volley was fired by the Marblehead regiment, which did escort duty on the occasion.

Mugford was killed on the very day he was 27 years of age. One hundred years after, on the anniversary of his capture of the powder ship, the citizens of Marblehead dedicated a granite monument to record his exploit.

Mugford's widow married Arnold Martin, and their daughter Sarah became the wife of William Stacey. To their son, Capt. William Stacey, came the old house at their death, and his daughter, Sarah L., with her husband, John B. Lindsey, now owns and occupies it, letting a tenement on the lower floor to William H. Orne, who married their daughter.

The house has, therefore, sheltered six generations, including John Grist with his descendants.

John Grist and his wife died at the same time, March 2, 1794, were of the same age, 66 years, and were buried on the same day in the same grave in St. Michael's church yard.



GRISTE HOUSE, MARBLEHEAD.

up. Mugford sensible of the danger of the situation, threatened the captain and all on board with instant death should the order be executed. His resolute manner terrified them, and they refused to obey the commands of their officers.

News Article

Springfield Republican | Monday, May 24, 1869 | Springfield, MA | Page: 2

The Republican.

COMMONWEALTH SKETCHES.

MARBLEHEAD AND ITS PEOPLE.—I.

A Unique Coast Town—Some of the Local Peculiarities—Marblehead and the Liberty—Dr Holyoke—Judge Story—Commodore Tucker and Minister Adams—Skipper Ireson and Whittier—Old People—Dialect—Superstitions in Marblehead and their Origin—Jeremiah Lee's Mansion.

Bostonians say that whenever, twenty years ago, a stranger entered Marblehead streets, the boys at once turned out and threw stones at him, as an indignant hint for him not to bring present manners and customs into a town so thoroughly imbued with the past. The ancient fishermen gazed with wonder at a city gait and smartly brashed hat, and the village maidens cast their glances only slyly, showing that they knew full well what was interdicted by the custom of their community. The queer, crooked roofed old houses retained their perches on the rocks by the sounding sea; no innovator dared to buy them and blow them all up to make room for some seven-story hotel, or model street; the huge, old-fashioned mansions in the town's center held comfortable, sleepy, rich old fellows, who never went anywhere, and never cared to; shoe factories had not multiplied, and Marblehead had fair to resist the encroachments of modernism, and always remain, as compared with its neighboring towns along the coast, unique, quaint, rather exclusive, and very attractive to the antiquarian.

A score of years has brought with it much more rapid changes than even the most ambitious for modern improvements could have prophesied. Already many of the town's peculiarities begin to be talked of as things of the past. The dialect, once so universal, is now heard with a supercilious smile; the young ladies flirt with strangers without any care for Marblehead's antique exclusiveness; the boys beseech you to allow them to serve you; and the places of the fishermen, such as old Ben Ireson, and the sailors, such as those high-minded, brave, and chivalric fellows who went privateering in the early wars, are now supplied by mudsills, who know very little of navigation, and less of the world about them.

From Salem a crooked and brief branch railroad line leads round a headland in the coast to the harbor of Marblehead. Approached from the land, the aspect of the town is anything but romantic; but from the sea it is picturesque as an Italian mountain village. In these days of sunshine and spring breezes, I have thought it worth my while to linger in this town which sent a Muckford and a Col. Glover into the revolution; which was so rich and patriotic that it had a regiment of 1000 trained volunteers, heroes of the old French and Indian war, ready to enter the service of liberty in 1775; which was so early true to the cause of independence that it called upon all the officers of those volunteers, who thought they owed allegiance to King George, to surrender their commissions; whose citizens fought so bravely on the ocean that it entered the revolution with 15,000 tons of shipping, and came out with 1300; whose sons were so numerous in the naval engagements that at the war's close 600 of them were found in Dartmoor prison, in England. This was the town which furnished Harvard college with its first president, in Dr. Holyoke; and from the same street where the Holyoke mansion stands came Judge Story, whose fame is now so conspicuous. This was the town which gave birth to old Commodore Tucker, who carried our first minister, John Quincy Adams, to England, after we had established our independence. The Marbleheaders like to tell anecdotes of this voyage of Commodore Tucker's. One is that when about half way to England, a French vessel engaged the Marblehead craft, and Tucker commanded Minister Adams, and all the rest of the passengers to retire below decks during the action. But Minister Adams said he preferred not to go, whereupon Tucker took him bodily, and carried him kicking and protesting, down the companion-way. Adams staid where he was dumped until after the fight. This was the town where Jeremiah Lee built his famous mansion, the counterpart of that which Longfellow now owns in Cambridge, and for which all the building material and furnishings came from England. This was the town which first responded to the call for volunteers to put down the rebellion, Knott Martin, the village butcher, leaving the hog which he was about to kill half slaughtered, and rushing forth to offer himself a sacrifice, if need be, on the country's altar. Marblehead sent 1434 stalwart soldiers into the war which has just closed, and, after much controversy, has at last won the honor of having it recorded in history that hers was the first company which reached Boston, on the road to Richmond and glory.

The old people in Marblehead cling to life as firmly as seaweed to a rock, or scales to a fish scale. Ninety is not at all an uncommon age. The new postmaster, the same Capt. Martin who was so in the forefront of liberty eight years ago, consulted the other day with an old gentleman of ninety-two, relative to the lease of a certain building. "Lease it to you, of course—fifteen or twenty years, if you want it!" cried the old boy, evidently with the utmost confidence that he should live to see the lease expire. One old lady of 82, whose grandfather helped to found the Warner line in this city, and who has remained in single blessedness her 82 years, has just closed out her business, and retired to rest in her old age. She was long one of the characters of the place, and in her little store sold thread, needles, candy, and brimstone for half a century. The Marblehead gamins were wont to bother her with useless questions, and so frequent were their demands for thimbles, that for years she had a huge sign in her window, on which was painted "I do not sell thimbles." For seventy years the old lady has lived in the same house, never extending her travels beyond Salem. Her two great particular aversions are thunder storms and church organs. When the former rage, she dresses in silk, and sits patiently in the middle of a room until they are over; and the presence of the latter in all the churches has resulted in her firm decision to worship God at home. She remembers distinctly seeing "Old Floyd Orson," as Whittier calls him in his ballad, dragged past the door of her house, half a century ago, suffering the vengeance which his fellow fishermen thought they were inflicting upon him for his so called inhumanity. By the way, there is a great diversity of opinion as to the story which the Quaker poet has pictured in his ballad. The version to which the older Marbleheaders cling, however, is most generally accepted, and causes some grumbling at Whittier's apparent liberty with historical facts.

SKIPPER BEN IRESON.

Say those who knew him long before the present generation was born, was a brave and good seaman, who went annually to the Grand Banks, and always returned lucky best known by the sobriquet which grew to him in that inexpressible way in which many "thick-say the Marbleheaders, Whittier came to call him "Old Floyd Orson," mistaking the sobriquet for his baptismal name. Once when sailing in the gradual approach of a storm, his seamen showing the skipper three shipwrecked mariners, and he bade them to their rescue. They refused to take off unless he went with them, being among them; but he sternly refused, saying that a skipper should never desert his ship. Once more he ordered them to the rescue, which was practicable without danger, and when they returned again, set sail for home, when they reached the others, that the shipwrecked would be picked up by the vessels close behind. 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