



THE NICHOLAS ROBBINS FAMILY NEWSLETTER FALL, 2010

Descendants of James and Benjamin Robbins,
Early Settlers of Yarmouth County, Nova Scotia

Introduction by Lawrence G. Robbins

James Robbins, farmer and innkeeper of Plympton, Massachusetts, and younger brother, Benjamin Robbins, also a farmer in that locale, migrated with their respective families to Yarmouth County, Nova Scotia around 1762, where they both settled in the Chebogue area. They were fifth generation descendants of Nicholas Robbins, sons of Jeduthan Robbins (Jr) and wife, Rebecca (Crocker) Robbins. They came in a wave of New Englanders, induced by the English Governor of Nova Scotia to settle lands vacated by the departing French Acadians.

This past summer, some descendants of the Robbins brothers gathered at Yarmouth for a reunion. Hugh Kimball "Kim" Robbins very kindly supplied me with a summary of events together with a nice group photo of the attendees. Earlier this year Clark and Chris Robbins and their cousin, James Robbins Palmer supplied me with a copy of a very interesting letter from Capt. Samuel B. Robbins to his son John James Clark Robbins, recounting a voyage in 1906, when Capt. Robbins's schooner "Sirocco" was nearly lost during a hurricane off Cuba. Capt. Robbins, a ninth generation descendant of Nicholas Robbins, was a noted Yarmouth shipmaster during the later 19th and early 20th centuries. A portrait of another of his ships, the "Ruby", is prominently displayed in the Yarmouth County Museum. A few portrait notations from the Museum's Catalogue are also included in this Newsletter.

This "special" edition of the Newsletter honors the Robbins brothers of Yarmouth County, Nova Scotia and their descendants. Many thanks to Kim, Clark, Chris and James for their supply of the aforementioned summary, correspondence, photos and other documents pertaining to their branches of our family.

Robbins Reunion in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia

by Hugh Kimball "Kim" Robbins

Some of the descendants of Deacon James Robbins via his great-great-great grandson, J. J. Clark Robbins, and

wife Ruby held a family reunion in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, August 7-9, 2010. The weather was in agreement to providing a memorable weekend for all. A meet and greet was held on Friday evening at the home of Kaye Robbins, widow of the late Hugh Robbins and the last surviving member of her generation. She sets a high standard at entertaining guests, as she graciously has done at many family gatherings over the years. She was happy to do one more in her 85th year.

David Lister, a descendant of Deacon James's brother, Benjamin Robbins, made the trip from Newcastle, Australia. This was his second visit to Yarmouth, having visited earlier in the late 1980s. He had a wealth of information on the Australian Robbins family to share with us and presented each member of our family with a watercolour painted by his Aunt Mary (a Robbins descendant), a well known painter who had, in recent months, passed away. He is continuing on a trip around the world when he leaves Nova Scotia.

The second day found the family discovering the history of Yarmouth and our family's past through the wonderful Yarmouth and Tusket museums in the area or just taking in the sights of the town and county which, in the days of the tall ships, was one of the most significant ports on the eastern seaboard of North America. The Robbins family was well tied to that seafaring history. A family dinner was held Saturday evening at the Austrian Inn, where the cuisine was well appreciated by all.

The third and final day found us at Kaye Robbins's family cottage in Carleton, in the countryside of Yarmouth County on Lake Fanning. After a brief rain shower passed, friends and family were welcomed to a wonderful potluck supper, which are legendary in our wing of the family. A family photo was taken while all were present and at the conclusion of the day, all the participants bid farewell to each other in the hopes that we may meet again soon. We have remained a close family for many years. The first reunion of J. J. Clark and Ruby's family, I am told, was in 1955.



Front row: (left to right) Alice Robbins-Kraeutner, Kathleen Robbins, Kaye Robbins (last surviving member of the Robbins parents, wife of Hugh) Margie (Robbins) Weeks, Mary (Robbins) Dechaine.

Second row: Artur Kraeutner (husband of Alice), Janet (Robbins) Demille, Jennifer (Robbins) Hemeon, Jill Robbins, Heather (Robbins) Hayes, Simone Samsom (wife of Clarke), David Lister of the Robbins family from Australia

Third row: Jim Palmer (son of Mary (Robbins) Palmer, Clarke Robbins

Back row: Kim Robbins, Cathy Palmer (wife of Jim), Chris Robbins, Marijke Robbins (wife of Chris).

A transcription of a 1906 letter from Capt. Samuel Benjamin Robbins, then in Havana, Cuba, to his son, John James Clark Robbins of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, after Capt. Robbins's ship was swamped by foul weather in the Gulf of Mexico

Transcribed by Christopher Walter Robbins, James Robbins Palmer and James Clark Robbins. (Notes to Reader: Attempted clarifications of the original are given in brackets. The letter has been split into more paragraphs than in the original in hopes that this may render it more readable.)

Havana, 21st June, 1906

[To:] J. J. Clark Robbins

Dear Son;

I have not your letter to answer the different remarks you made [and can answer them] only as I remember them, as it, with all private and official documents, were destroyed when she filled up.

We sailed from Mobile [Alabama] on the 2nd of June...fine moderate weather and it continued so till the 9th when the sea began to assume very high proportions and it came right head on and the wind from the NE and veering north. It made a very confused or cross sea and the little vessel battled with it till the deck load strained her and the pumps could not free her so as we sounded her and found she had 5 feet in her and [the water level] was gaining notwithstanding [the pumping].

We relieved her of some of her deck load, but it [the high seas] had done its work with the poop sill and before we was aware, it rushed into the cabin and tore away bulk heads and partitions in a few moments.

We had not time to save anything beside the chr [chronometer ?] and sextant and a few papers and macaroni and oatmeal. The cabin and forecabin was completely gutted and sailors [he probably means 'sails'] and all clothing totally destroyed with all the vessel's papers both official and private and we were then about 100 miles west of Tortugas.

It was Sunday night at 1 p.m. [a.m.?] when she filled up and on Monday the 11th the weather became fine. Our water was all salt except a small keg of 15 gallons on the house that had been filled a long time and was quite dirty. We had a few onions and raw potatoes and a few packages of macaroni and oatmeal and one ham and two or three tins of Armour's corned beef and on Tuesday, the 12th, a small schooner from Belize bound to Key West and saw our signal of distress flying which was a table spread at half-mast and he bore down on us and kindly gave us of his provisions namely three bunches bananas, pineapples, two 2 pound tins roast beef, and one small loaf of bread and our keg filled with water and he was about 70 miles from Key West and he arrived [in Miami] next day Wednesday and reported us and as soon the Navy department got the word, they dispatched a powerful cruiser in search of us and on Thursday at 10 a.m. he came up with us off Matanzas [on the north coast of Cuba, east of Havana] bearing SSE 15 miles and he took us in tow with a new 8 inch rope of his and he had us in Havana to anchor at 6 p.m. and he went away back to Key West.

It was a mercy he got hold of us that day, as the next day it came on a severe gale on shore and we could never have kept off with our water logged vessel. The "Heiddie Feore" was in the same gale with us and got disabled and she came up behind us and went on shore 20 miles east of here and is a total wreck. She is steel. He had no water in her. He lost one man in the gale and his compass and broke his steel main mast.

We have got to the wharf and getting the balance of deck load off, then will get her pumped out. She is in a very deplorable mess. In her cabin, the provisions, paints and oil are all washed together and now she is still in this hot weather the stench is fearful. Our crew is over half laid up with malaria and salt water boils. Mate is in the hospital. When [we] are clear of this lumber, expect to load molasses for Halifax. If you see Mr. Vila in Yarmouth, tell him for me to try and buy his lumber at Bridgewater from the Davidson Lumber Co. and/or Dickie

and McGrath to load at Halifax or Ship or Sheet Harbour. If I can find out where to address Mr. Vila, I will write him from here. I will make no repairs here, only temporary but do all North.

This is Friday night the 22nd and today I chartered to load part cargo of molasses for Halifax to load here. It suits us better than anything as we can make all our repairs there at a much less cost than down here. We are still discharging our deck load and expect when it is finished to pump her out then go into the hole cargo.

Note there has been some bad weather as far east as Newfoundland the like weather has never been known in the Gulf as this season. I suppose you read of the "Emma L. Cottingham" coming to grief with no one saved but the captain.

I was expecting to send you something from here for household expenses but this has knocked it on the head. We shall hope to be able to do so from Halifax, if spared to get there.

Please tell Mr. McGrath we hope to pay half of what we owe him this year or even more although we have met with this backflow. My interest is all insured. Mr. Troop has a very little insurance on his half.

I hope this will find you all well as this leaves me. Write me to Halifax c/o Messers Black Bros. I hope the [shoe store?] business is good. Kind regards to all inquiring friends.

From your affectionate father,
S. B. Robbins
Schooner Sirocco



Additional Notes to Reader: The two storms mentioned by Capt. Samuel Benjamin Robbins in his letter, the one that swamped the "Sirocco" and the one that hit just after they reached Havana, seem to be a perfect match for the two described in the on-line encyclopedia, Wikipedia. Summaries of the Wikipedia descriptions follow:

Tropical Storm # 1. The [1906] season started on June 8th with a tropical storm that formed in the western Caribbean Sea. The storm quickly strengthened to a peak of 50 mph (80 km/h) winds the next day and the system maintained intensity as it moved northward and eventually made landfall near Panama City, Florida on June 13th. The storm then quickly weakened to a depression as it moved inland and became extratropical over Tennessee on June 14th. It dissipated shortly thereafter.

Tropical Storm/Hurricane # 2. On June 14, 1906, a 40 mph (65 km/h) tropical storm formed just north of Cuba. The storm rapidly strengthened, reaching hurricane status two days later as a Category 1 before grazing the Florida Keys and striking the southeast tip of Florida on June 17th. After moving offshore, intensification continued as the hurricane moved northeast and the hurricane reached Category 2 status the next day and attained its peak of 105

mph (170 km/h) on June 19th. The storm then began weakening and turned to the east-southeast on June 20th as a minimal hurricane as it went out to sea. The hurricane weakened to a tropical storm on June 21st, turned eastward, and weakened to a depression and became extratropical on June 23rd.

The Ship Ruby of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, Capt. S. B. Robbins

A portrait of the sailing ship "Ruby" is on prominent display at the Yarmouth County Museum in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. The following portrait notes appear in the Museum's Catalogue:

The ship "Ruby" was built at Church Point, Digby County, Nova Scotia in 1878 at the N. & J. Raymond Shipyard. She was built for A. C. Robbins and others of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia and registered at that port.

Built of spruce, birch, beech, pitch pine and oak, she was fastened with iron bolts. The "Ruby" was 202.7 feet in length, 39.7 feet in breadth and had a 23.6 foot depth of hold. Her tonnage was 1392 tons.

The "Ruby" spent the first nine years of her life in the North Atlantic trade (with one voyage to Rio de Janeiro), then followed several trips to the Far East. From 1891 to 1899 she sailed to North and South Atlantic ports. In 1900 she was sold to the Norwegians and registered in Sandefjord and later Skein. In January, 1907 she was wrecked at Fernandina, Florida.

This oil on canvas portrait of the "Ruby" was painted in 1891 in Liverpool, England by W. H. Yorke. The painting is captioned: "Ruby of Yarmouth, Capt. S. B. Robbins". The background is typical of several paintings by W. H. Yorke, which show various lighthouses on the approach to Liverpool along with a Liverpool pilot schooner.

In this painting the "Ruby's" signal flags, indicating her code to be S. D. H. K., are flying below the Red Ensign, which shows that she was a British vessel (as were all Canadian vessels at that time).

The painting of the ship "Ruby" was donated to the Yarmouth County Museum by Mrs. John Robbins.

Copyright for this painting rests with the Yarmouth County Museum, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada. Catalogue No. S 54.

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