

COL. JOHN BURR. [25]

HE was a son of Nathaniel Burr and grandson of Jehu Burr the first. Of the earlier members of the family none seem so intimately connected with the present generation as does Col. Burr. Old men still point out the limits of his farm, the site of his house, and the old oak under which he bought his lands of the Indian Sugamores; and until 1874, a great-grand-daughter was living, who retained many pleasing and vivid recollections of her grand-sire.

He was born in May, 1673, and held his first public office in the Colony in 1704, during Queen Anne's war, as Commissary of the County.

The Commissary, it is proper to note, was an officer to whom varied and arduous duties were entrusted. He was to take and keep fair accounts of all public charges which should arise in his county by reason of the war, and to provide for the soldiers engaged in the public service. He was also to send orders to the several towns, to provide two pounds of "biskett" for every listed soldier of such town, which was to be made of the country's wheat received for rates; but if there was none of this in the county, then wheat was to be impressed on a warrant from an Assistant or Justice. He was further expected to have such a stock of supplies on hand that in case of a sudden call to arms the public safety should not be endangered thereby.

At the next Court, in May, 1704, he appears as Deputy from Fairfield, and was continued in this office Oct., 1705, May, 1708, (perhaps in the interim, the Journal of the House for this time being lost,) May, 1710, Aug., 1710, May, 1711, June, 1711, May, 1712, Oct., 1713, May, 1713, Oct., 1714, May, 1717, Oct., 1718, May, 1719, Oct., 1719, May, 1720, May, 1721, May, 1723, Oct., 1723, May, 1724.

Oct. 10, 1723, he was elected Speaker of the House, and again May 14, 1724. He was voted 30s. each session for his "good services" as Speaker.

He was appointed Auditor May 9, 1717, May 12, 1720, and May 15, 1725. Justice of the Peace and Quorum, May 10, 1711,

May 13, 1714, May 12, 1715, May 10, 1716, May 9, 1717, May 8, 1718, May 14, 1719, May 12, 1720, May 11, 1721, May 10, 1722, May 9, 1723, May 14, 1724, and May 13, 1725. Assistant May 8, 1729, May 14, 1730, May 15, 1731, May 11, 1732, May 10, 1733, May, 9, 1734, May 8, 1735, May 13, 1736, May 12, 1737, May 11, 1738, May 10, 1739, May 8, 1740, May 14, 1741, and May 13, 1742. Present in Court as Assistant Oct. 9, 1729, May 14, 1730, Oct. 8, 1730, May 13, 1731, Oct. 14, 1731, May 11, 1732, Oct. 12, 1732, May 10, 1733, Oct. 11, 1733, May 9, 1734, Oct. 10, 1734, May 8, 1735, Oct. 8, 1735, May 13, 1736, Oct. 14, 1736, May 12, 1737, Oct. 13, 1737, May 11, 1738, Oct. 11, 1738, May 10, 1739, Oct. 11, 1739, and May 8, 1740.

Judge of County Court, May 12, 1726, May 11, 1727, May 9, 1728, May 8, 1729, May 14, 1730, May 13, 1731, May 11, 1732, May 10, 1733, May 9, 1734, May 8, 1735, May 13, 1736, May 12, 1737, May 11, 1738, May 10, 1739, May 8, 1740, May 11, 1741, May 13, 1742, and May 12, 1743.

Judge of Probate Court, Dec. 29, 1726. (in place of Joseph Wakeman deceased) May 11, 1727, May 9, 1728, May 8, 1729, May 14, 1730, May 13, 1731, May 11, 1732, May 10, 1733, May 9, 1734, May 8, 1735, May 13, 1736, May 12, 1737, May 11, 1738, May 10, 1739, May 8, 1740, May 14, 1741, May 13, 1742, May 12, 1743.

He was several times commissioned in the military service of the Colony. Aug. 4, 1710, he was appointed Major of the forces engaged in the brilliant expedition to Port Royal, Nova Scotia.

Col. Nicholson was appointed Commander-in-chief, and Matthew Allyn, Lieut. Colonel. Connecticut's quota was 300 men. The expedition proved highly successful; with the aid of the British fleet, Port Royal was taken, and named Annapolis, in honor of Queen Anne, and by the third of November, Major Burr and his men reached New London on their return, as is shown by an entry in the records of a meeting of the Governor and Council, held at New London, Nov. 3, 1710, (Col. Rec., Vol. V, p. 189.)

“Whereas Major John Burr hath laid before this board an account of money expended by him for the support of himself and 28 of his company, in their travel from Plymouth to Stonington, amounting to four pound, ten shillings, and two pence: *Ordered*, that Rich. Christophers Esq. pay unto the said Major Burr the aforesaid sum out of the bills of credit in his hands belonging to the Colony, and that he also deliver the said Major Burr out of

said bills, the sum of four pounds more, for the defraying the further charge of himself and his men, to their several dwellings."

It seems that Major Burr and company were entertained by Capt. John Prentts during their stay in New London, as at a meeting of the Council, Nov. 7, it was ordered "that Rich. Christophers Esq. pay unto Capt. John Prentts, the sum of one pound, eighteen shillings, and ten pence, for the entertainment of Major Burr and his company."

In his character as a military man, as well as in his civil capacity, he was several times entrusted with difficult and dangerous commissions for the State, as will appear by the following extracts from the Colonial Records:

NEW HAVEN, Sept. 15, 1720.

"It having been represented to this board, that an Indian living near Danbury called Chickens, has lately received two belts of wampumpeag from certain remote Indians, as is said, to the west of Hudson River, with a message expressing their desire to come and live in this Colony, which said messenger is to be conducted by aforesaid Chickens to the Indians at Potatuck, and Wiantenuck, and Poquannuck, in order to obtain their consent, for their coming and inhabiting among them, and that hereupon several of our frontier towns are under considerable apprehensions of danger from Indians, fearing that the belts have been sent on some bad design :

"*It is resolved*, that Capt. John Sherman of Woodbury, and Major John Burr of Fairfield, taking with them Thomas Minor of Woodbury, or such other interpreter as they shall judge meet, do repair immediately to said Indians at Potatuck and Wiantenuck, and cause the said Chickens, to whom the belts and messenger were sent, to attend them, and to make the best inquiry they can into the truth of said story, and what may be the danger of said message, and as they shall see cause take proper order that the said Indian with the belts, and the principal, or chief of the Potatuck and Wiantenuck Indians, attend the General Court at its next session, to receive such orders as may be useful to direct them in their behavior in relation thereunto ; and that Major Burr return home by way of Danbury, that the inhabitants there, and in those western parts, may be quieted as to their apprehensions of danger from the Indians, if upon inquiry they find there is no just ground for them."

NEW HAVEN, Oct. 11, 1792.

“For conveniency of several members of this court, who live remote, and that they may within the present week have sufficient time to return home, it is ordered that Major Burr, Major Eells, (here follow eleven other names) be a committee, who shall stay after the court is up, and inspect and take care that the several acts of this court be truly and exactly entered on the records.”

Governor and Council at Hartford, Apr. 26, 1725.

“This board having intelligence by a copie of a letter from Philip Scheyler of Albany, that the enemies are all come over the lake, and that it would be prudence to strengthen the frontiers on Connecticut River: *It is considered and resolved*, that notice thereof be forthwith sent to Litchfield, Waterbury, Woodbury, Farmington, Simsbury, and New Milford: and the commission officers of the aforesaid towns are ordered forthwith to make a view of the arms and ammunition of the soldiery in said towns, to see that all the soldiers in their respective companies be forthwith well equipt with their arms and ammunition, according to law, and that they are in perpetual readiness to defend themselves and offend the enemy, wheresoever they shall be called or directed by their officers, or by the Governor and Council, or Committee of War.

“*And it is ordered*, that New Milford, Litchfield, Simsbury, Waterbury, and Woodbury, do forthwith set up a constable’s watch in their respective towns; and the constables of the respective towns aforesaid, are ordered by the advice of the commission officers and selectmen of the said towns, to see such watch or watches faithfully kept by such numbers of men, and in such places as the said townsmen and officers, or the major part of them, shall from time to time agree to and appoint.

“*Resolved*, that a scout of ten effective, able-bodied men be forthwith sent out from Simsbury, to take their departure from Salmon Brook at Simsbury and march across the Wilderness to Housatunnack and Weataug, and inform the sachems of said Indians, that as we look upon them to be our friends, we send them the news that many of the westward Indians are come out against these frontier parts of the country, and also that Scatecook Indians are all drawn off, it is supposed to the enemy; and we send them this news, that they may secure themselves in the best manner they can, from the said enemy: and farther to inform them, that it

being difficult to distinguish them from the enemy, they are forbid to let their men hunt, or travel in the land belonging to their government, on either side of the Housatunnack River, where we must send our scouts to discover the enemy that come down this way.

“And whereas, we have intelligence from Albany, that the enemy are come all out from Canada, before the Boston gentlemen got to Canada, and the Skatacuck Indians are drawn off, and there is discovery of Indians in the wilderness above or north of Litchfield, and New Milford: for the quieting and securing these towns at least for the present, while they get their seed into the ground.

“*It is resolved*, that orders be sent to Major John Burr of Fairfield, from this board, that he forthwith send out his warrants by order of the Governor and Council that sat this day at Hartford, April 26, 1725, to the chief commission officers of the towns of Fairfield, Stratford, and Milford, and cause five effective, good, able-bodied men to be detached or imprest in each of the respective towns, and forthwith to cause the said fifteen men under command of a serjeant by him, said Major appointed, to march to New Milford, and to attend the service of guarding, scouting, watching, and warding, by the direction of the commission officers of the said town of New Milford.”

May 10, 1733, he was appointed one of the judges in a Court of Chancery, which had full power “to hear and determine accounts in equity, and award execution thereon, in all causes and controversies between the possessors of the bills of the New London Society, and the mortgagers, as also between the mortgagers themselves, their officers, committees, debtors, or receivers, respecting said bills, or the doings of said society, upon any suit between the parties.”

The student of early Connecticut history will recognize this New London Society as one of the most barefaced frauds ever organized. Ostensibly a sort of banking, and general merchandise concern, it issued indented bills for different amounts, payable in silver, or bills of credit of the Connecticut, or neighboring governments, it being given out that the company had a paid-in capital sufficient to meet them when due. The bills became a circulating medium, and passed into the hands of all classes; presently it was discovered that the only assets of the company were mortgages on

certain wild lands owned by the stockholders : a rush on the bank ensued, and the bills became worthless.

As was natural a great clamor against the Company then arose, and criminations, and recriminations, suits, charges and counter charges startled the staid society of the day with revelations of iniquity, hitherto undreamed of.

In this emergency the General Court constituted the above Court of Chancery, with power to try, not only suits between the victimized public and the stockholders, but between the stockholders themselves, who had by this time fallen into a fierce altercation over the distribution of the spoils. There were other public services performed by Col. Burr, not so important as the above, but worthy of mention. At the General Assembly May 9, 1717, with Peter Burr, Samuel Eels, Johnathan Law Esqrs. and Major John Clark, he was appointed "to return the thanks of this Assembly to the Rev. Mr. Timothy Cutlar, for the great pains he took in the sermon he preached yesterday, and to desire a copy that the same may be printed."

May 12, 1720, he was one of a committee "to deliver into the treasurer's hands the sum of £1320 2s. 6d. being a part of the dead bills brought in by the rate of 1718, taking his receipt for the same." May 11, 1721. "Ordered by this Court, that a patent be granted to the Hon. Nathan Gold, Esqr., Peter Burr, Esqr., Major John Burr, Capt. Joseph Wakeman, Capt. Moses Dimon and Lieut. Jonathan Sturgess, all of Fairfield, and their heirs at common law, to hold a grant of 600 acres of land, made to the town of Fairfield, by the General Assembly at Hartford in 1672, for the maintenance and support of a grammar school to be kept there, and for no other use whatsoever." May 14, 1731, appointed with Mr. Joseph Whiting to return the thanks of the Assembly to the Rev. Mr. Whittlesey, "for the sermon he preached yesterday, and to desire a copy, etc." In 1732, he was on a committee to let out £3,000 of the bills of credit, "to such persons, freeholders in the Colony, as shall mortgage in lands, double in value to the sum said mortgager shall borrow." This was quite a delicate task, as the committee were to be "very careful and inform themselves well, that the title to said land is clear, and that it is at least double the value of the mortgage, and free from encumbrance." Oct. 11, 1733, a difficulty in the town of Lebanon concerning highways was reported, and he was appointed on a committee with Matthew Allen and James Wadsworth, to hear and report on the same. Oct.

13, 1737, with Edward Lewis, and Ebenezer Silliman he was appointed to sell rights of western lands at the court house in Fairfield.

Col. Burr was probably one of the largest land holders in the State.

May 12, 1720, "the Assembly gave, granted, bargained, sold, and confirmed to Roger Wolcott Esq. of Windsor, Major John Burr of Fairfield, John Riggs of Derby, Samuel Gunn, and George Clark the third of that name, both of Milford, John Stone of Stanford, Ebenezer Fitch of Windsor aforesaid, and Peter Pratt of Hartford, being all of this Colony, one certain piece, or parcel of land bounded south on Mansfield bounds as stated in the patent to that town dated October the 20th, 1703, west upon Wilmamantick River, north upon Stafford, east upon Ashford, by a line drawn from Ashford nine mile and half tree, standing in Mansfield line, southerly of a house set up by Obadiah Abbey, then to run from that tree north, nine degrees easterly to Stafford bounds," the whole parcel being in estimation about 16,000 acres, be it more or less, it being in consideration of the sum of five hundred and ten pounds in current money, by instruments well executed in the law, secured to be paid to the publick treasury of this Colony by said grantees; to have and to hold the same to them, in equal parts or proportions, saving all grants by this assembly already made of said lands, and regularly laid out and returned; and this assembly further order and enact, that a patent at the request of said grantees under the seal of this Colony, signed by the Governor and Secretary, be made of the aforesaid land to the said Roger Wolcott, John Burr, John Riggs, Samuel Gunn, George Clark, John Stone, Ebenezer Fitch, and Peter Pratt for the firm holding the premises to them, and their heirs forever." Besides this grant he had a large farm surrounding his residence (which stood on what is now Fairfield Avenue in the City of Bridgeport) which he bought of the Indian Sagamores, also a "long lot,"* and several other large grants from the town of Fairfield; to this should be added a large inheritance from his father.

Col. Burr was one of the principal founders of the old North

* His long lot was the 58th counting west from the Stratford line; his father's the 49th having been laid out first. The former lay between Cornelius Hull's and Henry Rowlands, and was 39 rods, 12 links in width; the latter between John Banks and Obadiah Gilbert, and was 34 rods, 5 links in width. The long lots were granted by the town, and were of uniform length, running back through the wilderness to the Danbury line, a distance of about 14 miles, and in amount were laid out in direct ratio to the taxes paid by the grantee.

Church of Stratfield, (now the First Congregational of Bridgeport, Rev. Charles Ray Palmer, Pastor.)

He was also a principal subscriber at the organization of the St. John's Episcopal church, Bridgeport, in 1748. He died in Dec. 1750, and was buried probably, in the Old Stratfield burying ground.

His estate was valued at 15,288 pounds, an immense sum in those days. A copy of his will is appended.

April 26th, 1750, Item. My will is that as I have agreed to give my loving wife Elizabeth, by a marriage covenant dated 29th March, 1727, it shall be performed, I having already paid two hundred pounds mentioned in said covenant (according to my said wife's directions) to her daughter Mary, the remaining part of the sum in bills of credit mentioned therein. My will is, that my executor shall pay to my said wife, the sum of thirteen hundred pounds in bills of credit of the old tenor or equivalent in new tenor, to make up the principal and full of the money, and my will farther is, that my said wife shall have the use of my dwelling house where I now live, and the whole of the orchard adjoining, during the time she remains my widow, and also liberty to get firewood for her own use in my chestnut hill lot, during said term, and also provisions for half a year.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my loving daughter Abigail Hubbell the sum of ten pounds in bills of credit of the old tenor, with what I have already given her, is to be her full share of my estate.

Item. I give and bequeath to my loving daughter Mary Smedly, the sum of ten pounds old tenor, which with what I have already given her is her portion.

Item. I give and bequeath to my grandson Ebenezer Dimon, the son of my said daughter Mary, the sum of one hundred pounds in bills of credit old tenor, or equivalent thereto, to be paid him when he shall arrive at the age of twenty-one years.

Item. I will and bequeath to my grandson, William Dimon the sum of fifty pounds, in bills of credit, old tenor, or equivalent thereto, to be paid him when he shall arrive at the age of twenty-one years.

Item. I will and bequeath to my grandson David Dimon the sum of fifty pounds, in like currency, or equivalent thereto, to be paid him when he arrive at the age of twenty-one years.

Item. I will and bequeath to my beloved son John Burr and to his heirs and assigns forever, the value of twelve hundred and fifty-eight pounds in bills of credit old tenor, to make him equal to what I have already given to my son William, and also the sum of four hundred pounds more in like currency, or the value thereof, on account of his being my eldest son.

Item. All the remainder of my estate both real and personal, of what kind so ever, not before mentioned in this will. I will, devise, and bequeath to my beloved sons John Burr and William Burr, and their heirs and assigns forever in equal portion, on condition that they keep and maintain my son

Joseph Burr, during his natural life, with good and sufficient clothing, meat, drink, washing, and lodging and other necessaries.

Finally. I do hereby constitute and appoint my well beloved sons, John Burr and William Burr, executors of this my last will and testament, hereby revoking all former wills by me made. In witness whereof I set my hand and seal.

JOHN BURR.

In presence of

LYMAN HALL,
RICHARD HUBBELL,
BENJ'N. HUBBELL, Junr. }

Fac-simile of Autograph:

John Burr
1727