

Dublin Historical Society

Dublin, New Hampshire 03444

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Solomon Piper

A Success Story with Maritime Digressions

Near the entrance to the Peabody Museum in Salem, Mass., there is a life-size carved wooden bust of a man dressed in the ordinary business clothes of the middle of the last century. It is nothing like our notion of a ship's figurehead – a full-length, full-blown, larger-than-life lady pointing the way for vessels named *Freedom* or *Columbia*. It is, nevertheless, the figurehead of a bark built in 1845, and while scarcely a portrait, is obviously intended to represent Solomon Piper, the man for whom the vessel was named.

Solomon Piper grew up in Dublin and spent most of his life in Boston. Who was he, and why was a Maine-built vessel named after him?

EARLY DAYS IN DUBLIN

Dublin has never been a place for making fortunes. Of the many Dublin lads who left in search of one, probably none succeeded so well as Solomon Piper. His life was the embodiment of the 19th century version of the American dream: a poor small-town boy, with no advantages and little education, gets rich through initiative and hard work.

His 77 years spanned the beginnings of the young republic. He was born in 1789, the year the Constitution was ratified and George Washington became President. He died in 1866, a year after the assassination of Lincoln and the end of the Civil War.

His father, also Solomon, had been one of the Acton minutemen at the Concord bridge in 1775 and subse-

quently served throughout the Revolutionary War. After the war, he moved to Temple, N.H., where his first child, the Solomon of this article, was born. In 1794, the family moved to the southeast corner of Dublin, and built the house on Valley Road in which William Pickford now lives.

Young Solomon's schooling was limited and brief. Speaking at the Dublin Centennial in 1852, he described the Schools of his youth:

"Our schools were then kept but a small portion of the year. The schoolhouses were small, inconvenient and uncomfortable. Old hats were the common substitutes for broken panes of glass; and it was not unusual, on a cold morning, for a detachment of the larger boys to be sent into the adjacent fields to collect decayed stumps to replenish the fire; . . ."

NOTICE OF MEETING

The Society's annual **Pot Luck Supper** will be held in the Vestry of the Community Church on Friday, February 19 at 6 p.m.
Bring a pot and try your luck!

Michael Walsh, Dublin resident and Manager of Pisgah State Park, will give a slide lecture entitled "Rails and Trails", about using old railroad rights-of-way as hiking trails – a topic currently in the news.

He attempted to extend his education by doing chores for the Rev. Laban Ainsworth in Jaffrey in return for tuition, but that experiment lasted only three weeks. Later, he spent six weeks as a student at the Academy in New Ipswich, which apparently qualified him as a teacher. He taught for one term in Fitzwilliam.

A BEGINNING IN BOSTON

In the summer of 1810, shortly before his twenty-first birthday, he walked to Boston with everything he owned on his back. There he found a job with one Benjamin Fessenden, who ran a wood wharf on the Back Channel, about where South Station is now. Solomon became Fessenden's partner in 1815 and sole proprietor on Fessenden's death in 1828.

Solomon thus became a 'wood wharfinger', as he described himself in deeds, and so remained for the rest of his life. 'Wood' meant firewood, rather than lumber, and coal was later added to the line. A nephew, John Ellery Piper, joined him in the business in 1854, but Solomon still owned the wharf at his death.

THE BARK SOLOMON PIPER

In 1845, then, Solomon Piper was an established merchant in Boston, bringing in wood by ship to his wharf for resale. At that period Maine was the primary source of wood, and Bangor the main port of shipment.

Down the Penobscot River from Bangor, near where the river joins Penobscot Bay, lies the town of Searsport. Known as a cradle of sea-captains, it was also for many years a cradle of ships. Among those launched there in 1845, the largest was a bark¹, christened *Solomon Piper*, and bearing under her bowsprit the figurehead with which this article began.

Why she was named *Solomon Piper* must remain a matter of conjecture. Her principal owner was Jeremiah Merithew, who had been building ships in Searsport since 1817, but there were other investors, of whom Solomon Piper may conceivably have been one. What seems more probable is that Solomon was a good enough customer of Merithew's to be worth

cultivating. Merithew had a fleet of schooners, and it seems probable that one or more of these delivered wood to the Piper wharf in Boston.

The *Solomon Piper* was 94 feet long, 24 broad, drew ten feet and was rated at 196 tons.² Her first skipper was Jeremiah Merithew's son, Joseph. Later, under another captain, she made a voyage to San Francisco and back, traversing the Straits of Magellan in both directions without charts, a considerable feat of seamanship for that or any day. This voyage was probably around 1850, when every available vessel was pressed into service for the California gold rush. It is odd to think of Solomon Piper's name and effigy threading the Straits of Magellan, thereby connecting Dublin with Tierra del Fuego.

Little else is recorded of the bark's career, which ended when she was wrecked on Cape Cod in 1861. Since her figurehead survived, we may hope that her crew did, too.

FAMILY INTERESTS

In 1817, Solomon married Jerusha Hollis of Boston, who bore him two daughters, Sarah and Susan. Jerusha died in 1851, and the following year, at the age of 63, he married Mary Elizabeth Taggard.³ Their son, William Taggard Piper, was born in 1853. A friend, the Rev. William Tilden, in a memoir written after Solomon's death, thus describes his family life:

"His family affections were warm and strong. His children and grandchildren were very dear to him. It was in the midst of home enjoyments that the sunny side of his nature shone out, and you saw the tender affection hidden under an exterior, which to the outside world seemed rough and unimpressible."



Figurehead of the bark, *Solomon Piper*
Courtesy of the Peabody and Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

¹ A bark was a three-masted vessel with only fore-and-aft sails on the aftermost, or mizzen, mast. This distinguished it from a ship, which had square sails on all three masts.

² Tonnage had nothing to do with a vessel's weight or displacement. It was supposed to be a measure of her cargo-carrying capacity, and was arrived at by a formula.

³ Mary Elizabeth Taggard's brother, Bartholomew, became her stepson-in-law, when he married Solomon's daughter, Susan, in 1856.

Affection for his descendants was matched by pride in ancestry. He became a member of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, and in 1849 published a pamphlet of Piper genealogy, which he appears to have researched and written himself.

THE MIDAS TOUCH

In 1836, Solomon acquired a second business interest, becoming a director of the newly-founded Freeman's Bank. He became President in 1843 and held that post until his death. The bank prospered, its stated capital rising from \$150,000 in 1844 to \$400,000 in 1855. At the time of Solomon's death, a number of Dubliners – Allisons, Fiskes, Gowings and others – were shareholders in the Freeman's Bank. They appear to have done very well.

So did Solomon. In 1846 his name appears along with Lowells and Cabots and Quincys in a published list of Boston men "credibly reported to be worth one hundred thousand dollars." That was a tidy sum for the time, equivalent to several million today.

In the entry on himself in the Piper genealogy of 1849, he set down his formula for success:

"Whatever of worldly prosperity may have fallen to his lot is but the natural result, under Providence, of patient, persevering industry, guided by an ordinary share of prudence and common sense. No golden prospect of acquiring sudden wealth by speculation was ever able to tempt him from the 'even tenor of his way,' deeming a slow but less uncertain prospect of gain more conducive to rational and permanent happiness."

As self-description, this is quite revealing – perhaps more so than he intended – of the man and his character. He does not appear to have suffered from self-doubt.

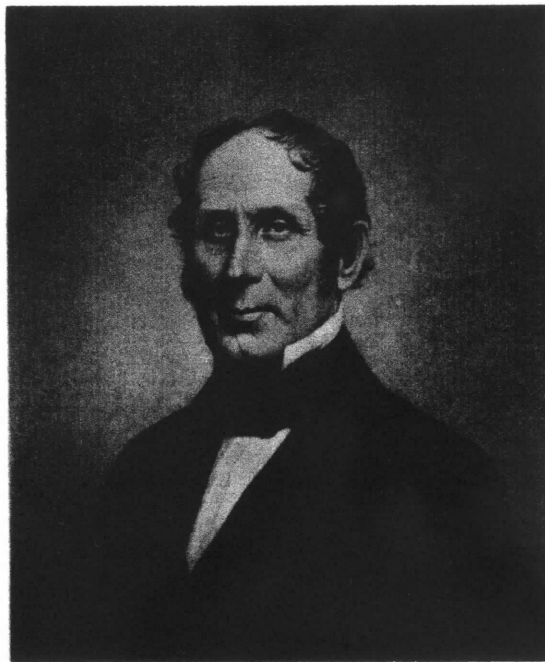
DUBLIN LOYALTIES

Unlike many self-made men, Solomon did not run from his roots. Throughout his life he remained loyal to Dublin and to the extended Piper family that remained there.

After his first wife's death, he acquired what is now the General Store as a summer house, thus becoming Dublin's first summer resident. He spent vacations there until the year he died, when he sold the property

to Washington Proctor, his nephew by marriage, who ran a blacksmith's shop nearby.

He was, in addition, a very generous benefactor of the Dublin Unitarian Church. His gift of an organ on the opening of the present meetinghouse in 1853 was only one of many gifts in cash and kind. Here is the Rev. Mr. Tilden again:



Solomon Piper

From an engraving in the Dublin Historical Society.
Sharron Monaghan photo

"He loved the place of his boyhood, and delighted in recalling the friends and incidents of his early life. It was the privilege of the writer of this notice to spend a brief season with him amid these early scenes, and to know something of the fondness with which he cherished old memories and old friends."

AMBITION ACHIEVED

He died quite suddenly in his 78th year, apparently of heart failure, leaving his widow and nine-year-old son. Fifty-six years after arriving from Dublin on foot, he was carried to Mount

Auburn cemetery to lie among the proper Bostonians.

In his memorial essay, written soon after Solomon's death (and before good manners had parted company with truth), the Rev. William Tilden sums up the sort of man Solomon was:

"Mr. Piper had strong points of character. He was clear headed. What he saw, he saw with great distinctness. He had energy and force of character. He was sagacious, cautious, no speculator, but of great persistency in following out his well-matured plans. His opinions once deliberately formed, were not easily changed; and if his strong will sometimes ran into wilfulness, and his persistency of purpose into obstinacy, it was only what often happens to an impulsive nature. He was quick, irascible, impatient of opposition, blunt, and often harsh to those about him."

Mr. Tilden does, however, go on to describe, in a passage previously quoted, Solomon's softer side as a family man, and to tell of his generosity to the poor. He also attended to his civic obligations, serving on the Boston Common Council and for three sessions as a Representative to the General Court.

All in all, Solomon Piper seems to have been a rather admirable specimen of the self-made man – tough and unpolished but also upright, civic-minded and generous; proud of achieving riches, but never ashamed of his poor beginnings. In his Will, in which he was able to provide handsomely for his widow and children,

only two objects are singled out for special bequests. One was the "pitcher and salver presented to me by the Freemans Bank", which he left to his son. The other, left to his daughters, was "the view of the Grand Monadnock painted for me by Fisher." These, it seems, were the things he treasured.

EPILOGUE

Solomon's only son, William Taggard Piper, was the child of his father's old age and was only nine when Solomon died. He graduated from Harvard in the Class of 1874 with a number of academic distinctions, including membership in Phi Beta Kappa. Thereafter he went abroad for travel and further study at Trinity College, Cambridge, and the University of Leipzig.

On his return, he married and built a house on Brattle Street in Cambridge, where he lived until his death in 1911. Comfortably housed and married, he returned to Harvard as a graduate student, earning a Ph.D. in 1883.

For all his academic honors and credentials, William never taught. Indeed, he never had a paying job at all, but spent his life in good works, civic and charitable, in Cambridge and Boston. The pattern was a familiar one

in the last century – hardscrabble farmer begets successful business man who begets a gentleman of leisure.

In 1879, William Piper married Anne Palfrey Bridge, daughter of the Rev. W. F. Bridge, minister of the Dublin Unitarian Church, first as assistant and later as successor to the Rev. Levi Leonard, from 1855 to 1865. So although William's manner of living was very different from that of his carpenter uncles and blacksmith cousins, the Dublin connection did not altogether die.

—J.W. Harris

I am grateful to William Bauhan for telling me about the figurehead and to the librarians and staff at the Boston Athenaeum, the Boston Public Library, the Massachusetts Archives, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the New England Historic Genealogical Society, the Peabody and Essex Museum (Salem, Mass.) and the Penobscot Marine Museum (Searsport, Maine) for help in research.

An annotated version of this article is in the archives of the Dublin Historical Society.

—J.W. H.

NEWS FROM THE ARCHIVES

Progress on the Archives Building

Slow but steady progress continues on the projected archives building behind the Town Hall. The ground plan has recently been re-oriented (north-south, instead of east-west) in order not to impinge on the parking area.

Dick Hammond is most generously contributing the plans and specifications, which we hope to put out for bids this month.

Recent Accessions

It is a pleasure to report recent gifts to the Society's archives from a number of generous donors.

Jessie Hale has added a number of items to her previous gift of records and photographs of the Joseph Lindon Smith family. Papers of the late Corinna Smith will go to the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe, where the bulk of her papers already are. Other Smith family material, which is to remain in Dublin, has now been processed and catalogued.

We are grateful to Bernice Hyman for a magnificent photograph of the Horace Hamilton house, which

will be the cover picture on the 1992 Town report. Alexander Jackson has given us a collection of slides taken by his late mother, Katherine Mitchell Jackson, as well as some papers relating to Stonewall Farm. Photographs of the Maurice Tuttle family, c. 1900, have come from Sherwood D. Tuttle of Ft. Thomas, Ky.

The New Hampshire Historical Society has kindly turned over to us the orderly book, 1822-1848, of the 4th Infantry Company, 12th Regiment of the New Hampshire Militia. This was a Dublin militia company, whose other records, dating from 1808 to 1855, we already had.

Other gifts have been gratefully received from Nancy Campbell, George Foote and George Williams.

CREDITS

This issue of the Dublin Historical Society Newsletter has been prepared and edited by John W. Harris.

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