

John Alden (sailor)

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Captain **John Alden, Jr.** (ca. 1626 or 1627 – March 25, 1702 [O.S. March 14, 1701]^[1]^[Note 1]) was a 17th-century American soldier and sailor. He was a well-known public figure in his time but is now chiefly remembered as a survivor of the Salem witch trials, of which he wrote a much quoted account.

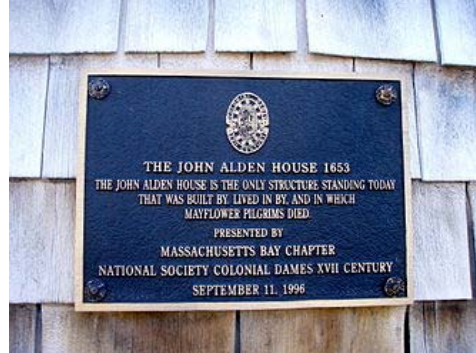
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Personal life

John Alden, Jr. was the son of John Alden, Sr. and Priscilla Alden (née Mullins), who settled in Plymouth Colony (present-day Plymouth, Massachusetts) in 1620, arriving on the Pilgrim ship *Mayflower*. He was born in Plymouth in about 1626 or 1627. He and his older sister Elizabeth are listed in the records of the division of cattle among the residents of Plymouth, which occurred on June 1, 1627 [O.S. May 22, 1627].^[2]

John Alden, Jr.



Born	ca. 1626/1627 (before June 1, 1627 [O.S. May 22, 1627]) Plymouth Colony
Died	March 25, 1702 [O.S. March 14, 1701] (aged 75) Province of Massachusetts Bay
Residence	Salem, Massachusetts Boston, Massachusetts
Nationality	English
Occupation	Shipmaster, merchant
Known for	Written account of the Salem witch trials
Spouse(s)	Elizabeth Phillips Everill
Children	14
Parent(s)	John Alden Priscilla Alden (née Mullins)

He was a sea captain, a merchant in Boston, and a charter member of Rev. Samuel Willard's Old South Meeting House and Third Church in Boston, and held a military command during King William's War and was involved in the Naval battle off St. John (1691). He married Elizabeth Phillips Everill in 1660 and they had fourteen children.

Alden, Jr. died on March 25, 1702 [O.S. March 14, 1701] in what was then the Province of Massachusetts Bay. His gravestone reads "Here lyeth y^e body of John Alden Senio^r aged 75 years deceased March y^e 14 170¹/₂"^[3] ("Senio^r" in this context indicates that he was himself father of a third John Alden). The stone is preserved at the portico of the present Old South Church in Boston after having been discovered during excavations where it had been dumped after the removal of the graves.

Salem witch trials

In addition to the troubles at Salem, Massachusetts, John Alden, Jr. was involved in a number of scandals and controversies, which featured heavily in his trial for witchcraft. The only one to bring much modern attention, however, occurred in Salem when he stopped there on his return home from Quebec, where he had gone in February 1692 to ransom British prisoners captured in the Candlemas attack on York, Maine. He was subsequently accused of witchcraft during the Salem witch trials in May 1692. He had been inclined not to make much of the matter, but was prevailed upon by some friends and broke out of jail. He escaped to Duxbury, where he stayed with friends until, as he later said, "the public had reclaimed the use of its reason".^[4] When he returned, he was cleared by proclamation. The authorities do not seem to have searched for him with any diligence; one of the judges, Samuel Sewall, an old friend, is known to have expressed doubts about his guilt, and attended a prayer service at Alden's house in the hope of receiving guidance.^[5]

Narrative

His vivid first-hand narrative of the witchcraft trials was later published by Robert Calef in *More Wonders of the Invisible World*. Alden recounts how he appealed to his friend Bartholomew Gedney, one of the judges, to clear his character; Gedney replied coldly that he had always looked on Alden as an honest man, but now must alter his opinion.^[6] Alden said that he hoped in time to change Gedney's opinion again: unlike

another socially prominent eyewitness, Nathaniel Cary, he never cast doubt on the judges' integrity, although he referred to the afflicted girls with contempt as "juggling wenches". As he noted, much of their alleged evidence against him — such as claims that he sold whiskey to the Indians and had Indian wives and children — was simply gossip which they had presumably picked up from their parents.

Fiction

John Alden is played by Shane West (as Captain John Alden) in the 2014 TV series *Salem*.

Notes

1. His gravestone, which used the Julian calendar and the Annunciation Style of enumerating years with dual dating, recorded his death as having occurred on March 14, 1701/2: "Here lyeth y^e body of John Alden Senio^r aged 75 years deceased March y^e 14 170¹/₂". See also Old Style and New Style dates.

References

Endnotes

1. Date on gravestone: See <http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~dahling/aldenj.htm>
2. Pulsifer, David; Shurtleff, Nathaniel Bradstreet, eds. (1861). "Division of Cattle" (<http://archive.org/stream/cu31924082451455#page/n25/mode/1up/search/%22Joh.+Alden%22>). *Deeds, &c., 1620–1651; Book of Indian Records for Their Lands*. Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England. Vol. 12. Boston, Massachusetts: William White. p. 10. Retrieved 17 March 2014.
3. Bowman, George Ernest (1904). "Captain John Alden's Will and Inventory and the Account of His Executors" (<http://archive.org/stream/mayflowerdescendv6mass#page/n411/mode/2up/search/%22John+Alden%22>). *The Mayflower Descendant* (Boston, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants). Vol. VI (4): 193. Retrieved 17 March 2014.
4. Starkey, Marion L. *The Devil in Massachusetts* 1949 Doubleday Edition p.180
5. Francis, Richard *Judge Sewell's Apology: The Salem Witch Trials and the Formation of a Conscience*. Harper Perennial 2006 p.118
6. Starkey, p. 145

Texts

- Canadian Biography - John Alden (http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/alden_john_2E.html)
- A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England. James Savage, Boston MA: Little Brown & Co., 1860. v. 1
- Upham, Charles (1980). Salem Witchcraft: Volume II. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co..
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