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Was English or Scottish

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WHAT'S NEW?

NH Founder David Thompson Was English or Scottish



READER MAILBAG
October 2012

Dear SeacoastNH.com,

I was just reading your blog on him [David Thompson] and was curious -- why do you call him a Scot? When I research the internet, it shows him born in England. Also, what is the private source that claims he worked for Ferdinando Gorges? Have you seen a primary source to verify this? Also, the Internet shows that his son was also born in England, but you say he was born in New England? i'm curious about your sources. Thanks. -- *Kathleen Michael* (See our response below)

Kathleen,

I'm curious about your sources too. Wikipedia? The best place to start would be Google Books. It's a stupendous resource of millions of books.

It's been a long time since I really dug into the sources for David Thompson (or Thomson). That research was done years ago. The early documents I read all called him a "Scott" though they could certainly be wrong. A quick search just now brought me to [the online research of GC Fraser](#) with whom I corresponded while putting this Web site together back in the late 1990s.

A Scottish birth is attributed in the local histories of Portsmouth and Rye and that info was carried on by historians since then, but admittedly no local historian I know has traveled to Europe to examine early documents.

Nathaniel Adams (founder of the Portsmouth Athenaeum) in the first history of Portsmouth published in 1825, eg, refers to David Thompson as "a Scotchman" (Page 2) as do many early histories including Orcutt's history of Dorchester, MA (page 49). I'm pretty sure this reference comes right from Pilgrim Father Edward Winslow who noted that Myles Standish visited Thompson at Pannway in New Hampshire in 1623 and calls in search of food. Winslow calls Thompson a "Scotchman" in his journal. This reference appears to have been widely picked distributed and I spotted a couple dozen references to Thompsom in history texts online as either a Scotchman, a Scottsman, or a Scott.

I have two printed biographies here of Thomson that I believe also list Scotland, but the genealogical group Piscataqua Pioneers lists him as hailing from Devon, England, which certainly makes sense. (They also list his son John as having been born in Massachusetts after the Thompson's arrived in the New World.) I see that a note in Wikipedia also suggests that originally historians believed Thompson was from Scotland, but it is now thought that he was born in Plymouth, England. Certainly could be true, but I wouldn't rely on Wikipedia as your final source. It's great for getting started in your research. I recently wrote a few history books for young readers and my editor specifically noted that no references to Wikipedia were allowed. The Internet, like a lot of early historians, is as often wrong as right. And the Internet is a big place.

I'm hoping to begin a book on the history of Portsmouth soon and, if it flies, I'll have an entire year to dig into the latest data on the lives of the original European explorers here. I will certainly give Mr. Thompson special attention. History is a moving target and one has to keep running to catch the latest facts.

HERE'S A LETTER TO MY SITE FROM MS FRASER
It originally appeared on SeacoastNH in 2005

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MORE ON NH'S FOUNDER DAVID THOMPSON

Close but no cigar with [the Early Settler story](#). David Thomson was a Scotsman according to all who knew him, a traveler and scholar. There is NO evidence he ever worked for Gorges but he definitely worked with him. Thomson was granted the Piscataqua 6,000 acres plus an island by the Council for New England, headed by the king's cousin, Ludvick Stuart as President and Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel. (The Indenture documenting this grant makes it clear the grant was his - though he took on business partners to help finance the undertaking.)

David was also named the acting Governor of Massachusetts and attorney on behalf of the Council for New England under the 1622 Massachusetts grant given to Robert Gorges, son of Ferdinando. In this grant, which I located at the Public Record's Office outside of London, Thomson is styled Mr. David Thompson, Gent. - In a letter Thomson wrote to Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel from New England, David signs his name Thomson - with the Scottish spelling.

Documents found in Scotland and England suggest that the real David Thomson is from Corstorphine, Scotland - outside of Edinburgh. His father was Rev. Richard Thomson, a widower who married Agnes (Foulis) Hepburn. His nephew (by marriage) David Foulis was ambassador to England while Queen Elizabeth lived and later served the young Prince Henry who died at age 16. Thomas Hamilton, who was the King's personal attorney married Agnes' niece. Hamilton also served as the Sec'y of State to Scotland under the Scottish King James at the time David Thomson was granted the 6,000 acres Piscataqua(NH) grant. David's stepbrother, Adam Hepburn served as the law clerk to Hamilton in when he was Sec'y of State.

King James favored David's father, Rev. Richard Thomson with richly endowed assignment, possibly at the request of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots based on a letter written shortly before her beheading by her cousin, Queen Elizabeth. The Thomson genealogy suggests that David was actually distantly related to the King through Alexander, the Earl of Mar one of the most famous men in Scotland during the 15th century.

The Thomsons of Corstorphine lived near their close relatives the Forresters of Corstorphine who had married into the Sinclair family of Freemasonic and Rosslyn Chapel fame. (One of David's great, great, great etc. grandmother's was a Sinclair) Based on his seal, David may also have been involved with early Freemasonry or some other secret society. He attended the University of Edinburgh in 1602 as a Philosophy major - and may also dabbled in alchemy as well as running an apothecary business in Plymouth, England shortly after he married.

David Thomson was a widely traveled, well educated, and highly favored adventurer and colonizer. His widow, Amias Cole Thomson, married his close friend and fellow colonizer Samuel Maverick who later served as a Royal Commissioner to New England under King Charles II.

-- Genevieve Cora Fraser

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