

THE CAPEN FAMILY

Descendants of
BERNARD CAPEN
of Dorchester, Mass.



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The origin of the name CAPEN and the early history of the family is shrouded in mystery. Several spellings of the name are found in England; but nothing definite is known of the original spelling or meaning of the name.

Bernard¹ Capen was the eldest of the name who came to America. He came, probably from Dorchester, in old England, as appears from the will of his son James² who died in England before the family came to America. The exact date of his arrival in this country is not known. His wife, Joan, and three children are said to have come with him. Some of the other children may have preceded him and one at least must have come later. He is named among the first settlers of Dorchester, Mass.* He was granted land in Dorchester 5 Aug. 1638 which is the date of the first appearance of his name on the records of Dorchester. He died there 8 d. 9 mo. 1638 aged 76, which makes his birth about 1562. He built a house, which is still in existence (1928) and considered by many the oldest house in New England. The original house, which was built probably in 1638, had a large addition made to it about a hundred years later and for upwards of three hundred years stood on the original site. In 1909 it was moved to Milton and set up on a hill in what is much like its original setting.

His grave is in the old "North Burying Ground" in Dorchester and the gravestone is said to have the oldest date of any known gravestone in New England. The original stone, which is now preserved, although in many pieces, in the rooms of the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston, has this inscription: "Body of

*All towns mentioned are in Massachusetts unless otherwise designated.

*See page 12 behind
for details*

| — pen aged | — ied ye | — er 1638 | — Joan | — aged |.”
 The stone in the “North Burying Ground,” which replaces
 the original one reads: “Here | lies the Bodies of | Mr.
 Barnard Capen | & Mrs. Joan Capen his | wife. He died
 Nov. 8 | 1638 aged 76 years | & she died March | 26
 1653 | aged 75 years |.” His given name was often
 written, as on his gravestone, and doubtlessly pronounced
 Barnard.

The next oldest stones in the “North Burying Ground”
 are for children of Thomas Clarke of Dorchester, Abel
 who died in 1644 and Submit who died in 1648. On the
 little stone for Submit are the words: “Submit submitted.”
 In 1914 a stone was unearthed in this graveyard marked
 “N. C. 1682” and placed in the “Capen Row.” If it was
 a stone for a Capen, it must have been for Nathaniel
 Capen (John,² John,² Bernard¹). This Nathaniel Capen
 was born 1677 and died 1682. No other known N. Capen
 was born or died in 1682. There are over forty Capen
 graves in the “Capen Row.”

An extract of Bernard Capen's will, which is on file in
 Suffolk Co. reads: “Octo 9th 1638. Sonne John five acres
 of land out of my great lott, next adjoining to his lott ye
 which he is to possess immediately after my decease wch
 is to fulfill a promise made at his marriage. To wife all
 such lands and goods as I now possess during her life.
 And when it shall appear her dayes drawe to an end that
 she wth the rest of my friends whom I put in trust, to
 divide theis lands and goods to my children equally. If
 she change her name by marriage with another man then
 she shall wth the aduise of those of my friends give porcons
 equally to my children. Now theis my friends wch I put in
 trust to see theis things done according to my will are
 Mr. Minit the elder, my brother Dyer & William Sumner.”

“George Dyer and Will Sumner deposed before County
 Court 19 November 1652 that this was the last will of
 Bernard Capen.

Edwd Rawson, Record.”

"John Capen deposed before ye County Court 19 November 1652 that the tyme his ffather made the will was in the yere 1638

per Edwd Rawson Recd."

1. BERNARD¹ CAPEN married in England Joan Purchase, daughter of Oliver Purchase, in 1596 on Munday of Whitsun week. The place of marriage has not been found. Whitsun (Whitsunday) is the fiftieth day after Easter, which makes the date of marriage about the last of May or first of June 1596. Joan, the wife, died in Dorchester 26 March 1653 aged 75 years.

Children, probably all born in England, probably were:

2. BERNARD² Capen, perhaps the one called "Barnard the Younger," who witnessed the will of James.²
- +2. i. JAMES² Capen, d. Dorchester, Eng., 8 Sept. 1628.
ii. RUTH² Capen, b. 7 Aug. 1600.
3. iii. SARAHNA² Capen, b. 11 April 1602; d. 13 Nov. 1666; m. (1) in Dorchester, Eng., 14 April 1624 William Rockwell, b. Eng., 1591, d. Windsor, Conn., 15 May 1640; m. (2) 29 May 1645 Matthew Grant, b. Eng. 27 Oct. 1601; d. Windsor, Conn., 16 Dec. 1681.
4. iv. DOROTHY² Capen, b. about 1608; d. 18 Sept. 1675; m. in Dorchester, Eng., 17 Jan. 1629 Nicholas Upsall, d. Dorchester 20 August 1666, aged about 70 years. Their graves are in "Copp's Hill," Boston. Dorothy Upsall, in her will, mentions brother John Capen and sisters Elizabeth Swift and Honor Hannum.
- +5. v. JOHN² Capen, b. Eng., 26 Jan. 1612|8; m. (1) Redigon Clapp; m. (2) Mary Bass. He mentions, in a letter, sister Upsall and sister Swift.
- vi. ELIZABETH² Capen, m. in Dorchester, Eng., 18 Oct. 1634 Thomas Swift. She d. 26 Jan. 1677|8. He d. May 1675. In his will he calls John Capen, brother-in-law. His gravestone is the most imposing in the "Capen Row."
- vii. HONOR² Capen, m. William Hannum of Dorchester, and later of Windsor, Conn., and Northampton. He d. Northampton 1 June 1677, she d. Westfield 1680.

viii. HANNAH^d Capen, m. Dorchester, Eng., 4 Aug. 1829
Robert Gifford. Her marriage is recorded, in the Register of Holy Trinity Church, Dorchester, Eng., the same year as that of Dorothy Capen to Nicholas Upsall.

The following record was found on a leaf of an old New Testament, printed, in London 1615, by Robert Barker. A corner of the page is lost. In it are written names of "John Capen his book 1658," "John Capen 1701," "Preserved Capen."

"Barnard Capen maryed Joan ye dafter of Oliver Purchis ye year of or Lord 1596 on Munday of Whitsun week & dyed ye 8 of November 1638 aged 76.

Joan Capen ye dafter of Oliver Purchis dyed ye 26 of March 1658, ye night before, aged 75 years.

Ruth Capen ye dafter of Barnard Capen was born ye 7 August 1600.

Susanna Capen ye dafter of Barnard was born ye 11 of April 1602. She dyed ye 13 November 1666.

John Capen ye son of Barnard Capen born ye 26 of January in the yeer of or Lord 1612.

John Capen maryed Redegon Clap, his first wife, the 20 of October 1637 & dyed ye 10 December [16]45.

Joanna Capen ye dafter of John Capen ye 31 October [16]38 & dyed ye 19 of ye same month [16]88.

John Capen ye son of John Capen born ye 21 October [16]39.

John Capen maryed Mary Bass ye 20 Sept. [16]47.

Samuel Capen ye son of John Capen born ye 29 July [16]48 & baptized at Brantry being born ther.

Barnard Capen ye son of John Capen born ye 24 March 1650 & dyed ye 2 of May [16]91 of ye small pox.

dafter of John Capen born ye 6 July [16]52.

of John Capen born ye 17 No. [16]54.

of John Capen born ye 4 March [16]56|7

born ye 29 Decem. [16]59

born ye 1 Octo [16]62

born ye 29 Octo [16]66|7."