

Knapp Origin

The name of Knapp has been found in England since the fifth century, in various forms of spelling. Oswald Greenway Knapp, the Knapp genealogist of England, found the name in more than ninety different forms of spelling, though no doubt all were variants of the modern name. It is claimed that it was of Saxon origin, though there is no proof of this. It is common in all Teutonic countries and it is just as probable of Anglican origin. The early spellings were usually with a "C", as Cnaep. Other forms were Cnepe, Knepe, Knopp, etc. In early times the name was often preceded with "atte" and "de la". "atte" disappeared by about the year 1300. "La" was not used after 1360 and "de" disappeared after 1400. Originally it was used as an individual name and died with its owner. After about 1200 it began to be used as a family name and was transmitted from father to son. It is possible that the name originated from "cnoep" meaning a hilltop, or the English name "knob" meaning the same. A man living on the hilltop became known by that name. In America the name was usually spelled with one "p" until about the time of the Revolution.



In England there were no less than six or eight family groups bearing the name of Knapp, but they lived in different parts of England and bore no relationship with one another, so far as Oswald Greenway Knapp could determine. He believed all were of independent origin.

The place of origin in England of the four New England immigrants is still not proved, though many statements to the contrary are to be found. It is believed that William Knapp came from near Cornard Parva or it is probable that Nicholas came from this same vicinity as the name has been found there. The name Nicholas Knapp was evidently not common in England, as O. G. Knapp could find records of only some twelve or fifteen persons bearing that name throughout all England and for all time. The names of Aaron and Roger occurred only three times each in all England.

There is no proof that William and Nicholas were brothers or even relatives though that statement is often found in print. When this conjecture was repeated often enough, it finally became accepted as a fact. Both men are supposed to have come to Watertown with the Winthrop and Saltonstall fleet in the summer of 1630, though both their names appear in court records earlier that same year. Records do not show that William and Nicholas had any dealings of any kind with one another. Whenever either was in difficulty, it was always a stranger who came to the rescue, never the reputed brother. No signature of Nicholas has been found. He always signed with a mark much like this "y".

Most of the early New England immigrants were dissenters from the Church of England, so their births, marriages, etc. are not recorded there, making it impossible to trace their origin accurately. In general, they were a religious people, though independent in thought, who took the Bible as their guide and rule in life. Usually church membership was a first requirement to qualify a person to vote, own property or become a Freeman in a town.

Watertown, Massachusetts was settled mainly by immigrants from Counties Suffolk, Essex and Norfolk, England and the rest of the Massachusetts settlers also came largely from the southeastern part of England. Most of the early settlers were Puritans or Independent Thinkers who migrated to escape persecution at home and to worship as they pleased in the New World. Some groups became very

intolerant of people who differed in belief from their own group. Most early towns were founded by church groups migrating as a body, led by their pastor. Later, as conditions changed, settlers came for economic reasons, hoping to improve their financial standing in a new country where they could acquire and own property, especially land, and thus attain independence.

The pastor of the church at Watertown was the Reverend George Phillips, from Boxted, County Essex, who remained there about ten years. The church was organized on July 30, 1630, with some forty men, headed by Sir Richard Saltonstall, signing the membership list. This church remained the only church in the town for sixty-six years. Only church members could become Freemen and vote.

Stamford, Connecticut, was settled in 1641 by people from Wethersfield, Connecticut, who brought with them their church organization and pastor, the Reverend Richard Denton. He was from Yorkshire, England. This church was organized by seven religious men who left England because of persecution due to their religious belief. They believed in the Bible as their only guide and law in living and were known as Congregationalists. It is probable that Nicholas Knapp lived in Wethersfield for a year or more between the time when he left Watertown and settled in Stamford.

The legend that Roger de Knapp was Knighted by Henry VIII at a Tournament held in Suffolk in 1530 is wholly the product of some fanciful mind and has not the least foundation in fact, notwithstanding the number of times that it has been published and the number of people who would like to believe it.

O. G. Knapp and his father, also, searched the English records carefully and corresponded with the officials of the College of Heraldry, all of whom agreed that there was never a Coat of Arms granted to anyone by the name of Roger de Knapp nor was there any Tournament held at or near Suffolk in 1530. They can find no record of a Knapp by the name of Roger ever having been Knighted or living in Suffolk or Essex at any time. It is believed that the story first appeared in America and that in all probability it is the invention of some unscrupulous genealogist in England in an attempt to satisfy the ambition of an American client.

Some six or eight Coats of Arms have been granted in England to persons bearing the name of Knapp and are recorded there. So far as is known, all the male descendants of these grantees have died and the lines are now extinct. It is therefore believed that no person living either in England or America is legally entitled to use this emblem as a mark of Heraldry. In 1940 The Knapp Family Association of America adopted the Suffolk Coat of Arms as the emblem of the Association, but without the slightest thought that any one of them is legally entitled to use it in Heraldry. But it may be used by them as an emblem, for no one else is entitled to or can be harmed by its use in that way. The Suffolk Coat of Arms was first granted to Henry Knapp of Hintlesham, Suffolk, and later to George Knapp, of Tuddenham and to Robert Knapp, of Needham, probably both descendants of the above Henry. The blade was first adorned with three bay leaves and was without a motto, but it has since been changed by its owners in many ways and at different times. The leaves were replaced by a laurel wreath and various mottoes have been used at different times by various persons. The arrangements of the figures and the position of the parts of the Coat of Arms have been changed to suit the fancy of the bearer. The following mottoes have been used: (1) Spes Nostra Deus. (2) Fortiter et Feliciter. (3) In Bello Aut in Pace. (4) En Dleu est Ma Conflance. (5) Sans Dieu Sans Tout. (6) Nun Quam Non Paratus. (7) In God My Trust. (8) Asplro. All these and many other changes were made according to the whim or fancy of the bearer and were not a part of the original grant. A copy of the Coat of Arms adopted by the Knapp Family Association of America appears as a frontispiece for this genealogy. It was made for us by our good friend, Winfield Scott Downs, the managing Editor of the American Historical Company, Inc., of New York.

Some persons have been inclined to believe that the original immigrant ancestor, Nicholas Knapp, is identical with the Nicholas Knapp who married Susan Mitterson, of Wells-by-the-Sea, but they have now discarded this theory. It is much more probable that he was descended from one of the two men named Nicholas Knapp who lived at Cornard Parva.