

# Silent Thunder:

THE RADICAL DAUGHTERS OF PRISCILLA MULLINS



Thomas Lee house, c. 1914.

“The One fact,...  
which explains American religion ... is  
that the colonial churches were largely  
planted by religious radicals . . .  
radical in both their  
religious and political views.”

– William W. Sweet



Plymouth Plantation.

## Freedom

1620

PRISCILLA MULLINS SURVIVED the voyage of the Mayflower, but her father, mother, brother, and servant perished in the Great Dying. She poured her energy into creating Plymouth Plantation, with years of hard work, near starvation, and fear of “ye Indians skulking”. She was thankful for God’s providence and mercy.

The Plymouth colonists were an odd lot – Separatists exiled for their radical religious beliefs, servants, and fortune-seekers. But they promised “in ye presence of God, and one of another [to] covenant and combine our selves together into a civill body politick, for our better ordering & preservation.” From the beginning they separated church and state – 10 years later, the Puritans established a theocratic government in Massachusetts.

## Struggle

PLYMOUTH SURVIVED BECAUSE TWO INDIANS – Samaset and Squanto – helped them grow corn and forge a peace treaty with Massasoit, which lasted for nearly 50 years.

The Plantation also survived because families cared for each other. Priscilla Mullins and John Alden married.



Reenactment at Plymouth Plantation.

Other family members began to arrive. Family homes were built. Gardens planted. Children born. Worship established.



Scott, Eunice, Erika & Luke stand outside of the Alden home in Duxbury.

## Expansion

BY 1627 THE ALDENS HAD TWO CHILDREN – Elizabeth and John. The Aldens moved to Duxbury, building a long narrow two-story house. In addition to raising eight more children in this house, Elizabeth helped to manage the family farm. In 1653, John built a larger house that remains standing.



Image from the Plimoth Plantation Museum.

Elizabeth married William Pabodie. They raised 13 children. Priscilla helped birth her 70 grandchildren and lived to welcome the first of her 500 great-grandchildren.

## Freedom & Struggle

1630s

THE GREAT MIGRATION OF PURITANS began in 1630 into Massachusetts. They fled the Established Church in England for the freedom to develop a society built on Biblical principles. Fort Saybrook was built to protect settlers from aggressive acts of the Pequot Indians. By 1637, the Pequots were defeated in a brutal attack by the colonists.

## Expansion

1640-1660's

Both the Thomas<sup>1,2</sup> Lee family and the three Lay brothers came to Saybrook in the mid-1640's. Robert<sup>1</sup> Lay of Saybrook and his wife, Sarah (Fenner) (Tully) Lay raised their children near Potapoug Point where ships plying the Connecticut river docked. Lay's Wharf was the first wharf on the river. It was recently excavated and photographed.



Excavation of Lay's Wharf. Photo courtesy of Donald Malcarne.



Thomas Lee House Judgement Hall. Photo courtesy of the East Lyme Historical Society.



Thomas Lee House, c. 2007.

structures of its type in Connecticut, nearer by more than 100 years to the time of Christopher Columbus than we are today to the time of George Washington."

In East Lyme, Ensign Thomas<sup>2</sup> Lee had become a successful farmer and about 1660 began building a house which today is an historical landmark owned by the East Lyme Historical Society. What began as a one room house was enlarged to accommodate his 5 children born of Sarah Kirtland and 8 with his second wife, Mary DeWolf.

## Struggle 1670-1700's

CONFLICTS WITH TRIBES over land erupted into King Philip's War in 1675-76. The Lay house in Potapaug was fortified as a garrison. A combatant "slew another at Rob't Layes, to ye great affrightment and terror of Goodwife Lay. . ." In the end the tribes were defeated and brutally punished – over the protests of many colonists. It was decades before peace was achieved and families recovered.

## Expanding Family Lines 1703-1784

IN 1703 MARY GRINNELL, the granddaughter of Elizabeth and William Pabodie, married Robert<sup>3</sup> Lay, thus joining the Alden Mayflower line to the Lay line. The Lay's opened an Inn near Saybrook, where George Washington slept in 1775. In 1705 Justice Thomas<sup>3</sup> Lee, married to Elizabeth Graham, inherited the Lee house, where he held court in the Judgement Hall for 40 years. In 1757, the house passed to Justice Lee's grandson Elisha<sup>5</sup> Lee, a veteran of the French and Indian War. Elisha<sup>5</sup> Lee married Abigail Murdock who bore a daughter, Phebe, in 1762. When Phebe Lee married John<sup>5</sup> Lay the Lay (Alden) and Lee lines were joined.

## Freedom & Expansion 1776-1900

Elisha<sup>5</sup> Lee and John<sup>5</sup> Lay both fought in the Revolutionary War and celebrated the Freedom that brought the nation into being. When Washington's presidency was over, power transferred peacefully. Democracy became a possibility for the world (no voting rights were available to women).

In 1797, Phebe and John<sup>5</sup> Lay followed the new migration west, this time up the Hudson River, over the Alleghenies to Clinton, New York. Phebe saw that their ten children were raised to be leaders of the expanding western lands.

Juliet Lee Lay, Phebe's ninth child, was born in 1801. Juliet and the Rev. Henry Axtell married in 1830, bringing together the Alden, Lee, Lay, and Axtell lines.



Johanna and Juliet Lee Lay consider one another.

The Axtell's youngest daughter, Mary Matilda (Minnie), married Israel Parsons Rumsey, a civil war veteran. He brought the family to Chicago in 1868 and became a leader in the expanding grain market. Minnie, her sisters, children and grandchildren were engaged in world mission, peace and temperance movements, local charities, and women's suffrage.

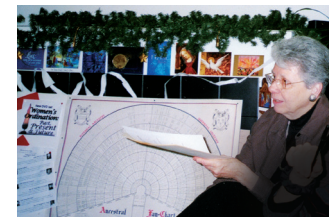
## Today

In 1914, the East Lyme Historical Society began repairing the ancient Thomas Lee House (1660), always careful to retain its original features. As Norman Peck writes of the Thomas Lee House, " Here it stands.... It is older than other

Old houses enclose the spirit of those who have inhabited them and connect us to their efforts to do good in the midst of tough choices. On the wall of the parlor is a Charge by John<sup>3</sup> Lee. It charges his posterity to live in the faith that inspired his (and our) ancestors in times of freedom, struggle, and expansion:

" I charge my dear Children, that you fear God and keep his Commandments and that you uphold his public worship with diligence. . . [I]n your Prayers you pray for converting grace for yourselves and others and that God will show you the Excellency of Christ and cause you to love him. . . [S]erve God in the way you was brought up in and avoid all Evil Company lest you be led into a snare and temptation. . . [B]e always dutiful to your mother and be kind to one another. . . This I leave in Charge to all my posterity to the End of the World . . ."

— John<sup>3</sup> Lee (January 13, 1765)



Eunice Blanchard Poethig, in front of the family genealogical chart.

With deep appreciation and thanks to Jean Rumsey (1912-2009) for her extensive genealogical work.

\*Superscript numbers indicate the family generation. Number 1 refers to the generation that first arrived in the New England colonies.