THE HALL FAMILY:
A STUDY IN THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM
1650-1850
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THE HALL FAMILY: A STUDY IN THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM

In order to understand the significance of the patriarchal family system in Middlesex County, Connecticut, I have chosen to look at the Hall family. I will scan four generations of the Hall family to explore paternal control over the distribution of property to the offspring. In doing this, I see a direct connection between the distribution of wealth to parental control over the sons' education and means of support.

In the paternal system, the family was "the unit through which virtually all major social and economic activities were mediated."¹ The Hall family was no exception.

The Hall family was one of the most influential families in Connecticut for many years. The first Hall to settle in Connecticut was John Hall. John and his wife Jeanne (Wollen) Hall were the progenitors of the Halls of Wallingford, Conn. John Hall died at Wallingford in 1676 at the age of 71. It is from John through his son Samuel who was born in 1648 and died in 1725, to his son John, that we come to the generation with which I wish to begin my investigation.²

The Honorable John Hall of Wallingford was born December 23, 1670. Mr. Hall was a man of prominence in his day and a representative from his town.³ He married Mary Lyman in 1691. The two had eleven children to care and provide for. The children were John, Esther, Samuel, Caleb, Eunice, Benjamin, who died in infancy, Benjamin, Sarah, Eliakim, Elihu and Nancy.

The land holdings of the Honorable John Hall family were very large and encompassed several sections of the town of Wallingford.
At this time, the town of Wallingford included what is now Meriden, Chesire and a section of Middletown. In each section or parish, as they were called, the Hall family held property. John Hall being a traditional patriarch held tight control over his interest in the town as well as his interest in his family holdings. Philip Greven, Jr. noted the relationship between the patriarch and his position in the town as juxtaposed to his position in his family. "The men who first settled the town long remained the dominant figures both in their families and their community. It was their decisions and their actions which produced the family characteristic of the 17th century Andover." 4

The Wallingford land records show that John Hall gave land parcels to his sons but these were not released from his power until his death. This was made evident by the disparity of the dates on which the deeds were written and the dates that the deeds were actually filed and became legal. There were incidents, however, when the sons actually purchased property from their father. John Hall purchased twenty acres for a small fee from his father. 5 Samuel also purchased a pasture land of several acres for £20. 6

The procedure of withholding deeds was a precautionary measure taken to ensure that the family would be provided for and in later times would be able to provide for itself. This also helped to keep the family in a close cohesive unit, and guarantee the old age care of the parents by their children. It also reduced the chances that the property would be split
up and the base of power lessened. Large landholders at this
time were considered wealthy. Land was actually a power source.
The agricultural society of early Connecticut was very dependent
upon the land and those who had come to hold much of it would not
have it divided readily.

One way to utilize the land to its fullest was to draw up
an agreement deed. This would allow more than one son and,
perhaps cousins or in-laws, or what seem to be adjacent property
owners, to establish mills on pieces of family property. There
are deeds of this nature on record in the Wallingford files.
One such deed states that an agreement between the brothers John
and Caleb Hall and a Stephen Peck was made "to construct and use
a grist or corn mill on the elbow of Whartton (cq) Brook and to
dig and build necessary dams...". It was granted by John Hall
to his sons and Stephen Peck that "all land that shall be neces-
ssary or needful convenient or commodity to erect or sett (cq)
thereon any mill or mills...for £11. current money...". This
agreement allowed the father to remain the owner of the land
while his sons made use of it for their own benefit. This type
of agreement also allowed the father to keep a tight rein on
his sons.

This was a pattern not isolated to Connecticut as Philip
Grevens attests to in his research of Andover, Massachusetts.
Grevens found similar happenings in the Ballard family. The
Ballard brothers had been given land to build upon by their
father before his death, but no deeds of gift had been granted
to them, thus preventing their full independence as long as he
remained alive. Their family remained closely knit by their establishment of residences near the paternal home on family land and by the prolonged control by William Ballard over the land he had received as one of the first settlers.

Although the father held tight control during his life he knew the property would be divided after his death. John Hall divided his land into parcels that do not appear to be evenly distributed between his sons Samuel, John, Benjamin, and Caleb. The two younger sons, Ellicom born August 1711 and Elihu born February 1715, were not mentioned in this agreement.

John's eldest son, John, appears to have broken one of the patriarchal patterns in that he did not go on for a college education. Instead, he remained on the land and was married at a fairly early age, twenty-four, to Mary Street. John is the ancestor of Lyman Hall. John had great influence in the colony and represented the town at the general court.

John's second son, Samuel, was born October 1695. Samuel was sent to Yale and returned as a minister. When Samuel returned from school he settled on his father's land in Chesire parish. In 1724 he became minister over the Congregational Church in Chesire. Samuel was married at the age of 32 to his first wife Anne Law, daughter of Jonathan Law, Governor of Connecticut.

The youngest son, Elihu, also graduated from Yale. Elihu died in London, England in 1784. In 1750, he became the King's attorney. When he died he possessed a large estate in Wallingford and a whole township in Vermont. Unfortunately, no information could be found concerning the previous ownership of his
property in Wallingford. There are possible connections between the father's holdings and Elihu's estate but this could not be documented with facts. It is suspect that perhaps part of the Wallingford land may have been John Hall's. Elihu was granted property from his brother Caleb which originally belonged to his father.¹⁵

Benjamin settled in Chesire on the Law farm while Caleb remained an important citizen in Wallingford. Eliakim also settled on family property in Wallingford. John's daughters, Esther, Eunice, Sarah, and Nancy, married prominent people. Eunice married three times and her second marriage was to Governor Jonathan Law.

To study the patriarchal system of the Hall family it is convenient to follow Samuel's family. Samuel had thirteen children, two of whom died in infancy. Samuels children were Samuel, Jonathan, who died after one day of life, Benoni, died at birth, Lucy, Samuel, Ann, Samuel, Mary, Brenton, Elisha, Sarah, Jonathan and Abigail. The names of the children are listed in the order of their birth. Brenton was born in Chesire on April 2, 1738 and died at the age of 82 in Meriden on November 25, 1820. His name came from his great-grandmother Sarah Brenton, daughter of William Brenton, Colonial Governor of Rhode Island.¹⁶

Brenton's father, Samuel built a house for him in 1760 on land owned by Samuel in Meriden. During the Revolution Brenton was an ardent patriot "rendering the cause substantial pecuniary assistance but declining political preferment for himself. He was always spoken of as a kind-hearted hospitable man satisfied
with a quiet life on his paternal acres."17 After the war, he was induced to give more of his time to public affairs. He was a representative to the General Assembly from Wallingford and was the first representative from Meriden. Brenton was very active in incorporating the town of Meriden. Division from Wallingford came in 1806.18 He was described as an aristocratic wealthy farmer and large landowner, taking great interest in all agricultural matters.

Brenton's brothers Elisha and Samuel, next older and next younger than he, both graduated from Yale like their father, but Brenton seems to have been satisfied with the skilled tutelage of his father and devoted his energies to the development of the valuable tract in Meriden to which subsequently on August 4, 1767 his father gave him a deed. It is important to note that although the deed was written in 1767 it was not placed on the land records until June 27, 1777.19 His father Samuel died in 1776. This confirms previous statements that the father remained in control of the land until his death.

Samuel deeded property to his sons Elisha, Jonathan, and Brenton. It seems that the older sons have died because Brenton is now called the eldest son in the 1767 deed from his father.20 To Elisha Samuel deeded the house, land, barns and pastures. This was also dated August 4, 1767 but was not received to records until April 8, 1776, two months after Samuel's February 1776 death. Jonathan was deeded large plots of property, an orchard, and Lathrop Farm. This deed was dated, again as Elisha's, August 4, 1767. It was not received to record until
June 28, 1776. Elisha's acquisition of the property entailed that he take care of his parents and that his mother have use of part of the house, pasture and cows after the father's death.

Samuel's will distributes his property and moveable items among his children, daughters and sons. (See will enclosed). The will and the deeds are examples of the patriarchal system in action at its most stringgent. Brenton Hall was to carry the system on through his children.

Brenton Hall married Lament Collins of Wallingford. She died at the age of thirty-eight. His second wife was the widow Abigail Guy of Branford. He was married for the first time at the age of twenty-four. He had twelve children. His oldest son was William Brenton who was born May 31, 1764, graduated from Yale in 1786 and two years later graduated from the medical college in Philadelphia. Other children of Brenton were; Collins, Samuel, Lament, Oliver, Joab, Ira, Augustus, Casper, and daughters Lucy, Sarah, and Anna.

Brenton followed the Hall tradition by sending one of the elder sons to Yale. Brenton tried to follow the paternal system by keeping his sons as close to him as possible and in retaining power over the estate. Unfortunately, Brenton's will could not be found. It is not recorded in Meriden, Wallingford, Middletown, or the State Library. Perhaps the will could shed some light on the feelings of a man experiencing a changing world. Brenton, like his father Samuel, divided the property among his sons. Unlike Samuel however, Brenton deeded and allowed to be recorded to son Collins the land on which Collin's house was
built in the year 1796. The property was deeded and recorded in 1796. This may be an indication of lessening parental control by Brenton. He also sold several pieces of property to his son Collins for various amounts of money ranging from $100-$200. Brenton, in the year 1801, gave to his son Oliver land in the parish of Meriden thus further dispersing his holdings during his lifetime. This was received to record in 1801.

Brenton's son Samuel passed away in 1795. Casper was born in the old homestead in Meriden and died there in 1869. This was left to him by his father. William Brenton settled in Middletown where he practiced medicine. He petitioned the town to grant him leave to build a pox-house on property near Black Pond which was owned by his father and later deeded to him.

Although Brenton tried to keep parental control outside forces made this almost impossible. The year 1800 was not only an end to a century but a beginning of a whole new era. It marks the "turning point in a way of life that had sustained Connecticut farmers for one hundred and fifty years." These people had to span the gap from the old economic concept to new system was becoming outmoded. Land was beginning to be no longer a base of wealth. Instead, cash accumulations were being revered more highly than acreage. The system was changing. Fathers could no "longer give their sons the literal means of existence as they had at the beginning of a farming community, but a "stake" to begin their lives. Sons were liberated from any obligations to community and family by the very nature of these gifts and loans." Although the new wave of capitalism had some effect on
Brenton's generation, he and others of his ilk tried to hold on to the old patriarchal system. Unfortunately, this mode could no longer survive prosperously. We can see this more clearly through Brenton's sons and the next generation.

Brenton's son Oliver was a clergyman. He did not stay on the family property but went to New York. Ira moved to New York where he died in the Oneida Company in 1862. Joab remained in Meriden but his children did not stay close to the family lands. This is evidence that the sons and daughters who remained in the Wallingford area could not hope to continue the patriarchal system that had prevailed prior to 1800. William Brenton's sons were left without the strong leadership of their father at an early age. Both left Middlesex County. His son Samuel Holden Parsons settled in Binghamton, New York and engaged in mercantile business. Samuel Holden Parsons Hall became prosperous and would always find room in the business for his children, nephews and even distant cousins. This action seems to be a nineteenth century version of the patriarchal system, using labor as a commodity and capital as a power base. Family ties seem to continue to be functional even if not necessary for prosperity.

It seems that the change in the American family system can be seen as a decline initiated "by the practice of partible inheritance, hastened by population density in an increasingly affluent community and finalized in a new economic context of the 19th century."26 It seems that the Hall family did not relinquish the patriarchal system with the speed necessary to
retain their wealth and power. In trying to hold on to old safe ways in this new mechanized, capitalized, individualistic society they remained on the perimeter and did not flow into the mainstream of the new society.
FOOTNOTES


3Ibid., p.33.


5Wallingford Land Records, Vol. 5.

6Ibid., vol. 5.

7Ibid., Vol. 8, p.288.

8Ibid., vol. 8, p.286.

9Ibid., vol. 8, p.288.

10Greven, p.288.


12Theo. Hall, p.34

13Ibid., p. 35.

14Ibid., p. 39.

15Wallingford, vol. 9

16Theo. Hall, p. 49.

17Ibid., p. 157.

18Ibid., p. 158.

19Ibid., p.159.

20Wallingford, Deed Enclosed.

21Theo. Hall, p. 50.

22Wallingford , Deed enclosed.
Footnotes-2


25 Ibid., p.42.

26 Greven, p. 36.
Bibliography


Wallingford, Town of. Land Records.

In the Name of God Amen this 23 Day of March 1774
I Samuel Johnson late of Wallingford in the County of New Haven in the State of Connecticut in New England of Sound Mind and Memory being of Sound Mind and Memory, through blessed be God my Blesse and de make this my Last Will and Testament first I give my soul to God through Christ and my Body to Christian burial hoping to receive it again at the Resurrection of the Just and of the Unjust Charges and Just Debts are paid my estate I dispose of as follows if my wife is and I give to my beloved wife Anne the income of all our estate in the household Government during life and the use of one half of my Dwelling house the North end of it and the use of my chair and Chamber and the use of two lots during life also the use of all my household Goods and my Negro Charles to wait upon her and the use of a room which of my sons he will Live with and if he is not able to get his living some of my money be allowed for his Support.
2) my Will is and I give to my three sons Brinton, Ishmael, and Jonathan all my movable Estates except the household Goods equally after death.
my will is and I give to my two Daughters Ann the wife of Mr. Williams and Abigail the wife of Mr. Felt my two silver porsings and all my silver spoons and the silver candlesticks this with the silver spoon is all silver given them only my lead spoons and pepper box to turn and aliguate this

my will is and I give to my grand children Lucas and Samuel Efford Brooks the same silver cup over which Mary Ann Brooks was to have given them a great interest in Lucas that is all silver given them

my will is and I give to my grand children Elisha and Sarah Deeds all my silver plates except one and which I give to my wife to make and in event of her death or marriage that all she may have given her to childare among all my grand children and daughters and daughter in law and all this

Samuel Williams

October 25th 1795

S. Parker

Mary Robinson