

THE TWO CAPTAINS WILLIAM PEIRCE (PIERCE)

BY

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Since our study of a couple of years ago on "Captain William Peirce, Ancient Planter and Early Settler of Mulberry Island" for the Fort Eustis (Va.) Historical and Archaeological Association, there have been frequent inquiries concerning our subject and the other Captain William Pierce who was a sea-captain of great repute. The research into the Mulberry Island subject, spawned a great deal of information on many varied collateral subjects, which could not be included in the study. We are herewith presenting one aspect of intense interest which has been generated by the inquiries we have received.

Back in the early part of the seventeenth century, the name of William Peirce (Pierce) was almost as common as "John Smith". And like Captain John Smith, there were two Captains William Peirce (Pierce). We would like to separate the identities of the two prominent Captains William Peirce (Pierce), and relate them to their geographical sites. The dates of events, the duties of each man and the lines of communication within the colonies and between the colonies and England were such that it would have been virtually impossible for one man in the 17th century to perform all the tasks outlined for the Captains Pierce (Peirce).

Both captains were of English ancestry. They were contemporaries, having both been born in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Interestingly, both had a wife named Jane (sometimes spelled Joane). Both men were interested in advancing the New World and were men of courage and ingenuity. Both men were friends of their respective Governors in the New World. Here their paths diverge.

There are at least twenty different variants in the spellings of the Peirce name. For the most part we will refer to Captain William Peirce of Virginia as P-E-I-R-C-E and Captain William Pierce of Massachusetts as P-I-E-R-C-E, although in quoting sources a variation in spelling may occur.

Captain William Peirce arrived in "James Citty", Virginia in 1610, after having been shipwrecked in Bermuda along with Sir Thomas Gates and Sir George Somers in the wreck of the "Sea Venture" in 1609. His wife, Jane, and his daughter, Jane, reached Virginia in 1609 on the "Blessing". His title of Captain was derived from being Captain of the Guard at Jamestown.

Captain William Pierce was a noted sea-captain who made many trans-Atlantic voyages from England, principally to New England and the Plymouth Colony. As will be noted later, he also made some voyages to the West Indies. His title of Captain was derived from being master or captain of many sea-going vessels.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PIERCE, sea-captain

Place of birth: Cambridge, England

Date of birth: 1590

Date of death: 13 July 1641

(Above from the Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; "Dictionary of American Biography", vol. XIV, ed. Dumas Malone (1934), p. 406)

Place of death: probably at sea, since he was fatally wounded by the Spanish after stopping at New Providence, Bahama Islands ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, p. 164ff)

Parents: James and ? (Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah)

Children: Three children ("Dictionary of American Biography", vol. XIV, p. 406). (1) Edward (1633-1673), (2) James; (3) William (___ - 1661) ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, p. 163)

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PEIRCE, planter of Virginia

Place of birth: England ("Colonial Va. Register", Stanard, p. 32; "Beville Family of Va.", Tedcastle, p. 121)

Date of birth: unknown

Date of death: By 22 June 1647 ("Adventures of Purse & Person", Hiden, p. 400)

Place of death: Virginia ("Colonial Va. Register", Stanard, p. 32; "Beville Family of Va.", Tedcastle, p. 121)

Parents: ? and ?

Children: Jane (or "Joane"), who became the third wife of John Rolfe and later the second wife of Captain Roger Smith ("Cavaliers & Pioneers," Nugent, p. xxx; "Narratives of Early Virginia", Tyler, p. 237; "Domestic Life in Va. in the 17th Century", Jester, pp. 6-7; "Lists of Emigrants to America", Hotten, p. 174; "Adventures of Purse & Person" Hiden, pp. 234-5, 261-3, 281-2, 308; "Cradle of the Republic", Tyler, pp. 45, 119, 237-8; "17th Century Isle of Wight County, Va.", Boddie, p. 289; "Colonial Surry", Boddie, pp. 49-51, 60; "Southside Virginia Families", Boddie, pp. 52-3; "Virginia Carolorum", Neill, pp. 59-61; "Virginia Vestuta", Neill, pp. 194-5; "The Devon Carys", Harrison, vol. 2, p. 596n; Virginia Magazine of History, vol. 23, p. 320, vol 25, pp. 233-4, vol. 21, p. 209, vol. 53, pp 61-5, vol. 51, p. 83, vol. 3, pp. 276-7, vol. 1, p. 447; William & Mary Quarterly, 1st ser., vol. 9, pp. 270-1, vol. 10, p. 169)

Other children (names unknown) ("Acts of the Privy Council (Colonial Series) of England", p. 223).

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PIERCE, sea-captain

First appears in Colonial Records in 1623 when he captained the "Anne" to Plymouth Colony ("Dictionary of American Biography", ed. Dumas Malone, vol. XIV, p. 406.)

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PEIRCE, planter of Virginia

First appears in Colonial Records ("True Reportory", Strachey, p. XIV) as a member of the expedition 1609 to Virginia in the "Sea Venture", flagship of Sir George Somers and Sir Thomas Gates, which was shipwrecked on Bermuda. His wife, Jane, and daughter, Jane, arrived in Jamestown on the "Blessing" in 1609 ("Domestic Life in Virginia in the 17th Century", Jester, pp. 6-7; Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 51, p. 33). He arrived in Virginia on June 2, 1610 and thereupon made his home at Jamestown ("English Politics in Early Virginia History", Alexander Brown, p. 16-13).

1622

Attempted voyage in the "Paragon", of which he was captain, but put back. Ship was owned by his brother, John. ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff).

Appointed Captain of the Fort at Jamestown after the massacre of 22 March 1622, when the captain, William Powell, was killed. ("Cradle of the Republic", Tyler, p. 112). Had two large tobacco plantations in conjunction with John Rolfe; one across the James River from Jamestown and the other at Mulberry Island (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 25, pp. 233-4; "Minutes of the Council and General Court", McIlwaine, p. 99; "Colonial Surry", Boddie, pp. 60-4). During the summer he was appointed to lead a raid against the Indians in retaliation for the March massacre ("Institutional History of Virginia", Bruce, vol. ii, p. 79).

1623

Captain of the "Anne" on voyage from England to New England, arriving July-August 1623. ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff; "Saints and Strangers", Willison, p. 350; "The Mayflower Planters at Plymouth, Mass. 1620", Hills, vol. 1, p. 84). His name first appears in the colonial records in this year ("Dictionary of American Biography", ed. Dumas Malone, vol. XIV, p. 406).

Commissioned Captain of the Governor's Guard and Lt.-Gov. of James City (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 16, p. 6; "Cavaliers & Pioneers", Nugent, p. xxx). Commissioned to go against the Indians 23 July 1623 (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 16, p. 3; Wm & Mary Quarterly, vol. 7, 2nd ser., pp. 209-10; "Institutional History of Va. in 17th Century", Bruce, vol. ii, p. 352; Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 65, p. 20). In November he was given an order to levy men, tobacco and corn throughout the plantations for the subsistence

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PIERCE, sea-captain

His ship, the "Paragon", was wrecked in February 1623 ("Dictionary of American Biography", vol. XIV, p. 406).

As captain of the "Charity", he brought Winslow and the first cattle to New England ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff).

Captained the "Jacob" with Winslow and more cattle. ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff)

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PEIRCE, planter of Virginia

1623 cont'd

of the men of the Fort for six months ("Records of the Virginia Company", Kingsbury, vol. IV, p. 401). In February and March 1623, he represented James City in the Assembly (Wm & Mary Quarterly, vol. 7, 2nd ser., pp. 127-3; "Records of the Virginia Company", Kingsbury, vol. IV, p. 535).

1624

William Peirce and his wife, Jane, were residents of James City with 4 servants, in the muster 24 January, 1624. He had 13 servants at his plantation at Mulberry Island in his muster 25 January 1624 ("Adventures of Purse & Person", Hiden, p. 29, 44-6). William Peirce mentioned as one of the leading men of Jamestown, father of John Rolfe's third wife, Jane, and successor to Captain William Powell as captain of the fort ("Cradle of the Republic", Tyler, p. 45). Burgess from James City ("Colonial Surry", Poddie, p. 164). As a Burgess he signed a Declaration with the Governor and others requesting the King to send over commissioners to investigate the hardships of the past 12 years at the Virginia Colony ("History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia", Stith, pp. 307, 317; "Narratives of Early Virginia", Tyler, p. 426).

1625

Represented the Corporation of James City in the General Assembly, May 10, 1625 (Wm & Mary Quarterly, vol. 7, 2nd ser., p. 131). Was a member of the Convention, 1625 ("Cavaliers & Pioneers", Nugent, p. xxx). Henry Bradford was servant to William Peirce at James City (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 27, p. 36). A court order of 2 Jan 1625 required the payment of tobacco to Captain William Peirce "before Mondye next" by Mr. Moone (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 25, p. 33).

1625 cont'd

Between the 19th and 25th of April 1625 at a meeting of the General Court, he presented and signed before the Court, an inventory of the effects of Thomas Peirce, who was killed in the massacre of 22 March 1622 ("Minutes of the Council and General Court of Virginia", McIlwaine, p. 55; Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 23, pp. 12-3). May 23, 1625, William Peirce gave a deposition in connection with a trial of Edward Sharples (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 65, p. 158; "Minutes of the Council and General Court of Virginia", McIlwaine, p. 61).

1629

Captained the "Mayflower" (not the original) out of London March 1629, arriving Salem, Massachusetts, May 15, 1629. ("Saints and Strangers", Willison, p. 356; "Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff; "The Mayflower Planters at Plymouth, Mass. 1620", Hills, vol. 1, p. 36).

Captain William Peirce and his wife, Jane, visited England with the Governor and other Virginians and while in England they each wrote a separate report concerning their twenty years in the Colony ("Cradle of the Republic", Tyler, p. 53; "Cavaliers & Pioneers", Nugent, p. xxx; "Adventures of Purse and Person", Hiden, p. 261-3; "Calendar of State Papers", Colonial Series, Sainsbury, vol. 1, p. 100; "Virginia Carolorum", Neill, pp. 59-61).

1630

Captained the "Lyon" from Bristol on two voyages. On his arrival on the first voyage, he found great destitution at the Bay and when Winthrop arrived June 12, 1630, he sent Captain William Pierce of the "Lyon" back to England for food. He sailed December 1, 1630 from Bristol and arrived February 5, 1631 ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff).

May 21, 1630, he proved the will of John Rolfe, his son-in-law, in Prerogative Court of Canterbury, England (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 21, p. 209 and vol. 58, pp. 63; "Adventures of Purse & Person", Hiden, pp. 231-2).

1631

Captained the "Lion" (or "Lyon"), sailing from Salem, Mass., departing April 1st and arriving at Bristol, England,

Captain William Peirce, became a member of the Council in Virginia in 1631 and remained such from 1631 to 1644.

1631 cont'd

April 29th. On the return voyage arrived November 29th ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff; "The Mayflower Planters at Plymouth, Mass. 1620", vol. 2, p. 88).

(Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 28, p. 320, vol. 1, p. 447; "Cavaliers & Pioneers", Nugent, p. xxx; "Colonial Surry", Boddie, pp. 49-51; Wm & Mary Quarterly, vol. 3, 1st ser., p. 66; "17th Century Isle of Wight County, Va.", Boddie, p. 292; "Beville Family of Virginia", Tedcastle, p. 121; "Colonial Virginia Register", Stanard, p. 32; New England Historical & Genealogical Register, vol. 42, p. 393). With others, he signed a paper of accord between the Governor and Council of Virginia on December 30, 1631 ("Calendar of State Papers", Colonial Series, Sainsbury, vol. 6, p. 138).

1632

Lost the "Lyon" near Feake Island, off the Virginia coast (near Cape Charles), November 2, 1632, about 5 A.M.; the mate in charge having omitted sounding. He was in Virginia on Christmas Day 1632, at which time he wrote to friends in Boston describing conditions in the southern colony ("Dictionary of American Biography", ed. Dumas Malone, vol. XIV, p. 406; "Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff).

During the year Captain William Peirce was a member of the Grand Assembly Council at James "Citty" which met on 4th of September 1632 ("Statutes at Large", Hening, vol. 1, p. 173). In addition, he was present at the Court at James "Cittie" on 5 June 1632 ("Minutes of the Council and General Court in Colonial Virginia", McIlwaine, p. 201). He was mentioned as a member of the Virginia Council of State in 1632 ("Historical Report on the Ft. Eustis Tract, Fort Eustis, Va.", Charles W. Porter, Assistant Historian, Dec. 5, 1936, files of the National Park Service, Yorktown, Va.).

1633

Pierce brought the first cotton from the West Indies into New England ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff).

Peirce was a member of the Grand Assembly Council at James "Citty" the 1st day of February 1633 ("Statutes at Large", Hening, vol. 1, p. 202).

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PIERCE, sea-captain

He captained the "Rebecca" and the "Naragansett", probably in trans-Atlantic service. ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff).

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PEIRCE, planter of Virginia

1634

He was a member of the Council and signed papers with other members of the Council of Virginia to the Privy Council in England February 8th and March 14th, 1634 ("Calendar of State Papers", Colonial Series, Sainsbury, vol. 1, pp. 175-6; Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 8, p. 155). On June 20, 1634 at Patuxent, Maryland, commissioners who had been appointed by the governments of both the Maryland Colony and the Governor of Virginia, met to investigate the charges that William Claiborne incited the Indians to acts of hostility against the settlers at St. Mary's. The commissioners from Virginia included Captain William Peirce ("William Claiborne of Virginia", John Herbert Claiborne, Chap. 5, p. 74).

1635, 1636 and 1637

In 1635 Pierce took the "Defense of London" on a voyage to the West Indies; afterwards rescuing refugees in the Connecticut valley. In 1636 captained the "Desire", a ship of 120 tons built at Marblehead. Also in this year he carried Endicott's forces to Block Island as well as brought the first sweet potatoes from the West Indies to New England. In 1637 he brought supplies from Boston for the Pequod war ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families, pp. 164ff).

These were notable years for Captain William Peirce and must be considered together. After much friction between the Council in Virginia and Sir John Harvey, the Governor of Virginia, several protest meetings being held in York County and elsewhere, on April 28, 1635 Captain William Peirce with several others ousted Sir John Harvey from office ("America's Oldest Legislative Assembly", C. E. Hatch, p. 17; Va. Mag. of Hist, vol. 1, pp. 425-3; "Institutional History of Virginia in 17th Century", Bruce, vol. ii, p. 357; "Colonial Virginia", Morton, vol. I, pp. 139-44). In July 1635 Sir John Harvey complained to the King and to the Lords Commissioners for Foreign Plantations, concerning the mutinous proceedings of the Council ("Calendar of State Papers", Colonial Series, Sainsbury, vol. 1, p. 213; Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 1, pp. 425-9); "Colonial Virginia", Morton, vol. I, pp. 139-44). As a result of Harvey's complaint the prime actors in the mutiny, including Captain William Peirce, were ordered December 22, 1635 by the King to be sent to

1635, 1636 and 1637 cont'd

England to answer for their misdemeanors of usurping the government ("Calendar of State Papers", Colonial Series, Sainsbury, vol. 1, p. 217; Va. Mag of Hist., vol. 1, p. 423 and vol. 9, p. 34; "Adventures of Purse & Person", Hiden, p. 249; "Virginia Carolorum", Neill, p. 123). Captain William Peirce must have reached England about February 1636, because on September 29th, 1637, he petitioned the Privy Council stating he had been in England for about 13 months answering the information against him in the Star Chamber and requested permission to return to Virginia to settle his estates. Peirce posted 1,000 pounds security to appear in the Star Chamber, when required. The following day, September 30, 1637, the Privy Council gave Peirce license to return to Virginia allowing him full liberty and permitting him to better manage his estates there ("Calendar of State Papers", Colonial Series, Sainsbury, vol. 1, p. 253; Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 9, p. 269; "Acts of the Privy Council (Colonial Series) of England", pp. 217-23; "Colonial Virginia", Morton, vol. I, pp. 139-44).

Captain Peirce on March 1, 1635 conveyed 50 acres of land in Lawne's Creek, Va. ("Cavaliers & Pioneers", Nugent, p. 123). On June 22, 1635 he patented 2,000 acres at Lawne's Creek, Va. ("Cavaliers & Pioneers", Nugent, p. 29; "17th Century Isle of Wight County, Va.", Boddie, p. 239).

1638

Captain Pierce made a voyage from Boston to the West Indies carrying several Pequod prisoners and bringing back negro slaves and an "Aligarto". He also made a voyage to England ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff).

Following his return from England, Captain Peirce evidently resumed his plantation duties and attended meetings of the Council in Virginia ("Colonial Surry", Boddie, pp. 49-51).

1639

Captained the "Desire" from London to New England, January 17th. Also made a voyage to England in the record time of 23 days. During the year he printed an Almanac, the first bound book in English printed in North America by Stephen Day. This was a Marine Almanac calculated for New England. ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, pp. 164ff).

Member of the Court and present for the session on 6 January 1639 (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 2, p. 99; Wm & Mary Quarterly, vol. 4, 2nd ser., p. 16). He was also selected to "view" the tobacco crop at the 6 January meeting (Wm & Mary Quarterly, vol. 4, 2nd ser., p. 23; "An Historical and Practical Essay on the Culture and Commerce of Tobacco", Tatham, pp. 155-3)

1641

Captain Pierce carried a party of dissenters to settle in the West Indies, but owing to the hostility of the Spaniards, he put back. He stopped at New Providence, Bahama Islands, to bring away a congregation living there. The Spaniards had taken possession, but he stood in hoping to rescue his countrymen. The enemy opened on the "Desire" with cannon fire; he sent all below except himself and one sailor; both were fatally wounded July 13, 1641. (This is the last information concerning the sea-captain). ("Lincoln, Pearce, Porter, Ayer & Allied Families", Lincoln, p. 164ff; "Dictionary of American Biography", ed. Dumas Malone (1934), vol. XIV, p. 406).

He is shown to have been a member of the Court and present at the session of 13 October 1641 (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 12, p. 204; "James City County 1634-1904", Rev. Lindsay O. Duvall, pp. 3, 46).

1642

Captain William Peirce was a member of the Council in Virginia (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 28, p. 320). He was a member of the Council 1 March 1642 (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 8, p. 66); was present at the Quarter Court at which Sir William Berkeley presided for the first time as Governor on 8 March 1642 ("Minutes of the Council and General Court in Colonial Virginia", McIlwaine, p. 493) and was a Burgess for the Grand Assembly held at James "Citty" the 1st day of April 1642 ("Statutes at Large", Hening, vol. 1, p. 235). Governor Berkeley administered the oaths of allegiance and supremacy to the Councillors, including William Peirce, Esq. upon his arrival in the Colony ("Virginia Carolorum", Neill, pp. 155-6).

1643

In 1643 Captain William Peirce gave a tract of 25 or 27 acres at Pasbyhayes in open court to Alexander Stomar (or Stoner) (Wm & Mary Quarterly, vol. 20, 2nd ser., pp. 475-6; "The Bygone 'Subberbs of James Cittie'", Forman; "Cavaliers & Pioneers", Nugent, p. 177) He was present at the Grand Assembly at James City on 2 March 1643 (Va. Mag. of Hist., vol. 23, p. 223). On 16 December 1643, he patented 2100 acres of land at Mulberry Island ("Cavaliers & Pioneers", Nugent, p. 149; "Historical Report on the Fort Eustis Tract, Ft. Eustis, Va.", Charles W. Porter, Assistant Historian, Dec. 5, 1936, files of the National Park Service, Yorktown, Va.; "Colonial Churches of Tidewater Virginia", Mason, pp. 117-9).

1644

On the 1st day of October 1644, Peirce was a member of the Grand Assembly Council at James City ("Statutes at Large", Hening, vol. 1, p. 232).

1645

In 1645, Captain William Peirce went on an expedition to the Northern Neck, called "Chicoan" ("Colonial Surry", Boddie, pp. 49-51). On the 17th of February 1645 he was a member of the Grand Assembly Council at James City ("Statutes at Large", Hening, vol. 1, p. 238; "Colonial Surry, Boddie, pp. 49-51; "Virginia Carolorum", Neill, p. 136). On January 20, 1645, dame Elizabeth Harvey asked the Court to substitute Captain William Peirce and one other as trustees in place of four men under a feoffment made by her for the use of her son by a previous marriage ("Virginia Carolorum", Neill, p. 415).

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PIERCE, sea-captain

CAPTAIN WILLIAM PEIRCE, planter of Virginia

1646

Captain Peirce was listed as being second in the standing of the Council in 1646. ("Colonial Families of the United States of America", vol. VII, Mckenzie, pp. 186-9; Wm & Mary Quarterly, vol. 9, 1st ser., pp. 170-1). On July 7, 1646 he sold his 2,000 acres of land at Lawnes Creek to Edward Bland of London ("Cavaliers & Pioneers", Nugent, p. 160; "Adventures of Purse & Person", Hiden, p. 97).

1647

The only information on the final date of Captain William Peirce is that he was deceased by 22 June 1647 ("Adventures of Purse & Person", Hiden, p. 400; "Virginia Genealogist", vol. I, p. 62).

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