

**Generation Three**  
**John Pierce and Abigail Thompson Pierce**

- |   |                 |   |
|---|-----------------|---|
| 3. <b>John (8/27/1668-1/27/1744)</b>    | m. 1/6 /1692/93 | Abigail Thompson of Braintree                             |
| 4. Abigail (8/20/1694-5/23/1761)        | m. 1) 7/11/1715 | Samuel Withington   |
|   | m. 2) ?         | Joseph Weeks  |
| 4. Mary (4/29/1696-6/18/1759)           | m. 1/23/1717-18 | Daniel Preston  |
| 4. Sarah (8/29/1698-12/31/1747)         | m. 6/25/1719    | John Wiswall (11/15/1688-4/15/1761)                       |
| 4. Ann (1/18/1700/1701)                 |                 |   |
| 4. <b>Samuel (11/30/1702-9/16/1768)</b> | m. 12/7/1732    | Abigail Moseley<br>(11/20/1711-1/10/1776)                 |
| 4. Ann (1/26/1704-11/14/1754)           | m. 1/29/1730/31 | Nathaniel Langley (?-11/22/1779?)                         |
| 4. John (4/5/1707-8/8/1778)             | m. 1) 4/5/1736  | Elizabeth Sheppard, (1713-9/19/1736)                      |
|   | 2) 11/10/1741   | Elizabeth Fessenden,<br>Lexington, (3/18/1721-11/11/1780) |
| 4. Hannah (10/16/1709-11/24/1757)       | m. 2/21/1727/8  | Ebenezer Clapp Jr.<br>(10/4/1705-1/10/1752)               |

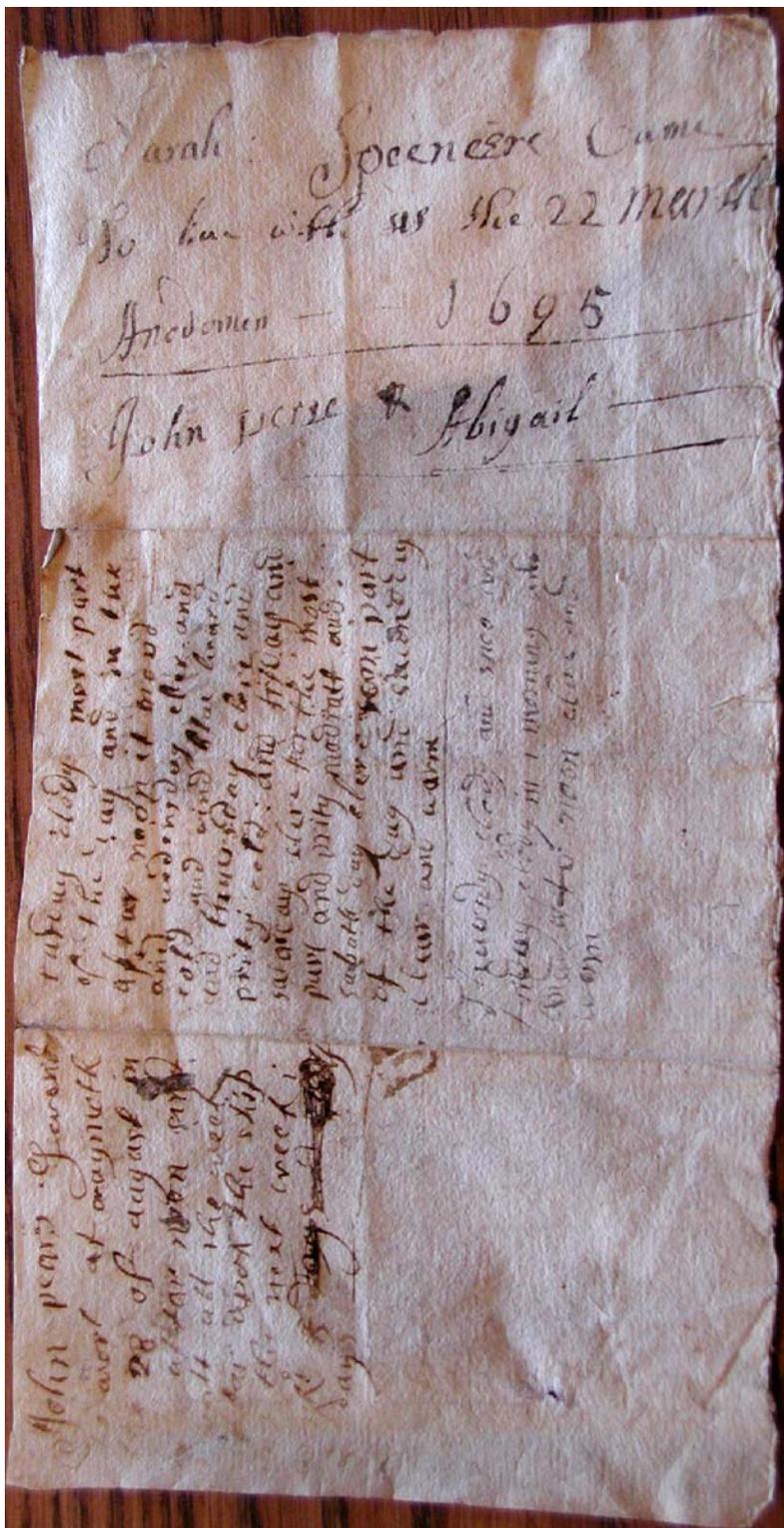
John Pierce was thirty-eight years old when he inherited the Pierce House and home lot in 1706. He had married Abigail Thompson of Braintree thirteen years earlier, and the couple had five surviving children; baby Ann had died at birth. John and Abigail may or may not have lived with Thomas and Mary Pierce in the Robert Pierce House along the Lower Road for some period after their marriage, and the young couple may have remained in the house when Thomas and Abigail acquired their new dwelling, the Pierce House, in 1696. John received title to his grandparents' six acres, "together with al[l] the housing & Barns Fencing, Orchard" in 1701, prior to his father's death, and he bought twelve acres of land near Tileston's Mill and Tolman's Creek, property later referred to as Twitchell's Pasture. Abigail too brought property to the marriage, as she had inherited land, perhaps in Braintree, from her father.<sup>1</sup> By the time of his father's death in 1706, when John inherited his father's house, John and Abigail were already well established, with a family and a farm. The couple had two more children, John and Hannah, and all seven children survived their father and inherited property themselves under the terms of John Pierce's will.

Approximately six years after John inherited his father's house, he and Abigail expanded the building to accommodate their growing family.<sup>2</sup> Using the same post-medieval design and construction as the original house, the Pierces added two rooms, one on each floor, to the west end of the building. The chimney stack was rebuilt so that there was a fireplace in each of the new rooms, and although cooking still seems to have been done in the original hall, the new rooms provided additional work and sleeping space for John and Abigail's three teen-aged daughters (Abigail, seventeen; Mary, fifteen; and Sarah, thirteen) and their four younger children.

Property ownership in the eighteenth century was not static; Dorchester farmers, including the

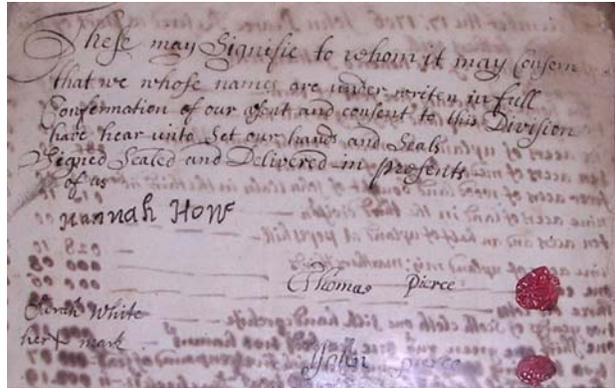
Pierces, bought, sold, bequeathed, and inherited a patchwork of lots in the town and its surrounding communities. Although John did not make the same extensive additions to the family landholdings that his father had, he owned almost 150 acres of land at his death in 1744, including seventy acres inherited from Thomas in 1706.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the Dorchester properties at Twitchell's Pasture, he acquired roughly sixty acres in Stoughton from town land divisions, and he may have made other purchases in Dorchester as well.<sup>4</sup> John sold one piece of property, eight acres at Pope's Hill, to his brother Thomas in 1710.<sup>5</sup>

Like other eighteenth-century farmers, Pierce would not have worked all his land. In the 1720s his "improved," or actively cultivated land included eighteen acres of mowing land, thirty of pasture, and only eight of tillage, or land planted in crops other than hay and grasses; he also had a small orchard of one and a half acres. John's brother Thomas, who had inherited a double share of their father's estate, was actually cultivating less land than his brother, including only two acres of tillage, and his farm had nine animals compared to the thirteen his brother John owned.<sup>6</sup> The shortage of labor in New England limited the amount of land that could be farmed at any one time, but farmers such as John Pierce nonetheless continued to accumulate more property to provide for their own and their children's futures.



John Pierce notes, 1695.

Although a farmer like his father, John Pierce was also a noted sportsman, and he particularly hunted brants, or wild geese. According to his accounts, he killed over 30,000 brants during his lifetime, and he sold or bartered many of them in the community.<sup>7</sup> Pierce's 1744 estate inventory lists his "armour" and ammunition, as well as the tools and farm implements necessary to his agricultural labor—the plow, cart, pitchfork, rope, hoe, grind stone, axes, and shop tools. Pierce's animals included a mare, several cows, a steer and an ox, and besides the barn his outbuildings included a shop, sheep house, and corn barn.<sup>8</sup>



John Pierce's portion of Thomas Pierce's estate, 1706.

Pierce family lore notes John not only as a sportsman, but also as a man of strict religious principles. One story recounts John's preparations for the Sabbath. Apparently he habitually shaved every Saturday afternoon, using a mirror that remains in the family's possession. One Saturday he had only shaved half his face when the sun set and the sky grew dark; rather than violate the Sabbath, he stopped shaving and went to the meetinghouse the next morning with one half of his face clean shaven and the other bristled with stubble.<sup>9</sup> Although the story may be apocryphal, there is a certain consistency to the piety of the John Pierces through the later generations. John Pierce, his son John, and grandson John were active church members, and his great grandson John was a prominent Brookline clergyman in the mid-nineteenth century. The first John "led in sacred musick in publick worship," as did his son and grandson, using a pitch pipe to "set the tune."<sup>10</sup> Family members were also strong temperance advocates in the nineteenth century, echoing, perhaps, the principles of the first John Pierce.<sup>11</sup>

When John Pierce died in 1744, he provided for each of his family members.<sup>12</sup> Abigail was seventy-six years old when her husband died, and his will instructed their son Samuel to take care of her, cutting, splitting, and delivering her wood and caring for her cow. During her lifetime Abigail was to have the "Westerly half of my Dwelling House and Cellar," which was the newer part of the house, and one third of John's remaining real estate and personal estate, plus a "suit of mourning cloaths;" his silver tankard she was to have



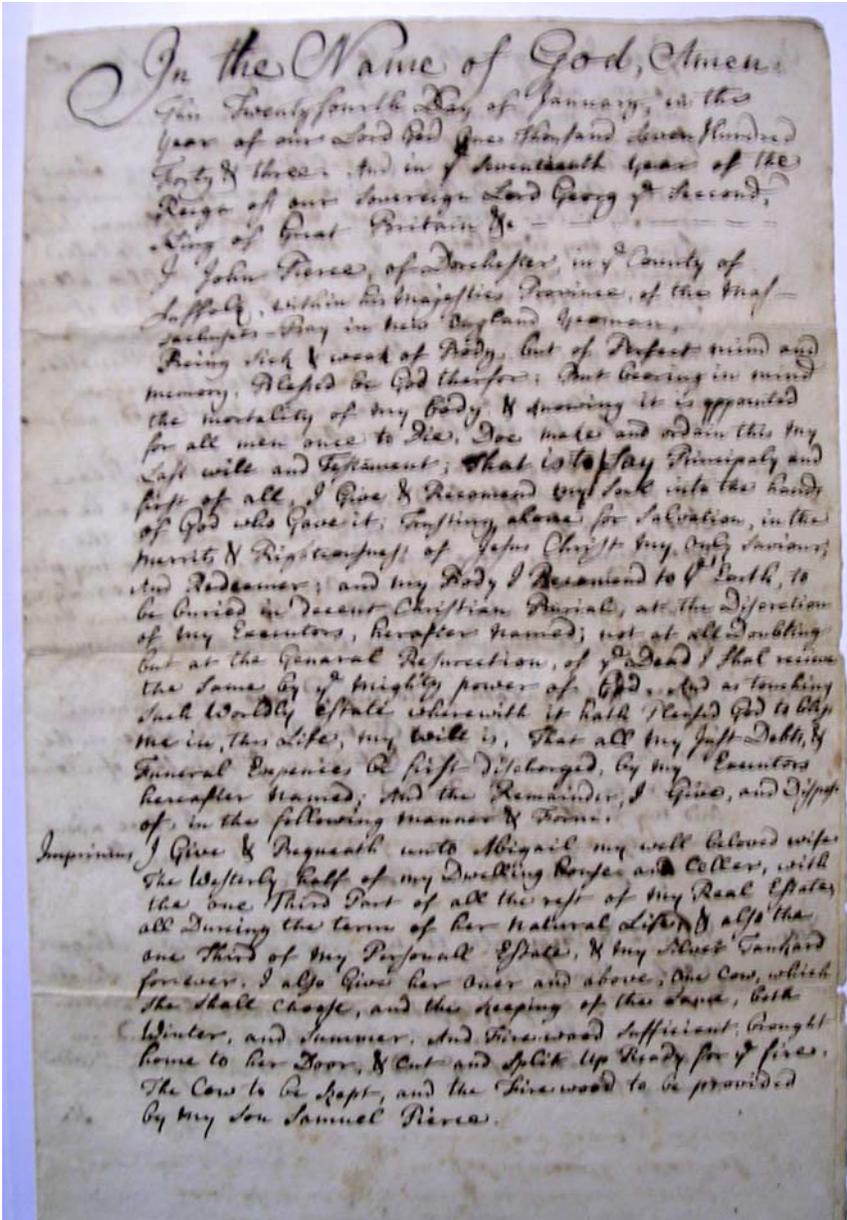
Thomas Pierce's west end addition, c. 1712. Conjectural drawing.

Mark Harland Johnson.

forever. The remaining personal estate went to all seven children, with a double share for Samuel, the eldest.

Unlike his father, John Pierce willed his lands and buildings only to his sons, Samuel and John, preserving the family holdings intact in two fairly sizeable estates. His five daughters received equal amounts of money, in addition to their dowries, to be paid out of the estate by the two sons. Samuel, the elder, received the house lot, dwelling house, barn, and orchard, and four parcels of varied land types—pasture, wood lot, and salt marsh—that totaled about fifty additional acres. His share was greater than his brother John's, but he also had greater responsibility for his mother, who lived with him for another three years, and he paid his sisters a larger portion of their inheritance.

John Pierce II was already living in the older Robert Pierce House with his wife and children, and title passed to him at his father's death. He also inherited seven acres of meadow and orchard in Dorchester, and both John and Samuel received equal shares of the Stoughton properties. Although a farmer, John Pierce II was also a craftsman. He had served an apprenticeship in Boston, with a Mr. Rand, "a shop joiner, in modern times called a Cabinetmaker."<sup>13</sup> He set up his own shop in Dorchester, and his grandson, the Rev. John Pierce, relates that "much of his time was occupied in making stove-frames and bird-cages, which he commonly carried to his customers in Boston on foot." In September of 1736, five months after their marriage, John's first wife Elizabeth Sheppard died, and he then married Elizabeth Fessenden of Lexington. The couple had fourteen children; to supplement the income necessary to support such a large family, Elizabeth acted as a wet nurse for at least eight babies.<sup>14</sup> The eldest of her own children, John Pierce III, also served an



John Pierce will. Written January 24 1743/44, probated February 14, 1743/44.

apprenticeship, first, at age twelve, on the Dorchester farm of Remember Preston, and at age fifteen with Samuel Howe, a local shoemaker who also served as a town selectman and a representative to the General Court. Pierce remained a shoemaker in Dorchester for seventy years, and after he died in 1833, his son Samuel continued the trade, in his father's shop, for another forty years. Like his grandfather, John Pierce III prided himself on his piety, and he claimed never to have missed public worship for over fifty years, from March of 1776 to February of 1829, when an exceptional snowstorm made the roads impassable.<sup>15</sup>

All of these many members of the Pierce family, then, remained a presence in Dorchester, as farmers and craftsmen and leaders of the Dorchester Church. Scattered throughout the town, these other descendents of the Thomas and John lines, as well as the inhabitants of the Pierce House, were aware of the family connections and traditions. Although their houses do not survive today, they maintained family homesteads over several generations. John Pierce II and his son Jonathan Pierce, a housewright, continued to live in the Robert Pierce House along the Lower Road until the early nineteenth century. From 1773 to 1874, the families of John Pierce III and his son Samuel Blake Pierce lived in the Mt. Bowdoin area in a "two-story, old-fashioned structure," on a "good-sized farm," while the Thomas Pierce descendants lived along the Lower Road well into the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> Certainly many members of the extended family moved out of Dorchester and even out of Massachusetts, but persistence and stability are important threads of the family's history.

## Endnotes Generation Three

1 Thomas Peirce to John Peirce, Unrecorded Warranty Deed, Oct. 7, 1701, Samuel Pierce Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA; Stephen Minot to John Pierce, Unrecorded Deed, Indenture, Jan. 31, 1700/01, Pierce Family Papers, Library and Archives, Historic New England/SPNEA, Boston, MA; Hopestill Humfreys and Isaac Humfreys to John Pierce, Unrecorded Warranty Deed, May 29, 1703, Pierce Family Papers; and Edward Zimmer and Andrea Greenstein, "Pierce Family Genealogy," Generation 3, p. 2, unpublished paper, undated, Library and Archives, Historic New England/SPNEA.

2 See Laura Driemeyer, Anne Grady, Susan L. Porter, and Susan Walton, Pierce House Historic Property Report (HPR), Section V—Architectural Analysis—Overview of Alterations, Room 101 and Room 201, 2005, Library and Archives, Historic New England/SPNEA.

3 For a summary and listing of John Pierce's known property transactions, see Pierce House HPR, Appendix B—Summary of Pierce Lands—Section C, John Pierce.

4 John's inventory of 1744 lists some properties, such as five acres of Mather's lot and twenty-four acres of woodlot in the Third Division, for which the origin is unclear. They might be part of John's inherited lands, or represent unrecorded purchases. John Pierce, Inventory, Suffolk County Probate, Docket No. 8032, 1744.

5 John Pierce to Thomas Pierce, Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, 50/72, Dec. 21, 1710.

6 "A List of the Polls and Faculties, for the Town of Dorchester," 1727, Collection of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, R. Stanton Avery Special Collections Department, New England Historic and Genealogical Society, Boston, MA. John had four oxen, six cows, one horse, and two pigs; Thomas had seven cows, one horse, and one pig.

7 John Pierce Account Book, Pierce Family Papers. See also John Pierce, Pierce Family Record Book, p. 98, John Pierce Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA. An archeological survey substantiates Pierce's reputed skill, as numerous bird bones were found in a dig on the Pierce property. Christina Ambiel, "The Pierce House," in the Dorchester Historical Society *Newsletter*, XII (Winter, 2001), 7.

8 John Pierce, Inventory.

9 Mary Virginia Terhune (Marion Harland), *Some Colonial Homesteads and Their Stories* (New York, 1897), pp. 353-354.

10 Pierce Family Record Book, pp. 98, 210, and 170.

11 John Pierce III was the president of the Dorchester Temperance Society during the early nineteenth century, and he boasted that his ten children and more than forty of his grandchildren were also members. Although he had participated sparingly in the drinking that was customary during the haying season, he had abstained from "ardent spirits" for over fifty years. According to his son, his temperance resulted in both good health and a correspondingly "temperate" and even personality. Even when he was in his nineties, Pierce's "nerves were so steady; and so much at his command, that, to the last, he could cary around the room a vessel brimful of water, without spilling a single drop." Pierce Family Record Book, pp. 233, 236. The family remained critical of grocer S. S. Pierce, a distant relative, because much of his profit came from the sale of alcoholic beverages. See transcript of interview with Anne Pierce Shaughnessey by Susan Porter, June 4, 2001, p. 38, Library and Archives, Historic New England/SPNEA.

12 John Pierce, Will, Suffolk County Probate, Docket No. 8032, 1744.

13 Pierce Family Record Book, p. 100.

14 Pierce Family Record Book, pp. 210, 171.

15 Pierce Family Record Book, pp. 211, 234-235. The Samuel Howe with whom John III apprenticed was connected to the Pierces in other ways. He served as a selectman with John II's brother Samuel, and Howe's daughter Elizabeth married Samuel Pierce, Jr.

16 On the John Pierce line, see Pierce Family Record Book, p. 170, 210-211, and 222-224, Pierce House HPR, Appendix A – Genealogy, and Laura Driemeyer, “Trail of Original Pierce House,” Research Files, Historic New England/SPNEA. The genealogy indicates that the John Pierce-Samuel Pierce house was in Field's Corner, but Boston City Directories list Samuel Blake Pierce's address as Harvard Street, near Washington, which is in the Mount Bowdoin area, and the house appears there on the Elbridge Whiting *Map of Dorchester, Massachusetts* (1850). On the Thomas Pierces, see transcript of interview with Anne Shaughnessey by Susan Porter, June 26, 2001, p. 28, Library and Archives, Historic New England/SPNEA.