

Research Report
Lorraine Blanton Personal Research
William & Joanna Blessing Towne Family/Edmund Towne/Henry Skerry
January 24, 2021

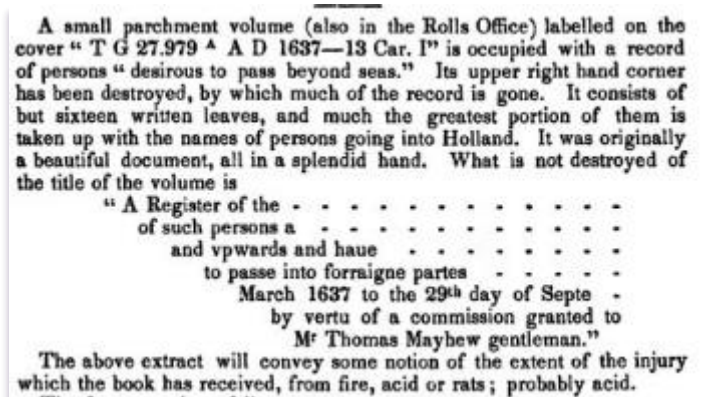
Objective

Identify the Edmund Towne who immigrated to Salem, Massachusetts in 1637 as the apprentice of Henry Skerry, cordwainer (shoemaker). Is this Edmund Towne the son of William Towne and Joanna Blessing?

Background

Ongoing research into the William Towne and Joanna Blessing family group has focused on their date of arrival in Massachusetts although their emigration records have not been found.¹ Originating in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, England, they are believed to have settled in Salem, Massachusetts around 1635.²

An intriguing passenger examination record does exist, however, for an Edmund Towne, 18, who immigrated to Salem with Henry Skerry, a cordwainer, on the *Rose of Yarmouth* in 1637.³ William and Joanna Towne had a son, Edmund Towne, who also settled in Massachusetts.⁴



Description of the document found in the Rolls Office, Chancery Lane, London.
"Founders of New England," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*,

¹ See research notes on the Towne Family dated October 2020 through January 2021.

² Lois Payne Hoover, *Towne Family* (Baltimore: Otter Bay Books, LLC for Towne Family Association, 2010), p. 2. The researcher holds a copy of this book; however, it is not widely disseminated. It may be found in a library or by contacting the Towne Family Association. This is a well-sourced book that has been used extensively in the researcher's Towne family research. The researcher has verified many of its sources.

³ "Founders of New England," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, vol. 14 (Oct 1860), p. 325 (article pp. 297-345); image, *American Ancestors* (americanancestors.org : viewed 13 Jan 2021).

Lois Payne Hoover, *Towne Family*, p. 103. The Towne Family Association hired a professional researcher, Charles Farrow, who confirmed the information described in "Founders of New England," including Edmund's age.

⁴ Lois Payne Hoover, *Towne Family*, pp. 103-182.

vol. 14 (Oct 1860), p. 324 (article pp. 297-345); image, *American Ancestors* (americanancestors.org : viewed 13 Jan 2021).

Aprill the 11th 1637. The examination of Henry Skerry of Great Yarmouth in the County of Norff. Cordwaynar, aged 31 yeares, and Elizabeth his wife aged 25 yeares, with one child Henry, and one Aprentice, Edmund Towne aged 18 yeares, ar desirous to passe for New England to inhabitt.

Entry for Henry Skerry and Edmund Towne.

"Founders of New England," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, vol. 14 (Oct 1860), p. 325 (article pp. 297-345); image, *American Ancestors* (americanancestors.org : viewed 13 Jan 2021).

A point of conflict is Edmund Towne's age at immigration. The ship's examination listing includes him as an 18- year-old. However, Edmund, the son of William Towne, was baptized in 1628.⁵ If he was baptized shortly after he was born, he would have been only 9 years old when he left England. This conflict in age brings about the question of the identity of the Edmund Towne who traveled with Henry Skerry.

Scope & Strategy

Previous research sessions have concentrated on the Towne Family, including Edmund, before and after their arrival in Massachusetts.⁶ The focus and scope of this research session is to document Henry Skerry's activity soon after his arrival in Massachusetts in 1637. Insight into Skerry's activities may provide evidence of an association between him and the Towne family and, therefore, the possibility that Edmund Towne traveled to New England with them.

- Where did Henry Skerry settle?
- What was his occupation?
- Do records include Skerry's interactions with Edmund Towne or the William Towne family?

Limitations

This research session was assigned 15 hours for planning, research and report writing, and took place between 1 January and 24 January 2021.

Due to the narrow time allowance, and travel limitations posed by the COVID pandemic, the research was limited to sources that could be found online.

Summary Conclusion Based on Detailed Research Notes

The results of this research session do not offer direct evidence about the identity of the Edmund Towne who immigrated to New England with Henry Skerry in 1637, nor do they reveal evidence that Edmund Towne interacted directly with Henry Skerry after reaching New

⁵ Lois Payne Hoover, *Towne Family*, p. 103.

⁶ See research notes on the Towne Family dated October 2020 through January 2021.

England. They do, however, show that Henry Skerry immigrated from Great Yarmouth, England, and settled in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1637. He was likely to have interacted with William Towne, Edmund Towne's father, who had immigrated from Great Yarmouth two or three years earlier.

This evidence, combined with previous research, supports the likelihood that the Edmund Towne who immigrated with Henry Skerry was the son of William Towne.⁷ Research into this question is concluded.

- Henry Skerry was admitted as an inhabitant of Salem 12 July 1637 and was granted land there. William Towne was an inhabitant and landowner in Salem at the same time.
- In 1637 Henry Skerry owned land near "Estyes" who was likely to be Jeffrey Esties, the father of William Towne's son-in-law, Isaac Esties. The proximity of Henry Skerry to a known associate of William Towne indicates the possibility that they knew each other.
- Henry Skerry was a constable in Salem indicating that he was a respected and widely known member of the community. His occupation as a cordwainer was not noted, neither was any occupation other than constable and landowner.

The conflict regarding Edmund Towne's age at the time of immigration remains unresolved.

Key Terms & Explanations

1752 Calendar Change: Prior to 1752, England and its colonies used the Julian "Old Style" calendar rather than the Gregorian "New Style." Under the Julian calendar, the first day of the year was March 25 and the first month of the year was March. However, England acknowledged the creation of the Gregorian calendar in 1582 and sometimes recorded dates in both the old and new format. In 1752, England as well as New England and other English colonies, switched to the New Style Gregorian calendar.

This use of different calendar styles can be confusing when comparing dates prior to 1752. When dates are referenced in this research report, attempt is made to clarify and translate the date into Gregorian style. An explanation of the English calendar preferences can be found at the Connecticut State Library web site.⁸

Cordwainer: Henry Skerry's occupation was a cordwainer. In mid-17th century England and New England, a cordwainer was the common word for a shoemaker, a person who makes shoes or boots from leather. Correspondingly, a cobbler is a person who repairs shoes or boots.⁹

⁷ See research notes on the Towne Family dated October 2020 through January 2021.

⁸ "1752 Calendar Change," web page, *Connecticut State Library* (libguides.ctstatelibrary.org : viewed 22 Jan 2021).

⁹ "What is a Cordwainer?" web page, *The Honorable Cordwainers' Company* (thehcc.org : viewed 22 Jan 2021).

Detailed Research Notes

Source 1: Pope's Pioneers of Massachusetts¹⁰

Source Analysis: Somewhat unreliable

The author does not specifically source his information. He does however state,

“The names here given are all which have been found in the journals and lists of the colonies, towns, churches and counties of the period, 1620-1650, including, as well as those perpetuated in the passenger-lists of that time which have survived to our day.”

And,

“While the names, dates and facts here stated have been taken by the compiler from the original documents or from such copies of them as have been made and *verified by the highest authority, references are often given to pages in the Historic-Genealogical Register or other publications where copies or abstracts of the same may be seen.*”

The section on Edmund Towne seems to include estate information that was instead from William Towne's estate. This flaw casts doubt on the author's reliability.

Abstracted Information: Edmund Towne

- Edmund Towne came to Salem with Henry Skerry in 1637 as his apprentice.
- He was a “Sergeant”.
- Edmund Towne was mentioned in William Towne's will as a beneficiary of his estate.
- After Edmund Towne came to Salem, he “rem.[oved] to Topsfield”.
- Edmund Towne's wife was Mary.
- He had a child, Sarah (1657 - c. 1661).
- Other Townes included in this book are John Springfield Towne, William Towne (planter), and William Towne (gardener).

Analysis: Topsfield is adjacent to Salem and their town centers are about ten miles apart.¹¹ The date of Edmund Towne's removal to Topsfield is not noted; however, this record provides evidence that he was in Salem and then moved to Topsfield.

¹⁰ Charles Henry Pope, *The Pioneers of Massachusetts* (Boston: Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 1900); book image, *Ancestry* (ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/48213/ : viewed 8 Jan 2021).

¹¹ Directions from Topsfield, Massachusetts to Salem, Massachusetts, *Google Maps* (google.com/maps : viewed 8 Jan 2021), depending on the route the distance is between 10 and 14 miles.

Conflicting Information: The 1678 and 1682 disposition of Edmund Towne's estate refers to individuals who were not Edmund's children. Instead this appears to refer to the probate of William Towne's (Edmund Towne's father) estate since it lists his children, including Edmund.¹²

TOWN, TOWNE,

Edmund, apprentice to Henry Skerry, came in 1637 to Salem. Sergeant. Rem. to Topsfield. Wife Mary; ch. Sarah b. 26 April, 1657, d. in 1661 and — d. in 1662-3.

His est. was divided 27 (4) 1678, as his widow declared he had wished, to herself, 4 sons and 5 daus. Distribution in 1682 to ch. Edmund, Jacob, Joseph, Rebecca, wife of Francis Nurse, and Sarah Bridges.

Charles Henry Pope, *The Pioneers of Massachusetts* (Boston: Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 1900); book image, *Ancestry*

(ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/48213/ : viewed 8 Jan 2021), p. 459.

Abstracted Information: Henry Skerry

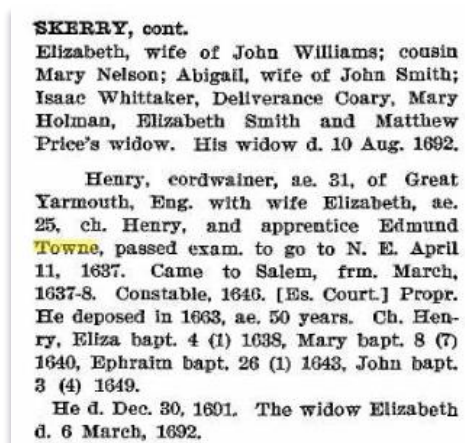
- Henry Skerry was from Great Yarmouth, England.
- He passed the exam to come to Salem, New England on 11 April 1637.
- He was 31 years old at the time [making his year of birth about 1606].
- His occupation was a cordwainer.
- His apprentice Edmund Towne traveled with him
- He was named a freeman [citizen] in March 1637/1638.
- He was a constable in Essex County in 1646.
- At 50 years old, he was deposed in 1663 at the Essex Court [year of birth 1613].¹³
- He died 30 December 1691 [about 85 years old].
- Henry Skerry had a wife, Elizabeth who was born in about 1612 and died in 1692.
- He had children, Henry, Eliza, baptized 1638; Mary, baptized 1640; Ephraim, baptized 1643; and John, baptized 1649.
- The previous entry in the book was for his brother Francis Skerry who came to Salem in 1636.¹⁴
- Francis Skerry's will included his brother Henry and mentions another brother, Robert, who remained in England.

¹² Lois Payne Hoover, *Towne Family*, p. 4.

¹³ Essex County, Massachusetts, *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County Massachusetts, Volume 3, 1662-1667* (Salem : Essex Institute, 1911), p. 104; book image *Family Search* (familysearch.org : viewed 5 Feb 2021). Henry Skerry gave a deposition for a land dispute.

¹⁴ Charles Henry Pope, *Pioneers of Massachusetts*, p. 416.

Analysis/Conflicting Information: The ages indicated in Henry Skerry's entry lead to conflicting birth years, 1606 and 1613, with a difference of seven years. This conflict has not been resolved.



Charles Henry Pope, *The Pioneers of Massachusetts* (Boston: Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 1900); book image, *Ancestry* (ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/48213/ : viewed 8 Jan 2021), p. 417.

Source 2: Salem Town Records¹⁵

Source Analysis: Reliable

This publication is a transcription of Salem, Massachusetts, original handwritten, bound books, “Town Records” and “Book of Grants”. The Essex Institute states that “The spelling, punctuation, &c., will be strictly preserved, and passages erased or interlined in the original will be retained. . .” It appears that the transcribers have taken care with their work, although as a transcription, it is considered a derivative source.

William P. Upham, a contributor to this book, points out that several men were appointed as town clerks, charged with recording land and town transactions in Salem: Jeffry Massey, Emanuel Downing, Mr. Sharpe, Ralph Fogg and John Holgrave. Assuming these men attended the town meetings, they provide primary information about the proceedings.

The authors point out that several pages are missing and that some pages are out of order within the binding of the original records.

Negative Search: Edmund Towne is not mentioned in this publication; however, note that pages are missing from the original record books.¹⁶ The lack of Edmund Towne's inclusion in these records does not indicate that he did not settle in Salem. He may have been too young to require attention in the town records and/or moved away prior to becoming an adult.

¹⁵ Salem, Massachusetts, *Town Records of Salem, Massachusetts, Volume 1, 1634-1659* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1868); book image, *Family Search* (familysearch.org/library/books : viewed 13 Jan 2021).

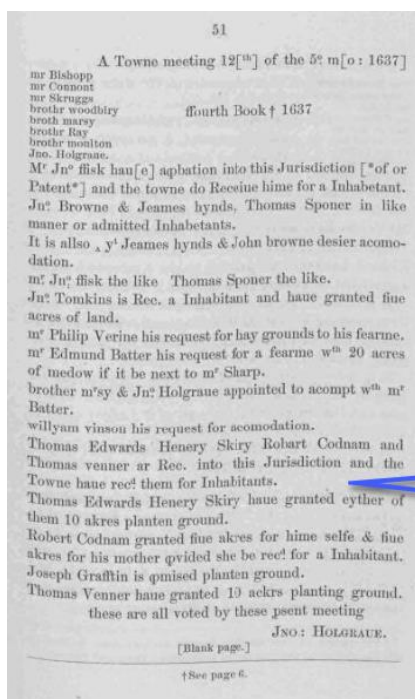
¹⁶ Edmund Towne does not appear in the publication index. A digital search was made of the publication text for the last name Towne or Town: no Edmund Towne was found.

Abstracted Information: Town meeting 12 July 1637

Salem, Massachusetts, town meeting on the 12th day of the 5th month of 1637 [12 July 1637]:

- Henry Skerry was received as an inhabitant and granted ten acres of planting land.
- Other men admitted as inhabitants at the same time were Thomas Edwards, Robert Codnam and Thomas Venner.
- Thomas Edwards was also granted ten acres of planting ground.
- John Holgrave recorded the meeting.

Analysis: The passage from England to New England could take anywhere from five to twelve weeks.¹⁷ Henry Skerry's family and Edmund Towne left England around 11 April 1637 so they would have arrived in Massachusetts sometime between 15 May 1637 and 3 July 1637. Henry Skerry was admitted to the Salem community within a few months of his arrival.



Thomas Edwards Henery Skiry Robert Codnam and Thomas venner ar Rec. into this Jurisdiction and the Towne haue recd them for Inhabitants.
Thomas Edwards Henery Skiry haue granted eyther of them 10 akres planten ground.

Salem, Massachusetts, *Town Records of Salem, Massachusetts, Volume 1, 1634-1659* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1868); book image, *Family Search* (familysearch.org/library/books : viewed 13 Jan 2021), [p. 51](#).

Abstracted Information: Town meeting 21 August 1637

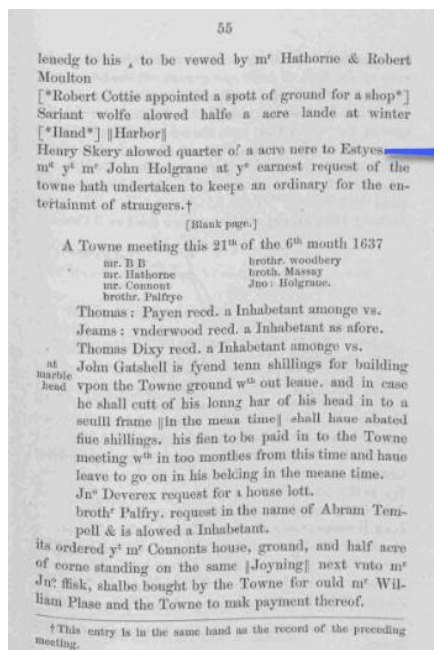
Salem, Massachusetts, town meeting on the 21st day of the 6th month of 1637 (21 August 1637):

- “Henry Skery [was] allowed quarter of a acre of land nere to Estyes”

Analysis: This publication contains many references to Henry Skerry's land grants and purchases. This record especially stands out because of its mention of the proximity of Skerry's

¹⁷ David Cressy, “The Vast and Furious Ocean: The Passage to Puritan New England,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 57 (Dec 1984), p. 520 (article pp. 511-532); online image, *JSTOR* (www.jstor.org : viewed 13 Jan 2021).

new land to Estyes. Estyes may be the same person as Jeffrey Esties. Jeffrey Esties was the father-in-law of Mary Towne, William Towne's daughter.¹⁸



Henry Skerry allowed quarter of a acre nere to Estyes.

Salem, Massachusetts, *Town Records of Salem, Massachusetts, Volume 1, 1634-1659* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1868); book image, *Family Search* (familysearch.org/library/books : viewed 13 Jan 2021), [p. 55](#).

Suggestions for Future Research

Research on the identity of the Edmund Towne who sailed with Henry Skerry in 1637 is concluded. If future research is necessary, it may concentrate on Edmund Towne just before and just after his arrival in New England, specifically addressing the conflict in his age as reported on the ship's records versus his baptism.

- Verify Edmund Towne's birth date.
Follow up on Essex county court records mentioned in "The Towne Family" that might be used to calculate Edmund Towne's age.¹⁹
Verify baptism in Great Yarmouth church records; research other church entries that may provide information.
- Research interactions between the Towne family and Skerry family (including brothers Francis and Robert) in Great Yarmouth, England.
Research apprentice records in Great Yarmouth.
- Determine where Edmund Towne settled in New England and his occupation.
Follow up on reference to Edmund Towne as "Sergeant."²⁰

¹⁸ Lois Payne Hoover, *Towne Family*, p. 263.

¹⁹ "The Towne Family," bound photocopied book, Fred J. Reynolds Genealogy Collection, Allen County (Indiana) Public Library; image, *Family Search* (familysearch.org : viewed 22 Jan 2021).

²⁰ Charles Henry Pope, *The Pioneers of Massachusetts* (Boston: Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 1900), p.

Investigate the idea that Topsfield may have been noted for shoemaking.²¹

- Identify other men in Salem, Topsfield, or other nearby communities possibly named Edmund Towne.

Sources Consulted

Books

- Hoover, Lois Wayne. *Towne Family*. Baltimore: Otter Bay Books for Towne Family Association, 2010.
- Pope, Charles Henry. *The Pioneers of Massachusetts*. Boston: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1900.
- Salem, Massachusetts. *Town Records of Salem, Massachusetts, Volume 1, 1634-1659*. Salem, Massachusetts: The Essex Institute, 1868.

Journals

- "Founders of New England." *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (October 1860).
- Cressy, David. "The Vast and Furious Ocean: The Passage to Puritan New England." *The New England Quarterly* (December 1984).

Web Pages

- "1752 Calendar Change." *Connecticut State Library*. libguides.ctstatelibrary.org.
- "What is a Cordwainer." *The Honorable Cordwainers' Company*. thehcc.org.

Further Resources

The following resources were encountered but are either not yet reviewed or not pertinent to this report and may contain information for future research on the Towne family. They may also cite additional sources for review.

Banks, Charles Edward. *Topographical Dictionary of 2885 English Emigrants to New England, 1620-1650*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1976. Book image available at *Hathi Trust* (babel.hathitrust.org : viewed 21 Jan 2021). Also available at [Ancestry](https://www.ancestry.com).

This book is an index that includes Henry Skerry and Edmund Towne.

Davis, Goodwin. "The Four Blessing Sisters." *The American Genealogist*, vol. 33 (1957). Publication image available at *American Ancestors* (americanancestors.org : viewed 15 Jan 2021). The article states on page 199, "...it is possible the [Towne] family emigrated a few years earlier, with the Buffums and Firmages."

Dow, George Francis. *History of Topsfield Massachusetts*. Topsfield, Massachusetts: Topsfield Historical Society, 1940. Book image available at *Internet Archive* (archive.org : viewed 12).

Essex County, Massachusetts. *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County Massachusetts, Volume 1, 1636-1656*. Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1911. Book image available at *Hathi Trust* (babel.hathitrust.org : viewed 15 Jan 2021). Also available at

459; book image, *Ancestry* (ancestry.com : viewed 8 Jan 2021).

²¹ Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), *MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report, Topsfield, "Early Industrial Period (1830-1870): Economic Base,"* PDF image, *Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc : viewed 12 Jan 2021), p. 12.

Family Search.

Salem, Massachusetts. *Town Records of Salem, Massachusetts, Volume II, 1659-1680 and Volume III, 1680-169*. Salem: The Essex Institute, 1934. Book images available at *Family Search* (familysearch.org and familysearch.org : viewed 21 Jan 2021).

Towne, Edwin Eugene. *The Descendants of William Towne, Who Came to America on or About 1630 and Settled in Salem, Mass.* Newtonville, Massachusetts: Edwin Eugene Towne, 1901. Book image available at *Ancestry* (ancestry.com : viewed 15 Jan 2021).

Towne, William B. Towne. "Notes and Memoranda Relating to Persons of the Name of Towne." *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, vol. 21 (1867). Publication image available at *American Ancestors* (americanancestors.org : viewed 15 Jan 2021).

"Early Vital Records of Massachusetts From 1600 to 1850." *Massachusetts Vital Records Project* (ma-vitalrecords.org : viewed 15 Jan 2021). This web site provides indexes by town and by surname of New England town "Tan Books."