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James Travis and the Siege of Brookfield, 1675

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This story is a work of creative non-fiction. It is a first person account of real people and factual events that took place in England and the Massachusetts Colony in the 1600s. The story is about the life of the Travis and Fitts families who came from Devon County, England to the Massachusetts Colony in 1634. The story teller is James Travis who was born in Newbury, Massachusetts in 1648. His parents were English aristocrats who left their family wealth and their country to seek religious freedom and economic prosperity in the New World. The story begins with James and his family during the “Siege of Brookfield” by Nipmuc Indians in 1675. As the siege lingers into its 3rd day with total annihilation a very real possibility, in a flashback the author uses the voice of James to provide a glimpse of what life was like during monumental historical episodes, including the English Civil War, King Philip’s War, Puritanism, and the settlement of Massachusetts. James grew up in Newbury with one older sister. Their father died at the age of 36 on a return business trip to London. This placed many hardships on the family at time when single mothers were frowned upon by society and children could be taken from them as indentured servants. Fortunately, their uncle lived close by and was able to help keep the family intact and to teach James the skills required of a young man to be a successful farmer and citizen. The living conditions, food, medicine, clothing, housing, and religious services are all described by James, as are the dominating social mores and the strict legal environment in which he and his family lived. Their mother married a widower 11 years after the death of their father and moved to Gloucester, Massachusetts. At maturity, James inherited money left to him in trust by his father, enabling him to marry. However, his wife, Mercy Pearce, was the daughter of Quaker parents who were persecuted for their religion by the predominant Congregationalists in the community. Although James and Mercy were Congregationalists, his association with his in-laws created many difficult situations for him and his wife, as well as his in-laws and brother-in-law. In 1668, one year after their marriage, James moved his family from the coast as one of the 13 original settlers of Quaboag Plantation (Brookfield) on the Massachusetts frontier about 40 miles west of Boston. Seven years later James found himself, his wife, and their three young children trapped along with 94 others in a building of only 1,300 square feet, Ayers Tavern, in Brookfield under a three-day siege by Nipmuc Indians. The “Siege of Brookfield” occurred August 2-4, 1675 by the heretofore friendly Nipmuc Tribe during the first year of King Philip’s War. The villagers were finally rescued by a 48-man militia unit from Marlborough. After the siege and the destruction of the village, James joined the militia. He was captured by Mohawk Indians and held captive for two years in western New York. After his narrow escape, James returned to his wife and children who had relocated to Sherborn, Massachusetts not far from Brookfield. He died in about 1777 in Framingham or Holliston, Massachusetts. His wife died in Holliston in 1744 at age 94. An epilogue describes a “Peace and Reconciliation” ceremony between the descendants of the settlers at Quaboag and the Nipmuc Tribe of the Wampanoag Nation at the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the founding of Brookfield on September 18, 2010. James and Mercy Pearce Travis are the author’s 7th grandparents through their oldest child, Elizabeth Travis who was born in 1668 and died in 1746.

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