

“The Art of Joinery, From Winslow to the Connecticut River”

By Ruth Major, Descendant of brothers Kenelm and Josiah Winslow (and their 17th Century Marshfield neighbors at Green Harbor, Thomas Waterman and Robert Bourne.)

David Parsons Holton’s “Winslow Memorial,” informs us that **Kenelm Winslow** was a “**Joiner** by trade,” “6 Jan 1633-34, when Samuel Jenny was Indented to him as an apprentice; but he is elsewhere and generally called a ‘planter,’ and was somewhat engaged in the shipping interest.” (1.) p. 73

Additional references to the Winslow’s association with shipbuilding includes information on Kenelm’s son, **Job**, “He is styled “Lieutenant” and was a shipwright by occupation.”(Ibid p. 80.)

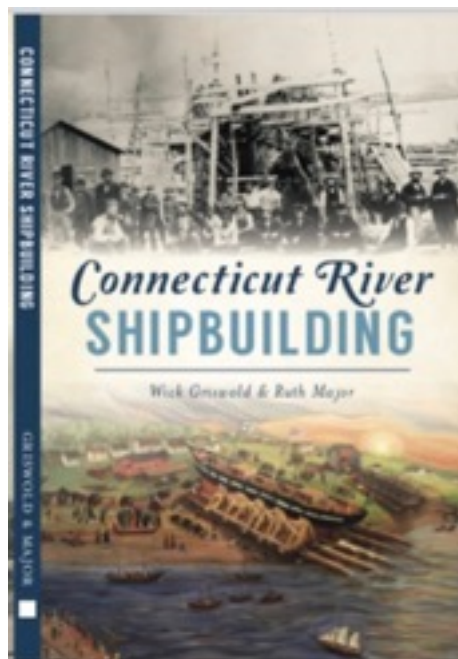
As a writer and fine artist, I appreciate fine craftsmanship and artistry. Whether it be a painting, a piece of fine furniture or a beautiful wooden sailing vessel, I especially appreciate looking at a piece that has been skillfully crafted and joined by hand. Recently, while researching I was amazed and thrilled to find an article online entitled, “Connecting a London-Trained Joiner to 1630’s Plymouth Colony,” by Peter Follansbee. As I read the article, my heart leapt for joy when I realized the author was writing not only about finely crafted furniture, but also my ancestor Kenelm Winslow and his apprentices, one of whom was the son of my ancestors, John and Sarah Jenny of Plymouth, MA. Mr. Follansbee wrote:

“A recent study undertaken to identify New England joiners who first trained in London has begun to bear some interesting fruit. The records of the **Worshipful Company of Joiners and Ceilers of London** provide the earliest written proof of a London connection to a New England joiner. The joiner in question is **Kenelm Winslow**, who arrived in Plymouth Colony in about 1631.” (2.)

Mr. Follansbee goes on to explain that 1621 to 1628, records from the Master’s and Warden’s account books provide evidence of Kenelm finishing his apprenticeship in London under the tutelage of Abraham Worthington. “It was standard practice for an apprentice finishing his time to make a payment to the Company, along with a gift of a spoon.” The standard term for London apprentices was seven years, and the term was completed when the apprentice was age 24 but not before. Apprentices in New England had different terms from those agreed upon in London. Samuel Jenny, eldest son of John and Sarah Jenny of Plymouth, was apprenticed to Kenelm Winslow in 1633-4 for four years “to learn the ‘joiners occupacon.” The shorter length of training in New England was due to the fact that in Plymouth, leaders determined apprentices would be given four-year apprenticeships. A young person would finish his training by the age of 21 and be able to join the work force as a trained artisan. It is interesting to note that by 1660, this decision was reversed in favor of the longer training requirement. (2.)

Samuel Jenny's apprenticeship with Kenelm Winslow was excellent preparation for a young man whose father was, in 1636, authorized to "erect a mill for grinding and beating of corn upon the brook of Plymouth." John Jenny operated the mill until his death in 1644, when Samuel Jenny took over the operation of their Jenny Grist Mill. (3.)

As a joiner, Kenelm was able to use his skills and talents **making furniture** such as storage chests, chairs, desks and tables or **house and outbuilding construction**, including windows, doorways, stairways and flooring. Joiners were also sought after to work in **shipbuilding**. I am keenly aware of the great respect and need for joiner work especially with regard to wooden shipbuilding, as I have just finished co-writing a book with Wick Griswold entitled, Connecticut River Shipbuilding. Our book may be pre-ordered on Amazon and is due to be released by Arcadia/The History Press on October 5th of this year.



If there is one position in a shipyard I have come to appreciate immensely, it is that of the **JOINERS**, an elite group of highly regarded and well trained artisans.

History writer, Ellsworth Grant researched and wrote about shipbuilding. He referred to joiners as one of three main groups of craftsmen who worked in the shipyards. He mentioned that the 1850 census revealed that ship joinery was "a select, family- monopolized business." In Middlesex County, which included 13 Connecticut towns, the 17 ship-joiners listed in the county belonged to only four families. Joiners were given fair wages but better conditions than others working in the shipyards. Unlike the carpenters and caulkers, joiners were required to have specialized skills and training and often worked indoors. Some joiners

became masters and operated their own joinery businesses. Joiners with enough clients were able to take on apprentices who would presumably provide assistance and eventually add more clients to company rosters. Some joiners augmented their incomes by making specialized tools for their trade. All joiners were at liberty to work on houses and outbuildings, furniture and cabinetry, and/or vessels. (4.)



“Launching of Schooner *James A. Phelps* from David Mack’s Shipyard, Essex, CT, October, 1870” by Ruth Major

I have been corresponding with Master Shipwright Paul Kilpin in Western Australia for about two years, and he has taught me a lot about wooden ships and shipbuilding. Paul offered to make me a half-hull model of one of my ancestor’s ships constructed in 1841 in Essex, Connecticut. Using traditional

methods, Paul is hand-carving sections of the model from American grown wood and gluing the sections together prior to sanding and painting the half-hull to look like the actual hull. I asked Paul to explain the work of a Joiner, and he wrote back about joiner apprentices, tasks assigned to Joiners, the types of joints they use and the tools they work with. He gave permission to share the information. Think of Kenelm and Job Winslow as you read this last section...

Regarding apprentices, Paul wrote that 12 to 14 year-old boys would start out their apprenticeship sweeping and cleaning, and caring for tools and equipment, running errands, etc. Despite their desire, (and in order to increase their desire,) “boys” were not given tools for about three years. Apprentices lived with their master joiners until they fulfilled their apprentice obligation or were sent to another master, perhaps to learn a different skill. Small boats were worked on first in order to avoid ruining longer and more valuable lengths of timber. After three more years, apprentices graduated to “hands-on” ship joinery.

Joiners were responsible for doing the “detailed work of connecting pieces together.” This might include setting in paneling in a door or setting “the countersunk dovetails of the deck beams into the shelving timbers.” When the hull was launched and it came time for the vessel to be finished off, that’s when the joiners’ art was on full display.

Fresh from the blacksmith and tool shops, with their precision tools sharpened and oiled – adzes, double-handed long saws, axes and several sized chisels, hand saws, blades, angle gouges and gougers - off to the ship the joiners went. With his collection of fine sharpened tools and detailed drawings, the joiner set about making and setting the flooring, cabins, furniture, windows, furniture, doors and paneling along with any other detailed finished pieces the owners ordered. Joints were made secure and durable by skilled joiners who were masters in art of making details. According to Paul joiners would create the wooden details “using tongue and groove, mortise and tenon, dovetailed corners and anything else that got the job done!” (5.)

Master Shipwright, Paul Kilpin sanding a half-hull ship model





“The Launch of Orphan, 1846”

R.Major

References:

(1.) Holton, David Parsons, Winslow Memorial: Family Records of Winslows and their Descendants, Volume (1.) p. 73. and p. 80., 1877. [Winslow Heritage Society - Home](#)

(2.) “[Connecting A London-Trained Joiner To 1630s Plymouth Colony by Peter Follansbee | Incollect](#),” Published Sep 10, 2013 online at Incollect.com. This article was originally published in their sister company, [Antiques and Fine Art - The #1 Selling Antiques Magazine](#)

(3.) [Pilgrim Hall Museum - Beyond the Pilgrim Story - John & Sarah Jenny](#)

(4.) Grant, Ellsworth. “Thar She Goes!” Shipbuilding on the Connecticut River, Ellsworth Grant and the Connecticut River Foundation at Steamboat Dock, Inc. Greenwich Publishing Group, 2000. pp. 68-73.

<http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/WordsPaintArticle.pdf>

My Article online about John Howland, including reference to John Gardner, his indentured servant from George Kendrick and before him, Kenelm Winslow! See all information regarding joinery and the relationship between Kenelm Winslow and son Job, John Jenny and son Samuel, John Howland and his purchase of John Jenny's home, apprentice or indentured servant John Gardner and his former relationship with Kenelm Winslow. He was sold, did not work out as a joiner or farm worker, but may have with John Howland and Elizabeth Tilley. Many connections here. All material together