



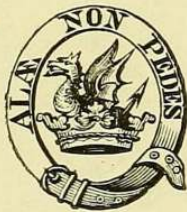
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A  
MEMOIR  
OF  
ELI BICKFORD,  
*1754-1856*  
A  
PATRIOT OF THE REVOLUTION.



NEW YORK:  
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1865.

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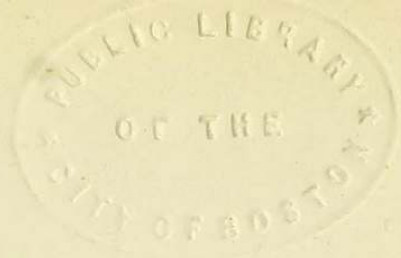
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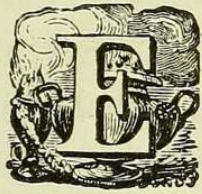


ELI BICKFORD.





## MEMOIR.



ELI BICKFORD, the subject of this memoir, was a native of Durham, N. H., and was born on the twenty-ninth day of September, 1754. His father, Samuel Bickford, had been united in marriage, in early life, to Elizabeth Clark, from whom was descended a numerous family of stalwart sons and daughters.

The early life of Eli Bickford, being spent upon the farm with his father, was distinguished by no remarkable incidents, save those so common to the early settlers. The principal sports and pastimes of his youth were hunting and fishing, in both of which he excelled. During the twenty-second year of his age, war having broken out with England, followed by the Declaration of Independence on the part of the American Colonies the ensuing

year, the spirit of independence and resistance against oppression, of which he was possessed, was at once aroused.

Too long had he breathed the mountain air of liberty—too often had he trod the pathless forest in pursuit of beasts of prey, tamely to submit to the thralldom of a foreign power. Urged on by a bold and adventurous spirit, equalled only by his love to his country, he soon enlisted as a private in her service. But now succeeded one of those calms in the warlike elements, so repugnant to the restless, impatient spirit of the youthful soldier. Several months having thus passed by, and being called into no engagement with the enemy, he longed for more exciting service.

Thinking the navy might furnish scenes more congenial to his nature, he embarked on board a vessel, at that time privately cruising along the New England coast. In their first engagement with an English man-of-war, he, with the rest of the crew, were taken prisoners. They were conveyed to New York, and on their arrival there, were placed on board the "Old Jersey" prison-ship, then lying in the harbor. Here his sufferings

were great, though not of long continuance, as happily for him, he, in common with many other prisoners, was sent to England.

The vessel in which they were transported was under the command of one Captain Smallcorn, one of those men of narrow and contracted souls, who are ever regarded with contempt and scorn. Mr. Bickford has often remarked of this commander, that he was a sample of the *smallest corn* he had ever met. During the passage, Mr. Bickford was attacked with small-pox, which greatly increased his sufferings, while a plank on deck was his only pillow, added to which were the insults and severity of the officers of the vessel. On his arrival in England, he was immediately placed in close confinement, in which situation he was kept for about four years and six months.

Many pleasing anecdotes were related by him concerning this interesting period of his history. Accustomed to a life of activity, he could not now pass his time in idleness. Having found a piece of the hinge of a door, he, with other prisoners, formed a plan to escape, by digging a passage through the walls, and under ground, sufficient to

admit of their egress. A report of this attempt had reached the keeper of the prison, but it failed to convince him of its truth. Consequently, he frequently jested with Bickford, who was the leader in this enterprise, inquiring how he succeeded in his efforts. His answers were so truthful and accurate, that, instead of convincing, they tended only to blind the jailor. One morning, as he entered the prison, he said, "Well, Bickford, how soon will you be ready to go out?" "To-morrow night," was the reply. "O, that is only some of your nonsense," was the rejoinder. To this, Bickford replied, "However, this is our intention," and when the time came, the jailor found it to be true.

After digging a passage for some distance underground, concealing the dirt in their hammocks, made into bags for this purpose, the prisoners found themselves under an adjoining house. They then proceeded to take up the brick floor, unlocked the door, and passed out, without disturbing the inmates, who were asleep in the rooms above them. They concealed themselves for some time, hoping by some means to escape from the Island,

but being unable to do so on account of the vigilant watch which was instituted over them, they finally made a contract with a man who was to return them to the prison and then give them one-half of the reward of forty shillings sterling, which was offered for their recapture. As a punishment for their attempt to escape, they were confined for a week in the "Black Hole," and fed on bread and water only. So successful was this expedient, however, that it was afterwards put into operation on several occasions, particularly when the purses of the prisoners had need of replenishment.

The mode of settling difficulties among the prisoners was somewhat characteristic. The parties at variance, taking their stand before the other prisoners, exchanged a few rounds of well-directed blows, then shook hands, and were better friends than ever. Thus, varying as best they could the monotony of prison life, they spent their time. At the Declaration of peace, an exchange of prisoners was made, and Mr. Bickford then returned to New Hampshire, and set out at once for his home.

During the long years of his absence, no tidings had reached his family concerning him, while he too remained in ignorance of their welfare. It was on a Sabbath morning when he reached his native place. The people had assembled in the church to worship God. Passing the door of the church, he was seen, and recognized by one of the assembly, who announced the fact of his return to others. Immediately the place of worship was vacated, the entire congregation rushing out to see one who "though dead, was alive again, though he was lost, yet was he found."

Soon after his return, he was married to Abigail, daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Rand, a native of Hampton, but then residing in Deerfield. Owing to the depreciation in value of Continental money at this time, his entire property, real and personal, amounted to the sum of only seven dollars, one of which went to pay the parson's fee.

A strong heart and willing hands constituted at this time his only wealth. In 1792 and 1793 many settlers emigrated to northern Vermont, and he among the rest, with his wife and four children, found a home in what was then an almost unbroken

wilderness. Selecting a location in the eastern part of Danville, Caledonia County, he at once commenced the work of clearing up a farm, and erecting a log house upon a gentle slope of land covered with a rich growth of the sugar maple. But scarcely had he commenced his labors, before he was prostrated by a fever, and the strong man was laid low.

Dark was the prospect which now opened before him. A long cold winter had already commenced. The settlers, it is true, were kind, and one of them had hospitably received the family of the emigrant into his own small dwelling; but they, too, were poor, and so few in number, that Mr. Bickford has frequently said that he has seen all the men in town sitting together on one log. Added to this, his house was not yet completed.

One day as a neighbor listened to his delirious vagaries and fearful forebodings, while his reason was wandering, the man remarked, "this house must be finished." The neighbors immediately rallied; the house was completed, and Mr. Bickford and his family entered upon its occupancy; and often, in after years, has he remarked, that

never was he so happy in his life, as when he first took possession of his new home. With untiring energy and unabated industry he toiled on, until he had acquired a competency for himself and family of nine children, causing his wilderness home to "bud and blossom like the rose."

Ever pleasant and affable in his manners, possessed of a rich experience, rendered still more attractive by an unusual flow of genial, ready wit, he drew around him a large circle of firm, disinterested friends. Religion, too, lent her attractions, clothing his life with a new beauty, while he sought to adorn the doctrine of God, his Saviour, in all things. His was a religion that was attracting, investing its possessor with none of that moroseness so often witnessed in those called by the name of Christians. He loved his Saviour, and loved all his creatures. To the Congregational church was he ardently attached, of which he remained a worthy member till his death.

When, as they grew to manhood and womanhood, his sons and daughters left their paternal home to go forth into the wide world, his feet still



lingered around the old homestead, and tried friends, with whom were associated so many pleasant scenes of the past.

In the autumn of the year 1840, the wife of his youth and old age, the partner of his joys and sorrows, sweetly entered into rest. And now, alone, he trod life's pathway. But, though the snows of more than fifty winters had sprinkled the brow of his youngest born, and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren gathered in the old homestead, his cheerful laugh and pleasant voice was heard recounting the scenes of the "long, long ago." Yet the freshness of youth still lingered around his heart, rendering him a fitting companion for every age, and children and youth, as they gazed upon him, felt that even *age* had its attractions. When a century had passed by, and left him still tossed upon life's billows, thought left the busy present, and wandered back to the bright scenes of the past, and the old man was a child again.

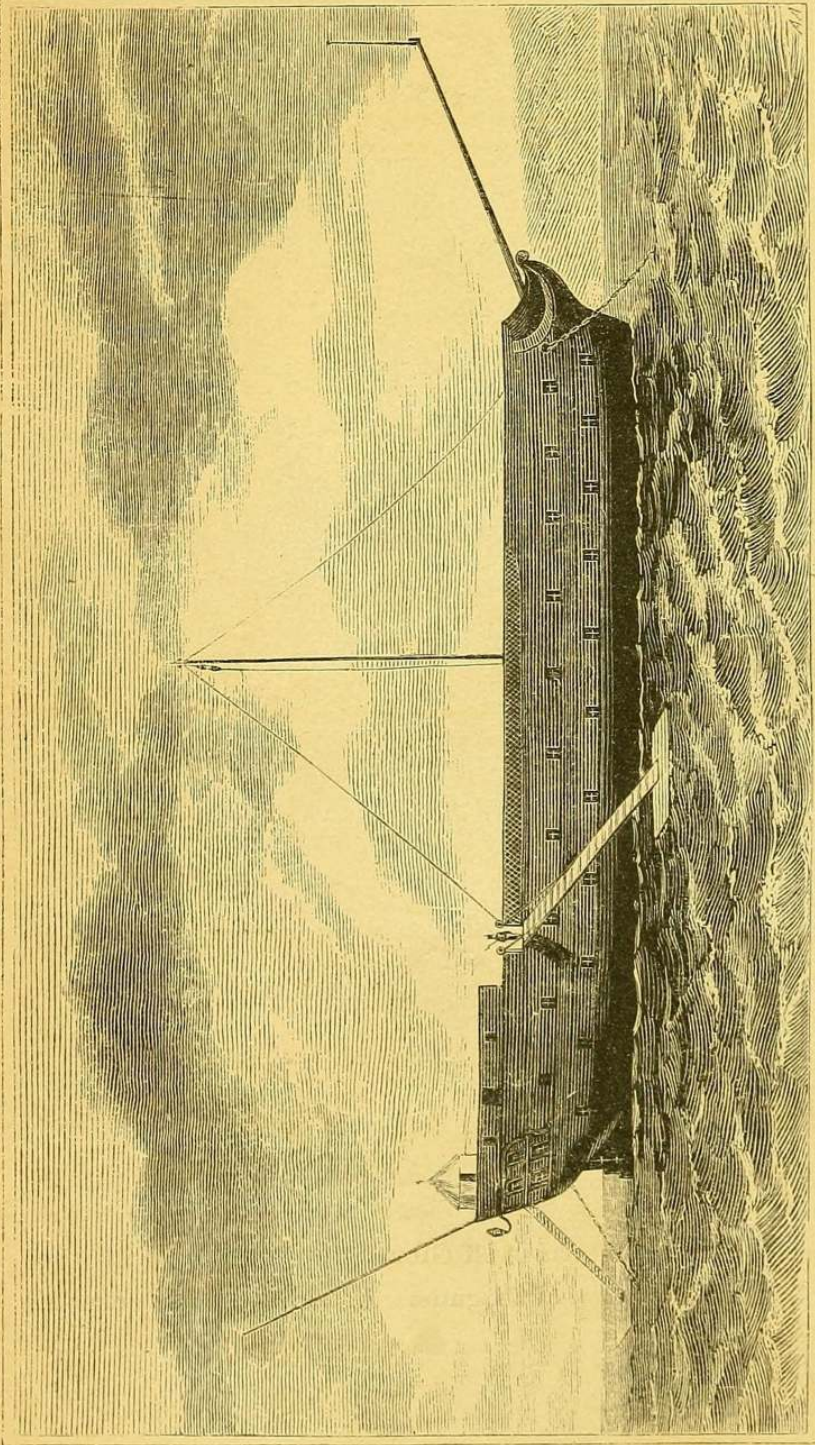
On the fifth day of May, 1856, at the advanced age of one hundred and one years, seven months and six days, life's weary wheels stood still, and

peacefully and gently, his spirit departed to meet that Saviour whom he had so long loved.

In a quiet burying ground at North Danville, by the side of his beloved wife and daughter who had preceded him, his body rests, while eight of his children survived him. One son has passed more than the three score years and ten allotted to human life, on the old homestead, which still remains in the possession of the descendants. Other sons and grandsons have wandered off to the West, and to the South, and to the land of golden dreams, and some, imitating the example of their ancestor, are to-day fighting in their country's defense, for the spirit of patriotism is not wholly extinct in his descendants.







THE JERSEY PRISON SHIP.



## THE PRISON-SHIP "JERSEY."

By CHARLES I. BUSENELL.

THE "JERSEY" was originally a British ship of the line. She was registered as a 4th-rate, carried 60 guns, and was built in 1736, as successor to a 50-gun ship, which had been condemned as unfit for further duty. The first service of our ship was in 1737, when she was one of the Channel fleet, under Sir John Norris. In 1739 she was commanded by Edmund Williams, and composed one of the Mediterranean fleet, under Rear-admirals Nicholas Haddock and Sir Chaloner Ogle, and she was subsequently one of the squadron that was designed against Ferrol. In 1741 she was commanded by Peter Lawrence, and in March of that year, she bore the flag of Sir Chaloner Ogle, at which time she composed one of the fleet of Admiral Vernon, in his unsuccessful expedition against Carthage. In 1743 Harry Norris was appointed to her, who in 1744 was succeeded in command by Charles Hardy, subsequently Governor of New York. Under this officer she formed, in the following year, one of the Mediterranean fleet, under Vice-admiral Rowley. On the 26th of July, when on a cruise off Gibraltar, she fell in with the *St. Esprit*, a French ship of 74 guns. An engagement ensued,

and lasted for 2½ hours, when the *St. Esprit*, being much damaged, was compelled to sheer off. The *Jersey* being also much crippled, was unable to pursue her, and accordingly put into Lisbon for repair. She subsequently served in the Mediterranean fleet, under Admiral Medley, and then returned home. In Oct., 1748, the *Jersey* was reported as a hulk, and in 1755, after being put into repair at Chatham, and manned with a crew of 420 men, she was placed under the orders of Sir William Burnaby, in anticipation of a rupture with France. In 1757 John Barker was appointed to her, and under him she formed one of the Mediterranean fleet, under Henry Osborne, Admiral of the blue. In 1759 she composed one of the fleet of Admiral Boscawen, in his maneuvers against the French squadron, under M. de la Clue, and she was one of the three ships that made the unsuccessful attempt to cut away two of the enemy's vessels in the harbor of Toulon. About the latter part of the year, Andrew Wilkinson was appointed to her, under whom she composed one of the Mediterranean fleet, under Vice-admiral Saunders, until near the termination of the war. In 1766 William Dickson was appointed to command her as captain to Sir Richard Spry, who hoisted his flag on board, and continued in her as commander of a small squadron in the Mediterranean till 1768. In the following year she sailed from Plymouth for Newfoundland, taking the Hon. John Byron, the newly appointed Governor of that colony, as a passenger, and bearing his flag on board. She returned home at the end of the year and put into Chatham, where she was soon after fitted up as a hospital-ship. She was placed under the orders of Commander W. A. Halstead, and sailed for America in the spring of 1776, as one of the squadron of Commodore Hotham, arriving at Sandy Hook in

the month of August. She subsequently was used for a short time as a store-ship, then employed again as a hospital-ship, and finally fitted up as a prison-ship, in which capacity she remained till the termination of the war, when she was broken up and sunk off the Long Island shore, near the site of the present navy yard.

*Narrative of John Blatchford*, pp. 108-110.

*Adventures of Christ. Hawkins*, pp. 202-215.











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