

Were Elijah Dunham of Pearsontown and Eiljah Dunham of Deer Isle the same person?

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Before now there was no evidence to demonstrate that Elijah Dunham who lived at Pearsontown in the 1750s was the same man who settled at Deer Isle in the late 1760s. In "Founding of Pearsontown, Maine," Albert J Sears makes the connection between the Pearsontown Dunham and the Deer Isle Dunham, but offers no explanation. His published history and the plausibility of the idea has spread the unfounded claim. New information has come to light that allows us to draw the conclusion that records refer to the same person.

Six muster rolls between 1755 and 1760 indicate that Elijah Dunham belonged to a company of men who stood in defense of the frontier settlement of Pearsontown, also called Hobbstown, and later known as Standish. Pearsontown was a very small frontier settlement in the 1750s, having only 16 families. They were distant from any fortified settlements, and were well exposed to attack during the conflict that raged with the French and the Indians during that decade. A company was raised for protection, as well as to allow the Massachusetts General Court to provide supplies to the settlers. Elijah was one of these men, and presumably had a family. The last muster roll that he appeared on dated Pearsontown was in 1760.

The inhabitants of Deer Isle submitted a petition to the General Court in 1762 asking for a grant of the island to secure the improvements they had made. Elijah was not among the signers. Deer Isle historian Hosmer claims that Elijah and his sons arrived on the island about 1766. We have no documentation to support the claim, but it seems reasonable, as other settlers arrived about this time. We do know, however, that he was living on the island in 1776, as he a member of the Deer Isle Committee of Inspection during the Revolutionary War, which submitted a letter to the General Court asking for instructions on how to deal with captured vessels. Elijah appears in several records on Deer Isle until his death in 1813.

It is not clear where Elijah of Pearsontown came from, nor where he went after 1760. We do not know the origins of Elijah of Deer Isle. That the stories of these men do not overlap allows us to postulate that they are same person. The closest town to Pearsontown in that era was Falmouth, the place where many of the Deer Isle settlers lived before removing to the mid-coast. It is plausible that Elijah was part of this same trend of migration. We know nothing about the family of Elijah of Pearsontown, if they existed. Unfortunately, any records that exist referring to the family of Elijah of Deer Isle do not make any allusions to Pearsontown, Standish, or Falmouth. However, one aspect of the records that do exist may be interpreted in a different way that can connect the two Elijahs.

Most of the records of Elijah were created by other people and recorded aspects of his life. Such records included censuses, land records, military records, town records. Two records included the signature of Elijah Dunham. In 1757, the residents of Pearsontown asked the General Court to add more men to the local military rolls. Elijah was among the signers. The petition of the Committee of Inspection on Deer Isle from 1776 described above also included Elijah signature. Despite being signed 20 years apart, they are remarkably similar to each other. We can only conclude that Elijah Dunham of Pearsontown and Elijah Dunham of Deer Isle were the same man.

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Further Conclusions

Starting with the premise that Elijah Dunham was a military man from Pearsontown who was a settler of Deer Isle, we can examine other records in a new light. Perhaps we can construct a better timeline of his life.

The 1800 census recorded Elijah's family at Deer Isle, indicating that they had come from "St George's." Depending on how the question was asked of the census taker, what this means is unclear. If we believe that the family lived at St George's before settling on Deer Isle, we can conclude that they resided there for a short period after leaving Pearsontown sometime after 1760. Another interpretation could be that St George's was the first place that they lived in Maine.

A presumed son of Elijah, Joseph Dunham, was said to have been born at "Long Island." Despite an 1880 census record of his son referring to New York, it is far more likely that this island would be located in Maine. There are several islands in Maine that have gone by that name, located at Georgetown, Falmouth, Friendship, and Blue Hill. Friendship is located on the St George River, and, although sparsely populated at the time, could have been the place the family lived in the early 1750s when Joseph is presumed to have been born. A muster roll from 1748 lists a "centinel" name "Elisha" Dunham. Their company appears to have been stationed at Point Pleasant, as that is where the roll was endorsed. Point Pleasant is also located on the St George's River. Thus this record lends credence to the hypothesis that the Dunhams lived at St Georges early, and that Joseph could have been born there.

The alternative idea that Long Island could be the one off Falmouth is supported by the notion that many mid-coast settlers who arrived shortly after the cessation of the hostilities of the French and Indian War came from around Falmouth. Mary wife of Samuel Pickering of Deer Isle is said by historian Hosmer to have been a daughter of Elijah, although there are no records to support this (and a few to counter this). The 1800 census indicates that the Pickerings had come from the Portland area. This is not surprising, but if Mary turns out to be a daughter of Elijah, this fact would add weight to the claim that Long Island near Falmouth was where the Dunhams lived at one time.

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Elijah Dunham's life becomes clearer knowing that we can extend his story back to 1755 with certainty, and in all likelihood to 1748. Questions remain though:

-Elijah was apparently married twice. His first wife Joan is known from a 1789 deed. Deer Isle historian Benjamin Lake Noyes claims his second wife Ruth married Ezekiel Alexander shortly after Elijah's death in 1813. Who were these women? Was Joan the mother of his children?

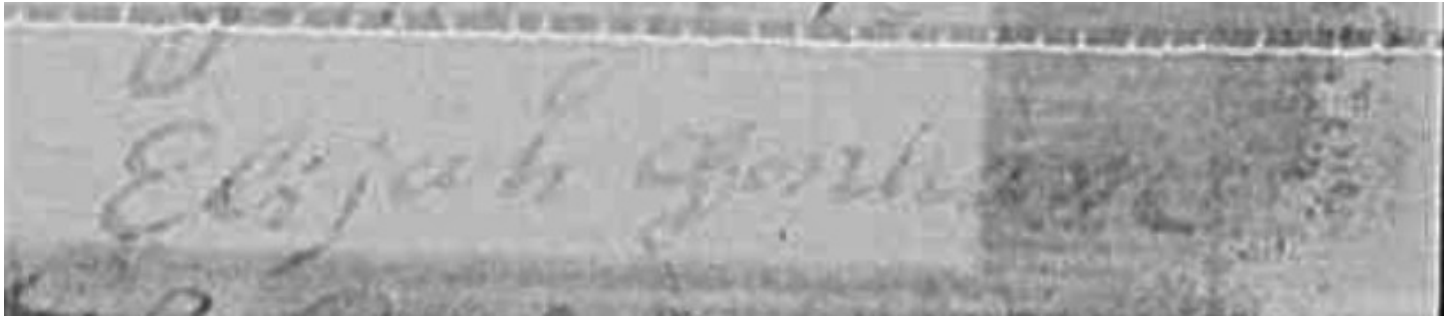
-We take it for granted that Elijah Dunham the younger of Deer Isle is the son of Elijah. Joseph and Samuel Dunham are two other presumed sons. Mary wife of Samuel Pickering is said to have been a daughter. Who were Elijah Dunham's children?

-The 1760 muster roll at Pearsontown indicates that Elijah was 31 years old and born in "Middleton." Middleton, New Hampshire, was granted only in 1749, making it an improbably birthplace for Elijah who would have been born about 1729. The more natural reference would be to Middleton, Massachusetts, in Essex County. We find no record of any Dunhams in that town in that period or shortly before or after. Was the muster roll filled out improperly? Was Middleton the birthplace of a man on the line above or below Elijah? Was there a Dunham family who lived at Middleton that eluded record makers?

-A Dunham family lived at Falmouth about the time Elijah Dunham was born. Elisha Dunham was first recorded there in 1733 and remained for over a decade before removing to Boston and then Chelsea. None of his family remained in Falmouth. These Dunhams had come from Massachusetts, living at Gloucester and Norton, but they were not known to have lived in Middleton. Considering the coincidence of the Elisha Dunham family in Falmouth about the same time as the birth of Elijah, departing about the time Elijah went into the service on the eastern frontier, one could conclude that the two Dunhams were related. Was Elijah Dunham the son of Elisha Dunham of Falmouth? Or some other relation?

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1757 Pearson Town Petition



<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1055547?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
Massachusetts State Archives collection, colonial period, 1622-1788

Authors: Massachusetts. State Archives

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v. 116 -- Towns (from p.293), 1751-1754 ; v. 117 -- Towns (to p.615), 1755-1762.

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[1054/1373]

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Petition Augt 18 1757

Comtee on Frontrs

Province of the Massachusetts Bay

To His Excellency Thomas Pownall Esqr Govr in Chief of his Majys Pro of the Mass Bay in New Engd

To the Honble his Majestys Council & House of Representatives in general Court Assembled Augt 1757

The Petition of the Inhabitants of a New Township in the County of York lately granted to Capts Humphry Hobbs and Moses Pearson and Others, Humbly Sheweth

That they live more exposed to the Indian Enemy than any other Part of the Eastern Country, and that there is no Settlement so far removed into the Wilderness by Eight Miles as they are by Reasons whereof they could by no means subsist in Time of War, unless they were help'd by the Government the last Year as well as this, which Favour they are in Duty bound to acknowledge & Return the Honble general Court hearty Thanks for the Same; but as their Number is now increasd to Sixteen Families and the Honble Court have as yet been pleas'd to put but Ten of the sd Inhabitants into Pay, and being quite a new Country & they now being able to cultivate and improve their Lands in Time of War have had nothing, or very little else to subsist on this Spring and Summer than what those ten Inhabitants in Pay of the Province have recd from the Province, divided among the Sixteen Families, by means whereof most of their Families have been in a Suffering and at Times in a Starving Condition, and must inevitably quit the Settlement to avoid Perishing with Hunger

Wherefore your Petitioners humbly beseech your Hons to take Pity of them in their distress'd Condition, especially as they are so far remote from the utmost Frontier of any Other Settlement in the County, and give Orders that Sixteen of said Inhabitants be put into Pay and Subsistance and your Petitioners as in Duty bound will ever pray

Thomas Stevens

Pearson Town July 20th 1757

John Walker

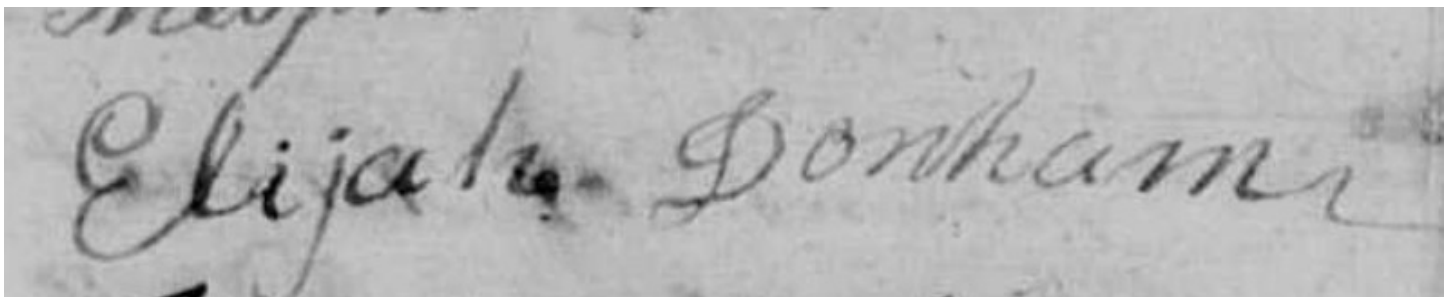
Samuel Knowles

Arthur McGill

John Burnell
Timothy Crockers
Clement Meserve
Clement Meserve jur
Thomas marton
John? Candage?
John York
Israel Thorn
Elijah Donham
Joseph Thorne
Abraham York
James Lord

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1776 Petition of the Deer Isle Committee of Inspection



<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1055547?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
Massachusetts State Archives collection, colonial period, 1622-1788

Authors: Massachusetts. State Archives

v. 180 -- Rev. Petitions (from p.208), 1775-1776 ; v. 181 -- Rev. Petitions, 1776

Granite Mountain Record Vault

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[700/1346]

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Comee of Deer Island, Me for instructions as to certain captured vessels 6 June 1776

To the Honorable The Council and House of Representatives of the Coloney of the Massachusetts at Watertown assembled or ? the Memorial of the Committee of Inspection for Deerisland in the County of lincoln humbly Sheweth that wheare as your Memrl Did in the mounth of August last teake in custidity the Sloop Saley and the Schoney Nightenhill the Property of Nathan Jones and Jonathan Rich for being Employed as We aprihended Contreary to the Resolvs of Confress and Wheareas your Memorl Did in the mounth of Septr Meake aplication to This honorable Court for their orders on Said Vessils and Whereas the Seame Was obtaind at a Cerey Execordenery Expence by a Resolve of the honorable how Detaining Said Vissils under the Cear of sd Commitee untill the farther order of this honoll Commt and Whereas your Memrl aprihend that They Can do nothing more or less with Regard to sd Vessils as also about 90 quantles of fish wch was the cargo og the Schoner Nightengill and meade on this Island and as your Memrl are in formed that there is no Record Meade of sd Resolve having ben Serch for by the sd Jones last Winter with intent to teake advantage thereby and whereas your Memorialists Detained Said Vesils from no other Motive but to Provent Tread of that Neature which we aprihend was consederibly after thereby in this part of the Coloney and as Corst as was before mentioned has ben Great as also having the Concorance of this honorable Court in the Detaintion of sd Vessiles on the Evidance Meade to apeare against them

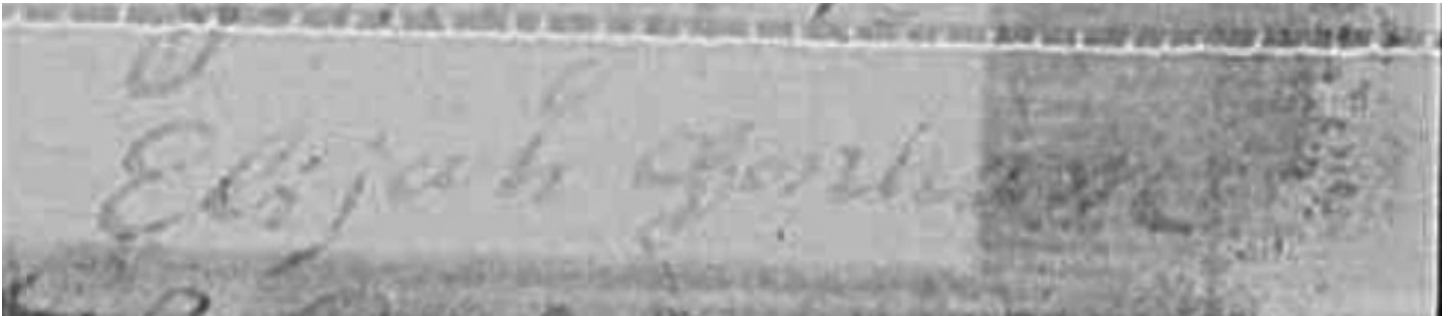
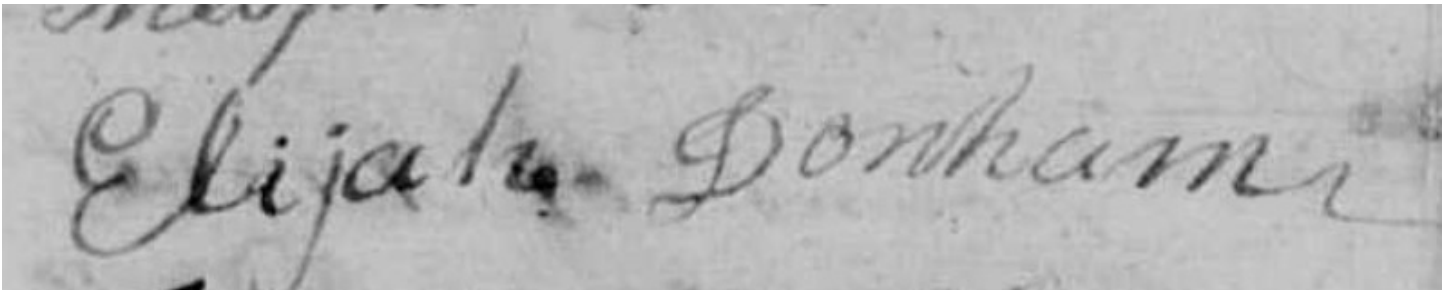
We your Memsts humbly Pray your honors Speedy orders on the sd Primeses & your Memsts as in Duty bound
will Ever Pray &c
Theophilus Eaton
Elijah Donham
Joseph Crockett

In the House of Representative June 1776

Resolved that where as the Committee of Safty and Correspondence of Dear Island Did on or about the 30th
Day of August Last take into Custody the Schoner Nightengil Supposed the Property of Jonathan Rick that the
sd Committee be and they hereby are Diverted to Detain and take proper Care of Said Schoner Nightengale
until the further order of this Court

* * *

Both Signatures

A close-up photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive script. The signature is "Elijah Donham" and is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The ink is somewhat faded and the handwriting is fluid and characteristic of the 18th century.A close-up photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive script. The signature is "Elijah Donham" and is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The ink is somewhat faded and the handwriting is fluid and characteristic of the 18th century.