

The Sketch of the Life of Nicholas Thomas of Eden

Written by himself August 6th 1857 – Age 78

Nicholas Thomas, Esq. was born on Mount Desert Island on May 18, 1780. His father, also named Nicholas, had come from Providence, RI, and married Lucy Somes, daughter of Abraham Somes. The family settled in the Thomas District of Eden.

When Nicholas Thomas, Esq. died in 1865, the Congressional Globe noted in its obituary that he “was of that kind commencing life under many, almost every disadvantage.” However, as these verses relate, he lived a full and remarkably varied life and left his mark on the history of Maine.

This “Sketch,” which he composed after his 77th birthday, tells of his adventures at sea, his troubles as a businessman and farmer, his life as a public figure of prominence and influence, his love for his family and for Mount Desert Island, and his veneration of the Constitution. Although he had had little education, he was an avid reader and had a vivid memory for places and people.

Thomas was a delegate to the Convention that drafted Maine’s Constitution, served several times in the Legislature, and was a town leader and benefactor throughout his adult life. He and Hannah Wasgatt were married for 68 years.

1.

In the year eighty I was born
In the town of Mount Desert
That lieth in the State of Maine
Of which it makes a part.

2.

I in fair Eden was brought up
And learned to work and play
Tis bounded south by Mt Desert
And north by Frenchmans bay.

3.

My mothers name was Lucy Somes
As you may understand
From Gloucester they first removed
Their harbor was Cape Ann.

4.

With pleasant gale they set all sail
In the year of sixty three
The wind increased and they sailed East
A wilderness to see.

5.

I understood they made the land
Not far from Cranberry Isle
Up Somes’s sound their way they found
And anchored their a while.

6.

Their ship they moored and went on shore
And took a full possession
Of George’s land on every hand
And deemed it no transgression.

7.
And had not George the British King
Disturbed their corperation
In time to come they would increased
And multiplied a nation.

8.
But I'll return and fix my mind
On facts that's more pertaining
Unto myself throughout my life
While lame I'm still remaining.

9.
In Ninety-two my mother died
I keep that day in mind
Twas on the eighteenth day of March
When the Sun was near the line.

10.
My father lived a single life
About a half a year
Then married Jane a second wife
Which filled my mind with fear.

11.
I feared in her I should not find
The mother I had lost
For she was kind in all her ways
And virtuous precepts taught.

12.
In Ninety-three two sisters dear
Likewise a brother too
Was called away by sudden death
To bid this world adieu.

13.
In one wide grave they three were laid
They died within one week
And no Physician could be found
To give the least relief.

14.
Thus out of six within one week
We were reduced to three
But I was one that still was spared
A lengthened life to see.

15.
Now up to Seventy years and six
My life has been prolonged
While millions of the human race
Have sickened; died; and gone.

16.
Upon a farm I was brought up
And learned to plow and hoe
To use the pitchfork scythe and rake
And after cows to go.

17.
I learned to milk when very young
Not more than twelve years old
And have continued in that course
Through summer's heat and cold.

18.
Up to this time I'm still inclined
To tend around the Barn
And feed the cattle; sheep; and hens
Protecting them from harm.

19.
To give them hay day after day
And see they often drink
And see the calves they are not starved
I often on them think.

20.
I often thought when but a boy
If I was only free
What propety I soon could make
By sailing on the sea.

21.

The day at length it did arrive
And I was Twenty-one
I now enjoyed full liberty
Throughout this world to roam.

22.

I first took up the coasting trade
And sailed along the shore
I sailed from Eastport to New York
And many places more.

23.

My work was hard both night and day
I suffered heat; and cold;
I spared no pains made no delay
In search of glittering Gold.

24.

But seven years before the mast
Ships duty I performed
But many times I thought and wished
I never had been born.

25.

My Captain he would curse & swear
Yes curse me to my face
When I was doing all I could
To put things in their place.

26.

Oh! how I longed to see the day
When I should once command
Then I could take full liberty
In calling on the hands.

27.

The day arrived and I was made
A Captain on the sea
But care and trouble followed on
Their was no peace for me.

28.

For four years more I tried my luck
I sailed along the shore
And freights of various kinds I took
For to increase my store.

29.

Sometimes I got the best of freights
And sometimes not so good
Sometimes I freighted boards and plank
And sometimes maple-wood.

30.

The fall before the British war
I took a load of plaster
Laid on the line took Course & Pine
Disaster followed after.

31.

For Philadelphia we set sail
The wind at east was blowing
Which soon increased into a gale
And soon commenced a snowing.

32.

We double-raaft our lower sails
And for Cape Cod we steered
But fell to Leeward of the cape
And Chatam lights appeared.

33.

Among Nantucket shoals we sailed
By soundings of the Lead
And anchored safe in Holmes's Hole
Upon its sandy bed.

34.

The wind at Northeast blew a gale
About the hour of noon
We lost an anchor drifted up
On shore at the Lagoon.

35.

I hired a crew to get her off
They used both boat and barge
And soon we found our ship afloat
By six days working hard.

36.

We found that beating on the sands
Had caused our ship to leak
And that some port for to discharge
We now was bound to seek.

37.

Then for New York we set our sails
And sailed along the Sound
We passed through Hurlgate on our way
And anchored near the Town.

38.

We sold our plaster on the warf
Was ready to return
The wind and weather proving fair
We now set sail for home.

39.

We crossed Nantucket shoals once more
With fair and pleasant gales
While one was heaving of the Lead
The others tend the sails.

40.

The pollock rip we safely passed
And hauled up for Cape Cod
We shortly meet the Northern sea
Out ship begin to Nod.

41.

The wind it quickly died away
Then come in with a squall
Which carried spars and sails away
With shrouds and Landyards all.

42.

And now before the wind and sea
We sailed our shattered Barque
A cargo we had none on board
Unlike to Noah's Ark.

43.

We drove about from East to West
Before the sea and wind
Our terror I cannot express
We feared a fatal end.

44.

For many days and many nights
The furious gale did blow
The waves ran high towards the sky
Our ship rolled to and fro.

45.

When thirty days had passed away
A sail we did espy
A signal Flag we hoisted up
And hove our vessel bye.

46.

And soon we had the pleasant sight
A Schooner bearing down
We hailed her from our quarter deck
To know where she was bound.

47.

Her Captain's name was Henry Tew
He proved to us a friend
He well supplied our present needs
And then conveyed us in.

48.

His name I ever shall respect
As long as I have life
But death has taken him away
He left a tender wife.

49.

For four days more we then sailed on
And then we made the land
It proved the Island of St Kitts
Upon our Starboard hand.

50.

And now anew we shaped our course
A harbor for to find
St Thomas soon it did appear
A harbor to our mind.

51.

For nineteen days we tarried their
Our vessel to refit
And bought up ballast; beef; & bread
To last us for the trip.

52.

Then from that harbor we set sail
And passed out by the Fort
To Carolina we were bound
On fair Columbia's coast.

53.

In ten days time we made the land
Not far from Charleston Bar
It was to us a pleasant sight
To find that we were their.

54.

For nineteen days we tarried their
A cargo to retain
We took in cotton rice and wood
And soon we sailed again.

55.

In twenty days we did arrive
In Massachusetts Bay
In Boston harbor moored our ship
On March the twentieth day.

56.

Our cargo their we did discharge
The wind it proving fair
We sailed our Craft to Beverly
And then we left her their.

57.

To Marblehead we soon did go
Took passage their for home
And likewise made a solemn vow
No more on seas to roam.

58.

I to my family returned
And was rejoiced to see
My wife and children all were well
Long time they'd mourned for me.

59.

They thought we'd perished in the sea
Where waves like mountains rise
But God by his divine decree
Had seen fit to spair our lives.

60.

What can I render to that God
That gave a safe return
That cheered my wife & children dear
Whose absence I had mourned.

61.

Now I resolved to stay on shore
And go no more to sea
I thought to work upon the farm
How happy I should be.

62.

I build a house, likewise a shed
To keep my cattle warm
And found my family in bread
That I raised upon the farm.

63.

But money I could not retain
My Taxes for to pay
So I was lead to think for once
To find some other way.

64.

At traiding soon I did commence
Set up a little store
And filled the same with merchandise
Of eighty pounds and more.

65.

I kept but little goods on hand
But often sent for more
Tobacco was in good demand
And spirits was no sore.

66.

For womans wear I had a stock
That best would please the eye
For they were always sure to pay
And seldom known to lie.

67.

A tipling shop I also kept
For which I was to blame
In every town it proves a curse
In practice and in name.

68.

It injures persons old & young
A tipling shop to keep
They take the earnings of the poor
And widows cause to weep.

69.

I prospered on a trading sale
But still was not content
I looked around on every hand
For something to invent.

70.

And soon a windmill I contrived
To grind both wheat and corn
Eleazer was my grinding man
My hopes proved all forlorn.

71.

For every peck of toll I got
For to increase my store
It cost me sixty cents a peck
And often something more.

72.

I found that I should not get rich
By grinding wheat and corn
I took her down unto her bace
And made of her a barn.

73.

Into ship building soon I went
For to increase my store
A schooner of one hundred tons
And likewise fifty more.

74.

She proved to be a lucky craft
Till she was two years old
Then took a squall and down she went
Upon Nantucket shoals.

75.

By her a thousand dollars lost
Hard earnings of my gain
I counted up my total loss
And nothing did remain.

76.

Once more I thought to try my luck
Upon a nother rig
I with the Spurlings built a craft
And rigged her in a Brig.

77.

For two long years she prospered well
And many voyage's made
I got my freight in gold and crowns
But little up I laid.

78.

To Martineque she being bound
A hurracane she met
Which carried away both mast and spar
But did not her upset.

79.

The Captain mate & all the crew
Were taken of the wreck
And put on board a British Brig
Which soon conveyed them back.

80.

To Mt Desert from whence they sailed
Not many weeks before
In safety back they all returned
Unto their native shore.

81.

I next into the forest went
Ship timber to procure
And then with oxen carts and sled
I hauled it to the shore.

82.

I sent a crew into the yard
I gave them bread and beer
They stoutly drank did little work
My brig she cost me dear.

83.

At length we laid the landing plank
And launched her of the ways
I paid the crew for all their work
Their price was by the day.

84.

Her measure was one hundred tons
And sixty seven more
We towed her eastward to a point
And safely did her more.

85.

I made of her a full rigged brig
While she laid on the shore
And named her the Royal Arch
Which name she always bore.

86.

I found that I should fall in debt
By building of the brig
It cost me much for oxen work
And likewise much to rigg.

87.

I soon made up my mind to sell
She kept me in a fret
I thought that she would fetch enough
To pay my honest debts.

88.

I sold her to some Boston men
They sailed her from the bay
And I have never seen her since
Nor never got my pay.

89.

One of the men was Able Barnes
The other Herman Daggett
Tis said they failed by drinking rum
So constantly they had it.

90.

Now I again had to return
And Cultivate the earth
That I had been accustomed to
Yes almost from my birth.

91.

The farmer is as free from care
As any class I know
He eats he drinks he sleeps secure
Though furious gales may blow.

92.

I in a garden take delight
To use the spade and hoe
And keep it clean of grass & weeds
So that the plants may grow.

93.

Thus many years has passed away
And I have lived to see
My son's and daughters married well
O happy may they be.

94.

Eleven children we have had
But six only remain
The other five have passed away
We could not them retain.

95.

If you ask me my politicks
Throughout my life has been
I answer I'm a democrat
Dyed in the wool and skin.

96.

I hold the Constitution
Of these United States
As sacred as the bible
Of what it does relate.

97.

And we the yankee nation
Are bound for to obey
That wholesome Constitution
Unto our dying day.

98.

So let us be united
Our country to defend
Support our Constitution
And ever prove its friend.

99.

Be careful that our rulers
Whoever we may choose
May wisely rule the nation
And not our rights abuse.

100.

We have become a nation
The world cannot subdue
So long as we're united
And keep our rites in view.

101.

For thirty years I've quit the sea
And labored on the farm
I've worked at cutting grain & hay
And tending well the barn.

102.

I've lived in Eden all my life
In district No four
My neighbors all are just and kind
What can I wish for more.

103.

Since I was wedded to a wife
I'ts more than fifty years
We live in harmony and peace
Each acting in our sphere.

104.

Our health it always has been good
Throughout a lengthened life
No great amount of doctor bills
I've paid for me or wife.

105.

One public act which I have done
Of which I'm proud to name
Our Constitution I did sign
Which rules the state of Maine.

106.

I thank my townsman for their choice
Which they bestowed on me
They trusted me with all their rights
In a Convention free.

107.

To Portland soon I did repair
With Delegates of Maine
For nineteen days we tarried their
The constitution frame.

108.

I trust the same will long endure
A blessing may it prove
And all our civil rights secure
In equity and love.

109.

I've married persons old and young
Of damsals many a score
One hundred as my records saith
And fifty seven more.

110.

I wish them joy and health through life
O! happy may they be
Each man enjoy a tender wife
And living blessings see.

111.

A Tanyard small I likewise had
I bought up hides and bark
And took them often by their weight
But sometimes by their mark.

112.

A master tanner soon I found
George Hudson was his name
And one would thought by his account
He was a man of fame.

113.

He told me much that he could do
In shaving down the hides
And what good leather he had made
I could not think he lied.

114.

I gave him wages very high
For to instruct my son's
But he proved only full of noise
He proved an empty gun.

115.

In one years time I found him out
And settled of his bill
And then I sold the tanworks out
Together with the mill.

116.

Within that time I built a shop
And made up boots and shoes
But still that proved like all my luck
For I was bound to lose.

117.

For twenty years I with my son
Have worked about the farm
He took the lead and went a head
And I kept following on.

118.

But death has taken him a way
And left me here to mourn
I know I soon must follow him
For he cannot return.

119.

I live with Bancroft Thomas now
He is my younger son
I trust he will provide for us
Until our days are done.

120.

If he should prove a faithful son
As the other one we lost
I hope he'll be rewarded
Among the good and just.

121.

I went to Legislature
In twenty two and four
And tarried their the session
Of forty days or more.

122.

Good laws and regulations
We for the people made
Then called upon the Treasury
And all our bills he paid.

123.

I the Free Mason order joined
And entered in their lodge
I learned the apron for to wear
And likewise used the Hood.

124.

The Trowel soon I learned to use
And worked by plumb and squire
So when the craft was hard at work
They oftimes found me their.

125.

From step to step I went ahead
Improving in the art
I entered soon a chapter lodge
Became a Royal Arch.

126.

Freemasonry has stood the test
For many thousand years
Has helped the orphan in distress
And dried up widows tears.

127.

One thing in place I did forget
Advice unto the young
So I will add a verse or two
Then close this lengthy song.

128.

Don't never take up drinking rum
Tobacco never chew
O! take no snuff or use the pipe
But bid them all adieu.

129.

For when a habit we have got
It's hard for to refrain
And often we may take to much
And find ourselves to blame.

130.

Now I've no more to write or say
On the events of life
I've lived in health for many years
So likewise has my wife.

131.

I know the day will shortly come
For death is ever nigh
When I must leave this house of clay
For shortly I must die.

132.

Death strikes us all with solemn gloom
To think that we must part
With all our friends and kindred dear
When death shall say depart.

133.

When I go hence I bid farewell
To all I leave behind
To children; friends; and kindred dear
Likewise to all mankind.

134.

O! may they prosper one and all
While they on earth remain
And with the labor of their hands
An honest living gain.

135.

Thus I have wrote my journal through
And brought it to an end
Farewell to all both friend and foe
So finis now Amen.

**Verses 136-139*

were added when

Nicholas Thomas was 85 years old.

*136.

I now am nearly eighty five
By God I'm spaired and still alive
In a short time I soon must go
And leave all earthly things below.

*137.

The warp has near the harness come
The laythe has now but little room
The shears of death will cut the thread
And then the vital spark is fled.

*138.

The spirit leaves its house of clay
Broke from its cage it finds its way
To regions, distant and unknown
No more on earth for to return.

*139.

My errors friends you'll please excuse
My Education's poor
Of schooling I had forty days
But could not get no more.



Stephen Shea, president of the Hancock County Trustees of Public Reservations, brought this remarkable document to the attention of The Mount Desert Island Historical Society. We appreciate very much his allowing it to be published. Spelling and punctuation are as they appear in the original handwritten document.