



Pownalborough Court House circa 1876

Hadlock Executed this Day

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In her last entry of the day on October 28, 1790, Martha Ballard, Hallowell, Maine midwife and diarist, wrote that the day was cloudy with rain in the evening, she was "at home helping cutt up and take care of the beef and knitt some. We brot 26 cabbage into the seller...got beets and carrots in also." And then, seemingly as an afterthought, she wrote, "Hadlock executed this day."

This small note refers to a crime that has long been a mystery for the people of Mount Desert Island. What crime did this Samuel Hadlock commit that demanded the sacrifice of his life? Little light is shed on this question by the local sources of the time and the records of local historians or genealogists. Only the newspapers of the period have information about the tragic and brutal crime.

Samuel Hadlock lived north of Manchester Point¹ in what is now the village of Northeast Harbor. He was a prosperous lumberman who operated mills powered by water from nearby ponds that still bear his name. A widower with three sons, seven daughters and several nieces, Hadlock had moved to the island from Gloucester, Massachusetts around 1783.²

Hadlock was executed for killing Eliab Littlefield Gott, age 22, whose mother, Patience Gott Tarr, and stepfather, Andrew Tarr, lived opposite Manchester Point at Fernald Point. (His parents Patience and Stephen Gott had divorced earlier). On the morning of October 26, 1789, Hadlock, 44, was reportedly at his mills all morning. There, he "drank very freely," according to a story in the *Columbian Centinel* newspaper.

In the course of the trial, it was reported that Hadlock had worked himself up into a violent passion because of his neighbors "... propagating some stories to his disadvantage."

After using abusive language, Hadlock seized Mrs. Manchester, a neighbor, "by the hair of her head, pulled her out of doors, and threw her on the ground several times." A short time later, he called to Eliab, who was passing by in a boat and "requested to be set across river in his boat." Eliab Gott went on shore, [and] Hadlock inquired where he was going with his boat? Gott answered [that he was going] "to an island after sand,"³ Hadlock told Eliab he had no right [to go] there," as he [Hadlock] had a "lease of the island." Then, Hadlock plunged Gott three times under the water holding him down. With a large club, he drove the young man and Daniel Tarr, a stepbrother of Gott's, up to Manchester's house.⁴

A deposition taken from James Richardson, Jr. "in the second day of November in the fourteenth year of American Independence [1790]," by coroner Jonas Farnsworth, continues the story:

Stephen Manchester came crying to my house saying Mr. Hadlock was killing his mother. I then ran to Mr. John Manchester's house. He asked me what I came for [and] I told him I thought murder was like to be committed. He asked me why I did not make more hast. I told him I made all the hast I could. Then, he [Hadlock] began with Mrs. Manchester and struck her down two times then turned upon me with a clubb in his hand, asking one [Richardson] what I drewed up to him for. I begged of him to be peaceable, and also desired Mrs. Manchester to say nothing to him. After a short time he left the house and I concluded was gone home & I was about going myself but Mrs. Manchester begged me to stay. But when I did sett out to go out of the dore, I saw said Samuel Hadlock driving Eliab Littlefield Gott & Daniel Tarr before him with a clubb, and drove them into the house. Then he [grabbed me], by the collar with his left hand and a clubb in the right hand. I then asked him what he ment. He said, I will let you know, God damn you, & pulled me to the doore. I then took hold of him in my own defence and went out with him and after a small tussel I threw him acrost the fence on back. The said Eliab came out after me...Hadlock took...Eliab by the hair but Mrs Manchester cleared it. Then Hadlock said he would murder us booth.⁵

Mr. Manchester then recalled in his deposition:

I looked out at the window and saw...Hadlock acrosst my guarding fence and...Richardson & the said Eliab holding

him. I heard Mr. Richardson call for me and I went out where they both were holding him &...Hadlock said he wanted to git up... Richardson let...Hadlock git up but Hadlock having his hand in the hare of...Eliab, my wife cleared that...[Hadlock] took a stake from the fence then I begged of him to be peaceable and not to do any murder...but he then followed Richardson with said stake, who escaped...he [Hadlock] turned and ran after...Eliab, whose clothes were wet and boots filled with water, and ...knocked him down.⁶

Comfort Manchester [the woman attacked] stated in her deposition, "I see him strike several more bloos, the deceased crying Lord have mercy on me...Hadlock said, pray, God damn you, for this is the last time you shall have opportunity to pray."⁷ [He received] bloos which fractured his skull in several places.

Manchester continued: I advised my wife with the child [Daniel Tarr] to make their escape and that I would go to the house take my gun and guard them. I followed my wife to...Richardson's house and told my wife she had best go to Mr. Johannet [Justice of the peace for Hancock County]. I loaded my gun and set out for my house again, and met said Hadlock on the run and he call out God damn you son of a bitch. He continuing to follow me someways, getting in to a thicket [I] lost sight of him, then primed my gun and set for home. It began to grow dark when I got near the house I heard him [Eliab] groon for about half of an hower, after which... Richardson came and we heard the grooning for about fifteen minutes and then it ceased on which we concluded he [Eliab] was dead. And thinking we heard talking in the house, I supposed Hadlock was there. The next morning...we found the said Eliab alive laying in my bead undressed and well covered with his cloaths laying on the hearth, I then with others carried the said Eliab to Mr. Tarrs where he lived that day and the night following, and then the next day... being Wednesday the twenty eighth day of the same October, he died on his wounds.⁸

The Lincoln County coroner, Jonas Farnsworth, was summoned by the town selectmen on October 30, 1789. A copy of the summons

they sent indicates that Hadlock was in custody at the time. The coroner arrived on Mount Desert Island on November 2, 1789. During his inquest, he interviewed more than a dozen witnesses. They included Samuel Reed, John Somes, John G. Richardson, Benjamin Atherton, John Manchester, Stephen Sargent, Isaac Bunker, Benjamin Bunker, Jr., Samuel Emerson, Richard Whitehorn, Alexander Nickols⁹, John Jordan, Samuel Cousens, Davis Wasgatt, James Richardson and Abraham Somes. (The descendants of many of those interviewed still live on Mount Desert Island or reside nearby).

All swore Hadlock killed Gott. They signed an oath that proclaimed "...he the said Eliab died of Felony by the hands of one Samuel Hadlock of Mount Desert aforesaid yeoman: who did kill him with a stake taken out of Mr. John Manchester's fence...by striking him on the left temple and on the back part of the head which broke his skull."¹⁰

According to court records, Samuel Hadlock was tried on July 6, 1790. In the courthouse which still sits on the banks of the Kennebec River in Dresden (Pownalborough), Maine,¹¹ Hadlock faced a panel of four justices¹² that included Robert Treat Paine, who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. William Lithgow, Jr. and Theophilus Bradbury were assigned as Hadlock's lawyers.

The trial lasted less than a day, and the jury's guilty verdict was unanimous. The court records state, "Samuel Hadlock [is to] be taken to the jail of the Commonwealth [of Massachusetts] from whence he came and from thence to the place of execution and there be hanged by the neck until he be dead."

But Sam Hadlock apparently had other plans. An advertisement in an issue of the *Cumberland Gazette* in late July offered a 50 dollar reward from Sheriff Edmund Bridge for the recapture of Hadlock, who had escaped from the Pownalborough jail on the night of July 16. Hadlock was described as being "of a sandy complexion, 43 years of age, five feet, eight inches high." A note added that, "As he left all his clothes in jail we cannot say what his dress will be."¹³

For more than two months, Hadlock's whereabouts were not known. Finally in early October, he was spotted on Mount Desert Island at his son's house. Before a group of citizens could be pulled together to catch him, Hadlock fled to sea on a fishing schooner owned by his son-in-law, John Manchester Jr.¹⁴ Two boats chased him but when Manchester's vessel was boarded, the owner swore "by all that is sacred" that Hadlock

was not aboard. One person from the boarding party named Jacob Reed went below deck to warm up before leaving the boat. A letter later published in the *Columbian Centinel* tells what happened.

As he was setting by the fire, he heard a gunlock snap and turning round saw Hadlock in the cabin with a gun presented towards the men on deck who were to the number of 10 or 11, and all in a cluster. Had the gun discharged at the time Hadlock pulled the trigger, it is probable he would have killed and wounded as many as five or six, as the gun proved to be loaded with two balls and 18 buckshot.¹⁵

“According to the story, Reed immediately began fighting with Hadlock who then drew a bayonet. Reed was reportedly stabbed in five places, “two of them very badly.” After Hadlock was secured he reportedly “foamed at the mouth,” and damned his gun for not going off. He reportedly boasted that he would have died in peace had he killed a dozen of his pursuers.

“Hadlock was returned to the Pownalborough jail to wait his execution. There, he made out a will which was the first to be filed in Hancock County.¹⁶ On October 28, 1790, exactly one year after Gott’s death, Samuel Hadlock of Mount Desert went to the gallows.”¹⁷

“He was executed at Pownalborough according to his sentence. Three clergymen attended the convict. The Reverend McClean was one of the men who preached to the unhappy man on the mournful occasion. After the service was over, dinner was sent him by the goalkeeper’s wife, who shed the ‘tear of humanity’ on the occasion. At one o’clock irons were taken off and he was led to his execution, amidst a numerous crowd of spectators.

“He appeared composed and when he had mounted the scaffold, Hadlock addressed the crowd and told his fellow citizens that he never had any malice or premeditated determination to kill...He exhorted all present to read God’s word and often meditate thereon, and not to neglect it as he had done. He said that he could truly state that his whole life had been a continual vexation of spirit, that he had never known true pleasure; that all his thoughts were continually engrossed on getting money and nothing else, which he now found to be absolute vanity. Hadlock solemnly declared--as a dying man soon to appear in the presence of his God--that no one gave him any aid or assistance [in his

earlier escape from the jail] but his young son who happened to be in goal with him that night...The stage was then knocked from under him [but] he fell through the noose, was soon tied up again, without discovering any signs of unmanly fear, and was launched into eternity."¹⁸

William Otis Sawtelle, an early twentieth century Harvard professor and local genealogist, claimed in *The Bar Harbor Times*, March 30, 1927, that Samuel Hadlock was buried somewhere on his farm (Manchester Point) and that like many other pioneers, his grave was without a stone.¹⁹

The year between Gott's death and Hadlock's execution must have been very trying for these families. For the parents of Eliab Littlefield Gott, justice must have been welcome.

One account concludes, "...thus fell an innocent young man, a victim of the ungoverned passions of an unprovoked neighbor, [who was] probably too much inflamed with strong drink. Let such as indulge this vice take warning by Hadlock's unhappy situation, especially when they are reminded that the law considers intoxication as an aggravation, rather than an excuse for a crime."²⁰

This historical event has value today because it reminds us how little human nature changes. Hadlock suffered the pressures of raising a family, dealing with widowhood, establishing himself in the community and building a successful business. Stress and pressures, no doubt, contributed to a successful man losing control of the situation, and ultimately his life.

Two hundred years later, truth and history are better served by laying out the facts of this tragic event.

Notes

¹ Manchester Point no longer exists on most maps but is commonly acknowledged to be the next point of land north of the present swimming club, off Manchester Road where the house called "Indian Head" now stands.

² According to William Otis Sawtelle, Massachusetts records show that Samuel Hadlock with his son and other children acquired, after 1783, a DeGregoire grant of 100 acres on the east side of what is now Somes Sound, north of Manchester Point. On October 25, 1788 Hadlock conveyed all his property to his son, also named Samuel Hadlock, who was born July 7, 1770. The property consisted of the 100 acres with dwelling house, store and sawmill, probably in the area of Millbrook. (Washington County Registry of Deeds, Vol. 1, page 131).

³ At that time, sand was usually obtained at Sandpoint, the point just north of Manchester Point near Hadlock's land.

⁴ *Columbian Centinel*, Vol. XIII: 153, 21 July 1790. Also found in Portland's *Cumberland Gazette* (Portland, Maine), 26 July 1790.

⁵ Court files, 140698 to 140771, July 1789 to July 1791, Suffolk County, Ma.

⁶ Court files, actual deposition of John Manchester, 140698 to 140771, July 1789 to July 1791, Suffolk County Massachusetts.

⁷ *Ibid.*, actual deposition of Comfort Manchester..

⁸ *Ibid.*, actual deposition of John Manchester.

⁹ Nickols name was sometimes spelled with an "o" and other times with an "e".

¹⁰ Court files, 140698 to 140771, July 1789 to July 1791, Suffolk County, Ma.

¹¹ Until 1789, there were only two counties in the Province of Maine (which was still part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts), York and Lincoln counties. In 1789, Hancock County was formed but at the time of the murder (October, 1789) the county did not have a jail or court house. The Kennebec Proprietors had constructed a large courthouse and a jail to serve the judicial needs of the two counties.

¹² The other judges at Pownalborough for the July term were Francis Dana, Increase Sumner and Nathan Cushing.

¹³ *Cumberland Gazette* (Portland), 26 July 1790 and 2 August 1790.

¹⁴ John Manchester, Jr. married Mary Hadlock (daughter of the elder Samuel Hadlock) on June 20, 1790, while Samuel was in jail awaiting his trial on July 6, 1790. Several marriages took place between the Manchesters and Hadlocks. In addition to John Manchester Jr.'s marriage to Mary Hadlock, Thomas Manchester married Hannah Hadlock, September 30, 1791, Samuel Hadlock (younger) married Sarah Manchester on March 14, 1791; and, Daniel Tarr (Eliab's stepbrother) married Tryphose Hadlock on June 4, 1799.

¹⁵ *Columbian Centinel*, Vol XIV: 39, 16 October 1790.

¹⁶ The original is not on file at the Probate Court in Ellsworth, its whereabouts is a mystery. Although the copy does not tell us where this will was written, it contains clues that reveal Hadlock's true predicament on October 17, 1790, the day he dictated his will in the presence of three witnesses. He writes, "the time of my natural life is very short." (He was only 44.) The will was written in Pownalborough Jail, and witnessed by three local people, but probated in Hancock County because Hadlock was a citizen of Mount Desert Island, Hancock County.

¹⁷ Brechlin, Earl, "Modern Day Sleuths Uncover Grisly Tale of 200 Year Old Murder." *Ellsworth American*, 25 October, 1990.

¹⁸ Two preceding paragraphs excerpted from "Hadlock the Inhuman Murderer Executed," *Columbian Centinel*, 17 November 1790, p. 75.

¹⁹ In the Northeast Harbor Library, however, information on burials in the Smallidge Cemetery on Sinclair Road provided by Robert Smallidge, states that Hadlock was buried in 1789...and that he was convicted of murder and hanged after killing with a fencepost an individual who had assaulted his wife. The librarian (Robert R. Pyle) notes that the information is incorrect (date, existing wife and excuse for the murder) and that since the Smallidge family is descended from Hadlock, family lore has understandably supported a tale of justified homicide.

²⁰ *Columbian Centinel*, Vol XIII: 153, 21 July 1790.