

Joel Viles
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

Joel Viles served as a corporal in Captain John Parker's Lexington militia company and was on the Common during the morning engagement of April 19, 1775. Subsequently, he was a member of a detachment commanded by Captain Parker that was called to duty in Cambridge by the Committee of Safety from May 6 to 10, 1775, serving as a sergeant. On June 17 and 18, 1775 he was again on duty in Cambridge under the command of Captain Parker, this time serving as a corporal. Then, from March 4 - 8 he was on service in Roxbury, MA as a private in Captain John Bridge's company.¹

The first member of the Viles family to come to New England, according to various Viles Family genealogies, was John Vial. He was born August 10, 1617 in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, England and died in Swansea, MA February 26, 1685.² His son, John, was born in 1644 in Boston, died there in 1720 and is buried in Copp's Hill Burial Ground.³ His son, John, was born September 14, 1672 in Boston and died in 1717. In 1694 John married Mary Adams born April 24, 1666 in Boston and died in Boston (perhaps in the same year as her husband, 1717). Mary was the daughter of Henry Adams (born in 1640 in Weymouth, MA and died December 15, 1726 In Dorchester, MA). Only the first name of Henry Adams' wife, Mary, is known. The son of John Viles and Mary Adams, also named John, was born in Waltham in 1701 and died in the same town on February 4, 1774. On July 2, 1731, he married Susannah Bemis daughter of Joseph Bemis and Elizabeth Pierce. Joseph was born in Watertown, November 17, 1684; died there in 1738, and Elizabeth was born in Watertown September 9, 1687 and died in Weston February 10, 1753. Susannah Bemis was born in Watertown in 1715 and died in Waltham November 28, 1785. John Viles and Susannah had ten children the last of whom was a son Joel — corporal in Captain Parker's Company on April 19, 1775.⁴

Corporal Joel was born in Waltham on December 14, 1743 and was thus thirty-two when he stood in the ranks of Captain Parker's company on the Common. He had moved at some time from Waltham to Lexington where he then settled. Joel was unmarried on April 19, 1775, but just a little over two months later on June 27, 1775 he married Mary Bowman (born in Lexington February 28, 1754; died Lexington January 16, 1833) daughter of William and Mary (Reed) Bowman, and thus Joel was the nephew of Captain Thaddeus Bowman whose biography appears on this site. Perhaps as a married man now and soon to be a father, Joel's military service would be limited to the few entries given above. He had been chosen as the town's Hog Reeve in 1771, an office that sounds archaic today but was one that served an important function in 18th century Lexington. Hogs were supposed to be kept penned, but some managed to escape or in some cases farmers allowed them to roam in search of food with the result that the animals frequently caused a great deal of damage to neighbors' crops. In such cases, the hog reeve was charged with capturing and penning the offending animal (each town usually had a hog pen) and the owner was then liable for damages the hog had caused and for the fee due the reeve.⁵

In 1778, Joel was chosen as one of three delegates to a convention charged with attempting to fix a system of prices for "goods, wears and merchandise" because of the desperate shortage of money in Massachusetts and the inability of people to cope with "the high price of all the necessaries of life and the ruinous state of the currency."⁶ He also served as selectman in 1791.⁷ Joel died January 5, 1817, and unfortunately his gravesite has not yet been located.

Joel and Mary had ten children, all born in Lexington⁸, not an unusual number of offspring in those days.

1. Mary, born November 17, 1775; Mary, according to Charles Hudson, married Joseph Simonds (born Lexington September 19, 1771 and died November 21, 1834); However, Lexington's vital records do not list a marriage of Mary Viles to a Joseph Simonds. Mary died supposedly on March 5, 1867.
2. Susanna, born May 11, 1777; married (intention dated May 11, 1804 in Weston, MA.) Jonas Coburn (born Waltham November 8, 1773; died August 25, 1863). They had seven children all born in Weston. Susanna died May 20, 1843.
3. William, born February 6, 1779; died unmarried.

4. Bowman, born December 7, 1780; married (1) at Burlington April 16, 1807, Jerusha Burnham who died at Lynnfield September 13, 1812, age 29; married (2) September 21, 1813, Betsy Sawyer of Reading, MA who died at Lynnfield October 8, 1824, age 34; married (3) December 22, 1825, Sally Twiss(t). Some have her the daughter of Ebenezer and Sally, born either 1811 or 1815 which would have made her only fourteen or ten when she married, and the on-line vital records of Lynnfield have her as the wife of Bowman dying April 19, 1937 at age 32. There was another Sally, daughter of Daniel and Betsey of Danvers, born December 29, 1806 who might be a more reasonable candidate as Bowman's third wife.⁹
5. John, born August 11, 1782.
6. Elias, born September 17, 1784.
7. Hannah, born October 28, 1786; married April 18, 1816 (intention filed Watertown MA, March 30, 1816) Amos Teele born March 8, 1792. Amos was the son of Benjamin and Rhoda Cutting Teel. His death date is given as October 11, 1836, and if this is true he died as a prisoner in the State Prison at Charlestown.¹⁰ Hanna lived in Charlestown, MA and died there May 21, 1870.
8. Nathan, born August 24, 1789; married Nancy Reed of Roxbury, MA, lived in Boston where he died March 16, 1865.
9. Lucy, born September 11, 1791; married May 18, 1820, John Nelson (born March 1, 1789 and died August 19, 1859), son of Josiah and Millicent Bond Nelson; John was also the nephew of Tabitha and Thomas Nelson whose farms were on Nelson Road where Captain Parker and the men of Lexington laid an ambush for the Redcoats returning from Concord.¹¹
10. Joel, born October 21, 1793; died November 18, 1873; married Sally Smith adopted daughter of Jacob Smith. They had eight children all born in Lexington

Footnotes

¹ Massachusetts Office of the Secretary of State, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War, A Compilation from the Archives*, Seventeen volumes, Wright and Potter Printing Company, Boston, 1896, vol. 16, p. 328.

²David Jillson, in his article, *John Viall of Swansea, Mass. And Some of His Descendants*, Narragansett Historical Register, 1897, has him born in 1619 and originating from Twickenham, Middlesex County, England. According to Jillson, John owned and operated the Ship Tavern in Boston from 1662 to 1679 when he removed to Swansea. The property was then willed to his son, John.

³Viall, Public Member Photos and Scanned Documents -Ancestry.com.UK. The inscription reads: "Here Lyes Ye Body of John Vial Aged 76 Years Died November Ye 13 1720."

⁴*Vital Records of Boston, MA*, at www.ancestry.com; *Vital Records of Dorchester, MA*, at www.ancestry.com; New England Historical and Genealogical Society (NEHGS), *Vital Records of Waltham, Massachusetts to the Year 1850*, Boston, Mass. 1904; NEHGS, *Vital Records of Watertown, MA, 1630-1825*, at www.americanancestors.org; Mary Francis Peirce, *Town of Weston, Births, Marriages and Deaths, 1707 – 1850 . . .*, McInclloe Bros. Printers, Boston, Mass. 1901.

⁵ Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868, Revised and Continued to 1912*, Two Volumes, Lexington Historical Society, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1913. Volume II, *Genealogy*, pp. 720-21.

⁶*Ibid.*, Volume I, *History*, p. 237

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁸*Ibid.*, Volume II, *Genealogies*, p. 721.

⁹NEHGS, *Vital Records of Burlington, Massachusetts to the Year 1850*, Boston, Mass. 1915. *Vital Records of Danvers, MA to the End of the Year 1849* at ma-vitalrecords.org/ma/Essex/Danvers/; Essex Institute, *Vital Records of Lynnfield, Massachusetts to the End of the Year 1849*, Salem, 1907; NEHGS, *Vital Records of Reading, Massachusetts to the Year 1850*, Boston, Mass. 1912.

¹⁰*Vital Records of Charlestown, MA.*, "Amos Teel, convict in Massachusetts States Prison d. there, Oct. 11/ 1836.

¹¹Lexington, Massachusetts, *Records of Births Marriages and Deaths to January 1, 1898, Part 1 from Earliest Record to End of 1853*, Wright and Potter, Boston, 1898; NEHGS, *Vital Records of Lincoln, Massachusetts to 1850*, Boston, Mass., 1908.