

TREASON
The Violation of Trust

Janet Hudgins

Copyright © 2008 by Janet Hudgins
Canadian Copyright Registration No. 1059048

ISBN:	Hardcover	978-1-4363-4925-3
	Softcover	978-1-4363-4924-6

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

The cover:

Burn and Lay Waste from a painting by Nelson Surette, (1920-2004)
courtesy of the artist's estate: www.chezSurette.com

The Nova Scotia artist illustrates the English genocidal expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755. Surette, Canada's historian-in-art, created a lasting monument to the historical events surrounding this atrocity in a series of six paintings.

Burn and Lay Waste is in the Clare Municipal Building in Nova Scotia.

This book was printed in Canada by:
First Choice Books
Victoria, BC

To order copies, contact:

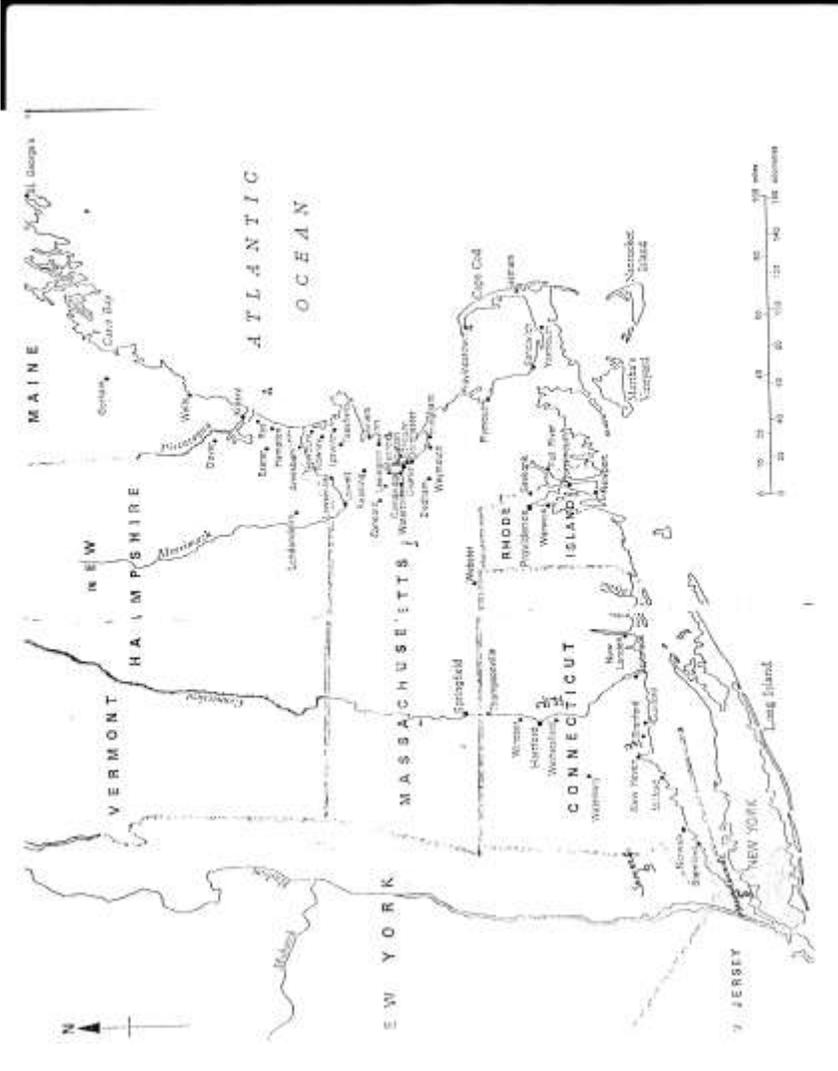
Xlibris Corporation
1-888-795-4274
www.Xlibris.com
Orders@Xlibris.com

for Meg

PART ONE

Overview

William Palmer is a 17th Century Kentish man living a bit more comfortably than most because he has had some elementary education. But, his young wife dies in childbirth and he begins to think of leaving England with thousands of others who are escaping the religious persecution of King and church. He makes the journey, helps to colonize New England and will cut a new home out of the wilderness four times before he dies. But, the Puritans have brought much of the religion they split from with them and they add more rigid rules in the creed causing upheaval among parishioners. The indispensable Natives, without whom many settlers would not have survived, are subjected to wars with the English and European disease eliminating whole tribes and subduing thousands more. The climate is severe along the Atlantic coast but nature provides both sustenance and shelter for Will when he marries and raises his family on his farms in Connecticut and New York. Will Palmer acquires land, that which he could never have done in England. It is obligatory for him, for security and place in society.



William Palmer and his family lived in these six settlements.

Part One

Not to know what happened before we were born is to remain perpetually a child. For what is the worth of a human life unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?

Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106-43 B.C.

1

Late in 1634, in the town of Maidstone, Kent, thirty-eight miles southeast of London, William Palmer was at a turning point. Less than a year ago, Sarah Heath, his wife of two years, died in childbirth along with the child, a girl, and he hadn't cared much about anything since. He carried on with his job at the sessional courts where he was the clerk, sometimes police court magistrate, reader and writer for those who were arraigned and their families. But it was as an after hours farm hand for his father, John, that Will kept balance in the family. His education and position in the courts elevated him several notches above his father who reckoned that working in the fields and mucking out the stables was good for Will. "Moind yer plaice," he'd say.

John Palmer, a tenant farmer west of the Medway River on the other side of Rocky Hill, never forgave himself for allowing his son to go to school, learning to read and write when he couldn't himself. It was Martha, his wife, who negotiated with the priors to enroll her son at Corpus Christi, vegetables from her kitchen garden and damson plums making the bargain. The boy walked alone to his morning classes at the corner of Fairmeadow and Earl Street on the Medway but he was expected to be at home in the afternoon to work on the farm. Despite his

Janet Hudgins

father's admonition against education, that he had better learn to sweat, Will had contributed as much as John to the farm and the household. But John had lost his son's respect years ago when Will realized that his mother had the brains and his father made all the noise and took all the credit.

Will had grown into a fine specimen once out of his teen years when it seemed he would never fill out. Although it would never be discussed, he knew his father thought him rather wet. He was fair and had the Palmers' high cheekbones. He wore his softly curled hair tied at the nape of his neck and his blue eyes were direct and clear below a high forehead. He gave an impression of reserved composure and people took to him to be a man who could be trusted.

But within him was a great discomfort with the life he was destined for, a life like his father's. He despaired of ever having any degree of self-determination over his future, and of ever owning anything more than a few personal belongings. But most significantly, he wanted to rid himself of the authority of the Church of England that he had grown up under, and he wanted to start again.

Events between Charles I and parliament were leading the country into utter chaos. Religious dogma had swung like a pendulum for centuries and by 1635, twenty years into the Thirty Years' War, Catholics and Protestants were still fighting for dominion over European souls. Charles demanded allegiance and developed imaginative punishment for citizens who presumed to make a decision of their own.

Understandably, confusion reigned among the lower classes who seldom got wind of what politicians and the aristocracy were planning until they were in the thick of it, but at the courts in Maidstone, conjecture was a daily diversion. Sometimes there was a kernel of truth in what Will's colleagues mused about and from which he was able to draw his own conclusions. He knew he had to leave Kent.

People were finding a way to get out of England, to escape the religious and political persecution. The Puritans had broken away from the Church of England and managed to get a charter for a company in central North America on the east coast. Not as difficult as it seemed since the King exiled them. They were persecuted as a threat to the authority of the crown: imprisoned, hanged, and forced out of the country. Some had escaped to Holland where they were allowed to practice their faith freely. They first turned down an offer to go to America with a Dutch-sponsored expedition preferring to make the trip with their own countrymen. Besides, to the Dutch the expedition was purely for capital gain, to the Puritans it was freedom.

Treason

Then, Will's cousin, Joseph, told him about the vast expanse of land available for the taking in the New World. Joseph said, "I've decided to go, Cousin. You should give this some thought, too, and I will provide you with any intelligence I receive."

Will did give long and careful thought to leaving his family and the familiarity of the culture inside the old city of Maidstone and taking a risky, six-week voyage with exposure to pirates and dreadful sickness on high seas.

By the first of the year he had made up his mind to go, and it created quite a stir. No one expected he'd ever leave Maidstone, he'd become such a mainstay, so the court was having difficulty replacing him, and the young ladies-in-waiting who expected to walk out with him after Sarah died knew they would not be called on now.

But, leaving his mother would be more difficult than anything else. He had always been there for Martha, helping to make her life easier, and he knew it could only get harder as she got older.

"I know about the 'ardships in the Colonies," he told her. "I'm a sight better off there than 'ere taking into account the wars we bin fighting and more's to come. In the New World I can own my own plot, and with land of my own I can at least be sure of an 'ome and enough food. And there'll be other Palmers there, Maum, cousins and elbow relations." His displeasure with the church was carefully skirted.

Martha nodded in agreement and kept her emotions to herself; she would never hinder him from going to the colonies on her account.

"I've known for some time that you would have to go. Perhaps, before you knew yourself, Son."

They were both suffering the pain of what they knew would be a permanent separation wrenching apart years of symphonic closeness and leaving a black void deep inside their respective guts. At times it would seem to Martha more than she could bear.

Will had things to take care of before he left. Before breakfast he brought his mother's cow in from the common for her to milk, then fed the pig and chickens. He left for work earlier than usual, just after the sun rose above Rocky Hill and cast a pink radiance across the white clouds in the northern sky. Usually he didn't leave until after his father left and the sun was well up. For twenty-two years John had worked at the smith's a mile or so along the old Roman road. But he was puttering this morning, having his first real sense that his son was actually leaving in two days and he would likely never see him again.

Martha had been weaving ells of fabric for the clothes Will would

Janet Hudgins

take with him, and this morning he wore the linen frockcoat she had just finished sewing with her tiny stitches, a needle-full at a time. The dye hadn't taken well because there had been a communal vat on the day she did it and hers was the last to go in. They used goldenrod and Martha expected the coat to be about the shade of mustard, and when it dried it was darker. But it improved after she set the dye in the alum wash. She was quite pleased.

Will went out to town to work for the last time Saturday morning, the fourth of July 1635. According to the dewed cobwebs on the grass and the locusts' robust song thrilling across the fields, it was going to be a hot day. What with a waistcoat, a stock and small clothes—shirt, breeches and stockings and identical boots, neither for the left foot nor the right—Will would be glad of the linen. His other frockcoat was wool, and his waistcoat, leather.

This morning he would walk across the Medway on the Great Bridge to the High Street, then turn north and up Week Street. It was the long way to court, a route he rarely took but he wanted to have time alone, to look out over the old stone bridge, and north to where the fresh, soft morning breeze wafted the willows' skirts out from the bank to kiss the glistening black water, slowly and softly rustling as if dressed for the evening in *peau de soie*. Teasing the water, the tiny, frosty-green leaves drifted out to the middle of the river, then back to the bank, out again, back again. He wondered if this erotica-of-the-willows went on every morning at this time, and how he could have missed it all these years.

Will forced his mind out of its reverie and thought about the last twenty-five convicts he had processed yesterday that were marched out of the courthouse, their chained manacles jangling along Week Street to St. Faith's. Some were outright crooks, others just trying to survive taking a bit of food for themselves or their families. Honesty was a luxury the average pauper could not afford. Sometimes prostitutes were included in the mix and meant to be segregated.

They boarded a barge and sailed down the Medway and under the bridge where he was standing, bound for Chatham, half way to London. Waiting there was the dark hold of a once-proud sea-going vessel that would take them to Virginia. Some would make it, the very hardy, about fifty per cent. The rest would die horribly of internal excruciation, the bloody flux, scurvy, mouth-rot, brought on by poor food and drink and hygiene, or the lack of it, the stench in the hold unbearable, and the consequences of fighting, a regular occurrence in the confinement of the holds. No one would step in; culling was natural and necessary. The bodies would be disposed of over the side, without ceremony. Dispatches

Treason

in the early part of the voyage guaranteed a good deal more comfort in the balance of the trip for the remaining fifty per cent, with more food and beer, and twice as much space, which was, even then, barely elbow room.

Then, too, there were the smugglers whom Will regularly recorded going through the exercise of a trial as part of the system that kept the contraband flowing to and from France and served many of Kent's gentry who lived very well on both sides of a very flexible court system.

And there was a man convicted of stealing a horse and its brass from a manor in Aylesford. He was working for the squire there, and was seen leading the handsome eighteen-hand shire away. He protested that he was taking the horse to the watering trough about two hundred yards ahead of him, but the owner would have none of it.

They had all been brought from prison last week to wait in the sweltering top floor of the courthouse for the circuit judge and the quarterly sessions. Some were resigned to their fate, and some meticulously carved messages for posterity in the wooden walls of the miserable holding cells: "John Davis. 3 times here to please his wife;" "Happy the man who in silk or in leather purse retains one splendid shilling."

In the annals of Will Palmer's working world lay the underside of humanity for which Maidstone was as well equipped as any English town for meting out prescribed punishment. Conveniently located in the square was the pillory for passers-by to offer righteous remonstrations: the ducking stool favoured for women, the whipping post where the accused was tied by the wrists to a post, his or her back stripped and lashed with a leather thong as directed by the court. The gallows at Penenden Heath was rarely used but when circuit judges decreed there was hell to pay and handed down the ultimate sentence, it was cause for great excitement. Will's work included the paperwork for such things and he, too, was expected to be there.

There would be a turnout of hundreds for a hanging. It would be delayed through a weekend to examine the gallows for surety, to clear arena space to accommodate the crowd, to allow the church to advise its flock on Sunday and suggest rather strongly that they be there so as to see for themselves—men, women and children—the upshot of sin. Many would come from miles around to see the spectacle. The lower classes would make the trip on Monday in a dray pulled at a walking pace by the quietest of workhorses. The women and children would stay overnight with relatives and friends, the men in any of several taverns, an inconvenience they would relish as they could freely imbibe, stretch

Janet Hudgins

stories and finally collapse. They would all sleep on the floor in a circle around the central post, feet inward although they might have chosen the odour of unwashed feet over foul breath. Early the next morning without ablutions but with a hearty breakfast, they would gather with the townsfolk, dignitaries, priests and all, and wait in the town square for the procession to begin. In a pint-sized hay wagon on two wooden wheels were wardens and fettered prisoners now utterly filthy, their clothes in shreds. Since the day they were condemned in court there was no need for decent food and clothing and theirs had been taken away and given to relatives of the guards.

Will would stand away with the important looking officials while the crowd kept pace up Well Road to Peel Street and on to the Heath, harassing the prisoners all the way. The process would take most of the day. The trip from the prison would last nearly two hours, then each of the felons was given his last rites by the Archbishop's top-of-the-line, I-told-you-so priest, and if the hangman didn't always accomplish the deed in a professional, one-off manner he was properly castigated by the crowd. Then the great unwashed amused themselves by pelting the dangling bodies with derision and rotten fruit so as to make their politics understood among neighbours and especially the clergy. The bodies were left there for days, sometimes weeks if deemed necessary, for the sake of setting a good and proper example. In that case, the remains were propped and fastened in a steel frame to shield it from abusers, although crows and other scavengers were quite welcome. And while the body rotted and shamed the family, children were threatened with the sight as a bogeyman, terrifying them when they misbehaved.

While Will made none of these decisions he watched and wondered at the severity of the punishment and the need for such a spectacle but kept his thoughts to himself. The group he was obliged to be with: colleagues, barristers, priests, and town officials commented on the drama.

“Came off well.”

“Agreeable day for it.”

“The population took careful notice, don't you agree?”

Will reluctantly turned and walked across the bridge to the east side, the stones satin-smooth from two hundred years of West Maidstone farmers trekking to town by horse and wagon. He looked to the Archbishop's grand palace just before the bend in the river, and All Saint's Church. He would be there twice for tomorrow's services; indeed, he would be severely punished and likely fined if he didn't turn up. There would be a special twenty-minute fire-and-brimstone sermon for his benefit,

Treason

preventive maintenance lest the power of the church slip his mind while on the high seas.

A lark called from her nest in a gnarled old hickory on the east bank. In a shallow pool just below the bridge, a trout lazed in the water, its translucent red, blue and yellow spots visible one minute, gone the next. Now and then the fish would slowly move its tail, open its gills, drowsily open and close its mouth. The river, the hickory and the church were all there long before Will was born, and would be still, long after he died.

He'd been here thousands of times but had never seen the profundity; there had never been a need, it would always be there the next day, the next time he chose to stop and look. Today, every item he saw, the minutiae and the arresting, concentrated his mind, for it would be for the last time.

As Will walked off the bridge, he looked north to the ancient Fraternity Hall where he had gone to grammar school. He remembered the rich furnishings and the cold atmosphere, the drill of learning to read, the punishment when he couldn't remember the Latin roots for the English verbs, reading the lessons from the Bible, and the still discernible memory of the knots in his stomach every morning during the long walk to the monastery. But he daren't mention it, his mother so wanting him to be literate on one hand, his father's suspicion of book learning on the other and his concern of Will reaching beyond his class; what would people say? "Moind yer plaice, son."

Will walked past a pile of stacked ragstone, and into the market in the broad High Street, the few hawkers there this morning barking out their wares:

"Straw'ries and craime, new bu'er from yeste'dees churnin'."

"Fresh 'ake and mussels, get 'em 'ere."

"'ops from the valley, the foinest this year," which Martha would buy to make the customary drink.

Hops for making beer were a major crop in Kent. The ubiquitous rural conical oast houses processed the hand picked hops for home made brews in Maidstone, then boiled in the process, beer was much more potable than most of the available water.

Will circumnavigated the foul smelling street as much as possible and still he stepped in sewage and rotting vegetation. He nodded to the fishmonger and smiled at the butcher. Everyone knew he was leaving and they watched soberly until he was out of sight. A little ragamuffin darted out from behind a horse-cart and nearly knocked him over as the wife of the butcher came from behind him, chasing the child away from her fresh

Janet Hudgins

flat bread cooling on a ledge on her cart.

“Ahhh, yer poor ma’am, Will. Where’ll she be without ya?”

“Yes, maum.”

Her husband, a thumping great lump of a man in a blood-smeared jerkin and apron, walked toward them.

“Ach, leave ’im alone, woman.”

He turned back to Will. “I hear there’ll be a dozen or so maids on the voyage. Like ta keep yer mind from wandrin’, I warrant ya.”

“Tsk!”

Will passed the common where the market horses were grazing and once away from the caterwauling he walked deliberately toward the courthouse looking to each side of the narrow street at what he would not see again. He nodded to everyone he saw, and felt them looking after him with wonderment or curiosity or envy. He had a cold feeling of not having taken the time to know all these people well enough or intimately enough, and now it was too late.

He was expected to turn up at the dance tonight at the top of the Market. There would be questions that he couldn’t answer himself about where he was going when he got there, what the voyage would be like, did he know anyone there, would he ever come back? One or two of the more inquisitive men would ask the questions while the rest stood by eagerly listening to the answers, each recipient having their way with it in the next round of telling. It would include pirates, incredible storms at sea, and a little potential scandal in case they’d heard any of this before. And this would lead to at least one dance with a young woman the reporter would not otherwise have had.

As Will approached the stilted courthouse he noticed someone quickly dart into the staff entrance where the clerks worked and where he worked, too. He rounded the building and walked up the wooden ladder-steps and as he went through the door there was a great huzzah as several young men gave him a farewell cheer. He suddenly felt doubt about going and had to muster some fibre before speaking. And he felt a twinge of guilt as it was taking a long time to find a replacement for him, the others doing the extra work in the meantime.

All day Will’s colleagues teased and cajoled.

“You’ll find yersel’ sleepin’ in the wood in America, no bed to lay yer hed upon, no roads to walk upon, ner no mother to make yer viands.”

“Ye’ll be back on the first vessel sailin’ east, I assure ya.”

“And yer hands, what’ll ye do with hands like a maid’s, trees to fell and turn into wood for burnin’, earth to dig and turn over?”

Will smiled self-consciously, then scolded, “Away with all of you. I’ve work to do.”

Treason

He finished the court transcripts and some letters he had been working on. Now, he gathered up his personal belongings from the trestle where he stood to work: three quills his mother received from the neighbours who kept geese, a lidded pot with the ink she made from walnut shells, a few books he kept for legal reference, and the small knife he carried in a sheath on his belt for trimming the quills. The county supplied ink of a lesser quality made from fruit juices and rag-paper for which ragmen patrolled the streets calling, “Ragman, Ragman. Bring out ye rags.”

The others pressed him to finish his work: “Hurry on man, we’ve an abundance of drinkin’ to do this day.”

Late in the afternoon they linked arms with Will in the middle and led him to The White Horse, the main grogshop in Maidstone, where they toasted his voyage and where they would keep him until the dance began early in the evening. They had a meal of flat bread and hard cheese, boiled beef, beer and ale—a quantity of ale. They talked about their years together in the sessions courts, the extraordinary cases they had witnessed, and laughed at their own capers and transgressions until their sides ached.

Then they strode down Pudding Lane, laughing and singing *Jones’ Ale, A Light Heart’s a Jewell, Little Barley-Corne*:

*Thus the Barly-Corne hath power
Even for to change our nature,
And make a shrew, within an houre,
Prove a kindhearted creature:
And therefore here, I say againe,
Let no man tak’t in scorn
That I the vertues doe proclaime
Of the little Barly-Corne.*

It was a beautiful summer evening, less sultry now with a cool breeze from the river. They could hear the lutes and see the torches and by the time they got to the market they were in fine fettle, ready for an evening of celebration. Everyone in Maidstone danced, and everyone would be out tonight to bid Will farewell. He saw his parents and other members of his family standing quietly in the distance. His face flushed; it brought him close to tears.

But he knew who he was, he knew this was final, that he would likely not return and he’d never ask for help. He felt like he was on the edge of a precipice, his emotions swinging between fear and excitement. He was leaving the only home he knew, going to an unknown land, an unknown future. Would he make it across the Atlantic, would he find fellow countrymen or Natives and what would they do to him if he did, and how

Janet Hudgins

much sinew did he have in him to cope with all the unknowns?

He danced and danced with nearly every young lady, every woman there and his mother a few times. She was a fine dancer, had taught Will when he was a child and they danced well together. He danced without stopping until his legs felt as if they might dissolve under him. But he had laughed, and talked, and listened, and loved and touched more in these few hours than ever at any one time in his life.

At the end of that night, Will watched the townsfolk and his colleagues as they disbursed to their respective part of the town, and then, with his parents, walked back across the Great Bridge from whence they came.

The next morning, feeling raw and gritty from the night before, Will gathered himself up for a full day at All Saints Church.

Now, the Lord shall be pleased to hear us, and bring us peace in the place we desire, but if we shall seek great things for ourselves and our posterity, the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us. Now, the only way to avoid this shipwreck is to do justly, walk humbly with our God. . . .

Late in the day while everyone was still in church, Will walked along Maidstone's old streets for a last time. He went north on Mill Street then east along Palace Avenue to Gabriel's Hill, south to Church and Wyatt Streets, the High Street, Bank Street, then back to Mill Street and he took account of everything from the lazy clouds to the smoke stacks to the gardens and stored them away for the future. By then, the congregation had been released to the church grounds where he met his cousins, aunts and uncles, and people he'd known all his life for a final few minutes each. Early the next morning he would leave in a coach for the half-day journey to Gravesend where he would embark on the *Paule of London* for the New World.

He woke before daylight to the knowledge that this was the day, the day he had to say good-bye, the day he had been both dreading and anticipating. He mustered himself. His father was the easier, a handshake and good wishes were all that were necessary. But his mother was another matter. He took Martha in his arms and felt the stifled, vibrating sobs, both knowing they would not do this again but each resolved to Will's decision to go. He held back his own tears as much as he could and held on to his mother as long as he should. He daren't look back for fear of losing his determination.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

