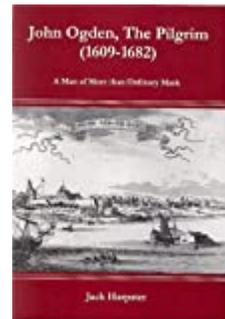




**Jack Harpster.** *John Ogden, The Pilgrim (1609-1682): A Man of More than Ordinary Mark.* Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006. 244 pp. \$52.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8386-4104-0.



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## The Wandering Pilgrim Who Helped Settle New Jersey

John Ogden was an English Puritan, probably born in Lancashire in 1609. Trained as a stone mason, he left for America in 1641, and settled first in "Rippowan"—what is now Stamford, Connecticut. After two years, he moved to Long Island, first living in Hempstead and then after six years Southampton, while it was first under Dutch and then English control. In 1665 he moved yet again, starting over as one of the founders of what became Elizabethtown, New Jersey. He was a member of a group that purchased lands from the Indians under a grant from Governor Richard Nicolls, only to quickly find itself part of the New Jersey proprietorship of George Carteret and John Lord Berkeley. This wanderer thus helped establish settlements in three colonies, and built the first stone church in New Amsterdam as well as mills in New Jersey. By the 1670s, he was a relatively wealthy landowner and member of the New Jersey assembly. He was involved in tanning, brick making, whaling, and trading. During the Dutch re-conquest of the area (1672-1674), he served as "schout" or town administrator. As a political leader in New Jersey (after 1674 East Jersey), Ogden participated in settler clashes with the proprietors over land titles, rents, and political control. He died in 1682, after

New Jersey had been divided into two provinces (East and West) and just as East Jersey was being transferred to yet another group of proprietors dominated by Quakers and Scots. He left behind six, perhaps seven, children; through the years descendants multiplied into the thousands and have included a number of very prominent Americans (Harpster includes Thomas Edison, and the wives of Millard Fillmore and Philip Armour among them).

Much of this is fascinating, as it makes clear that some settlers, like John Ogden, were willing to pick up stakes and move not just once but several times. Each time they started over, forming a town, and clearing the land. These settlers came for religious reasons but moved when additional lands became available. They were farmers, merchants, and craftsmen simultaneously. The book delves into English, New England, and middle colony history to tell its hero's story. In the process it makes clear that New Jersey, long known for its diversity (even in the seventeenth century), had an important and often neglected Puritan component. Ogden's neighbors and relatives came in a group and the churches they established

in their effort to reform Anglicanism became Presbyterian. Elizabethtown was just one of several Puritan villages across northern New Jersey.

Harpster also makes a valiant attempt to deal with New Jersey's complex early history. He notes the changes in ownership of the province, and how this contributed to conflicts over land titles. Of course Ogden and his family, particularly as Elizabethtown settlers, became embroiled in legal disputes over the land they claimed; these went on for well over a hundred years, long after this town founder's death. The book provides insight into the source of the disputes and why the settlers resisted proprietary claims.

While this book presents an interesting picture of seventeenth-century Puritans in New Jersey, it is also frustrating to read for several reasons. The author is a journalist and Ogden descendant; he is willing to describe scenes based on speculation, and offers what appears to be exaggerated praise for his subject. John Ogden left no papers or journals for the author to quote, and while he has read widely, he did not consult a number of important New Jersey sources.[1] At times the book has a very old-fashioned feel to it, a result of the writing, and not just the old woodcuts and other illustrations. It is full of long quotes from primary and secondary sources, and, while Harpster emphasizes that it is not a genealogical work, he ends with a chapter tracing descendants. A few quotes will illustrate the problems.

In describing the voyage of Ogden to America the author uses a number of sources on the *Mayflower* and other early ships, sometimes directly and obviously quoting to give a sense of the experiences. But he goes further when he describes John Ogden's arrival in the New World: "Land ho! It was an exuberant shout from the crow's nest, and it reflected the crewman's personal excitement as much as his professional duty. The trip had been long, and difficult" (p.43).

In evaluating John Ogden the author repeatedly portrays him as a hero, a man who brought the "seeds" of the American Revolution and democracy to the New World. Ogden, in Harpster's telling, fought against "tyranny" and "foreign domination" and should be placed "alongside men like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson,

Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and Patrick Henry as the founders of our democracy" (pp.173-174). When the Dutch arrived and Ogden took the oath of allegiance he was a patriot, Harpster argues, not a traitor (pp.167-172). It is because he opposed the proprietors' and their rents that he was a hero and democrat, one hundred years before the American Revolution. Harpster is sure Ogden was always fair, especially when he negotiated with the Indians, even though (as the author notes) no record of the meeting exists (pp.177-179).

The author is very careful in discussing the several possible English Ogdens who might have been the John Ogden he is tracing, and why he prefers one of them. He carefully notes that no image exists, but goes on to "guess" that a twentieth-century mural showing the settlement of Elizabethtown has one figure who surely must be Ogden: "there stands a large, hawk-nosed man, with a high forehead, long hair gathered at the back in a ponytail. To my mind this is John Ogden" (pp.56, 147).

Again, although Harpster consulted a wide range of sources, and sought the assistance of genealogical researchers in England and America, he neglected important relevant works on New Jersey including John Pomfret, *The Province of East New Jersey, 1609-1702: The Rebellious Proprietary* (1962); Richard P. McCormick, *New Jersey: From Colony to State, 1609-1789* (1964) and in particular McCormick's article on the rebellion of 1681; and Daniel Weeks, *Not for Filthy Lucre's Sake: Richard Saltar and the Anti-Proprietary Movement in East New Jersey, 1665-1707* (2001). The last is a recent work that also covers Puritans in East Jersey in the seventeenth century. It is a more scholarly and detailed book. Other scholarship on early America would illustrate how rebellious the colonists could be, especially in the seventeenth century, whether in New Jersey, Massachusetts, or the Carolinas (to cite a few examples). Disputes over rights and land titles were common, the situations complex.

#### Note

[1]. The appendix reprints a few documents related to John Ogden, including his will and the inventory from his estate, previously printed by William Ogden Wheeler in 1907 (reprinted in 2003).

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