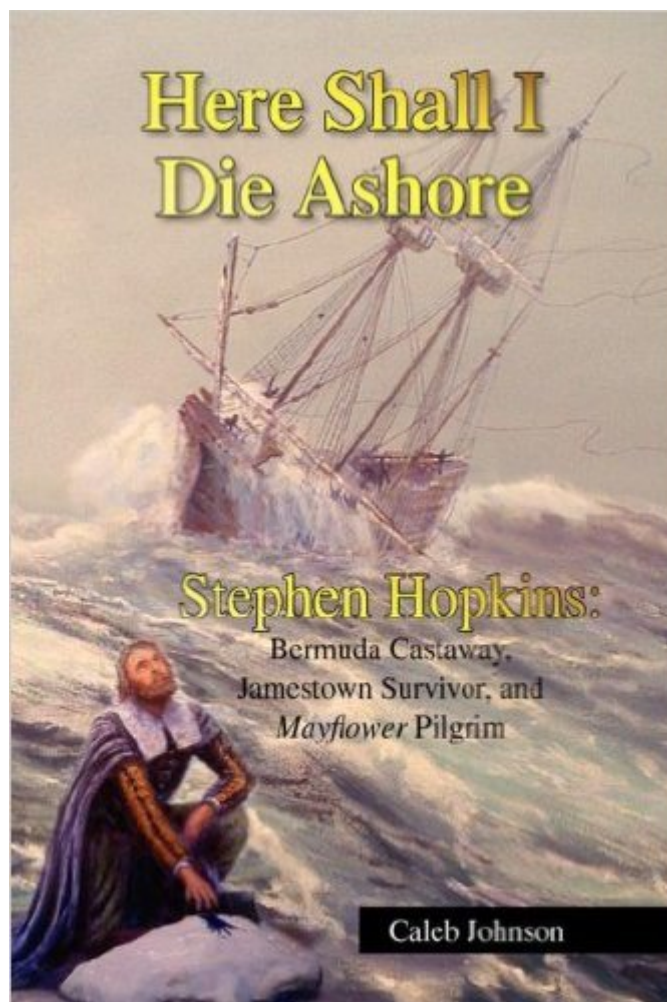


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Here Shall I Die Ashore



Synopsis

In the spring of 1621, Plymouth Colony sent STEPHEN HOPKINS to make the first visit to Wampanoag sachem Massasoit to present a red horseman's coat as a gift and sign of friendship. For most ordinary Englishmen, venturing off into the depths of unexplored America would have been a once in a lifetime adventure: but not for Stephen. By the time he turned forty, he had already survived a hurricane, been shipwrecked in the Bermuda Triangle, been written into a Shakespearean play, witnessed the famine and abandonment of Jamestown Colony, and participated in the marriage of Pocahontas. He was once even sentenced to death! He got himself and his family onto the Pilgrims' Mayflower, and helped found Plymouth Colony. He signed the Mayflower Compact, lodged the famous Squanto in his house, participated in the legendary Thanksgiving, and helped guide and govern the early colonists. Yet Stephen was just an ordinary man, with a wife, three sons, seven daughters, a small house, some farmland for his corn, and cows named Motley, Sympkins, Curled, and Red. These are the extraordinary adventures of an ordinary man.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Caleb Johnson put together a very engaging and well sourced book about the life of someone most have never heard of, but they probably should have. The more bits and pieces I've heard about Stephen Hopkins's life over the last 10 years, the more intrigued I've been. It is amazing what can be pieced together 400 years after the fact, even in the face of common misconceptions about his origins. Johnson does a very good job of providing context for all of the information included. If there

is some degree of uncertainty about any information, he states it very clearly but unobtrusively. The first 142 pages are the story of Hopkins's life and the conditions surrounding it, with illustrations as appropriate. The remaining pages are appendices with copies of previously published work as supporting information. All are useful. As a descendant of Stephen Hopkins, I eagerly awaited this book. I suspect others with interest in Mayflower history, or other general history of early America would find this look very interesting. Johnson, in fact, though a descendant of many Mayflower passengers, is not a direct descendant of Stephen Hopkins. For him to devote so much time to crafting this book should tell you something about the interest of the subject matter.

Stephen Hopkins was the only pilgrim at Plymouth who was also at Jamestown. By background, economic and social status, skills, and education, he was a very ordinary Englishman, yet he had a truly extraordinary life. He was adventurous and courageous. He had an independent streak that got him into trouble after his ship to Jamestown was shipwrecked during a hurricane and the passengers and crew were stranded on Bermuda. He had the audacity to challenge the authority of the leaders of the venture to compel the passengers to proceed to Jamestown. For this he barely escaped a hanging. At Plymouth he fell out of favor with the colony's puritanical leadership for operating a tavern. If you are looking for the first example of someone who epitomizes what would come to be known as the American spirit, Hopkins would be an excellent candidate. Caleb Johnson has done an excellent job of gathering all the known evidence about this interesting character and presenting it in an interesting and convincing narrative. Hopefully, the book will inspire additional research that fill in some of the gaps in Hopkins life. Although every Hopkins descendant will want to have a copy of this book, I believe it will be of interest to a much wider audience.

I've enjoyed getting to know this very interesting ancestor better. Somewhat amazed that the author isn't a fellow descendant: usually that's what motivates somebody to undertake so much loving effort. Johnson corrects the record without being unnecessarily nasty to some rather sloppy predecessors. And he labels his speculations carefully, without distracting from the remarkable story he's telling. Every Hopkins descendant (we are legion) should read this book. Also everybody who cares about the Plymouth colony. Or Shakespeare, for that matter.

Caleb Johnson has done an incredible job in bringing the Pilgrims to life as well as their community. For those of us blessed to be a descendant of Stephen Hopkins, we could not have found a better author to write the story of our ancestor.

Whether or not a reader is a descendant of this particular Mayflower passenger, this book provides a far more nuanced look than most of us have in mind when we think of this episode in history. Johnson, an established historical and genealogical sleuth, tells of evidence of Hopkins's earlier voyage to the New World, of his being on the Sea Venture when it wrecks in the Bermudas, of mutiny, and pardon and the tale becoming fodder for Shakespeare in his last play, The Tempest. On to Jamestown, back to England, where the now widowed Hopkins remarries, bringing surviving children from his first wife to the union. And then the delayed trip on the Mayflower, with his new wife giving birth at sea, in a cramped, smelly, ship, with no privacy. Johnson brings all this to life, including what it must have been like for the women, only four of whom survive the first winter. Native Americans are not left out, and Johnson includes what was likely their multiple perspectives on these invaders. Great literature it is not. But great sleuthing it is, complete with appendices that include transcripts of original documents. It's a tale most of us would find interesting, history buff or not.

I read this book as a part of a reading binge on Early American Settlements. So, much of Stephen Hopkins' life were familiar to me. Caleb Johnson adds some recently discovered and well documented aspects of Hopkin's origins in England. He fleshes out the character, but is almost too hesitant to draw inferences from the primary documents. Did Hopkins in fact keep a tavern or run a boarding house in England? However, I was repeatedly asking myself, "where was the editor?" My high school English teacher would have marked up this manuscript. I finally figured out that the book was self-published. That being said, I still found it to be a good read and would recommend it to those interested in Early American History.

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