

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Mother-in-law-Goose

Who was Mother Goose and when were her melodies first given to the world? These are the questions which have often been asked, but have never been satisfactorily answered. Following up on the reports in Friday's Diary we thought an explanation might be fitting today.

Many persons have imagined that Mother Goose is a myth, that no such person existed. This is a mistake. Mother Goose was not only a veritable personage, but was born and resided for many years in Boston, where many of her descendants probably now reside. According to one of the historic accounts which I have read, the last to bear the ancient paternal name died about the year 1807, and was buried in the Old Granary burying ground, where probably lie the remains of the entire family, if we may judge from the names on the numerous grave stones which mark their resting place.

The Goose family originated in England, but at what time they came to this country I have not been able to find out – but probably about the year 1656. They were landholders in Boston as early as 1660. So much for Mother Goose. Now for her melodies.

More than 300 years ago according to historians there was a small book in circulation in London bearing the name of "Rhymes for the Nursery, or Lulla-Byes for Children," which contained many of the identical pieces which have been handed down to us and now form part of the "Mother Goose's Melodies" of the present day. It contained also other pieces much more amusing, if possible.

T. Fleet, who later published the melodies of Mother Goose in Boston, was a man of considerable talent and of great wit and humor. He was born in England, and was brought up in a printing office in the city of Bristol, where he afterwards worked as a journeyman. He made his way to this country and arrived in Boston in 1712. Being a man of enterprise he soon established a printing office on Pudding Lane, which later became Devonshire street, where he printed small books, pamphlets, ballads and other items. He gradually accumulated property. It was not long before he became acquainted with the "wealthy family of Goose," a branch of which

he had in known Bristol, and shortly married the oldest daughter, Elizabeth.

By the record of marriages in the city registrar's office, according to my findings, it appears that in "1715, June 8, was married by Rev. C. Cotton Mather, Thomas Fleet to Elizabeth Goose." They established their home in the same house with the printing office in Pudding Lane. Mother Goose, like all good grandmothers, was delighted by the birth of a son to the happy couple. She spent her whole time in the nursery, and in wandering about the house, pouring forth the songs and ditties which she had learned in her younger days, greatly to the annoyance of the whole neighborhood it is said.

It also upset the nerves of her son-in-law – the melodies, I mean – but his shrewdness did not forsake him and from this seeming evil he contrived to bring forth some good; he conceived the idea of collecting the songs and ditties as they came from Mother Goose, and published them for the benefit of the world. This he did, and thus "Mother Goose's Melodies" were brought forth.

Another interesting feature of the publication, I have read, was the fact that Thomas Fleet, the publisher, was never known to spare his nearest friends in his raillery – let alone his mother-in-law – or when he could excite laughter at their expense, which explains why he adopted the title of the book.

The original edition of "The Only True Mother Goose" ends with this comment: "Cotton Mather and Mother Goose thus stand in juxtaposition; and as the former was instrumental in cementing the union, which resulted in placing the latter so conspicuously before the world, it is but just that it should be so – although he was a learned man, a most voluminous writer, and published a great many books, some wise and some foolish, it may well be doubted whether anyone, or all of them together, may have passed through so many editions, been read by so many hundreds of thousands, not to say millions, put so many persons to sleep, or in general done so much good to the world as the simple melodies of the other."

*"Little Boy Blue, come blow
your horn,
The sheep's in the meadow, the
cow's in the corn,
What! Is this the way you
mind your sheep,
Under the haycock fast
asleep?"*