

Mrs Marjorie Sayre, originally from Wellfleet, Massachusetts, now living in Florida, has sent this story of her relatives, who were repatriated on the Gripsholm.

My cousins were Dr. Nehemiah Somes Hopkins and his daughter, Helen Terry Hopkins. Actually Dr. Hopkins, himself, was not a relative. He married Fannie Blanchard Higgins who was related to my maternal grandfather as his mother was a Higgins.

Dr. Hopkins was born in the section of Wellfleet, Massachusetts, known as Bound Brook Island. Both he and his brother (I believe his name was Richard) became doctors, with Nehemiah specializing in diseases of the eye. His brother had planned to go to China as a medical missionary, but died very suddenly. Nehemiah felt that it was his duty to take over what his brother had planned to do. So, with his young wife, he set sail for China, knowing not one word of Chinese. He set up a clinic in Peking (as it was known then and as I will refer to it herein) and treated the people for their eye diseases. All of their children were born in China. (1) Ralph who served in France during WWI and later became the top ophthalmologist in Boston; (2) Paul who became the head of Shanghai Power and Light Company; and (3) Helen who throughout her stay in China both taught and helped her father.

Nehemiah was sponsored by the Methodist Church of which he was a member in Wellfleet. A few years after his arrival in China, members of the same church gave a substantial amount of money so that he could build a hospital in Peking. It was named the Hopkins Memorial Hospital. The Chinese people so revered Nehemiah that they gave him the title of "the man with the gentle hands". He was responsible for getting the Chinese government to stop the very, very fine stitching that caused so much eye problems for the Chinese. Both he and Helen were friends with Chiang Kai-Shek and his wife (also her sisters, the Soongs)..

Nehemiah and Helen were interned by the Japanese and, although they never spoke ill words of their capturers, Helen did say that if it had not been for their Chinese friends risking their lives to bring them food that they would have starved to death. Paul was also interred by the Japanese but in a different section of China.

When Paul was liberated he made his way to Peking. At the gates to the Forbidden City, he spoke with the guards. This is also a tribute to his father. The guards asked him how he spoke such perfect Chinese. He told them that he was born there. The guards asked the name of his father, and when he told them, they bowed down to him three times. He told me this when I was at his house in Key West, Florida. Paul's companion wanted to know what he had said, and Paul told him that he had just told them who his father was. I am not sure when Paul returned to the U.S. as his wife came from California.

As I said before, Nehemiah and Helen were repatriated on the Gripsholm. I had thought it was the first trip, but I am not really sure and anyone I knew who would have known has long since passed away. Ralph does have a son who I think is still living, but I am not sure. I really do not know anything about the rest of the family. Paul had a son, John, who, at one time had a business in Key West. Once again I do not know if he is living. The only part of the family with whom we were really in contact with was Nehemiah and Helen. They lived in one section of the house a few doors away from us. The other section was occupied by Nellie Higgins and her sister.

All of the Hopkins family are buried in the Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. Nehemiah had a tablet erected on Bound Brook Island where the old school house stood and where he had gone to school.

Marjorie Sayre
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