

# Ben and Jerry

## Benanuel and Jerathmeel Bowers (Ben and Jerry)

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**Warning:** this story contains references to fornication, moonshine, corporal punishment and jail. (Good, now that I have your attention – Read on!)

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My 7th paternal great-grandfather, Jerathmeel Bowers, was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1650 to George and Elizabeth (Worthington) Bowers. When Jerathmeel was six his father died and six months later his mother Elizabeth married Henry Bowtell.

The next mention of Jerathmeel in 1670 states that he “proved an outrageously insolent servant and was convicted of premarital fornication. (with Elizabeth Wilder)” ([Sex in Middlesex](#)). Massachusetts law provided, “that if any man commit fornication, with any single woman, they shall be punished, either by enjoining marriage, or fine, or corporal punishment, or all or any of these, as the judge of the Court that hath Cognizance of the case shall appoint”

Here Lyes ye Body  
of Capt JERATHMELL  
BOWERS Who  
Decd. April ye 23d  
1724 in ye 78th  
Year of His Age.

His wife is buried in Chelmsford.  
Her epitaph reads as follows:

Here Lyes ye Body of  
Mrs. Elizabeth Bowers  
Wife to Capt Jerathmell  
Bowers Who Decd  
March 4th 1721 in ye 76  
Year of Her Age.

Near it is:

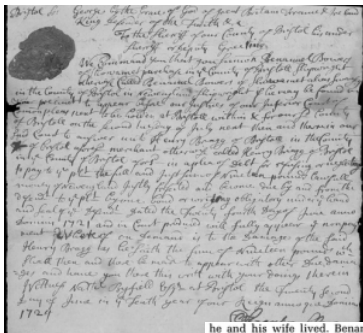
Nathaniel Bowers  
Son of Mr. Jerathmel & Ms Sarah Bowers  
Decd. Februry ye 27th 1726  
Aged 4 years & 11 Mo.

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In 1670, records show that Jerathmeel and Elizabeth were enjoined by the court and in 1671 had their first child, Hannah. Jerathmeel served in [King William's War](#) and later as a captain in [Queen Anne's War](#).

*Jerathmeel operated a still on the corner of his property and*

may have been the first man in Chelmsford to receive a license to sell liquor (“strong waters”). He was actively engaged in farming and became one of Chelmsford’s most prominent citizens, in addition to being a man of substantial wealth. His greatest distinctions came from serving the Town of Chelmsford as a selectman in 1690-92, state representative in 1697 and 1698. ([Groton’s Anonymous Mistress, Carl Flowers](#))



**BOWER, BOWERS,**

Mr. George, planter, Scituate, frm. 7 March, 1636-7; town officer. Sold land in Sci. April 2, 1640. Rem. to Cambridge. Wife Barbarie d. March 25, 1644. He m. April 15, 1649, Elizabeth Worthington. Ch. Jerathmeel b. 1649. He was before the Court 31 May, 1652, for voting when not a freeman of this Colony. Deeded land to son Benanuel in 1656.

He d. 1656; in his will he beq. to wife; sons Benanuel, John and Jerathmeel, and dau. Patience and Silence. The widow m.

wives alsoe"—there is little evidence that adherence to the Society of Friends led to a conscious flouting of puritan moral values.<sup>47</sup> Jerathmeel Bowers, stepbrother of Benanuel, a leading Quaker of Charlestown, proved an outrageously insolent servant and was convicted of premarital fornication.<sup>48</sup> and Elizabeth Cole, whose stepmother Ursula was a Friend and had said of Mr. Symmes and Mr. Shepard that “she had as live hear a catt meaw as them preach” bore a bastard by Samuel Eaton in 1674.<sup>49</sup> However Bowers was brought up in an orthodox, if contentious, household. His chronic insubordination—he called his mistress an “ordinary whore, a burn-tale bitch and hopping toad”—was more likely to have developed from his foster parents’ example.<sup>50</sup> Cole’s natural mother and father were also conformists. There is no hint in either case that Quakerism had anything to do with their misdemeanors. Nor was Richard Nevers’s early flirtation with the Gould Baptist group in Charlestown so much as referred to in the long drawn-out civil litigation with the Gardiners.<sup>51</sup> There is no evidence that religious heterodoxy brought sexual revolution in its baggage train, as it had in

he and his wife lived. Benanuel Bowers would have appreciated some of that leniency. In 1677 the Massachusetts General Court convicted Bowers for having his wife write “a paper of scurrilous verses, superscribed to Thomas Danforth, magistrate” which seditiously defamed Danforth and the Bay Colony magistrates generally. Not appreciating Bowers’s literary contribution, the judges ordered him publicly whipped twenty lashes as a declaration of his offense was read aloud.<sup>52</sup>

One might reasonably doubt the value of writing out an offender’s crime in an age when few if any observers could read. Indeed, that was probably why declarations of offenses were sometimes read aloud, as in the Bowers case. It was also probably part of the reason colonial authorities sometimes ordered offenders to make verbal acknowledgments of their crimes publicly. This sanction at once humbled miscreants and affirmed the authority of government, and that dual role is evident in its use in the seventeenth-century colonies.

This period was a time of persecution of the Quakers. The leading member of this sect, in this town, was Benanuel Bowers. Bishop characterizes him as “a tender friend;” and accuses the magistrates of casting him into prison, and fining him five pounds for carrying milk to a Quaker woman in jail. At the county court, June 19, 1656, held in this town, he was presented for absenting himself from the ordinance of Baptism, convicted, admonished, and ordered to pay the expenses of the court. A few years later, October 16, 1663, he was again convicted of irregular attendance, and “two several times” of entertaining Quakers in his family. On his examination, he affirmed “that the Spirit of God was a Christian’s rule, and that David had no need of the word, nor never contradicted it, and that he speaks of no other law but that which was in his heart.” Bowers fared severely: he had neglected the ordinances three months, and was fined for this, twenty pounds: he had twice entertained Quakers, and for this was fined four pounds, with the cost of court and three shillings to the witnesses.

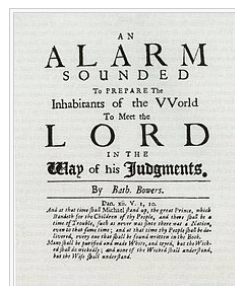
These documents offer additional information about Jerathmeel and Benanuel.

**Benanuel Bowers** – George Bowers by a previous marriage had a son who he named Benanuel (1627-1698). According to published accounts, Benanuel and his wife Elizabeth (Dunster), due to being Quakers, both received “cruel whippings and imprisonment and the loss of part of their worldly substance” through “the outrage and violence of fiery zealots of the Presbyterian party.”

In one case, he came to the aid of a well known early Quaker by the name of Elizabeth Wooten. [From an account of her travels](#) – “So afterwards I returned to Cambridge, where they were very thirsty for blood because none had been there before

that I knew of, and I cried repentance through some part of the town. So they took me and had me early in the morning before Thomas Danforth and Daniel Gookin, two of their magistrates who by their jailer thrust me in a very dark dungeon for the space of two days and two nights without helping me to either bread or water. But a Friend, **Benanuel Bower**, brought me some milk and they cast him into prison because he entertained a stranger and fined him £5.”

[Other offenses of his are also documented](#) – Benanuel Bowers appearing before the court and being convicted of absenting himself the public ordinances of Christ on the Lord’s days, by his own confession, for about a quarter of a year past, and of entertaining Quakers into his family two several times, on his examination he affirmed that the Spirit of God was a Christian’s rule. ([Source](#))



Quakers Benanuel Bowers and Elizabeth Dunster Bowers had twelve children. One daughter, [Bathsheba Bowers](#), become a well-known writer and speaker.

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For further information about Colonial America read:

[America’s True History of Religious Tolerance](#) – The idea that the United States has always been a bastion of religious freedom is reassuring—and utterly at odds with the historical record (Smithsonian Magazine, Oct 2010)

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