

“the awfull Burning of Capt. John Keyes House”
August 7-8, 1723

Source: *Boston News-Letter*, Aug. 15, 1723 p. [2].

Among the victims of this fire was William, the son of Natthaniel and Mary Oak[e]. He was born in Marlborough, February 18, 1705. His family was among the early residents of Westborough.

An exact Account of the awfull *Burning of Capt. John Keyes House, with Five Persons in it, at Shrewsbury, in the Night between the 7th and 8th of this Instant; taken from a Letter of the Reverend Mr. Breck of Marlborough, and from the Mouth of Mr. Ebenezar Bragg of the same, formerly of Ipswich, the only Person of those who lodg'd in the House, that by a distinguishing Providence escaped the Flames:*

Capt. *Keyes* was Building an House about 9 or 10 Foot off his old one. It was almost finish'd; and Mr. *Bragg* aforesaid the Carpenter, with his Brother *Abiel* of 17 Years of Age, and *William Oakes* of 18, his Apprentices, were working about it. Capt. *Keyes* with his Wife and four Daughters, lodg'd in the old one; and the three Carpenters, with three Sons of the Captain, viz. *Solomon* of 20, *John* of 13, and *Stephen* of 6 Years of Age, lay in the New. On the *Wednesday Night*, going to Bed they took a more than ordinary Care of the Fire, being excited thereto by the saying of one, *He wd'nt have the House Burnt for 100 Pound*, and the Reply of another, that *He wd'nt* for [400?]: Upon which they carefully rak'd away the Chips lying near it, and stay'd till the rest were almost burnt out; and then they went all six together to three Beds in one of the Chambers; and were very Chearly and Merry at their going to Bed, which was about 10 of the Clock.

But about Midnight, Mr. *Bragg* was awak'd with a Notion of the House being a Fire, and a multitude calling to Quench it: With which he got up, saw nothing, heard no voice, but could hardly fetch any Breath thro' the stifling smoak, concluded the House was a Fire, perceiv'd some body stirring, against whom he hit [2?] or three times in the Dark; and not being able to speak, or to Breath any longer, after striking his Forehead against the Chimney, he tho't of the Window, and happily found it: When he gain'd it, he Tarry'd a Minute, holding it fast with one hand, and reaching out the other in hopes of meeting with some or other to save them, till the Smoak & Fire came so thick and scorching upon him, he could indure

no longer: And hearing no noise in the Chamber, only, as he tho't a Faint Groan or two, he was forced to Jump out, and the Window being small, head fore-most; tho' he supposes by GOD's Good Providence, he turn'd before he came to the Ground. As Mr. *Bragg* was just got up again, Capt. *Keyes* being awak'd in the Old House, was coming to this side of the New and met Him. But the Flame immediately Burst out of the Windows, and the House was quickly all a light Fire. No noise was heard of the other Five that Perish'd; and it is very Questionable, whether more than One of them mov'd out of their Beds. The Old House was also Burnt and almost every thing in it: But the People were sav'd, thro' the Great Goodness of GOD. But a most dreadful sight it was in the Morning, to see the Five Bodies, Frying in the Fire among the Timbers, fallen down in the Cellar, till towards the Evening; when the few almost consum'd Fragments, without Heads or Limbs, were gather'd, and put into one Coffin, and Buried.

Psal. 66.3. Say unto God, How Terrible art Thou in thy Works!

Jam. 4.15. Ye know not what shall be on the Morrow.

Luk. 12.40. Be ye therefore Ready.