



**The Coffin Family; The Life of Tristram Coffyn, of
Nantucket, Mass;, Founder of the Family Line in
America: Together With Eniniscences and
Anecdotes ... Concerning the Ancient Families
Named**

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Excerpt from *The Coffin Family; The Life of Tristram Coffyn, of Nantucket, Mass., Founder of the Family Line in America: Together With Eniniscences and Anecdotes of Some of His Numerous Descendants, and Some Historical Information Concerning the Ancient Families Named Coffyn*

"And they token the relies of broken mete, twelve coffyns full." Thus it will be seen that this word originated back, far back, in the gray morning twilight of Asiatic life, in the nomadic period of man's existence, before the Bethlehem shepherds guarded their flocks by night on Judea's plains. Moving westward with the march of empire it retained its significance upon the borders of the English Channel, surviving the destructiveness of the Norwegian adventurers of the ninth century; and, becoming Normanized, it was first used as a sign-name, and then adopted as a surname from the official or business occupation, feudalism making it hereditary.

William the Conqueror, was born at Fallaise, a town of Normandy, France, in the department of Calvados, 22 miles S. S. E. of Caen, on the river Ante, in the year 1024. It is now a town of about 15,000 inhabitants, having still in the ruins of its ancient castle one of the finest towers in France. The town is built upon cliffs commanded by an old Norman castle and surrounded by a picturesque country. An equestrian, bronze statue of William was erected here in 1851. Within two short leagues of Fallaise stands the old chateau of Courtiton, once the home of the Norman Coffins, the family name having now become extinct in that vicinage. The present owner, Mons. Le Clere, is the grandson of the last Miss Coffin, the estate having descended in an unbroken male line, as is supposed, until her accession. She married, in 1796, from which time the name of Le Clere has succeeded to that of Coffin as possessors of this ancient estate. Admiral Henry E. Coffin, of the English Navy, a nephew of Admiral Sir Isaac, is the authority for the last statement. In a letter to Mr. William E. Coffin, of Richmond, Ind., written in October, 1880, he thus describes this old Norman chateau which he had several times visited: "It stands at the bottom of a hill in front of a lake. The drive to it is through ornamented wood, a zig-zag road descending to it. There is only the dining-room, kitchen, and part of the old house remaining, and the new part has two drawing-rooms built two hundred years ago, but looking nice."

It was upon this old estate, perhaps, that the first Norman Coffyn, of English fame, was born; and, being one of the younger sons, having no hope of an inheritance, if he rose to distinction in life it must be by his own endeavors. Reared within two leagues of Fallaise, he may have often sported with the youthful William, and been a favored guest at the Ducal Palace. When Williams father, Robert, made his pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre, never to return, Coffyn's father may have shared in the vicissitudes of that expedition; and, if in the capacity of keeper of the Dukes strong box, the name of Coffyn may have dated from the return of that mournful retinue as an individualized surname.

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