

Identifying the Origins of Betsy Jeffords, the Second Wife of Thomas Burt of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and Willet, New York

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John Jeffords and Mary Sanger were married in Dudley, Worcester County, Massachusetts, on 20 February 1764. John's origins have not been established with complete certainty, but he was probably the son of an earlier John Jeffords and his wife Martha Brown.¹

¹There is an unfortunate lack of primary sources for identifying the origins and parentage of John Jeffords the husband of Mary Sanger. He has been said to have been born in 1740, in 1746, and specifically on 11 July 1746, but no contemporaneous records indicating a year or date of birth for him have been located. According to *The Genealogy of the Cleveland and Cleaveland Families*, the father of Susanna Cleveland's husband Amasa Jeffords was "John Jeffords, a Revolution soldier, one of the raw recruits who flocked to the defense of the country when the British [were] at Lexington, Apr. 19, 1775, [and who] participated in [the] Bunker Hill battle, June 7, 1775, m. Mary Sanger." And Amasa's paternal grandfather is identified as "John b. ab. 1710, killed in [the] old French war, m. Martha Brown of Rhode Island" (Edmund Janes Cleveland and Horace Gillette Cleveland, compilers, *The Genealogy of the Cleveland and Cleaveland Families*, 3 Vols. [Hartford: Lockwood and Brainard Company, 1899], I:422). Neither of the claims regarding military service for Amasa's father and grandfather can be verified. The approximate birth year of the grandfather ("ab. 1710") is also likely off by several years, since he was probably the John Jeffords who was born on 4 December 1724 in Hopkinton, Middlesex County, Massachusetts – although his baptism, on 20 December, was recorded in the records of Boxford, Essex County, Massachusetts. He was the son of (yet another) John Jeffords and his wife Lydia Bayley, who were married in Salem, Essex County, Massachusetts, on 5 May 1721.

It would seem that this family originally lived in Boxford, and then moved to Hopkinton, while retaining for a time their membership in the church at Boxford – although "John Jeffards" was still said to be "of Boxford, in ye County of Essex" on 22 February 1724/25, when Thomas Millet of Falmouth, York County, Massachusetts (now Maine), bought land in Falmouth from him (York County Deeds, Book 11, Folio 201; cited in Archie Lee Talbot, *Robert Bayley, the First Schoolmaster in Falmouth (Portland) Maine and Some of His Descendants* [1917], 9-10). (The Town of Hopkinton was incorporated in 1715, but the First Congregational Church of Hopkinton was not organized until 1724.) It is also possible that John and Lydia's children (including John in 1724) were born in Boxford, where their baptisms were recorded, and that when the family later moved to Hopkinton the birthdates of the children were then copied into the Hopkinton records, even though the children had not been born there.

A brother of the John Jeffords born in 1724 was Nathan Jeffords, born in Hopkinton on 30 March 1727, whose baptism on 9 April was likewise recorded in Boxford. Nathan was living in Dudley, Worcester County, Massachusetts, beginning in the 1760s (*Town Records of Dudley, Massachusetts, 1754-1794* [Pawtucket: The Adam Sutcliffe Co., 1894], passim). Amasa's parents, John and Mary (Sanger) Jeffords, were also living in Dudley during this time-frame, and Amasa was actually born there. Nathan would have been an uncle of John the father of Amasa. And if it is true that the John Jeffords who was born in 1724 had died in the "old Indian war," leaving a young son John, Nathan may have become a father-figure to his nephew, and taken him with him when he moved to Dudley from Hopkinton. (Nathan had married Mary Cody in Hopkinton on 8 February 1750, and they had a daughter Mary, baptized in Hopkinton on 11 November 1750. He is said to have died on 25 December 1797, probably in Dudley, but the source for this date is not known.)

Martha Brown, the purported wife of the John Jeffords who was born in 1724 (or "ab. 1710"), has been identified in many places as the daughter of Captain John Brown of Swansea, Bristol County, Massachusetts, and his (second) wife Mary Pierce Burgain. This couple's daughter Martha was born in Swansea on 21 July 1729. John Brown died in Swansea on 28 April 1752. He left a will, dated 20 March 1752, probated on 5 May 1752, naming his wife Mary; his sons John, James, Jeremiah, Benjamin, David, and Seth; and his daughters Mary wife of Daniel Gould, Ann wife of [blank space] Chaloner, Elizabeth Hudson, Rachel (unmarried), Lydia wife of Benjamin Barton, and Martha (unmarried) (H. L. Peter Rounds, *Abstracts of Bristol County, Massachusetts, Probate Records, Book 2:*

Mary had been baptized (in infancy) on 31 December 1746, in Woodstock, Windham County, Connecticut, the daughter of Nathaniel Sanger and his wife Mary Roth. The heretofore identified children of John and Mary (Sanger) Jeffords are as follows: 1) William (“Billy”), born 4 March 1765 in Dudley; 2) Amasa, born 4 December 1768 in Dudley; 3) John, born 22 August 1771 in Dudley; 4) Alpheus, born 5 February 1774 in Oxford, Worcester County, Massachusetts; 5) Rufus, born 21 June 1777 in Oxford; and 6) Mary (“Polly”), born 13 August 1780 in Oxford. The births of these children are recorded in the vital records of the towns of Dudley and Oxford.²

After the birth of Mary (“Polly”) in 1780, John Jeffords disappears from the records of Worcester County. “John Jeffords” reappears in the records of Pittsfield, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, in August of 1790, when he and several other residents of Pittsfield signed a petition asking to be exempt from a tax for the support of the Congregational Church in Pittsfield, because they were not Congregationalists. A document prepared by Pittsfield town officials in March 1792 also listed “John Jeffords” among those people who had been residents of Pittsfield on 1 November 1789, and who at that time had claimed exemption from the church tax because they were Baptists.³

“John Jeffords” also appears on a list of men who were “warned out” of the Town of Pittsfield, dated 25 April 1792. An interesting notation in this document is the description of

1745-1762 [Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1988], 220). But the Martha Brown who married John Jeffords was no longer single in 1752. Since the son of Martha and John (also named John) was old enough to marry Mary Sanger in 1764, he certainly would have been born before 1752. So, this Martha Brown of Swansea is not our Martha Brown.

The John Jeffords who married Mary Sanger was a Baptist (see further on in the present article). While people do sometimes convert, as a matter of personal conviction, from belief in one religious system to belief in another, it is usually the case that people either remain in the faith in which they were raised, or adopt the faith of a spouse. It is significant, therefore, that both the wife and the father of the Baptist John Jeffords were from Congregational families, having been baptized in infancy. This suggests that John’s mother – identified in the Cleveland genealogy as “Martha Brown from Rhode Island” – was a Baptist; and that John was a Baptist through her influence. And there is indeed a very prominent Baptist Brown family in Rhode Island, descended from Chad Brown, the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Providence from 1642 to 1650. It is *possible*, therefore, that Martha Brown, the wife of the John Jeffords who was born in 1724, came from this family.

²A daughter Lucretia, said to have been born on 9 May 1766, and married to Abner Rawson, has also been assigned to this couple by some researchers. Abner and Lucretia are buried in the Soop Cemetery in Belleville, Michigan. The gravestone for “Lucretia, wife of Abner Rawson,” indicates that she died on 1 December 1843, “aged 78 years.” This calculates to a birth in or around 1765. John and Mary (Sanger) Jeffords were living in Dudley, Massachusetts, in 1765, when their son William was born. And they were still living there in 1768 and 1771, when two more children were born. But the birth of a daughter Lucretia, in and amongst these other children, is not recorded in the Dudley town records.

The Rawson Family states that Abner Rawson married “Mrs. Lucretia Jeffords,” and that their first child, Olive, was born in March 1785 (E. B. Crane, *The Rawson Family: A Revised Memoir of Edward Rawson* [Worcester: 1875], 65). The 1785 birth of a first child would place the marriage around the year 1784, when Lucretia was about 18 or 19 years old. That would be a pretty young age for a woman to have already been widowed, but at this time in history the appellation “Mrs.” would indicate that, at least in the understanding of the author of the Rawson genealogy, Lucretia had previously been married, so that Jeffords was not her maiden name.

³These documents are printed in J. E. A. Smith, *The History of Pittsfield (Berkshire County), Massachusetts, from the Year 1734 to the Year 1800* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1869), 457, 459.

John Jeffords as being “from Thompson[,] County of Windham & State of Connecticut.”⁴ Thompson – just across the Massachusetts-Connecticut state line – is about six miles from Dudley, Massachusetts, and about 12 miles from Oxford, Massachusetts. John and Mary apparently lived there for a time after their residence in Oxford. There are, however, no entries for any additional children of John and Mary Jeffords in the Thompson vital records. The Jeffords name does not appear in those records at all, in fact. (In spite of his having been “warned out” of Pittsfield in 1792, John Jeffords did not leave the town.)

No one with the Jeffords name appears in a census of “Inhabitants in the town of Pittsfield” that was taken in 1786.⁵ “John Jeffords” does appear in the 1790 Federal Census for Pittsfield, as the head of a household that was comprised of one male 16 and over, one male under 16, and 3 females. No other family with the name of Jeffords, or any variant thereof, was listed in Pittsfield in 1790. One of the females in the household was no doubt Mary (Sanger), the mother of the family. Another was likely the daughter Mary or “Polly,” who would have been nine or ten years old at the time of the census. But who was the third female?

In the 1800 Federal Census, and again in the 1810 Federal Census, there were only two “Jeffords” households in Pittsfield: that of John, and that of Amasa. Amasa was the son of John. In the 1790s Amasa had been living in or near what was later known as the town of Dover, in Windham County, Vermont, where a son George was born to “Amasa Jefford” on 6 December 1793. Amasa’s wife is not named in the record of George’s birth, but whoever she was, she had died by 1797, when Amasa married Susannah Cleveland, in Pittsfield.⁶ Amasa and John are also the only Jeffords men who appear on the 1795 and 1798 Pittsfield tax lists,⁷ and on the early lists of Pittsfield voters in 1802 and 1810.⁸

At a time when there were apparently only these two “Jeffords” households in Pittsfield – John’s and Amasa’s – a marriage intention was entered in the Pittsfield records on 25 September 1808 for “Mr. Thos. Burt & Miss Betsey Jeffords, both of Pittsfield.” On 2 October 1808 “Mr.

⁴“Pittsfield Warnings Out,” *Berkshire Genealogist* 19:2 (Spring 1998), 59.

⁵See *Pittsfield, Mass. Church and Other Records from Manuscripts Copied by Rollin Hillyer Cooke* (no date), I:367ff.

⁶Amasa and Susannah (Cleveland) Jeffords were the parents of five children: Naomi (born 15 January 1799), Allen Cleveland (born 23 November 1801), Harry (born 9 October 1803), Lucy Cleveland (born 4 November 1807), and Mary Ann (born 9 March 1809). Susannah died in Pittsfield on 9 December 1809, and Amasa married as his third wife, in 1816, Sarah Clifford, with whom he had four more children: Sarah, Maltby, Martha, and Charles Harvey (*The Genealogy of the Cleveland and Cleaveland Families*, I:421-22). We do not know what to make of an entry in the Pittsfield records for the death of a “Child of Am Jeffords” at the age of 15 months on 8 July 1813 (*Pittsfield, Mass. Church and Other Records*, I:336).

⁷*Pittsfield, Mass. Church and Other Records from Manuscripts Copied by Rollin Hillyer Cooke* (no date), II:389, 271.

⁸“Pittsfield Voters,” *Berkshire Genealogist* 20:2 (Spring 1999), 57.

Thomas Burt & Miss Betsey Jeffords were married.”⁹ Thomas had been born in Northampton, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, on 23 August 1761, the son of Oliver Burt and his wife Jerusha Kingsley.¹⁰ He was previously married to Phebe Francis, with whom he had fathered nine children (Anson Stearns, Frank, Sally, Sabrina, Betsey, Phebe, Ann, Henrietta, and Eunice).¹¹ His marriage to Betsy Jeffords was therefore his second marriage. This was a first marriage for Betsy, however. She is described in both records as “Miss Betsey Jeffords.” So, Jeffords was her maiden name. This corrects a long-standing published error, that Thomas Burt’s second wife was the widow “Betsey (Sessions) Gifford.”¹²

Thomas and Betsy (Jeffords) Burt had three children together:¹³ Harriet J. (born 20 July 1809¹⁴), Thomas (Junior) (born 1813¹⁵), and Alanson (born 15 May 1817¹⁶). The Thomas Burt family was still in Pittsfield at the time of the 1820 Federal Census, but by the time of the 1830 Federal Census they were in Willet, Cortland County, New York. After the death of Thomas Burt (Senior) on 19 May 1839, his widow Betsy went to live with their son Alanson in Ulysses, Potter County, Pennsylvania. In the 1850 Federal Census for Ulysses, “Betsy Burt” appears in Alanson’s household. She is described as being 65 years old, and as having been born in Vermont. She apparently died before the 1860 Federal Census, and is buried in the Old Lewisville Cemetery in Ulysses.¹⁷ (Her husband Thomas is buried in the Upper Lisle Cemetery in

⁹The marriages of Betsy’s brother Rufus Jeffords to Rachel Clark, on 12 April 1798, and of her brother Alpheus Jeffords to Betsey Foote, on 3 February 1808, are also recorded in the Pittsfield Vital Records.

¹⁰Roderick H. Burnham, *Genealogical Records of Henry and Ulalia Burt...and Their Descendants through Nine Generations* (privately published, 1892), 68-69.

¹¹*Genealogical Records of Henry and Ulalia Burt*, 105-06.

¹²*Genealogical Records of Henry and Ulalia Burt*, 105.

¹³*Genealogical Records of Henry and Ulalia Burt*, 106.

¹⁴Entry in the Family Bible originally owned by Harriet J. (Burt) Meacham, and now the property of the author. Harriet J. Burt and Randall S. Meacham were married in Willet, Cortland County, New York, on 3 February 1833. They are the author’s great-great-great-grandparents.

¹⁵Calculated from the inscription on his gravestone in the Upper Lisle Cemetery, Triangle, Broome County, New York: “Thomas Burt Died Sept. 3, 1864, Aged 51 y’rs.”

¹⁶Inscription on his gravestone in the Old Lewisville Cemetery, Ulysses, Potter County, Pennsylvania: “Alanson Burt Born Mar. 15, 1817. Died Sept. 1, 1893.”

¹⁷A date of death of 11 November 1854 has been attributed to Betsy, the widow of Thomas Burt, in some accounts of her life. This probably comes from *Genealogical Records of Henry and Ulalia Burt*, 105, which states that 11 November 1854 would be the correct date of Betsy’s death if she were “the daughter of Robert Sessions, Esq., of Pomfret, Conn.” But we know that she was *not* in fact the daughter of Robert Sessions. And our suspicions about the inaccuracy of this date are heightened when we observe that on page 99 of this same book, the second wife of Moses Burt of Wilbraham, Massachusetts, is identified as “Betsy Sessions Flynt,” born 7 May 1779; died 11 November 1854! Our Betsy’s gravestone in Ulysses is damaged, so that the date of death is no longer legible. It is *possible* (but unlikely) that the 11 November 1854 date was transcribed from this gravestone before it became damaged, and that two women named Betsy Burt, widows of distant cousins (Thomas and Moses), died on the same day.

Triangle, Broome County, New York, which is not far from Willet.) Betsy's stated age in 1850 calculates to a birth in 1784 or 1785. She was therefore born too early to have been a daughter of Amasa Jeffords, who would have been only 16 years old in 1785. This leaves Amasa's father John Jeffords as the only plausible father also for Betsy. In 1785 John's wife Mary (Sanger) Jeffords was 39 years old. This is an age at which a woman could easily have given birth to a child.

In the 1800 census, the John Jeffords household included 1 male 45 and over, 1 female 45 and over, 2 females 16 through 25, and 1 female under 10. Betsy, who was 15 or 16 years old in 1800, was no doubt one of the females recorded as being between 16 and 25. By the time of the 1810 census – two years after Betsy's marriage to Thomas Burt – her parents were "empty nesters." In that year, the John Jeffords household included only 1 male 45 and over, and 1 female 45 and over.

Reference has been made to John Jeffords' son Amasa being a resident, in 1793, of what was later to become Dover, Windham County, Vermont. Before 1810, Dover was a part of the town of Wardsborough, Windham County, Vermont. A charter had been granted for Wardsborough on 7 November 1780, after which settlers began arriving from various places in New England. The town was formally organized, and the first town clerk was elected, on 14 March 1786. A birth that would have taken place in Wardsborough between 1780 and 1786 might therefore not have been civilly registered. Some early births (beginning in 1782) were indeed entered into the Wardsborough records, but such data may not have been gathered and recorded as carefully as would have been the case after 1786. As far as ecclesiastical records are concerned, if the family into which a child had been born was a Baptist family, which did not practice infant baptism, then a christening record (in a Congregational or other paedobaptist church) would not have been created for such a child either. A reorganization of Wardsborough was effected in 1788, at which time it was divided into two districts, North and South, each with its own board of town officers. The South District became the town of Dover in 1810. The North District retained the name Wardsborough, and is now known as Wardsboro.

John Jeffords was not one of the grantees of the Wardsborough charter, and he does not appear in the early records of Wardsborough or Dover. There is admittedly no direct evidence that John Jeffords was ever there – although there *is* direct evidence that his son Amasa was there, in the South District. The absence of John's name in Vermont records could be explained by the supposition that John had arrived after the founding of the town, and had remained for only a short time. It is possible that he was employed for several months by one of the grantees, perhaps in helping to clear land, etc. But the 1850 census does indicate that Betsy Jeffords' family was living in Vermont when she was born, in 1784 or 1785. And there is no conflicting evidence that John and Mary Jeffords were residents of any other community in those years. We can therefore assume, on the basis of Betsy's 1850 census entry, that her parents were indeed living temporarily in Vermont at that time – probably in or near Wardsborough, where their older son is documented. They would have gone there from Thompson – likely in 1783 or 1784 – and then moved from there to Pittsfield between 1786 and 1789. A few years after this, Amasa also left Vermont and followed them to Pittsfield.

Because the Jeffordses were Baptists – who would not have had their children baptized

soon after birth – no ecclesiastical record of the birth of Betsy Jeffords would ever have existed. And if the Jeffordses were living in a civilly unorganized area at the time of her birth, there is a good chance that no governmental record of that event would have been created either. But a single woman named Betsy Jeffords, who had been born in Vermont, and who was then living in Pittsfield, got married in Pittsfield in 1808. There was no other Jeffords family in Pittsfield to which she could have belonged. And an otherwise unaccounted-for female was a part of the John Jeffords household in Pittsfield, in 1790 and in 1800. The only reasonable conclusion that can be reached is that Betsy was that female member of the Jeffords household.

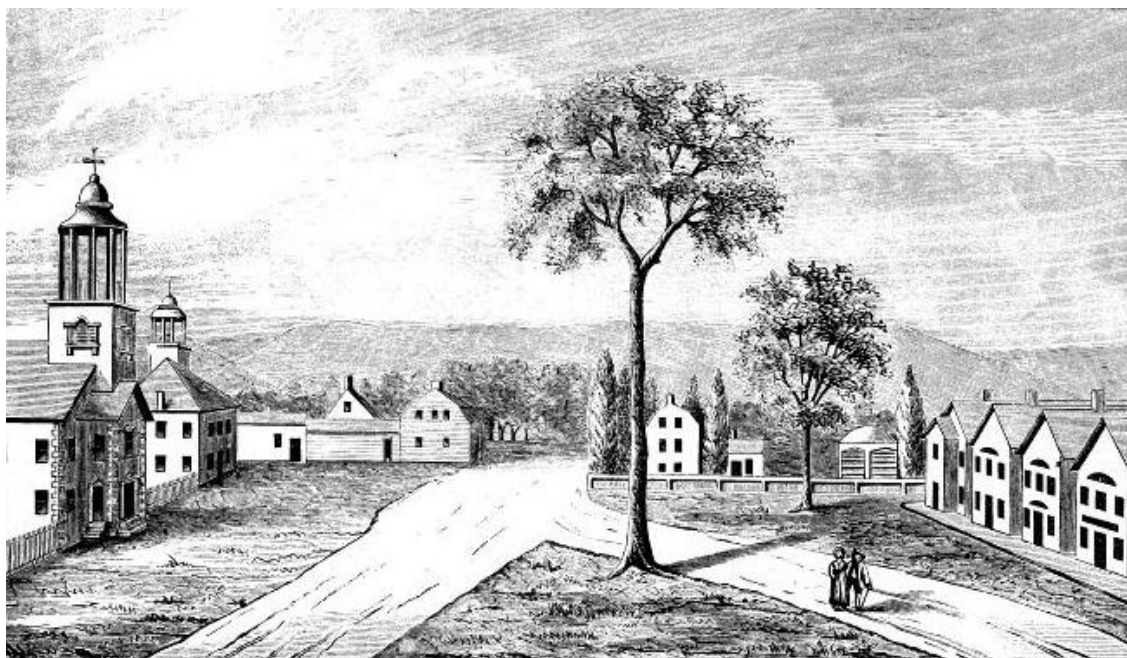
But there is more evidence for this conclusion. The last documentation we have of John and Mary Jeffords' presence in Pittsfield (and of their being alive) is in the town Selectmen's minutes, under date of 20 December 1819, where we read: "Agreed with Thomas Burt to keep John Jeffords & Wife from this time at \$1.83 per week."¹⁸ We learn from this that John and Mary were financially unable to provide for themselves at this point in their lives; and that they were under the care of Thomas Burt, who was now going to receive monetary assistance from the town in providing for them. Why would Thomas Burt be taking care of this couple in their old age? The answer seems obvious: because they were his wife's parents! (The poverty of John and Mary Jeffords would also explain why there are no will or probate records for either of them.)

This conclusion is genealogically and historically significant for those who count Thomas and Betsy (Jeffords) Burt as ancestors, not just because it satisfies a curiosity about who Betsy Jeffords really was, but also because this identification of Betsy's parentage gives her and her descendants – through her mother Mary (Sanger) Jeffords, and her maternal grandmother Mary (Roth) Sanger – a line of descent from Edward Fuller, a passenger on the Mayflower in 1620: Betsy Jeffords, daughter of Mary Sanger, daughter of Mary Roth, daughter of Benjamin Roth, son of Sarah Williams, daughter of Mary Fuller, daughter of Samuell Fuller, son of Edward Fuller.¹⁹

Phoenix, Arizona
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¹⁸"Pittsfield Records," *Berkshire Genealogist* 20:1 (Winter 1999), 27. The death of "Mrs. Jeffards" on 8 November 1810, in Pittsfield (*Pittsfield, Mass. Church and Other Records*, I:334), is likely a reference to a daughter-in-law of Mary and John Jeffords, and not to Mary herself, since the wife of John Jeffords was still alive in 1819. It is remotely possible, however, that this death entry is for Mary, and that John Jeffords had remarried (in his late 60s or early 70s) between 1810 and 1819.

¹⁹The Mayflower ancestry of Mary Roth (or Roath), born 4 May 1726, married to Nathaniel Sanger, can be found in Bruce Campbell MacGunnigle, *Mayflower Families Through Five Generations: Volume Four, Edward Fuller* (third edition) (Plymouth, Massachusetts: General Society of Mayflower Descendants, 2006), beginning on page 155.



Park Square, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 1807

Oct. 2 Mr. Thomas Burt & Miss Betsy Jeffords were married

Marriage Entry for Thomas Burt and Betsy Jeffords, 2 October 1808
Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Vital Records



Grave of Betsy (Jeffords) Burt
Old Lewisville Cemetery, Ulysses, Pennsylvania