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Abigail Thompson Did Not Kill her Daughter in Jail!

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One discussion in the Welles family genealogy has undergone more change and alteration than any other. That is the discussion about the murder trial of Abigail Thompson for the death of her husband Thomas³ Thompson, son of Thomas and Anne² (Welles) Thompson of Farmington. In the first edition of the family genealogy, Thomas³ (pp. 39-40) is presented as a fractious and stormy individual. The transcript of published and microfilmed records of the court case is included in Appendix C. About Abigail's daughter by her husband Thomas, we know only that the last record of her was on 1 April 1708. A note is made, however, that "A reference, as yet unverified, states that Abigail Thompson strangled her child."¹

In Donna's second edition of the genealogy, she quotes at length the a letter from the Rev. Dr. Gershom Bulkeley, a prominent doctor who resided in Wethersfield at the time of Thomas³'s death:

I find that the woman's act was in the nature of a chance medley, done in a quarrell, upon a sudden provocation; and also that the man lived 18 days after the wound, was up and down, here and there, cut wood, dressed flax, etc., all weathers; and that in all this time no care was taken of him by any of his neighbors or relations, his wound was never searched, no proper means at all used for his cure, nothing but a plaster applied, which skinned it over 3 or 4 days before he died; and in fine, nobody abiding in the house with them night or day, but he was wholly left to the mercy, care and nursing of that bloody woman, who they knew had wounded him. Hereupon my little sense concludes that the wound, penetrating into the brain, was indeed such that he might possibly dyed of it, but the neglect of it and ye [illegible] method of cure was such that he must of necessity die of them, and tis impossible to make it evident that he died of the wound. I cannot say the wound would have been cured if good means had been seasonably used; but I can say it is probable it might have been cured, because more dangerous wounds of the brain than that have been cured. It neither is or can be evident that he died of the wound: but I think tis evident that he died of corruption, gangrene and suppuration of the wound and brain, through the neglect of means to prevent it, which in an ordinary way of Providence, might have been done. Tis now endeavored to lay the fault of the neglect upon the woman. I cannot excuse her, any more than the man or his friends. I think that all are to blame; but besides else may be said to avoid it, tis certain she was not indicted, or brought to answer, on that account, and we must not indict upon one crime and evidence for another.²

Recently, though, further research has uncovered some interesting records.

¹ Donna Holt Siemiatkoski, *The Descendants of Gov. Thomas Welles of Connecticut, 1590-1658, and his Wife Alice Tomes* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1990), p. 40.

² David Sanders Clark. *Notes on the Terry and Related Families* (Washington, 1957), typescript at the NSDAR library (45517), II:Bulkeley:6, citing "Steiner, pp. 51-52." [Unfortunately, although I have the Terry book, I still have no idea which Steiner article or book this reference cites!]

First, the court case includes testimony that was never microfilmed or published. It is available only in its original form, in the record book of the court stored in the archives of the Connecticut State Library. This testimony shows that Abigail was, if possible, even more fractious and stormy than Thomas. Four different witnesses testified to at least four instances when Abigail said she'd be the death of Thomas. In one case, there is testimony from Abigail's stepson Thomas⁴ Thompson that during the summer he was summoned by his sister to his father's home and "found my mother driving my father before her and striking at him with a chair in her hands and my father fending it off with his hands. And I asked my mother if she was not ashamed to beat her husband, and she said she was not, and said he was an old devil and she would be the death of him." It was common knowledge that Abigail occasionally went to bed with a knife to threaten Thomas. After he was wounded by the shears, Thomas³ Thompson went to the nearby Worth homestead, holding the shears, with blood soaking his clothes down to his shoes. He told them that Abigail had flung the shears at him. She arrived later and admitted that she had done so, but hadn't meant to hurt him.

Second, Abigail is identified as the daughter of Nathaniel Thorp of New Haven, mostly because she asked that her child be raised by "her uncle Thorp" in Wallingford. Nathaniel Thorp had a daughter named Abigail and a brother Samuel who lived in Wallingford. New evidence shows that, a year after Abigail Thompson's supposed execution, Nathaniel Thorp names his daughter "Abigail Thorp" in his will. This gives us two new possibilities: either (1) Abigail Thompson wasn't Nathaniel Thorp's daughter or (2) Abigail wasn't executed and returned to her maiden name.

Third, we now know that Mercy Thompson survived, married, and had eight children. It is with great pleasure that I list them below. It is always a joy in doing genealogy to make a connection long thought to be lost.

94. Mercy⁴ Thompson (Thomas Jr.³, Anne², Gov. Thomas¹). The probate records put her age at 3 years old before 1 March 1707/8 when her guardianship was granted to John Clark, Jr. (Manwaring II:126 citing Hartford probate VII:105). She died 23 February 1778 at the age of 71 and was buried in the Town Street Cemetery, East Windsor, Connecticut (Hale 5). She married before 7 June 1728, **Thomas Bancroft** of Windsor, son of Ephraim Bancroft and Sarah Stiles.³ He was born 14 December 1703 in Windsor, Connecticut (Barbour citing VR 1:6). He died 4 July 1787 at the age of 83 and was buried beside his wife in East Windsor (Hale 5).

The Will of Thomas Bancroft, signed by mark 26 June 1787 and proved 6 August 1787, names his sons John, Abel, and Edward; grandson Isaac Bancroft, Jr.; and Daughter Hall. It appoints his son John as Executor. The witnesses were Stephen Heath and David Allen (East Windsor Probate District, docket no. 322).

Thomas and Mercy's son Abel died without issue. His Will devised to a number of nephews and one niece, reserving the improvement of some property which was settled on his housekeeper for her natural life. Abel Bancroft, however, did not specify how the property was to be divided after her death. On 4 May 1804, Oliver Barber and Jonathan Pasco distributed the residual property of the estate of Abel Bancroft to his legal heirs, being his brothers and sisters (East Windsor Probate District, docket no. 268). This distribution took place following the deaths of all his siblings, so it serves as an identification of all of his nieces and nephews alive in 1804. John Bancroft, Jr., the executor of the estate, received some value to pay his bill. Edward Bancroft's heirs are named as Thomas, Nathaniel, Sarah, Editha and Cloe Bancroft. Sarah

³ Farmington Deeds, 4:482, dated 7 Jun 1728, Thomas and Mercy Bancroft sell the lot at Round Hill that Mercy had received in the 1708 distribution of her father's estate. Farmington Deeds, 7:326, dated 29 Dec 1747, Thomas and Mercy [in text] or Mary [in record book copy of signature] quitclaimed to Samuel Thomson any interest coming "unto us as heirs of our late father Thomas Thomson at Farmington dec'd."

Munsel's heirs are named as Thomas Munsel, Ellis [Alice?] Elmer, and Abigail Pasco. Eunice Smith's heir is unnamed but there is only one share. Anne Hall's heirs receive a much larger share but are not identified.

Children, surname **Bancroft**, all born in Windsor, Connecticut:

- 423 i. **Sarah**⁵. Born 15 Dec 1728 (Barbour citing VR 2:290, mother's name given as Marcy). Died 28 Nov 1783 at age 54 according to her gravestone in Scantia Cemetery, East Windsor, Connecticut (Hale 122). Married 2 Jan 1750/1 in Windsor to **Jacob Muncil, Jr.** (Barbour citing VR 2:179), son of Jacob Muncil and Phebe Lewis. Born 21 Apr 1732 in Windsor (Barbour citing VR 2:398). Died 1790 at age 68 according to his gravestone in Scantia Cemetery beside his wife (Hale, p. 122, marker identifies him as having served in the 8th company of the 1st regiment in the French and Indian War).
- 424 ii. **Esther**. Born 21 Nov 1729 (Barbour citing VR 2:292, mother's name given as Martha). No further record for an Esther, but her brother Abel's Will names a sister Eunice Smith, who would have been the wife of **David Smith** of East Windsor.
- 425 iii. **Thomas**. Born 10 Oct 1731 (Barbour citing VR 2:292, mother's name omitted). Died 6 Aug 1758 at Lake George (Barbour citing VR 2:220) in Revolutionary War service (Stiles' Windsor 2:42).
- 426 iv. (Deac.) **John**. Born 31 Dec 1733 (Barbour citing VR 2:293). Died 20 March 1800 at age 65 according to his gravestone in Town Street Cemetery, East Windsor (Hale 3). Married **Anna Phelps** of Sharon who died 32 Jan 1790 at age 54 according to her gravestone in Town Street Cemetery (Hale 5).
- 427 v. **Edward**. Born 15 Jul 1737 (Barbour citing VR 2:294). Died before Jun 1797 (Stiles' Windsor 2:43). Married Sarah (—) (Stiles' Windsor 2:43).
- 428 vi. **Abel**. Born 25 Jul 1740 (Barbour citing VR 2:296). Died 15 Aug 1796 at age 56 according to his gravestone in Town Street Cemetery, East Windsor (Hale 12). Abel's Will, signed on 15 Aug 1796 and proved on 24 Aug 1796, leaves his housekeeper Hannah Dibble improvement of a lot for her natural life [without stating how it should then be divided], and names his cousin⁴ Isaac Bancroft, son of his sister; his cousin Thomas Bancroft, son of his brother Edward; his cousin Nathaniel Bancroft, son of his brother Edward Bancroft; his cousin John Bancroft, son of his brother John Bancroft, and his cousin Annah Jones, wife of Caleb Jones; and appoints John Bancroft, Jr., as executor, witnessed by Jenney Abby, Elizabeth Pasco, and Clary Booth (East Windsor Probate District, docket no. 268). The residual was distributed on 4 May 1804 (East Windsor Probate District, docket no. 268).
- 429 vii. **Ann**. Born 8 Oct 1743 (Barbour citing VR 2:299).
- 430 viii. **Nathaniel**. Born 17 Oct 1748 (Barbour citing VR 2:301). Died 20 Apr 1768 in East Windsor (Barbour citing VR 2:221).

Manuscript Reference: Thompson-Thomson Family File, manuscript of Julius Gay, no. 28091, Genealogy Collections, Connecticut Historical Society. Gay has also included a transcript of the Court of Assistants, vol. 2, p. 55, which reads like a verbatim trial transcript.

References: Savage 4:288-289 (provides birth for Mercy of 15 Oct 1706 in Hartford Jail, but this is two years too late for her age in her father's probate record or the age on her gravestone, all of these would have her born early in 1705); Stiles' Windsor 2:42-43 (does not identify Mercy's maiden name; also misinterprets Abel's Will, calling his niece and nephews his children).

⁴ Clearly a usage of cousin to mean nephew as Abel identifies Isaac as his sister's son. The terms niece and nephew were not yet in popular usage.