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Correcting Wikipedia Errors about Gov. Thomas Welles

By Barbara J. Mathews, CG

What an eventful August I have had! One day in mid-August, I wandered by Wikipedia.org, an internet encyclopedia. The content on Wikipedia is user-generated. I read the coverage of Gov. Thomas Welles. I was somewhat pleased to see that Donna's book on the family was cited in the biographical material. In addition, many of my newsletter articles were cited in the section labeled Descendants.

In that section, I saw many familiar names, such as Henry Wells, Gideon Welles, and Gerald Ford. I was surprised to see Sarah Palin among the notables. Her entry stated:

- [Sarah Palin](#),^[27] is an American politician, author, speaker, and political commentator who served as the [Governor of Alaska](#) from 2006 until [she resigned in 2009](#). She was the [Republican](#) nominee for [Vice President of the United States](#) in 2008.

A quick check of footnote 27 gave me:

27. [^] Battle, Robert (2008). "[Ancestry of Sarah Palin](#)".
<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~battle/palin.htm>. Retrieved 2010-03-10.

What I found on the resource called Rootsweb was an ahnentafel. If this word doesn't slide simply off your tongue, that's okay. It took me years to learn to spell it! In any event, it is a listing of ancestors where each father has a number that is twice his child's number. The mother's number is +1.

It took awhile, but I found Gov. Thomas Welles and his wife Alice Tomes as ancestors 15806 and 15809. Carefully I divided by two and found which of their children was listed as an ancestor of Sarah Palin. It was Mary Welles at number 7903. So far, so good. Thomas and Alice did have a daughter Mary.

Unfortunately, this is also where the ahnentafel goes wrong, very wrong. We've all seen lots of documentation that Mary was the wife of Timothy Baldwin of Milford, Connecticut. That wasn't the case in this ahnentafel. Instead, Mary's husband is listed as Anthony Hopkins. Humph thought I. Perhaps the author confused daughter Mary with daughter Ann? Ann's second husband was Anthony Howkins, not Hopkins, but the names are close.

Carefully I divided by two and found the child of the Anthony Hopkins and Mary Welles marriage. At number 3951 I found Ruth Hawkins, the wife of number 3950, Thomas Hart.

That had me very rapidly picking up both my manuscript and Donna's book. Ruth was not among the children of Ann (Welles) (Thompson) Howkins by Anthony Howkins in Donna's book. My manuscript lists all of Anthony Howkins children and Ruth appears there as a child by his first wife, whose name is unknown. Ruth is, indeed, married to Thomas Hart.

What I had found in the ahnentafel were two errors. The first was in the identification of which of the daughters of Thomas and Alice had married Anthony Howkins. The second error was the deal-breaker, though. That error took a daughter from Anthony's first marriage and attached her to Anthony's second wife. Wrong. Ruth Howkins was not a descendant of Gov. Thomas Welles.

I decided that I had an obligation to work to correct the information on Wikipedia. First I looked all over the Rootsweb ahnentafel to see if I could email the author and ask him to correct the work. I was unable to find his email address although I did find an address for one of his collaborators. I emailed that man and waited a full week for a response.

Being a Facebook sort of person, I also posted on Facebook about finding the error. I had the support of my friends there to fix it. After a week, I logged on to Wikipedia, created my own account, and spent time going through the tutorials on editing entries.

Then, I went into the Thomas Welles page and removed Sarah Palin from the list of descendants. There was a little line in which I could post my reason. I stated:

(The reference found at <http://www.wargs.com/political/heath.html> shows Ruth Hawkins as the daughter of Anthony Hawkins by Mary Welles. Not true, as she was a dau. of 1st wife.)

When I checked back the next morning, my deletion had been undone. A user named Marksv88 had left his own short message:

(Please take it to Talk if you want to refute a cited point.)

I felt bad that I had somehow messed up on etiquette. I went to the Discussion page and entered my explanation. I said:

In the ahnentafal, ancestor number 3951 is Ruth Hawkins, the wife of Thomas Hart. Her parents appear as ancestors 7902 and 7903, Anthony Hopkins [sic] and Mary Welles. This is not correct. Ruth Hawkin's parents were Anthony Hawkins and his first wife, whose name is currently unknown. As his second wife, Anthony married Ann (Welles) Thompson.¹

¹ All of the Wikipedia entries were retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Thomas_Welles"

I suggest that we refute this link from Ruth Hawkins to Mary Welles by citing Donna Siemiatkoski's 'The Descendents of Gov. Thomas Welles and his Wife Alice Tomes', p. 28, which shows that the children Anthony and Ann had together were Sarah, Elizabeth, and Hannah. Not Ruth. Donna cited sources here. They are: Farmington Vital Records, Farmington Church Records, and three other derivative works.

I waited as patiently as I could for two full days. I got no response to my posting. So, I entered:

I haven't had any response to my posting explaining the errors in the source material on the Hawkins-Welles connection. I will again remove the information from the page. I hope my explanation is complete enough for others to permit this correction to go through.

Within 15 minutes user Marksv88 had undone my correction again. This time he stated:

two days is really not much time for anyone to comment, but the reason why I reverted you again is verifiability. Your argument points to a book which at best could be called obscure. Is there any way to scan in the page in question so we can at least include it? Thanks

To which I soon responded:

This book is already included in the list of sources on the page on Thomas Welles. It is already an early footnote on the page. What's your beef with this change? I don't see that anyone else has been held to the standard to which you are now holding me.

I have to say that I felt bad about my anger on this. I decided that, rather than scanning Donna's book, I would find an online source that explained things. A short time later, I entered this information:

Marksv88, try this on for size: Charles William Manwaring, "A Digest of Early Connecticut Probate Records: Hartford District, 1635-1700 (R.S. Peck & Co., 1902), AVAILABLE ON GOOGLE BOOKS IN FULL VIEW FORMAT FOR EVERYONE TO SEE:

1. pages 208-209, the estate of Anthony Howkins names his wife as Ann. A daughter Ruth is listed among his children. In fact, Ruth's husband Thomas Hart

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continuously petitions the court to receive Ruth's share of the estate. Ergo, Anthony had a daughter named Ruth who married Thomas Hart. This is the part of the ahnentafel with which I completely agree.

2. page 324, the estate of Ann Howkins. It lists two of the children of Anthony Howkins: Hannah and Elizabeth. It does not list any of the older children of Anthony Howkins. Ergo the other children of Anthony Howkins were not Ann's children but the children of his first wife who died 12 July 1655 in Windsor (Barbour index to vital records citing the Report to the Colony p. 160).

I would also comment that Ruth's birth record appears in the report of the town of Windsor to the colony of Connecticut. The date is in 1646. Ann Thompson married Anthony Howkins in 1656, when Ruth Howkins was about ten years old. At that marriage, Anthony moved to Farmington and managed the property where Ann lived.

I will remove the Palin error tomorrow. Although my first posting did not receive an answer in two days, I do notice that my second posting got an answer in minutes.

By this time, ten days after the error had been found, it was still not fixed. Our newsletter editor, Marty Partridge, asked me to make the Wikipedia efforts the topic of my next column. She hoped this column could be a warning to members to use online sources with care. One of the Wikipedia editors, Boing! Said Zebedee, stated:

Hi. The problem here is really not in explaining the error (and it's not "personal politics" - you should [assume good faith](#)). The problem is that Wikipedia relies on references from "reliable" mainstream sources (see [WP:RS](#)), not on truth, and not on individual editors' reasoning. And if you can not find such sources to support your assertions, then you can not add them (even if you are correct). So if an editor finds something that they have personally researched and can personally argue is incorrect, they can not add their own reasoning to an article, as that would constitute original research (see [WP:OR](#)), which is not allowed.

My friends on Facebook found online information about how Wikipedia works. I had to learn the online Wikipedia editorial ettiquette and exercise more patience. Once a few more page editors chimed in, my effort to correct the entry found support. Finally, by the 14th of August, Mayflies gave support:

I am quite satisfied that the change Ignarp proposes is based on acceptable and available published genealogical research, as cited, and not upon the editor's personal unpublished research or opinion. The "tree" on which the Palin connection is based was itself based on less reliable older derivative (secodary) compilations, which failed to recognize that Anthony Hawkins, father of Ruth Hawkins, Governor Palin's ancestor, was married twice. Ruth, the daughter of an unknown first wife, was born ten years before Anthony's marriage to Mary [sic]

Welles, and so the cited tree by Battle and Hurdle is incorrect in listing her as Ruth's mother and connecting Ruth to the Welles line through her. This is so evident from the sources cited by Ignarp that I fail to see the basis for any controversy. These things happen in genealogy, and when errors are found and corrected in respected publications, it is seldom that anyone wants to perpetuate further the original misattributions.

And Boing! Said Zebedee even chimed in with support:

Sorry it's taken me longer than I'd hoped to contribute, but I've had a look now. Firstly, I just want to say that it looks like Ignarp has done some careful investigation here, and I don't personally doubt the conclusions - even if I can't see the sources myself. But what really struck me (which I didn't spot at first, and which Mayflies has also pointed out), is that we have no reliable source to say that Sarah Palin is a descendant of Thomas Welles in the first place! All we have is a user submission to the RootsWeb message boards - and anyone can add any old rubbish they want there (I'm an experienced amateur genealogist myself and I've seen plenty of major errors in people's posted genealogies - and I've even seen some that were completely fictitious). So yes, I agree with Ignarp, that the Palin claim should be removed, as it should never have been there in the first place.

And removed it was. Wikipedia is only one online source. This experience caused me to check a few more online sources. Many online tree sources give the name of Gov. Welles's wife as Elizabeth Hunt, an error that should have disappeared when the correct information was published in 1927. One site showed 2046 children of the governor, some of them with surnames other than Welles. Please use such sites with caution.

Below I provide you all with a preview of the family treatment from the new edition of our genealogy. This is the treatment of Ann² Welles. The book itself will have a chapter explaining what all the citation abbreviations mean. Please enjoy.

3. Anne² Welles (Gov. Thomas¹); born c. 1620, probably in Burmington, Warwickshire, England; and died bef. 19 October 1680 in Farmington, Connecticut (NEHGR 80:302). She married first on 14 April 1646 in Hartford, Connecticut (CHS Coll. 14:607, citing PR 1:22 (from back of book), groom's surname spelled TomSunn; NEHGR 80:302) **Thomas Thompson**, son of John Thompson and Beatrice Detton. He was baptized 1 October 1610 in Burford, Shropshire, England (Flagg 350, citing Burford Parish Registers).² He died 25 April 1655 in Farmington, Connecticut (Barbour citing 2:320). She married second bef. 6 May 1656 (Manwaring 156) **Anthony Hawkins** (also spelled Howkins), who died 28 February 1673/74 in Farmington, Connecticut (HH 782).

² Four men by the name of Thomas Thompson are listed in New England passenger lists for the 1630's — which are widely understood to be incomplete. Many authors have identified our Thomas Thompson as the man who, at age 18, was listed as sailing from London in the *Abigail* on 1 July 1635 bound for New England (Coldham 143), but this could not be the same man as he was seven years younger than our Thomas Thompson.

Thomas Thompson was granted land in Hartford, Connecticut (Goodwin-Morgan 1:205 citing Hartford Book of Distributions 137, 518). Thomas Welles of Hartford, Gentleman, settled a marriage portion consisting of property in Farmington on Thomas Thomas [*sic*] Thomson of Hartford and his wife Anne on 16 May 1642. "In consideration of a marriage lately undertaken betrothed & solemnized by & between Thomas Thomson & Anne Welles Daughter to ye sd Thomas Welles," the father provided half of the land and half of the buildings to be built there. The houselot contained 7 acres and was bordered east on the common, west on the river, north on the highway, and south on Mr. Steel's homelot. In addition there were 30 acres of meadow and 90 acres of arable ground. The reserved half was for the heirs of Thomas Welles (Farmington Deeds 3:138). Thomas¹ Welles later gave the other half of this property to his eldest son John Welles (Goodwin-Morgan 1:206). The houselot is at the center of Farmington, bounded on the west by the Farmington River, on the north by the highway which is now Route 4, and on the east by Route 10; the original homestead had been transformed into the Corner House Restaurant and then into the office building occupied by A. E. Edwards & Sons, Inc., an investment firm, which was partially destroyed by fire on 28 December 1999 (*The Hartford Courant*, issue of 29 December 1999, p. A3, cols. 3-5). By 2005 it had been rebuilt and operated as a restaurant that was no longer functioning in 2010.

On 13 October 1652 Thomas Thompson was admitted to the First Church, Farmington, Connecticut as one of the original "seven pillars" or founding members of the church (Church Records, slip index citing 1:36; Julius Gay Manuscript). Anne was admitted about one month later (NEHGR 11:323). As Mrs. Hawkins, Anne was again listed as a church member there on 1 March 1679/80 (Church Records, slip index citing 1:102).³

Thomas Thompson's father was John Thompson of Sherehouse who was listed in the 1623 Visitations of Shropshire as one of a large number of persons who "without any good ground or authority usurped the name and Title of Gentleman" and had agreed to stop using this title (Visitations of Shropshire, p. 4). This John Thompson had four sons: George, who succeeded him at Sherehouse; Thomas, who emigrated to New England; John, who graduated from Oxford University; and Samuel, who became a member of the Stationers' Company of London (Flagg 349). It is through the will of Samuel that we can link Thomas Thompson to his family in England. According to his will dated 25 August 1668 and proved 9 November 1668, Samuel "had great losses in the firing of London" in 1666. Samuel's will provides £20 for nephew Thomas Thompson should he want at the end of his apprenticeship to "go over to his mother in New England, " and £5 for niece Beatrice Thompson. The will also makes Thomas Thompson residual legatee should the three children of the testator die before adulthood (NEHGR 49:395-395).

Thomas Thompson's mother was Beatrice Detton, daughter of George Detton and his wife Anne ap Thomas (1623 Visitations of Shropshire 165-166). Detton was lord of the manor of Doddington in Neen Savage, Shropshire, about seven miles northeast of Burford. The Detton family did have the right to a coat-of-arms, in fact several, described in the Visitations of Shropshire as Harl. 1241, fo. 24 and Harl. 615, fo. 249 as well as S., fo. 297n.

³ Note that the church record transcript published in NEHGS 12:36 shows this as "Mr. Hawkins" which is an error as he had died previously.

In his will written April 1654, Thomas Thompson provided half of his lands and housing to his wife; named sons John and Thomas, daughter Beatrice [*sic*], and daughter Mary; gave each of his children a Bible; and appointed his two brothers (unnamed) and brother Thomas Welles as overseers of his Will. The inventory of his estate, made on 5 December 1655 by Thomas Judd and John Harte, valued his estate at £549:05:05. On 6 May 1656, Anthony Hawkins was appointed Administrator of the Estate as he had married the widow Thompson (Manwaring I:155-156).

Anthony Hawkins may have come from the area of Braintree in Essex, where the Hawkins family was connected with other early New England settlers, including the woolen draper Joseph Loomis who also settled in Windsor by 1640; moreover, he is mentioned in the will of John Hawkins of Braintree (Flagg 259). He settled first in Windsor, Connecticut, where his land from the plantation was recorded on 28 November 1640 (Stiles' Windsor 1:158). There he had three children (Stiles' Windsor 2:369): (i.) Mary, who married John Judd; (ii.) Ruth, who married Capt. Thomas Hart; and (iii.) John, who died young. His first wife, whose name is unknown, died on 12 July 1655 in Windsor (Barbour citing Windsor records as reported to the colony, 2:160).

Hawkins was a Deputy from Farmington to the General Assembly beginning in May 1657. He was a Patentee of Royal Charter of 1662. He was an Assistant for the Colony from 1668 until his death. On 22 January 1656/57 he became a member of the First Church, Farmington, Connecticut (NEHGR 11:325). Anthony Hawkins left a Will, exhibited to the court on 6 April 1664, names his wife Ann; children John, Ruth, Sara, Elizabeth, and Hanna; and sons-in-law John Judd, and John Tomson; and appoints his wife executrix and Samuel Wells and John Judd as overseers. It was not allowed, as it omits his daughter Hester, does not handle the dower interest properly, and omits money due his wife which she brought into her marriage. His inventory was exhibited at the same time and was valued at £332:05:00. Ann Hawkins refused executorship but was granted administration that same day. She must not have taken active measures, as on 1 November 1714 and again on 6 December 1714, the court tried to identify others to administer the estate (Manwaring I:208-209 citing III:134-139 for the will and inventory, and VIII:219 and VIII:225 for the follow-up concerns).

The inventory of the estate of Mrs. Anna Howkins [*sic*] of Farmington was exhibited in Hartford on 2 December 1680. Distribution was ordered to her children John Thompson, Thomas Thompson, Beatrice Parker, Mary Hally, Hester Gridley, Elizabeth Brinsmade, and Hanna Howkins (Manwaring 1:324).

Anne had raised the children of five different marriages: of her own two marriages, of her second husband by his first wife, and of her brothers John and Samuel, both of whom died young. At some point Anne may have moved her family to Stratford for awhile, as the younger children and stepchildren married there. Because Anne raised her own children and those of her brothers John and Samuel, and their descendants remained in the same area, many of their descendants eventually intermarried, resulting in several lineages which descend from as many as three to five of the six children of Gov. Thomas Welles (Nutmegger 30:211-215).

Children, surnamed **Thompson**:

- 13 i. **Beatrice**³; bapt. 17 Jan 1646/47 in Hartford, Connecticut (Barbour citing the Book of Distributions, p. 3); m. ___ **Parker** and may have lived in England as her uncle Samuel Thompson knew her by name.

- + 14 ii. **John**, b. c. 1648 in Hartford, Connecticut; d. 21 Nov 1711; m. (1) 24 Oct 1670 **Mary Steele**; m. (2) bef. 6 Oct 1696 **Ann (Fitch) Hart**.
- + 15 iii. **Thomas, Jr.**, b. c. 1651 in Hartford, Connecticut; d. 2 Jan 1705/06; m. (1) bef. 1677 **Elizabeth Smith**; m. (2) bef. 1704 **Abigail Thorp**.
- + 16 iv. **Mary**; bapt. 7 Jun 1653 in Farmington, Connecticut; d. c. 1691 in Stratford, Connecticut; m. 20 May 1673 **Samuel Hawley**.
- + 17 v. **Esther or Hester**, b. posthumously 17 Jun 1655 in Farmington, Connecticut; d. c. 1694; m. 2 Dec 1680 **Samuel Gridley**.

Children, surnamed **Hawkins or Howkins**, born in Farmington, Connecticut:

- 18 vi. **Sarah**; bapt. Jun 1657 (Barbour citing Farmington LR 2:328); d. unmarried bef. 5 December 1678 when the probate court ordered her share in her brother John Hawkin's estate to be distributed to her four sisters, Mary Judd, Ruth Heart, Elizabeth Brinsmade and Hannah Howkins (Manwaring I:210 citing IV:9).
- + 19 vii. **Elizabeth**, b. c. 1659; d. bef. 1696; m. 30 Oct 1678 **Paul Brinsmade**.
- + 20 viii. **Hannah**, b. c. 1661; d. 23 Jul 1698; m. (1) on 21 Dec 1681 **Jonathan Nichols**; m. (2) aft. 1689 **Sgt. Samuel Ward**; m. (3) c. 1697 **John Judson**.

Manuscript Resources: Connecticut Historical Society, Genealogical Collections, Thompson Family File, Manuscripts on the descendants of Thomas and Anne (Welles) Thompson:

- Rupert Farnham Thompson, Ancestors of Patricia Arlene Thompson
- Mrs. Edna Minor Roger, compiler, Research Report for Nellie (Goodrich) Eno (Mrs. George C.) and Relatives
- Miss Myrtle M. Jillson, "Thomas Thom(p)son Family," 16 Jun 1939.
- Charles L. N. Camp, "Thompson, Thomas of Farmington."
- David Francis Stoddard, contributor of Joyce Holbrook, Lois Dutton, Julia Cotten, and Ivis Ramsay "Solomon and Susannah (Gridley) Thomson, a Partial Account of their Children and Some of their Connecticut Ancestors."
- Julius Gay, "Thompson-Thomson Family."

Published Works: FEH 602 (which lists only Beatrice then posits she may have been "Bethia" but this is incorrect as she is clearly named after her grandmother Beatrice Thompson and named as Beatrice in her uncle's will); FOOF 656n; Goodwin-Morgan 1:205-210; HH 782; Stiles' Wethersfield 2:211-212; Stile's Windsor 2:369 (identifies Anthony's first wife as Isabel Brown), 653; Thompson Family Magazine 11:21-22; Visitations of Shropshire 4, 165-166; Welles (1968) 1:1: family CVIII-A.

Note: correction made 6 Sept. 2011 to error in date of second marriage of child no. 14 from bef. 6 Oct 1670 to bef. 6 Oct 1696.