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Amy⁶ (Ely) Gridley, the Oldest Living Woman in Chicago

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Former President Gerald Ford's lineage to the Welles family has been published in several sources, but all of the previous writers had to explain why Amy⁶ (Ely) Gridley had her first marriage in her forties and her first and only child when she was nearly 50 years old. Some writers have postulated that the birth date of that child has been given incorrectly. We, however, have found a newspaper article in which Amy explains her longevity and her marriage and child. I hope you enjoy Amy's spirit and hardworking persistence!

2853. Amy⁶ Ely (Wells⁵ Ely, Ruth⁴ Welles, Samuel³, Thomas², Gov. Thomas¹), b. Friday, 11 July 1777 in Lyme, Connecticut (Revolutionary War Pension File W5287, Family Record); d. 31 October 1876 in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (Pedigree Resource File submission of Michael Pierce; Ely 136 gives year only, as 1877); m. 16 Apr 1818 in the Third Presbyterian Church of Lyme, Connecticut (Revolutionary War Pension File W5287, Family Record, and Affidavit of Josiah Hawes, pastor of the church, records 1:151 state that Amy is from Lyme and Theodore from Clinton), as his third wife, **Theodore Gridley**, son of Jonathan Gridley, Jr., and Martha Adams, b. Dec 1758 in Farmington, Connecticut (Revolutionary War Pension File W5287, Family Record); d. Sunday, 26 Feb 1826, in the 69th year of his age, in Clinton, Oneida County, New York (Revolutionary War Pension File W5287, Family Record, and Affidavit of Amy Gridley dated 20 April 1855); buried in the Old Clinton Cemetery, Kirkland, Oneida County, New York (USGenWeb).

Theodore Gridley had two previous marriages. He married, first, bef. 1773, Ruth Lewis, who was born c. 1752 and died 26 February 1806, buried in Old Clinton Cemetery, Kirkland, Oneida County, New York (USGenWeb, gives year as 1826). Their children were (i.) Horace Gridley, (ii.) Chauncey Gridley, and (iii.) Theodore Gridley. He married, second, bef. 2 May 1813, Penelope Congdon, born c. 1763, and died 13 September 1817, at age 54, buried in the Old Clinton Cemetery, Kirkland, Oneida County, New York (USGenWeb). Penelope, wife of Theodore Gridley, was baptized as an adult on 2 May 1813 at the Old Stone Church, Clinton, New York (typescript of church records).

The will of Theodore Gridley of Paris, dated 4 February 1826 and proved 2 March 1826, names his wife Amy Gridley, his granddaughter Caroline Gridley, his granddaughter Sarah Gaylor, and his sons Horace Gridley, Chauncey Gridley, and Theodore Gridley, Jr. The will appoints Theodore Woodruff, Jr., Esq., and wife Amy Gridley as executors. It was witnessed by Stephen W. Curtis, Sally Curtis, and Adela C. Woodruff (Oneida County, New York, Surrogate's Office, Will Book 3 (1824-1829), pp. 93-97, FHL 038169).

In the 1840 federal census, Amy Gridley is a head of household in Kirkland, Oneida Co., New York, in a household containing one woman aged 70-80, one woman aged 50-60, one man aged 50-60, and four children (NARA series M-704, reel 313, p. 25). A[my] Gridley, age 83, b. in Connecticut, appears as a "Matron", in possession of \$1500 in personal estate, in the 1860 federal census in the household of her daughter and son-in-law, G.S. and E. E. Butler, in Ward 3, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (NARA series M-653, reel 165, p. 6 [also called p. 555B]).

Amy Gridley applied for a pension as the widow of a Revolutionary War serviceman on 20 April 1855, based on the Pension Law of 1853. She stated that she was 77 years old, living in Chicago. Her testimony on Theodore's military activities was later born out by a report from the Comptroller Office in the state of Connecticut, "Theodore Gridley was on a Pay Roll under the following heading, viz., 'A Pay Roll of the 6th Co. in the 2nd Regt. Rais'd. p[e]r order General Assembly, Connecticut, 1775' where the said Gridley is credited with service as a private from May 6th to Dec 18th 1775 = 7 months 12 days." Amy states that the 6th company was under Capt. Noadiah Hooker and that the 2nd Regiment was under the command of Col. Samuel Wyllys (Revolutionary War Pension File W5287, file of Theodore and Amy Gridley, NARA series M-804, reel 1130).

It is unusual during this period for a woman to make her first marriage at the age of 41, or to have her first child when nearing the age of 50. However, the following newspaper article shows that Amy felt these life choices only added to her longevity!

"The Oldest Woman in Chicago"

There is now living in Chicago a lady named Amy Gridley, who was born in Lyme, Conn., in July 1777. She is accordingly approaching her ninety-eighth birthday. She attributes her longevity to three things — the plentiful use of water, ample exercise, and marrying when past thirty-five. In her youth she was a sewing girl, and journeyed from farm-house to farm-house on horseback. In 1825 she and her husband rode a distance of 480 miles in a wagon to witness the ceremonies attending the laying of the cornerstone of Bunker Hill Monument. Her husband died in 1826, leaving considerable property, and five months subsequently, when she was nearly fifty years old, her first and only child was born. In 1854 she came to Chicago. Until within a few years she could see and hear plainly, but these senses, especially since the fire, have gradually grown weaker. She was always industrious, and devoted nearly all her leisure time to reading. Even now her mind is unusually clear. Her only occupation for the past year has been rumpling handkerchiefs, from which she seems to derive considerable amusement. Unlike most old ladies, she does not take snuff or require much attention. She is peaceful and contented, and calmly awaits the summons which will usher her into the world of perpetual youth.¹

Children, surnamed **Gridley**:

- 6528A i. [adopted] **Amy Ely**⁷, bapt. 2 Jan 1821 at the Old Stone Church, Clinton, Oneida Co., New York (typescript of church records, adopted status noted).

¹ *The Grand Traverse Herald*, Traverse City, Michigan, issue of 25 Feb 1875, p. 1, col. 7.

- 6528B ii. **Elizabeth Ely**; b. posthumously 16 June 1826 in Clinton, Oneida Co., New York; d. 4 Sep 1916 in Delavan, Wisconsin; m. 24 Apr 1843 at her mother's home in Clinton, Oneida Co., New York, the Rev. Wayne Gridley officiating, **George Selden Butler**, son of Daniel Butler and Betsey Comstock, b. 1 Jul 1820 in Rhinebeck, Dutchess Co., New York; d. in 1907 (Nutmegger 35:392, all data). The 1850 census finds the "Buttlers" living in a hotel in the 3rd Ward of Chicago, Cook Co., Illinois (NARA series M-432, reel 102, p. 203B). The couple apparently rented a home at the time of the 1860 federal census, residing in the 3rd Ward of Chicago, Cook Co., Illinois. G. S. Butler is a clerk, age 39, b. in N.Y., and E. E. Butler is age 33, b. in N.Y.; living with them is Elizabeth's mother, A. Gridley, a Matron, age 83, b. in Connecticut (NARA series M-653, reel 165, p. 6 [also called p. 555B]). In 1880, George S. and Elizabeth "Buttor" still lived in Chicago (NARA series T-9, reel 197, p. 78A). In 1902, they resided at 529 Hurlbut Street, Chicago, Illinois (Ely 256).

Gerald Rudolph Ford, 38th President of the U.S., is descended from Gov Thomas Welles through this couple as follows:

- Elizabeth Ely⁷ Gridley (DAR Lineages 34:219, #33603) m. George Selden Butler
- Amy Gridley⁸ Butler (DAR Lineages 34:219, #33602) m. George Manney Ayer
- Adele Augusta⁹ Ayer (DAR Lineages 107:140, #106445) m. Levi Addison Gardner
- Dorothy Ayer¹⁰ Gardner (DAR Lineages 97:213, #96681) m. (1) Leslie Lynch King, m. (2) Gerald Rudolf Ford
- Leslie Lynch¹¹ King, Jr., name later changed to Gerald Rudolph¹¹ Ford, Jr. m. Elizabeth "Betty" Ann (Bloomer) Warren

Manuscript Resources: Revolutionary War Pension File W5287, file of Theodore and Amy Gridley, NARA series M-804, reel 1130; Julius Gay Manuscript Collection at the Connecticut Historical Society, Family of Jonathan Gridley and Martha Adams (cites Farmington Deeds 22:402 and gravestones for Theodore and his first two wives and the Ely genealogy for information on Amy).

Correspondence: Kathleen Ely (unpublished manuscript, p. 13); Michael Pierce (submission to Pedigree Resource File).

Secondary References: Ely 79, 134, 256; Nutmegger 36:376-391 (contains errors on Welles ancestry); Presidents 87-89; Selden 111; TAG 53:56-57 (incorrect in postulating against evidence a birthdate of 1819 for Elizabeth Ely⁷ Gridley); Welles (1876) 197.