

Children of Samuel⁴ #26 Watson: Alice⁵ Watson

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This article is part of a larger family history, **The WATSON Family of West Greenwich, Rhode Island**, which can be found via [this link](#) to Part 1 and [this link](#) to Part 2.

A branch of the Watson family of Rhode Island settled in West Greenwich and lived there for nearly one hundred years. The patriarch of this branch was Samuel, designated #7 in *The American Family of John Watson of the Narragansett Country, Rhode Island*.

Alice⁵ Watson, daughter of Samuel #26 Watson

Alice⁵ WATSON (Samuel⁴, Samuel³, Samuel², John¹) was born in West Greenwich circa 1785. She was Samuel #26 and Abiah (Young) Watson's middle child, the fifth-born of nine children. Alice never married, but she had offspring.

Alice's name sometimes was written as "Alce" and "Elcy" and once as "Else." Her younger brother Samuel⁵ Jr. named his daughter Alice, who appears in the 1850 census as "Elcy." Perhaps "Alce" was pronounced as *AL-cee*. Catching on to this nickname that sounds like *Elsie* proved to be helpful.

Alice's First Appearance in West Greenwich records

Alice Watson was named in West Greenwich town council records no fewer than three dozen times between 1808 and 1827.

The first of Alice's many mentions in town council records occurred on March 14, 1808, when she had an order on the town treasurer for \$2.00 towards the upkeep of her 'bastard' child.

We quote here what we explained in [our article on Samuel #26's brother Nicholas](#):

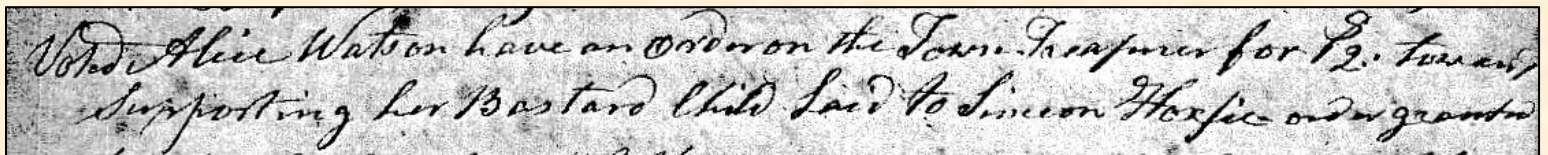
Illegitimacy was surprisingly common in those days; some women had multiple children out of wedlock. Nicholas⁴ Watson's daughter and 'bastard' grandchild continued to live under his roof, as all of them effectively got pulled into the local poor relief system.

Part of the poor relief system in Rhode Island was to obtain the names of the men who fathered children out of wedlock. Sometimes women were reluctant to admit who had gotten them pregnant. In those cases, the midwife would wait

until a woman was in the most painful part of her labor before demanding the name of the father – a practice that usually succeeded. In the language of the town council records, an illegitimate child would be “laid to” that man.

Thus, a town often was able to hold these men accountable for the financial support of their illegitimate offspring. The town would collect the money and then administer it over time to the mothers themselves or to other people caring for the mother and child.

Most West Greenwich town council records of that era mention the unmarried woman’s full name and only the surname of the father. Alice’s first appearance in WG town records is one of the exceptions, in that it tells us the father’s full name. “Voted Alice Watson have an Order on the Town Treasurer for \$2 toward supporting her Bastard Child Laid to Simeon Hoxsie order granted.”



Voted Alice Watson have an Order on the Town Treasurer for \$2. toward supporting her Bastard Child Laid to Simeon Hoxsie order granted

About the Hoxsie Family

Jeremiah Hoxsie and his wife, Sarah Niles, had at least five children. The two eldest, Joseph and Simeon, were born in Richmond, RI. The younger children – daughter Bathsheba, and sons Nathan and Christopher – likely were born in West Greenwich after the family moved there.

They lived in the same part of West Greenwich as Alice Watson and her family.

We know that Alice Watson’s uncle Robert⁴ Watson sold land in WG to Jeremiah Hoxsie in 1788. (WG LE 2:202). Although we can’t find Jeremiah Hoxsie in the 1790 census, we know that by 1794 he was “of Voluntown,” Connecticut. (Note to Hoxsie researchers: Those probate records from 1794 available at Ancestry.com are not post-mortem estate matters. They involve a lawsuit against a *very much alive* Jeremiah Hoxsie.)

Joseph and Nathan Hoxsie appear to have stayed in West Greenwich, while Christopher Hoxsie ended up in Voluntown near his parents. Bathsheba Hoxsie

married Abel Casey of West Greenwich (and Exeter, and Voluntown) – the same man who sold 74 acres of land to Alice Watson's brother Benjamin in 1818.

We know also that Nathan Hoxsie lived near Alice's family, based on the description of land sold to her father, Samuel #26 Watson, by her uncle Robert⁴ Watson in 1805. When Alice's brother Benjamin sold land in West Greenwich to Israel Gates in 1813, Joseph Hoxsie was an abutter.

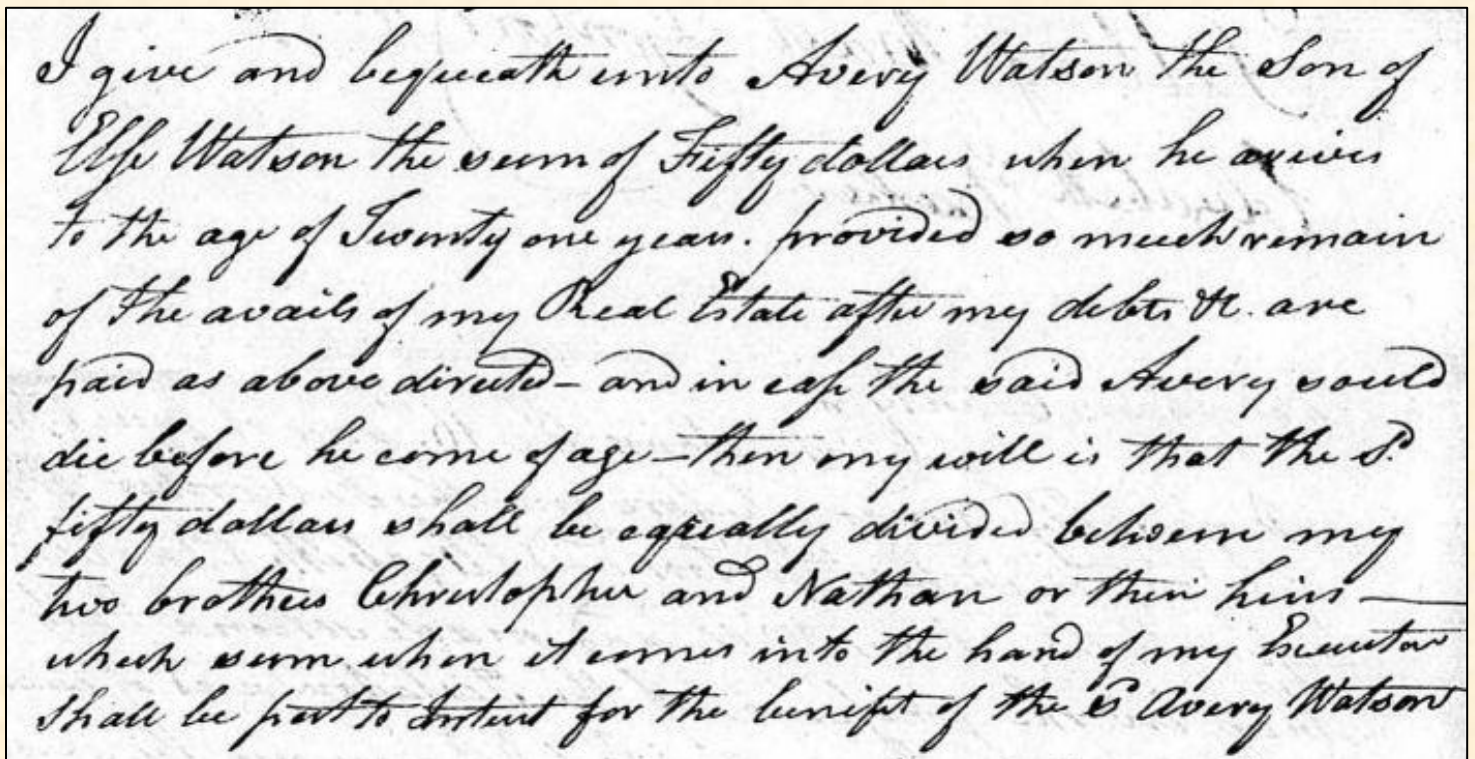
All of which is to say ... the Hoxsie and Watson families lived fairly close to each other. Their lives touched and occasionally overlapped.

Simeon Hoxsie

Simeon Hoxsie was born on March 21, 1767. (He was eighteen years older than Alice Watson.) While his siblings married and set up their own households, it looks to us like Simeon continued to live with his parents well into middle age. But he did own land, if not his own dwelling house.

When he was forty years old, Simeon got married: On September 3, 1807, in Voluntown, he wed a woman named Silence Green.

Simeon and Silence didn't have much time together. On May 19, 1810, Simeon drew up his last will and testament, apparently realizing that his end was near. That instrument entered probate on July 3rd of the same year.



*I give and bequeath unto Avery Watson the Son of
Eli Watson the sum of Fifty dollars when he arrives
to the age of Twenty one year. provided so much remain
of the avails of my Real Estate after my debts &c. are
paid as above directed - and in case the said Avery should
die before he come of age - then my will is that the s.
Fifty dollars shall be equally divided between my
two brothers Christopher and Nathan or their heirs -
which sum when it comes into the hand of my Executor
shall be paid to Intent for the benefit of the s Avery Watson*

In his will, Simeon mentioned his wife Silence; his parents Jeremiah and Sarah; two of his brothers, Christopher and Nathan; and *Avery Watson, the son of Elfe Watson*. (That *f* is a “long s” – an archaic letterform – used in the name of Avery Watson’s mother. Today we would write that name as “Else.”)

Simeon Hoxsie’s debts were paid from his estate, and his widow received her one-third part of his real estate. We saw no evidence from the probate documents that there was anything left over for Avery. But we’re grateful that Simeon wrote a bequest to his son by Alice Watson, because it gave us that child’s name.

It seems to us that Simeon’s wife Silence probably knew all about Avery, since both are mentioned in the will.

The date of the wedding (September 1807) vis-à-vis the timing of the first payment noted in West Greenwich town council records (March 1808) suggests that, *prior to* marrying Silence Green, Simeon may have been supporting his child directly. Simeon’s marriage somehow changed the process by which Alice Watson received child support. It looks like it got formalized through the WG town council, which obviously was willing to hold a married man accountable for his child with another woman. (Maybe Alice pressed the issue when it became clear Simeon wouldn’t be marrying *her*.)

This is why we think Alice gave birth to Avery before Simeon got married in September 1807. We have found no formal birth record for Avery Watson.

There are a total of four child support records for Alice Watson, correlating to Simeon Hoxsie, in WG town council record book 5. The second record, made on June 27, 1808, notes a \$5.00 payment and names Simeon. A record made on September 11, 1809, notes another \$5.00 payment without naming Simeon Hoxsie explicitly. The final such record, for September 1, 1810 – after Simeon’s death – notes no specific dollar amount, oddly, but names Simeon Hoxsie one last time.

The next financial support record for a child of Alice Watson came more than four years later, on December 29, 1814. By that time, the father’s name was given only as “Rathbun.”

Alice Watson's Continued Presence in Town Council Records

As far as West Greenwich town council records are concerned, Alice Watson had just four children – one by Simeon Hoxsie; one by a man surnamed Rathbun; and two by a man surnamed Hatch.

Alice's children would have used the surname Watson, not the father's surname.

Alice Watson's mentions in the stretch between December 29, 1814, and September 28, 1818, are for her child by "Rathbun." Rathbun was a common surname in Rhode Island, especially so in the area of Escoheag Hill where Alice and her family lived. During that time period, Alice – whose name was written most often as "Alce" in such records – received a total of \$25.31 in child support money, doled out in small amounts on eight different occasions.

On November 29, 1819, the surname Hatch made its debut in Alice's town council mentions. On that occasion, Alice was given a lump sum of \$14.00.

Between January 25, 1819 and July 31, 1820, there are seven entries for Alice and her child by Rathbun, regarding amounts totaling \$22.00. Alice's mentions in the record for January 29, 1821, includes one entry for Hatch (\$6.00) and another entry for Rathbun (\$8.56).

All the entries between March 26, 1821, and September 26, 1825, refer to Hatch, with a notation in the record for June 24, 1822, specifying the child as Alice's *second* one with Hatch. Over eleven different occasions, the town doled out a total of at least \$28.90 to Alice for the support of her children by Hatch (whose first name we never learn).

Here are samples of verbatim entries for Alice Watson and her children:

Voted that the Clerk search the Records and Grant an order to Alce Watson for what may appear to be due to her on the Rathbun score. (WG TC 6:147)

Voted that on application of Alce Watson the Clerk grant an order for what appears to be due, in proportion to paying the whole sum in 7 years – on Hatch score. (WG TC 6:149)

Voted Alce Watson allowed \$7.13 in full payment to her of all the money which the town Recovered of Rathbun as the father of her bastard child laid to him. Order granted. (WG TC 6:157)

On February 26, 1827, the town council voted that \$4.45 be reimbursed to Benjamin Tillinghast “for articles furnished Alce Watson” (WG TC 7:96). This is the first and only reference to Alice Watson being given assistance not explicitly associated with the upkeep of her children.

Alice Watson’s Children

Alice had not four but *five* children – three sons and two daughters.

Son Avery Watson

We know from Simeon Hoxsie’s will, discussed above, that Avery Watson was his son with Alice. We do not know when Avery was born, but surmise that his birth occurred before Simeon’s marriage to Silence Green in early September 1807.

Avery Watson died in West Greenwich prior to May 25, 1833, the date his estate entered probate. Nothing in those records indicates how old Avery was at the time. His “Goods Chattels rights and Credits,” assessed for their value toward the payment of his debts, were primarily articles of clothing (\$29.26). The other items were a note against Henry Aldrich (\$23.15) and cash in bank bills (\$39.90), for a grand total of \$92.31.

Henry Aldrich (1802-1886) – the man who owed Avery Watson \$23.15 – was a doctor. His obituary, found in the publication *Transactions of the Rhode Island Medical Society*, says that “Dr. Aldrich began practice in 1828 at Escoheag Hill, in West Greenwich, where he remained thirteen years, his practice extending over a large territory.”

No land, house, or furnishings were listed among Avery Watson’s possessions. He seems to have been a young, unmarried man when he died. The last document we found in this thin probate record indicates that Seth Gates claimed \$40.31 against Avery’s estate but received only \$27.41 in payment.

Inventory of all the Goods and Chattels rights and Credits which were of Henry Watson late of Westgreenwich deceased Shewen as by Jonathan Knowles one of the Administrators the 15th day of July 1833.

One Blue Broadcloth Coat \$9.	1 Brown Suit \$9.	-	-	-	\$18	"
1 pair do. do. pantaloons	4. 1 vest	-	-	-	5	"
1 black Silk vest	2. 1 do.	-	-	-	3	"
1 pair Sattinell pantaloons	2. 2 Shirts	-	-	0.25	2	25
2 pocket books	-	-	-	\$0.16 - 1. Pant button \$0.10	-	26
1 hat 75 cents	-	-	-	-	-	75
Note against Henry Aldrich	-	-	-	-	23	15
Cash in bank bills	-	-	-	-	39	90
					\$92	31

Clues from Census Records

Alice does not appear as head of household until 1840; it appears that she continued to live under her father's roof during his lifetime. So we studied the 1810, 1820, and 1830 censuses for clues about Alice's offspring.

The **1810** census accounts for Samuel and Abiah Watson; their children Alice, Samuel Jr., and Sarah; and one female under the age of 10. We expected to find a *male* under the age of 10, because Alice's son Avery was born between 1800 and 1808. Perhaps the notation for a female child is an error, but we can't prove that.

The **1820** census accounts for Samuel and Abiah; their children Alice and Samuel Jr.; one male under the age of 10; and one female under the age of 10.

West Greenwich town records indicate that Alice had three children *before* 1820, one of whom we know to be son Avery (born ~1806). Avery Watson doesn't seem to be living in Samuel and Abiah Watson's household in 1820. The two young children in this 1820 census listing are Alice's offspring by "Rathbun" (~1814) and "Hatch" (~1819).

The **1830** census accounts for Samuel and for Alice (but not for Abiah); and for one male under the age of 5; and two females aged 5 through 9.

West Greenwich town records note, on June 24, 1822, that Alice had a *second* child with “Hatch.” Given the numbers for the 1830 census, that child probably was a daughter.

Who are those other two children?

Perhaps the other girl is Alice’s *first* child with “Hatch,” first noted in town council records on November 29, 1819. That child likely just missed being enumerated in the age category “of 10 and under 15” in the 1830 census.

We now know that the young male enumerated in this census was Benjamin G. Watson, born in October 1826. (More about Benjamin G. to follow.)

The **1840** census records “Elcy” Watson as head of her own household in West Greenwich. Living with her were two females aged 15 through 19, and one male aged 5 through 9.

The two girls appearing in the **1830** census show up again in the **1840** census, both older by ten years. This means we can probably assume that Alice had at least two daughters – and they may have shared “Hatch” as their father. We have not discovered their first names or what became of them.

Considering that Alice’s fertile years likely ended around 1827, we think the young boy living with her in 1840 could not have been her child. Perhaps one of Alice’s daughters had a child of her own.

Likely son Lyman Watson

We’ve identified Lyman Watson, born circa 1814, as likely the *male child under age 10* enumerated in 1820 in Samuel Watson’s household, where Alice also lived.

Why We Think Lyman Was NOT Hazzard⁵ Watson’s Child

We’d been aware of Lyman Watson of West Greenwich for a long time, thinking he might have been Hazzard and Amy Watson’s child. Why? Because, in 1828, a formal guardianship was arranged by the town elders for “Limon” Watson.

Not knowing much about guardianships in Rhode Island, we consulted a number of sources, including the book *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England*. We added bold-type emphasis to the example in the quote below:

“Three years later, in the summer of 1800, the Exeter [RI] council took action regarding the other three children. James Brown, “son to Roseanna Brown,” was put under the guardianship of Exeter townsman Job Wilcox; **this action indicated that the boy had property of some kind** – perhaps an inheritance left by a relative – that would come to him when he turned twenty-one. As guardian, Wilcox was responsible to see that James received the necessities of life, had a proper place to live, and was trained for adulthood.”

After Hazzard Watson died in 1822, his minor children surviving him would have qualified for such attention. But the census data for Hazzard’s household in 1820 is problematic. We have concluded that there was no male child born circa 1814 residing with this family. (For more about that particular census data, please see our [article about Hazzard⁵ Watson](#), beginning at the very top of page 4.)

We know also that, in 1849, the town of West Greenwich appointed a guardian to the children of widower John Willet Watson, whose intemperance had caused his family’s removal to the Poor House in 1843. In that case, we doubt that there was inheritable property involved.

We did *not* expect to find a guardianship arranged for any “bastard child,” whose identities were rarely revealed in West Greenwich records.

Why We think Lyman Was Alice Watson’s Child

Along with the census data for Alice Watson’s father’s household in 1820, it was Lyman’s middle initial that suggested he belonged to Alice, not Hazzard.

When Lyman’s son Welcome E. Watson married in 1869, a record of that marriage preserved the name of the groom’s father, Lyman **R.** Watson.

Given that Alice Watson’s bastard child by “Rathbun” was first mentioned in town council records in December 1814 – the same year Lyman was born – that middle initial probably stood for **Rathbun**. It was a common practice to give an out-of-wedlock child its father’s surname as its middle name.

In “A Pattern of Favors for Alice and Her Family,” below, we discuss the reason why Lyman Watson may have enjoyed the privilege of a formal guardianship.

Lyman Watson’s guardianship as described in West Greenwich Wills 1822-1829, Vol. 6, pages 114 and 136-7:

At a Court of Probate held at West Greenwich in the County of Kent at the House of Thomas T. Hazard on the 6th day of March AD 1828

Present \David Matteson \ Wm B. Whitford \
 \Thomas A. James \ \ members

Limon [*sic*] Watson a minor about fourteen years of age appeared before this Court Agreeable to Notice to him Given and nominated Asa Gates for his Guardian. Whereupon the Said Court do appoint the Said Asa Gates Guardian to the person & estate of the Said Limon Watson he Giving bond in the Sum of three Hundred dollars for the faithfull [*sic*] performance of that trust. Jason P. Stone accepted as bondsman.



By virtue of the power Granted to the Several Courts of Probate within the State of Rhode Island &c for taking the care and oversight of Infants &c and of Granting Letters of Guardianship within their Several Townships.

To all people to whom these presents Shall Come Greeting. Know ye that we the Court of Probate of the Town of West Greenwich in the County of Kent in the State aforesaid by virtue of the Said power vested in us freely fully and absolutely Give and Grant unto and fully Empower Asa Gates of Said West Greenwich Yeoman to be the whole and Sole Guardian to the person and Property of Limon Watson of Said West Greenwich a Minor and to act and do in the premises as Whatsoever is proper Needfull [*sic*] and Necessary to be done in and about the Same, Provided it is Correspondent and agreeable to Law and for his So doing this Shall be his Sufficient warrant and discharge and for the Confirmation of the aforewritten and in behalf of the Court of Probate aforesaid I have Given forth this power of Guardianship under my hand and this Seal of the Said Court this 6th day of March AD 1828

Jon^a Nicholas T. clk

Lyman Watson apparently resigned from this guardianship on May 31, 1830, per a pair of researchers who generously shared their data with us some years ago. Not having a citation for this item, we offer it here as likely to be true.

Please see the Appendix to read more about the life of [Lyman R. Watson and his family](#).

Son Benjamin G. Watson

Benjamin G. Watson was born on October 8, 1826, a date that falls at the far end of Alice Watson's childbearing years. He was the *male child under the age of 5* enumerated in Samuel Watson's household in 1830.

Benjamin's death record names his mother as Alice Watson, and his father as Stephen Watson. Both Benjamin's death record and the record of his second marriage in 1892 list West Greenwich, RI, as his birth place.

We were expecting to find the father's surname given as Watson, while knowing that the "bastard child" always bore the mother's surname unless the parents wed later. Benjamin's middle initial G likely was a stand-in for his birth father's surname. Presumably we are now looking for a man named Stephen G----.

Please see the Appendix to read more about [Benjamin G. Watson and his family](#).

A Pattern of Favors for Alice and Her Family

Alice Watson's story takes a subtle but distinct turn in the years following the birth of her youngest child Benjamin G. Watson.

On February 26, 1827 – four-and-a-half months after Benjamin G. was born – Alice was given generic help ("articles furnished") by the town (WG TC 7:96). This is the first and only reference to Alice Watson being given assistance *not explicitly associated with her children*. It is also the last time Alice's name is found in town council records. She was not cited, as she was so many times before, as receiving financial support for yet another illegitimate child.

Then, prominent townsmen acted on behalf of Samuel #26 Watson, Alice's father.

On April 21, 1827, John Hazard and his son Robert, of West Greenwich, signed an affidavit in an effort to help Samuel get his federal pension reinstated.

Previously we'd viewed this as part of town efforts to get the local poor off the dole, because *it didn't correlate with any recent amendment to federal policy*. Four years earlier, Congress had passed legislation that allowed certain pensions to be restored. What changed to make the locals decide to help Samuel re-apply?

The outreach continued in the next year.

On February 4, 1828, the town furnished Alice's father with a cord of wood and unspecified "articles." (WG TC 7:110).

On March 6, 1828, Lyman Watson – who we now believe was Alice Watson's son, not her brother Hazzard's – was given the privilege and opportunity of choosing a guardian. And on March 31, 1828, Thomas T. Hazard was "allowed \$2.63 for wood and corn for Samuel Watson" (WG TC 7:112).

This sequence of events, on its face, has a simple explanation: The Watsons were poor; they needed help, and it was given.

But why arrange a guardianship for a bastard child? Why become more solicitous to an old man who for years had lived in poverty? More to the point, why did the *town* suddenly care about the Watsons, with their financial woes and illegitimate offspring?

Here's why: Benjamin G. Watson's sire may have come from a respectable family in West Greenwich, and the town worthies wanted to keep things quiet.

Viewed through that lens, the services rendered to Alice, Alice's father, and Lyman Watson in 1827 and 1828 begin to look less like poor relief and more like a pattern of favors. Keeping Alice and her kin happy may have been the price the town paid to suppress the possible scandal of Benjamin G.'s paternity.

A Striking Difference

Though Lyman Watson had the benefit of a guardianship, his life was not marked by unusual success. When Lyman was 36 years old, his occupation was that of "labourer." We get the sense that he didn't work his own land or practice a specific trade. But he married at an appropriate age, to a woman younger than himself (not a widowed older woman), and provided for his large family.

Benjamin G. Watson spent his working life mainly in cotton mills, but enjoyed more success overall.

We were intrigued to learn that in 1864 Benjamin G. Watson, along with A.W. Thurber (both of Jewett City, CT), patented “a new and useful Improvement in Steps for the Bobbin-Spindles of Spinning Frames.” (US Patent # 44,265 can be viewed at this Google site: <https://patents.google.com/patent/US44265>.)

Benjamin G.’s name appears on both sides of the assignor-assignee rights, which we *think* indicates that Benjamin G. shared in the rights, title, and interest of this patent. The other assignee was Ira G. Briggs, who owned a huge cotton milling operation in both Griswold and Voluntown, Connecticut. It’s our impression that Benjamin G. worked in the Griswold mill.

For years, we stashed records and data about Benjamin G. Watson in our “Stray Watsons” file. He showed up in West Greenwich, but he was born after Hazzard Watson died, so he didn’t come from that family. The course of Benjamin G.’s life appeared so much better than the others that, for the longest time, we didn’t entertain the possibility that he was Alice Watson’s child. Back then, bastard children grew up with reduced prospects for acceptance and success in life.

But Benjamin G. Watson was different. Undoubtedly he worked hard for what life gave him. Perhaps the difference was that he wasn’t forced to go to work as a child. Benjamin G. may have been given the opportunity to get an education.

In 1914, when Benjamin G. was an old man, a Norwich, CT, newspaper published an extract from his Civil War diary. (Use [this link](#) to read our transcription in the Appendix.) We can’t know how much the newspaper edited Benjamin’s account; but the prose clearly indicates that he was *literate*.

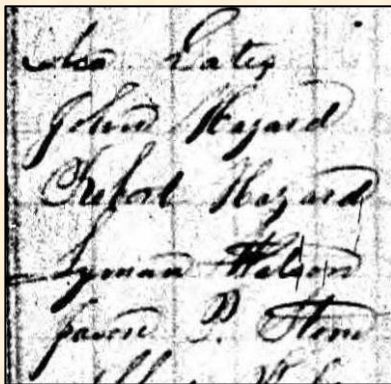
The Hazard Family

The Hazard family of West Greenwich, influential in that town’s government, shows up repeatedly in events following the birth of Benjamin G. Watson. Were they instrumental in protecting the good name of Benjamin G.’s birth father and, by extension, Benjamin G. himself?

John Hazard, his cousin Jeffrey Hazard of Exeter, and John’s son Robert lent their hands to helping Alice’s father re-apply for federal pension benefits. When the old

man was too ill to attend court for the drafting of the application documents, they brought the court to *him*.

The Probate Court meeting that handled Lyman Watson's guardianship took place in the home of Thomas T. Hazard, son of John Hazard. Thomas T. Hazard personally handled some of the relief given to Alice's father.



A glance at the 1840 census for West Greenwich shows Lyman Watson's name ensconced in the bosom of the Hazard family neighborhood. After Asa Gates' name are those of John Hazard and his son Robert. Lyman Watson's name comes next, followed by Jason P. Stone, who married John's daughter Alice Hazard. John's son Thomas T. Hazard appears earlier in this line-up, separated from Asa Gates' name by only seven other people.

Looking at this enclave of locally powerful people, we are reminded that Thomas T. Hazard, who supplied wood, corn, sundries, and services to Alice Watson's father *is the same man who had Alice's brother Benjamin⁵ imprisoned*, allegedly for uttering threats.

Alice Watson's brother Benjamin⁵ died circa 1824-25, mostly likely in prison. Benjamin G. Watson, born in the fall of 1826, bears his name.

What we see in the years following Benjamin G. Watson's birth are Hazard family efforts to serve the Watson family, not punish them. It's a surprising twist in both families' stories; and it's something that could have continued on, discreetly, for some time.

There's another aspect to Lyman Watson's guardianship and his residence among the Hazards. What looks like concern might also be about control. By keeping the Watson progeny close at hand, the Hazards could maintain a grip on the situation.

Alice Watson's Later Years

On December 28, 1836, Alice Watson made a deposition in support of her mother's application for a widow's pension:

I Alice Watson of Voluntown in the County of Windham in the State of Connecticut aged fifty one years do testify and say that I am the chi[ld] of

Samuel and Abiah Watson, that I have had three brothers older than myself all being born as I have always understood, after the marriage of my said parents. My eldest brother Hazzard died in August 1822 aged 43 years and would have been fifty eight years old had he now been living, my second brother lives in the State of New York in ~~Stephentown~~ and is fifty six years old at this time, that I have always understood my father and mother were married during the war of the Revolution in the year 1778 and further the deponent saith not --

(signed) Alice Watson

State of Connecticut

Windham County/Voluntown December 28th 1836

Alice's 1836 deposition is a trove of information about her family, both in what she says and what she doesn't say. We note that her testimony fell short of naming her third brother, Benjamin⁵, who likely died in prison circa 1824-25. (To view a scanned copy of Alice's deposition, click [here](#).)

Without this deposition, we never would have known that Alice left West Greenwich to live in Voluntown. We know, too, that Alice's mother Abiah resided in Voluntown after the death of her husband, Samuel #26, in 1834.

It's possible that both women lived with Jeffrey Watson – Abiah's son, Alice's brother – in Voluntown. The 1830 census shows a total of eight people in Jeffrey's household. Perhaps Jeffrey and his wife made room for his mother and sister as some of their children grew up and moved out.

But Alice's household in the 1840 census for West Greenwich shows two teenaged females and a young boy residing with her. Though we have found no Voluntown records mentioning Alice, likely she lived there with her own family under her own roof. We wish we knew the details of this part of her life.

Alice Watson is last of record in the 1840 and 1850 censuses in West Greenwich. By 1850 she was living alone. The inscription on Alice's gravestone tells us she died on May 7, 1855 "in the 70th year of her age."

Where's Alice? The Story of the Lost Watson Lot

When Alice Watson died in 1855, she was laid to rest not in her hometown of West Greenwich, but in Exeter. (Why, we don't know.) The likely location of Alice's

gravesite is within hiking distance of that part of West Greenwich where the Watson family lived for many years.

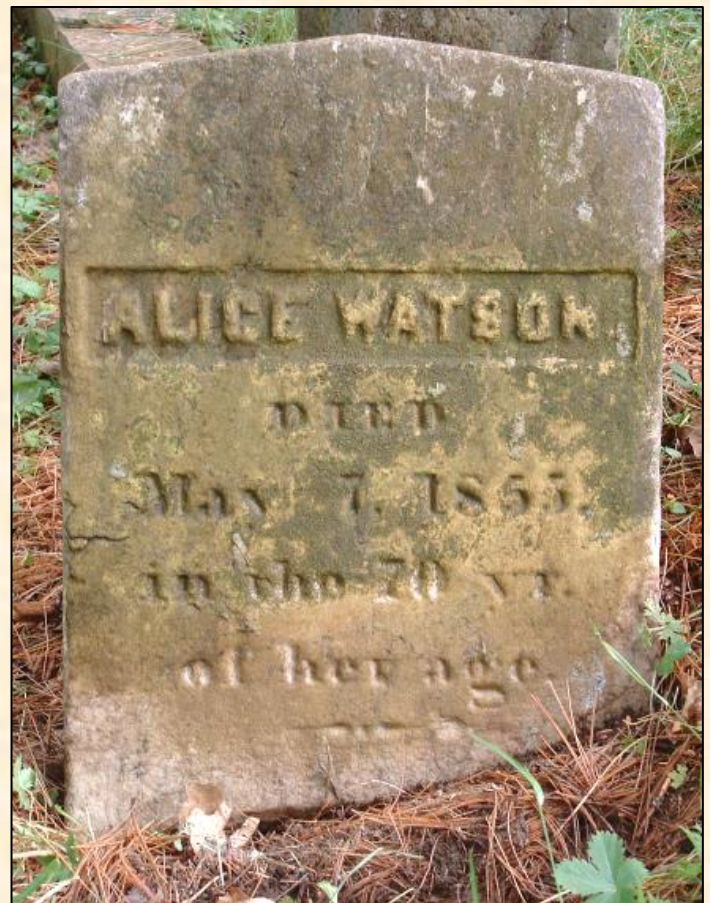
In 1940, Charles and Martha Benns recorded the location of Alice's grave in Exeter. Alice had the *only* inscribed headstone in a lot containing three other burials marked only with fieldstones.

In 1992, John E. Sterling, co-author of the book *Exeter, Rhode Island, Historical Cemeteries*, spent several days looking for Alice's gravestone, without success. That tiny lot likely had neither a stone wall enclosure nor granite posts, either of which would have helped to make its location evident.

The Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries Transcription Project listed Alice Watson's gravesite – the “Watson lot” – as **EX895**, a temporary number given to historical cemeteries found and recorded in the past but subsequently lost. In *Exeter, Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries*, the Watson lot is designated as **A24** (A__ numbers being reserved for lost cemeteries).

We, too, went looking for the lost Watson lot, on November 9, 2006, and again on March 30, 2007. In our article “[Where's Alice?](#)” we wrote about our hunch as to where this cemetery might be. When Find A Grave volunteer Bill Warner contacted us in 2013 about finding Alice's headstone in Thompson, Connecticut, we updated our original story with “[Alice: Lost and Found.](#)”

The discovery of Alice Watson's headstone in Connecticut occasioned a new number assignment for the Watson lot, **EX169**, at the website of the Rhode Island Historical Cemetery Commission (<http://rihistoriccemeteries.org/>). They, too, now assume that the Watson lot lies along the north-south stretch of Old Voluntown Road in Exeter.



Alice Watson's headstone probably left Rhode Island before John Sterling searched for it in Exeter. Presumably, the fieldstones marking the three other graves near Alice's remain in place, blending into the landscape. We hope they are found someday.

We learned two important things from Mr. Sterling: "Your feet are better to find [fieldstone marked graves]" than a steel probe, though a probe becomes useful for confirming their presence. Fieldstone markers *may have* initials and dates carved into them on the west side of the stone. Mr. Sterling has documented over 300 such fieldstones, one-third of which yielded the names of the deceased.

"Most colonial burial grounds, and up until the mid-nineteenth century garden cemeteries with their curved roads, had their burial oriented east-west. The bodies were buried with their head to the west end of the grave and their feet to the east. When you stand at the west end of the grave you are looking at the engraved side of the head stone. This orientation was so on judgement day the deceased will rise up and be facing the rising sun to the east." – *John E. Sterling, in an email dated 20 August 2020.*

Summary

Alice⁵ Watson was born in West Greenwich, Rhode Island, circa 1785, the daughter of Samuel⁴ #26 Watson and his wife Abiah Young.

Though she never married, Alice had five children by four different men. We're aware that she had offspring because of dozens of entries in West Greenwich town council records regarding the administration of financial support for Alice's children. The first four of Alice's children are represented in WG town council records. The existence of Alice's fifth child, son Benjamin G. Watson, is never mentioned in those records.

Alice Watson spent most of her life in West Greenwich, under her father's roof. Probably after her father died in December 1834, Alice went to live in neighboring Voluntown, Connecticut. By 1840 she was back in West Greenwich, enumerated as head of her own household. In 1850 Alice was enumerated as living alone, still in West Greenwich, which likely is where she died on May 7, 1855.

Alice was buried in Exeter, Rhode Island, not in West Greenwich. Her gravestone disappeared from Exeter, later turning up in a small cemetery in Thompson, CT.

We have found Alice to be one of the most interesting people in the Watson family. She managed a life that others would have found too intimidating or just too far out of the ordinary. The fact that Alice Watson's burial site was marked with a formal gravestone – unlike so many in this branch of the Watson family – suggests that someone cared enough about Alice to make sure that she would be remembered.

Appendix

Lyman R. Watson and His Family

Lyman Watson was born circa 1814. The fact that the town of West Greenwich set up a legal guardianship for him in 1828 is a solid clue that Lyman was born there.

By 1840, Lyman Watson shows up as a head of household in the census for West Greenwich. The numbers reflect that of a young couple with a male child.

In 1850, Lyman Watson, age 36, “labourer,” was enumerated in Richmond, RI, south of Exeter. His wife, Martha, whose maiden name *may have been* Congdon, was 32 years old. They had six children – oldest sons Welcome, age 10; Lyman, age 9; and Bennett, age 7; daughters Phebe, age 6, and Esther L., age 4; and their youngest son, two-year-old Thomas.

By 1860, Lyman has disappeared from the census record. Martha, 43, and their daughter Esther, 13, are listed as living in the Warwick, RI, household of Jeremiah Brand, “master weaver.” Martha worked as a weaver. Esther is not listed with an occupation but, sadly, there's no check mark for her in the column “Attended School within the year.” We do not find the other children in the 1860 census.

We do know that Watson brothers Welcome E. and Bennett served in the military.

Welcome E. Watson (middle name *possibly* Elliott)

Welcome Watson's first enlistment during the Civil War was with the First Light Battery, Connecticut Volunteers. He mustered in on November 21, 1861, in Plainfield, CT. According to CT military records, Welcome Watson *deserted* on January 24, 1862.

That's probably when they realized he wasn't coming back: On that same day in January, Welcome was busy enlisting in Massachusetts. Four days later, he was mustered into the 31st Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, Co. I. Welcome E. Watson was 23 years old; a resident of Pawtucket, RI, at the time; and worked as a cook. He was discharged "for disability" on June 20, 1862, in New Orleans, LA.

On November 22, 1862, in East Greenwich, RI, Welcome E. Watson married Lovancy A. Shippee. We don't know what became of that marriage.

We do know that Welcome married again on May 15, 1869. His new bride was Nancy M. Arnold, daughter of Andrew and Nancy Moffit (and, apparently, the widow of Mr. Arnold). Nancy Arnold was 42 years old at the time (born circa 1827), making her eleven or twelve years older than Welcome. She brought along her four children, ranging in age from 7 to 24, from her previous marriage.

Welcome E. Watson died before 1880. In that year's census, Nancy M. Watson was enumerated in Plainfield, CT, where she lived in the household of her daughter Abby F. Popple and son-in-law Frank Popple.

There is no evidence that Welcome and Nancy had any children together. Given Nancy's age at the time they married, this is not surprising.

Bennett H. Watson

On December 17, 1862, in Voluntown, CT, Bennett Watson married Mary A. Barber. Bennett was 21 years old, a "factory hand," residing in Griswold, CT. Mary was 18, born in Voluntown, also residing in Griswold. It was a first marriage for each.

Not quite fifteen months later, Bennett Watson, age 22, joined the Regular Army. He enlisted at Ft. Trumbull, Connecticut, on March 8, 1864, and served with the 3rd Light Artillery, Battery G. Bennett's enlistment record gives his place of birth as West Greenwich, RI, and his occupation at the time of enlistment as "seaman." Bennett was discharged at Ft. Warren, Massachusetts, exactly three years later, on March 8, 1867, when his term of service expired.

Bennett's marriage to Mary A. Barber ended early. We don't have the date of their divorce; but we found evidence of proceedings for custody of their only child. On November 16, 1869, Mary (Barber) Watson's petition for custody of her daughter

Ella Jane Watson was granted by the Superior Court in Norwich, CT. Ella had been living with her father in North Stonington.

Ella Jane Watson was born in Voluntown, CT, on October 10, 1864. (Whoever ordered Ella's gravestone put her year of birth as 1863. The record of her birth in Voluntown says 1864.)

Ella appears in the 1870 census living with her mother Mary Watson in the Voluntown household of Washington and Mercy Barber. This is the same family where we found Mary in 1850 and 1860, before she wed Bennett Watson. Almost certainly, Washington and Mercy Barber were Mary's parents.

More about Mary Watson and daughter Ella Jane:

Around 1875, Mary (Barber) Watson married Benjamin Franklin Colburn (1852-1927). They had no children together. [Mary](#) and [Benjamin](#) are buried in Cedar Swamp Cemetery in Sterling, CT.

Ella Jane Watson married Charles Lincoln GARDINER (1857-1930) in Voluntown on July 3, 1880. They had at least four children: Elbert Harry Rodney Gardiner (1888-1943); Mary Ella Gardiner (1891-1991); Edith Norton Gardiner (1897-?); and Roger Clifton Gardiner (1897-1940).

Ella J. (Watson) Gardiner died in 1899 at age 35. Ella's death record as indexed by the Connecticut State Library says she passed away on February 19th; her gravestone inscription notes her death as February 28th. [Ella](#) and her husband [Charles](#) are buried in Cedar Swamp Cemetery in Sterling, CT. Their shared headstone spells their surname as *Gardner*.

Bennett Watson was enumerated in the 1870 census in Stonington, CT. He had a new wife, Mary S. Watson. Bennett was listed as 28 years old, Mary S. as 39. (She was actually 40 years old by that time.)

Bennett's second wife was Mary S. (Whiting) Park. Mary was born on May 3, 1830, the daughter of Hallam Arthur Whiting and his wife Lydia Lamb. Mary seems to have been the widow of Edwin (or Edward) F. Park, whom she married on December 6, 1848, in Stonington, CT. Mary had three children with her first husband: Charles H. Park; Frederick N. Park; and Mary A. Park.

Bennett Watson and Mary S. Park married in *Sept.* 1869, per their data in column 14 of the 1870 census – "If married within the year, state month

(Jan., Feb., &c.). That timing fits closely with Mary (Barber) Watson's petition to regain custody of her daughter Ella Jane.

Frederick Park, Mary S. Watson's 17-year-old son, lived with her and Bennett.

In 1880, Mary S. (age 50) and Bennett Watson (age 38) were enumerated again in Stonington. Clarence, their seven-year-old son, lived with them, as did Mary's 30-year-old son Charles H. Park – who was listed as Bennett's *son-in-law*.

On May 1, 1882, Bennett Watson applied for a Civil War invalid pension, though it appears that he was not granted one; there is no certificate number associated with his application.

Bennett H. Watson died on September 18, 1887. He is [buried](#) in Elm Grove Cemetery in Mystic, CT. On December 24, 1887, Mary S. Watson applied for a widow's pension on the basis of Bennett's military service; it appears that she was successful.

Strangely, an application for Bennett's and Mary's son Clarence A. Watson was made on December 14, 1899, specifically referencing Clarence as a *minor*. Born in 1872, Clarence Watson was a minor at the time his father died. But by 1899 Clarence was far too old to qualify; he was not awarded a pension certificate.

Around 1895, Clarence Watson married Mary L. Burnham, born in Canada in 1873, the daughter of Louis and Esther (Rivers) Burnham. The two of them lived in Stonington, CT, and in nearby Old Mystic. It appears that they had no children.

Mary S. (Whiting) (Park) Watson died 1 Dec 1899 in Stonington, CT, on December 1, 1899. She is [buried](#) in Elm Grove Cemetery in Mystic, CT, in Plot 8-77 with her parents, two of her brothers, and other members of the Whiting family.

Mary (Burnham) Watson passed away in 1950. Clarence Watson died at age 81 on September 2, 1953, in Stonington. They are buried together in Elm Grove Cemetery in Mystic, Connecticut.

Benjamin G.⁶ Watson and His Family

There is no record of Benjamin G. Watson's birth in West Greenwich on October 8, 1826. As far as we know, Benjamin G.'s first appearance in WG records is when he married Mary A. HARRINGTON on March 8, 1846 – which tells us that

the bride lived there also. Mary Harrington was born on January 20, 1823 (this birthdate was calculated from her headstone inscription data).

Benjamin G. and Mary A. (Harrington) Watson had at least three children:

1. FRANCIS C.⁷ “Frank,” born 1846 in Rhode Island, likely in West Greenwich. Frank married Mary Alice (maiden name *possibly* Gardner) likely early in 1888, based on the birth date of their oldest child. Frank and Mary had three children before they divorced. (More about Frank later.)
2. OLIVE A., born May 4, 1848, in Rhode Island, likely in West Greenwich. In 1869, Olive married George W. Cole, a Civil War veteran. George was born circa 1845 in Connecticut, the son of George Cole and his wife Catherine Niles. Olive and George had four children – Georgianna; Charles B.; Benjamin A.; and Minnie E. Olive died at age 73 on January 24, 1922. George died on June 16, 1926. They are both buried in Union Cemetery in the village of Moosup, in Plainfield, CT. Sons Charles B. Cole (1872-1916) and Benjamin Andrew Cole (1877-1931) are buried in the same cemetery.
3. CHARLES, born in spring of 1865, probably in Connecticut. This child died at 3 months of age on August 18, 1865.

The gap between daughter Olive and son Charles is considerable. Perhaps Benjamin and Mary had additional children who didn’t survive childhood.

We find Benjamin, his wife Mary, and their children Frank and Olive living in Litchfield, Medina county, Ohio, in 1850. His occupation was written as “Shoe M,” which we take to mean shoe maker, likely in a boot and shoe factory. Since daughter Olive, age 2, was listed as born in Rhode Island, Benjamin moved his family to Ohio after her birth in May 1848.

Listed on the same census page as the Watsons was the family of Rhode Island native Charles E. Harrington. A relative of Mary (Harrington) Watson? Maybe.

In the 1860 census, Benjamin G. Watson shows up in Connecticut, where he lived for the rest of his life. Knowing that Alice Watson died in May 1855, we wonder if her decline and/or death had anything to do with his returning to New England.

Benjamin and family now were living in Griswold, just west of Voluntown. Benjamin worked as an “Operative in Cot[ton] Mill.” A young couple, William

and Martha Gardiner, lived with the Watson family in that census year. We don't know if this was simply a boarding situation or if one of the Gardiners was related somehow to the Watsons.

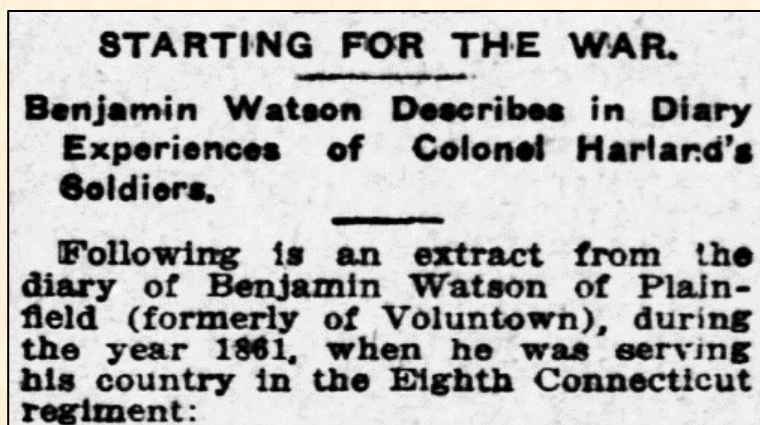
Benjamin was nearly 35 years old when he joined the Union Army in 1861, to serve during the Civil War.

Benjamin G. Watson in the Civil War

On September 23, 1861, Benjamin G. Watson enlisted in the Connecticut 8th Infantry Regiment, Company F. They wrote down his middle initial as "J."

Probably the most action Benjamin saw during his military service was at the battle of Antietam, near Sharpsburg, Maryland, on September 17, 1862. He was mustered out on October 15, 1862.

As a veteran, Benjamin G. Watson was a member of Kilbourne Post #77 of the Grand Army of the Republic in Central Village, Plainfield, CT.



On June 24, 1914, when Benjamin G. was 87 years old, the *Norwich Bulletin* newspaper published an extract from Benjamin's Civil War diary. Below is our transcription of this newspaper item:

The Eighth Connecticut regiment, to which I belong, was encamped at Hartford, Conn., some weeks before we started for the war. Our regiment consisted of 964 men when, Oct. 17, [1861] we had orders to pack our knapsacks at 9 a.m., to leave Camp Buckingham. Supposing our destination to be Hampstead, L. I. [*Long Island*], we all fell in at the beat of the drum and were soon in line. You could only realize by being present the soldiers hurrying to and fro, the gathering of spectators and the rattling of vehicles. The noise of the multitude reminds me of the old adage, "The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing."

At 10 a.m. we were all armed and equipped as the law directs and have fallen in for roll call, and at 2 p.m. we are on dress parade. It is cloudy and very warm. The sun shines out occasionally, hot enough to remind Jeff Davis of his future home. At 2:30 o'clock we are moving off the field with all our property – real and personal – on our backs. We have left the Tenth regiment in the distance and I have not so much as cast a lingering look behind, for I am glad to leave Hartford.

Orders to Colonel Harland

At 4 p.m. six companies of us are on board the Granite State, a boat that runs from this place to New York, and the other four companies are aboard the Mary Benton, that runs to the same place. One of our men from Willimantic fainted by the way, but is well cared for. Our equipage consists of one woolen and one rubber blanket, knapsack, haversack with rations, canteen filled with water, cartridge box, belts and musket. As we were getting aboard orders came to Colonel Harland to go to Staten Island, where we go, bidding adieu to old Hartford.

As we marched down Main street we were greeted by thousands of spectators from the sidewalks, doors and windows. They were giving us their well wishes by waving their handkerchiefs and their earnest looks spoke volumes. There was a large crowd assembled at the wharf ready to review us. One son of the Emerald Isle observed that the captain of the Eighth regiment was a fine looking man.

Salute from Colt's

When the boat started the air was vocal with the cheers and shouts of the multitude, and we tried to make our part of the noise. As we passed Colt armory they saluted us by firing spiked cannon and small arms of their own manufacture. As we passed down the river groups were assembled on either shore. One old woman shook her apron at us.

One of our men drank very freely of ice water when he came aboard. He had a fit and it was thought he would die, but through the skill of Dr. Harrington he was soon able to return to duty.

At 8 p.m. the moon is high and shines bright, and we are having a pleasant sail down the Connecticut river. We will soon enter the sound. There is hardly breeze enough to stir a ripple. Will our lives be always like sailing on a mirror bosom sea? I think I can safely say "Nay." At 9:30 we are passing Bridgeport off at our right. I wonder if P. T. Barnum is at home?

Post-War Life in Connecticut

In census year 1870, Benjamin, Mary, and their son Frank were living in Sterling, CT. In this census, Benjamin's occupation is given as "farmer;" son Frank's occupation was "work on farm." Daughter Olive had married in spring of the previous year. She, her husband George W. Cole, and their 8-month-old daughter Georgianna are listed on the same census page as the Watsons.

On August 28, 1879, Benjamin filed for a Civil War invalid pension. Not having a copy of the complete file, we don't know what war-related disability formed the basis of Benjamin's claim. The fact that his index file includes a certificate number means that Benjamin was awarded a pension.

By 1880, Benjamin G. Watson was still living in Sterling, but he was back to working in a cotton mill. Benjamin and Mary were now alone in their house. We don't find son Frank in that year's census.

Mary A. (Harrington) Watson died on March 17, 1889, at the age of 66 years, one month, and 25 days. She was laid to rest in Union Cemetery in the village of Moosup, in Plainfield, CT.

On November 24, 1892, in Norwich, CT, Benjamin married again. His new bride was Parmelia A. (---) Hall, the widow of Nathan S. Hall, who died in 1879. At the time of their marriage, both Parmelia and Benjamin resided in Sterling. Per the record of their marriage and the data on her gravestone, Parmelia was born on April 15, 1829 in Voluntown, CT. (We have not identified her family of origin.)

Benjamin and Parmelia had nearly two dozen years together. Parmelia's children from her first marriage were frequent visitors, as evidenced by numerous items in the *Norwich Bulletin's* gossip town columns. Parmelia's five children were Charles W. Hall (who married Eugenia A. Kinney); Lydia E. (who married Emulus

Burdick); Mary Emma (who married Dr. John K. Bucklyn); Ida Parmelia (who married Charles A. Frink); and Hannah C. (who married George A. Witter).

When Benjamin G. Watson died on July 10, 1916, it was probably poor Parmelia who found him “dead in bed,” per the coroner’s report.

Benjamin’s age at death was given as 89 years, nine months, and two days. Cause of death was recorded as heart disease.

**SUDDEN DEATHS
IN WINDHAM COUNTY**

Coroner Arthur G. Bill of Dan-
felson reports the following sudden
deaths in Windham county during
the past three months:—

July 3—Edward Ventefetuelle, 24,
Windham; drowned.

July 11—Benjamin G. Watson, 89,
Plainfield; found dead in bed.

EKONK

Word was received here Tuesday of
the sudden death of Benjamin Watson
of Plainfield. He formerly resided
here.

The *Norwich Bulletin* covered the fact of Benjamin’s passing, noting that he had previously resided in Ekonk, a village in the southwestern corner of Sterling.

Benjamin G. Watson was buried in Union Cemetery in Moosup with his first wife, Mary A. Harrington.

After Benjamin’s death, Parmelia went to live with her daughter Hannah Witter, in Brooklyn, CT. (She was enumerated in the 1920 census as “Camelia” Watson.) By 1923, Parmelia was living in Mystic, CT, with her daughter Emma Bucklyn, at 58 East Main Street.

And Parmelia was granted a widow’s pension based on Benjamin’s Civil War service.

Parmelia A. (---) (Hall) Watson died at age 97 on December 26, 1926, in Stonington, CT (where the eastern half of the village of Mystic is located). She was buried in Kennedy Cemetery in Voluntown with her first husband, Nathan S. Hall, and her son Charles, who predeceased her. Her name is inscribed on the headstone as *Parmelia A. Hall*.

PLAINFIELD

Funeral of Benjamin Watson—Storm
Cripples Trolley Car Which Locomo-
tive Hauls to Siding.

Funeral services for Benjamin Wat-
son, 89, were held at his home on Gal-
lup street Thursday afternoon at 2.30
o’clock, conducted by Rev. Arthur
Barwick, pastor of the Congregational
church. Many friends from Plainfield
and other places were present. There
were beautiful floral tributes. A hymn,
Shall We Gather at the River? was
rendered by a quartet, Misses Edith
Peterson, Florence Butterworth, Mary
Kingsley and Mrs. Edith Phillips. Ow-
ing to weather conditions, burial was
delayed a short while. The bearers
were Jason Lathrop, Herbert Gallup,
Robert Dawley and Edward Hall. Bur-
ial was at the Union cemetery, Moo-
sup.

Mr. Watson was a Civil war vet-
eran.

Son Frank C.⁷ Watson

Frank C. Watson, eldest child and only surviving son of Benjamin G. and Mary A. (Harrington) Watson, is a bit of a cipher. We cannot find him in the census between 1870, when he lived with his parents in Sterling, CT, and 1910, when he lived alone in that same town. Forty years is a long time to go uncounted in the census record.

The scraps of information about Frank that we *have* found indicate that he did marry and children. Frank's wife was named Mary Alice (or Alice Mary). They likely wed early in 1888, given that their first child was born in December of that year. But this marriage did not endure.

Some have given Mary Alice's maiden name as Munger, which we think is wrong. The death record from which that surname was gleaned involves a woman from a *Pennsylvania* Watson family, where the overlap in names is purely coincidental. We think it possible that Mary Alice's maiden name *might have been* Gardner or Gardiner.

Frank and Mary Alice Watson had at least three children:

1. HADLAI FRANK⁸, born December 27, 1888, in Sterling, Connecticut; died December 26, 1973, in Alexandria, Fairfax county, Virginia.
2. ELHANAN GARDNER, born February 27, 1890, in Plainfield, Connecticut; died June 2, 1971, in Providence, Rhode Island.
3. GRACE L., born in October 1891, per the 1900 census.

The loss of the 1890 US census record (much of it destroyed by fire in 1921) prevents us from seeing this family living together.

By 1900, Frank and Mary Alice's children were living in Hopkinton, Rhode Island, in the household of David and Abbie (Tucker) Hoxsie and their daughter Kate. Hadlai, Elhanan, and Grace Watson are listed as nephews and niece.

Hoxsie David	Head	M	M	DEC	1849	50
Abbie F.	Wife	M	F	Jan	1847	53
Kate M	Daughter	M	F	July	1881	18
Watson Hadley	Nephew	M	M	DEC	1888	11
Elhanan	Nephew	M	M	Feb	1890	10
Grace L.	Niece	M	F	OCT	1891	8

How, *exactly*, were Abbie and David Hoxsie related to these youngsters? We spent hours looking into this but found no good answers. Also, we know nothing more about Frank C. Watson's daughter than what is written in the 1900 census.

Frank resurfaces in the census record in 1910. At age 63, he was living in Sterling, listed as a "farmer," and marked as "single."

Our next glimpse of Frank comes with his World War I draft registration, completed on February 22, 1917. This document reveals that Frank's occupation was now "pension agent." And his marital status was noted as "widower." The widower status shows up again in Frank's enumeration in the 1920 census.

Frank's switch from "single" to "widower" suggests that Mary Alice divorced him, not the other way around – and that the word *widower* carried a better connotation.

Frank may have gotten word, ahead of that day in February 1917, that his ex, Mary Alice, had died. One item that gives us pause, however, is a detail embedded in Frank's daughter-in-law Helen's Rhode Island death record.

When Elhanan's wife Helen died in May 1923, her next-of-kin were noted as (1) Elhanan Watson and (2) Mary A. Watson. We wonder if "Kin 2" is Mary Alice Watson, Elhanan's mother, mostly because we can't come up with anyone else that could have been. And if Mary Alice were deceased before May 1923, would Elhanan, the informant, have included her name among his late wife's kin?

Rhode Island, Death Index, 1630-1930

Name:	Helen V Watson
Relation:	wf
Kin 1:	Elhanan Watson
Kin 2:	Mary A Watson
Death Date:	11 May 1923
Age:	31 Yrs

PLAINFIELD

Complicated Pension Case Settled in Favor of Mrs. Jeanette P. Weeks—

Packerville Woman Wins.

Pension Attorney Frank C. Watson has been notified by the Interior department that the badly complicated pension case that has been pending for nearly a year has been settled by the department recognizing Mrs. Jeanette P. Weeks of Packerville as the only lawful widow of James Weeks, who died last February in Noank, leaving a widow (so called) and children in that town. Records show that Jeanette P. Montgomery of Canterbury was married to James Weeks, the soldier, in 1862 at Canterbury, Conn., by Rev. Silas Cummings. Soon after Weeks went to the war and while he partly supported his wife until 1863 he deserted her then and she never saw him again until 1892 when he appeared with an officer at her home in Packerville and sued for a divorce. Mrs. Weeks did not care one way or another about the divorce and never thought any more about the matter until the news of his death

and family at Noank started an investigation which proved no divorce had ever been obtained by Weeks.

The claim has been long in settlement. Attorney Frank C. Watson, assisted by C. B. Montgomery of Packerville, prosecuted, and Special Agent H. F. Gloetzer of Hartford, represented the department.

The final settlement of the claim has opened up another case, as James and Annie Weeks of Noank were joint owners of real estate and just before Weeks' death the share of Weeks was transferred to Annie Weeks through a third party. Attorneys of the genuine Mrs. Weeks are preparing to claim no such transfer of weeks' property was legal without his legal wife's consent.

The accrued pension of James Weeks, due at the time of his death, has also been granted to Mrs. Janette P. Weeks of Packerville.

Frank's work as a pension agent made the local papers at least once. On February 4, 1916, the *Norwich Bulletin* published a short article that mentions Frank C. Watson as a "pension attorney." (The newspaper clipping shown here has been edited to make it more compact.)

Frank C. Watson died in Sterling, Connecticut, on December 19, 1926. He is buried in Union Cemetery in the village of Moosup, in Plainfield, CT, where his parents and siblings are buried.

Frank C. Watson's own sons, Hadlai and Elhanan

Hadlai F.⁸ Watson

Hadlai's World War I draft registration states his place of birth as Ekonk, Connecticut. That village sits in the southwestern corner of the town of Sterling. This tells us that Frank C. and Mary Alice (---) Watson were living there in 1888.

After serving in the US Navy, Hadlai worked as a civil servant in Washington, DC. His first wife was Pearl E. Kinney (1884-1963), born in Rhode Island, the daughter of Daniel S. and Sara Kinney. Hadlai and Pearl wed sometime between 1910 and when their daughter Dorothy was born in 1919. (Dorothy F. Watson, who died in 2003, married Winfield E. Hendrickson.) Hadlai and Pearl divorced sometime before May 4, 1942, the date on which Hadlai married again.

Hadlai's second wife was Ruth Ashmore Everett, 47 years old at the time they wed. Ruth died on August 17, 1946.

Nell Anna "Nellie" Duncan, born in 1884 in Alexandria, VA, was Hadlai's third wife. They married on November 20, 1947, in Pinellas county, Florida, the place to which both of them had retired. Hadlai and Nellie lived in St. Petersburg, FL. Nellie passed away on December 5, 1962.

Hadlai F. Watson spent his last days in a nursing home in Alexandria, VA, which is where he died on December 26, 1973 – the day before what would have been his 85th birthday. He is buried in Presbyterian Cemetery in Alexandria, VA, together with his third wife Nellie.

Elhanan G.⁸ Watson

Various records for Elhanan G. Watson list his birth place as both Connecticut and Rhode Island. We have deemed the primary sources most likely to be correct are the record of his daughter Mildred's birth in Westerly, RI, in July 1913, and his World War II draft registration record, both of which give Elhanan's place of birth as Plainfield, Connecticut.

We were baffled by his World War I draft registration, another primary source, which lists Mystic, CT, as Elhanan's birth place – until we discovered that his first marriage took place in Stonington, CT, where the village of Mystic is located (at least the eastern portion of it). The handwriting on Elhanan's draft registration form matches the signature of the registrar, T. F. Randall, not the signature of Elhanan himself. Either Mr. Randall slipped up somehow, on that June day in 1917, or Elhanan did.

Elhanan's middle name *Gardner*

Unless this name was a tip of the hat to his grandfather Benjamin Watson, whose middle initial was **G** (and potentially a stand-in for his father's surname), Gardner *might have been* the maiden name of Elhanan's mother, Mary Alice.

There was a Gardner family that lived in Plainfield. William Gardner (also *Gardiner*) and his wife Thirsa (or *Thirza*) had a daughter named Mary A., who appears in the 1870 and 1880 censuses. Could she have been Mary Alice? Perhaps, but we really don't know.

Rhode Island author and historian Kelly Sullivan Pezza has written a story from Elhanan G. Watson's life, one that occurred in 1902 while Elhanan was living with the Hoxsie family. This is where we learned that Elhanan's parents had divorced.

Kelly's story involves Elhanan's effort to set the Woodville schoolhouse on fire. Apparently he didn't like school, and he was known to act out in destructive ways.

Elhanan got caught and was sent to reform school for a couple of years. The good news is that he seems to have found his way in life afterwards. The punch line to this vignette is Elhanan's adult occupation: He worked for decades as a fireman for the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad. As Kelly puts it so well, "His interest in fire had apparently not cooled." You can read [this story](#) at Kelly's Facebook page "The Works."

On July 1, 1911, in Stonington, Connecticut, Elhanan G. Watson married Helen Viola CAHOON, born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1892.

Helen Cahoon's father *appears to have been* C. Joseph Cahoon. Joseph's wife Sarah McNair died in 1888, so obviously she didn't give birth to Helen. Joseph did remarry, in 1894; but we have no idea if his second wife was Helen's mother.

Elhanan G. and Helen Watson had probably six children together. There are a couple of interesting twists to their story.

Elhanan and Helen's first child appears to have been a daughter named **Alice Helen**, presumably born in Stonington, CT, on November 14, 1911, four-and-a-half months after her parents' wedding.

Elhanan and Helen's second child was a daughter named **Mildred May**, born in Westerly, RI, on July 10, 1913.

Both of these Watson daughters were adopted by Helen (Cahoon) Watson's sister Jennie (Cahoon) Morash (1883-1929) and her husband John (1875-1966). Both girls show up in the Morash household in Gloucester, MA, in the 1920 census.

"Castle Family Tree" at Ancestry.com, created by *delhipaisley*, notes that these adoptions took place in 1914 but gives no source for this assertion. Since *delhipaisley* appears to be a descendant of Alice Helen Watson, we'll assume she had some inside information.

By 1920, Elhanan and family were living in Providence. The oldest child listed in their household was **Evelyn Louise**, born Aug. 5, 1914 in Westerly, RI. The other children, all born in Rhode Island, were **Helen Viola**, born Oct. 31, 1916; and **Elhanan G., Jr.**, born Dec. 16, 1919. Elhanan and Helen had at least one more child after the taking of the 1920 census: **Louise M.**, born Feb. 1, 1921.

Helen V. (Cahoon) Watson died at age 31 on May 11, 1923, in Providence. Her cause of death was *carcinoma of uterus*; duration of disease, *two years*. She was laid to rest in Pocasset Cemetery in Cranston, RI.

Now consider this: Son **Howard Smith Watson** was born on June 5, 1922, while Helen was already diagnosed with uterine cancer. Howard's middle name matches the maiden name of Elhanan's second wife, Nellie M. SMITH. Multiple records for another son, **Harold Everett Watson**, say that he was born on December 16, 1923, seven months after Helen's death. (A lone dissenter, the 1935 Rhode Island state census, says 1924.)

Apparently Elhanan was cultivating a new relationship with Nellie, the woman he would go on to marry, even as Helen was still alive. We suspect that Nellie

(Smith) Watson was the biological mother of both Howard and Harold Watson. This would mean that Elhanan had probably seven children with his second wife.

We have found no date of marriage for Elhanan and Nellie. Nellie was born on September 14, 1890, in Scituate, Providence co., Rhode Island, the daughter of Fred Smith and his wife Mary J. Daylor.

The 1930, 1935, and 1940 censuses provide us with the names of the (other) children Elhanan had with Nellie: **Irene O.**; **Harriet B.**; **Ruth P.**; **Barbara H.**; and **Marjorie A.** (These daughters *could* still be alive, so we omit their birth data.)

Eventually Elhanan retired from his railroad job. A 1964 Providence city directory shows him and Nellie living at 408 Prairie Avenue. Their daughter Marjorie resided with them. Marjorie worked as an assembler at Leviton, an electrical components manufacturing company.

Elhanan Gardner Watson died on June 2, 1971, at age 81. He was buried in Swan Point Cemetery in Providence, RI. Nellie (Smith) Watson passed away at age 89 on November 21, 1979. She was interred with Elhanan in Swan Point Cemetery.

A Possible Candidate for Benjamin G. Watson's Father?

Remember that we are looking for a man named Stephen G----. Benjamin G. Watson's death record says that his father was born in West Greenwich, which may or may not have been true. It's likely that this man was a resident of West Greenwich at the time of Benjamin G.'s birth. If he were not, the town would have been rather less interested in concealing his identity.

An inquiry into *the middle initial G as a stand-in for the father's surname* brings up Gallop; Gardner; Gates; Godfrey; Gorton; and Green(e) – names gleaned from the 1820 and 1830 West Greenwich censuses. We do not find a man named Stephen with any of these surnames in the right time frame, though we may yet locate him. (The man could have moved away to head a household elsewhere.)

We do, however, gravitate to the Gates surname. They were a prominent family in West Greenwich, much more so than the other families named above. It might be significant that Lyman Watson chose Asa Gates as his guardian.

When Asa Gates' father, Israel Gates, died in 1822, he left behind an estate that spanned six-and-a-half pages in its accounting. While he might not have been the wealthiest man in town, clearly Israel Gates was prosperous.

Israel Gates' estate inventory listed people who owed him money. Some of these "notes" involved principal plus interest. Many of the names are familiar, including Robert Hazard and his brother-in-law Jason P. Stone, who together owed \$14.50. Israel Gates was a bit of a banker in the town of West Greenwich.

If Benjamin G. Watson's father was named Gates, part of an impulse to keep things quiet may have been to protect that man's interest in his inheritance.

Asa Gates had at least six brothers; none of them were named *Stephen*. His youngest brother, born circa 1806, was named Joseph *Stanton* Gates.

Could *Stephen* be a permutation of *Stanton*? Sure. It begins with ST and ends with the letter N. Do we have evidence to lay a paternity suit at Joseph Stanton Gates' feet? No. The town fathers succeeded at cloaking the identity of Benjamin G. Watson's father. But Joseph Stanton was old enough to have fathered Benjamin G. and young enough to have been that careless. He was Israel Gates' last child, still a teenager when his father died.

The way to solve this mystery now would be through genetic genealogy. If Benjamin G. Watson were to have a living grandson from an *unbroken* line of male descendants, he would have the same Y chromosome as Benjamin G.'s father. And that grandson's DNA might match that of folks with deep roots in Rhode Island, whose surname begins with the letter G.

Resources

Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/> is our favorite source for census, vital, and probate records, including (but not limited to) –

Connecticut, Town Marriage Records, pre-1870 (Barbour Collection) [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006. Original data: White, Lorraine Cook, ed. *The Barbour Collection of Connecticut Town Vital Records. Vol. 1-55*. Baltimore, MD, USA: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1994-2002.

Simeon Hoxsie's estate: *Connecticut, Wills & Probate Records, 1609-1999* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015. Author: *Connecticut State Library (Hartford, Connecticut)*; Probate Place: Ancestry.com says it's Hartford, Connecticut, but in fact it was Voluntown, Connecticut, in the Plainfield Probate District: Estate of Hoxsie, Simeon, 1810; docket no. 1108.

Israel Gates' estate inventory: Author: *Rhode Island. Probate Court (Kent County)*; Probate Place: Kent, Rhode Island. Ancestry.com. *Rhode Island, Wills and Probate Records, 1582-1932* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015. Original data: Rhode Island, District and Probate Courts.

Information regarding Bennett Watson's military service was obtained at Ancestry.com: *U.S. Army, Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2007. Original data: Register of Enlistments in the U.S. Army, 1798-1914; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M233, 81 rolls); Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group 94; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Record of Benjamin G. Watson's marriage to Mary A. Harrington: *Rhode Island, Vital Extracts, 1636-1899* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014. Original data: Arnold, James Newell. *Rhode Island Vital Extracts, 1636-1850*. 21 volumes. Providence, R.I.: Narragansett Historical Publishing Company, 1891-1912. Digitized images from New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. Arnold's transcription states that the original record of this marriage was found in West Greenwich Marriages Book 3, page 131.

Benjamin J. Watson (note the incorrect middle initial) in the *U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865* database at Ancestry.com – Sources: Connecticut: Record of Service of Men during War of Rebellion; “various cemetery listings on the Internet” – Source Information from Historical Data Systems, comp. *U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2009; Original data: Data compiled by Historical Data Systems of Kingston, MA; © 1997-2009 Historical Data Systems, Inc., PO Box 35, Duxbury, MA 02331

U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

Rhode Island, Death Index, 1630-1930 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2000.

U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_s

“The long s (ſ) is an archaic form of the lower case letter s.”

John E. Sterling and James E. Good, *Exeter, Rhode Island, Historical Cemeteries* (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, Inc., 1994); unpaginated.

We have included information gleaned from emails, dated March 7th and 10th, 2020, sent from Mr. Sterling to us.

West Greenwich, RI, Town Council books #5, 6, and 7. Town Clerk's Office, West Greenwich Town Hall, 280 Victory Highway, West Greenwich, Rhode Island 02817 (401) 392-3800 x100

Rhode Island Medical Society. *Transactions of the Rhode Island Medical Society*. 1888; pg. 375-376. Accessed online at Google Books on 21 March 2020:

https://books.google.com/books?id=CTGgAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA375&lpg=PA375&dq=Greenwich+Rhode+%22Henry+Aldrich%22&source=bl&ots=cAglxzP7UM&sig=ACfU3U276FyZ2sn0mVxo9iBWzjGEbeSd3g&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwil24LyyKvoAhUMIKwKHZqoD_sQ6AEwA3oECGMQAAQ#v=onepage&q=Greenwich%20Rhode%20%22Henry%20Aldrich%22&f=false

In 2001, Kelly Sullivan and her mother, Mary Lou Fiske, of Hope Valley, RI, shared with us enormous amounts of their research on members of the Watson family. They frequently didn't track source citations for their data; but we have found it extremely useful over the years as starting points for further pursuit. And we thank them again for everything!

Herndon, Ruth Wallis. *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. The passage we

quoted was taken from page 46 of this excellent book. Ms. Herndon cited, as her sources for the guardianship of James Brown, Exeter Town Council Meeting minutes for 2 June 1800 and Exeter Town Council Records Vol. 6, page 198.

Information regarding Welcome E. Watson's Civil War service was obtained from these two web sites:

- <http://www.ctgenweb.org/county/cowindham/records/military/catalogofctvolunteers1.html>
- <https://31massinf.wordpress.com/history/roster-of-the-31st-massachusetts-infantry-regiment-by-company/roster-of-the-31st-massachusetts-infantry-regiment-co-h-2/>

Information regarding Bennett Watson's marriage to Mary A. Barber was obtained via AmericanAncestors.org:

Rhode Island Roots Vol. 28 (2002), page 46: "Rhode Island Roots In Voluntown, Connecticut." Rhode Island Roots. Warwick, RI: Rhode Island Genealogical Society, 1975—. (Online database. AmericanAncestors.org. New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2018.)

<https://www.americanancestors.org/DB487/rd/13973/46/253032176>

A certified copy of Benjamin G. Watson's death record was obtained from the Plainfield, Connecticut, Town Hall, Town Clerk's office, on May 18, 2020. Barbi J. Gardiner, Town Clerk; 8 Community Ave., Plainfield, CT 06374

Mary A. (Harrington) Watson's date of birth was calculated from her headstone inscription data using the Tombstone Birthday Calculator at this website:

<http://www.searchforancestors.com/utility/birthday.html>

Find A Grave memorials:

Clarence A. and Mary L. (Burnham) Watson –

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/140387553>

Mary A. (Harrington) Watson –

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/77676729/mary-a_-watson

Benjamin G. Watson –

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/77676650/benjamin-g_-watson

Parmelia A. (---) (Hall) Watson –

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/19317429/parmelia-a_-hall

Olive A. (Watson) Cole –

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13815413/olive-a_-cole

George W. Cole –

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13815341/george-w_-cole

Charles B. Cole –

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13815299/charles-b_-cole

Benjamin A. Cole –

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/202262248/benjamin-andrew-cole>

Frank C. Watson –

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/84295799/frank-c-watson>

Hadlai F. Watson –

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/130463199/hadlai-frank-watson>

Elhanan Gardner Watson –

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/68022729/elhanan-gardner-watson>

Helen V. (Cahoon) Watson –

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/179788603/helen-v_-watson

Nellie M. (Smith) Watson –

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/68023067/nellie-m_-watson

Articles obtained at newspapers.com:

The *Norwich Bulletin* (Norwich, CT) newspaper: Extract from Benjamin G. Watson's Civil War diary, published 24 June 1914, page 10.

The *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT) newspaper: Mention of Benjamin G. Watson's sudden death, published 4 October 1916, page 22.

The *Norwich Bulletin* (Norwich, CT) newspaper: Mention of Frank C. Watson as pension attorney in "Complicated Pension Case Settled in Favor of Mrs. Jeanette P. Weeks," published 4 February 1916, page 2.

Connecticut Vital Records — Index of Deaths, 1897-1969 online database at the website of the Connecticut State Library, <https://www.ctatatelibrarydata.org/death-records/>

Connecticut Vital Records — Index of Marriages, 1897-1969 online database at the website of the Connecticut State Library, <https://www.ctatatelibrarydata.org/marriage-records/>

Westerly Births, Book 3, page 167 – record of the birth of Mildred May Watson on July 10, 1913. This record lists her as the second child of Elhanan Watson (born Plainfield, CT; 22 years old) and Helen Cahoon (born Gloucester, MA; 21 years old). Westerly Town Hall, 45 Broad St, Westerly, RI 0289.

“Castle Family Tree” at Ancestry.com, created by user *delhipaisley*, accessed in June 2020: <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/5649884/person/120174174286/facts>

“Rhode Island Births and Christenings, 1600-1914,” database, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:F8SF-5WY> : 17 December 2019), Nellie Smith, 1890. Accessed 14 June 2020.

“New London, Connecticut, United States Records,” images, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QHQ-BQ4B-Y37N> : August 17, 2024), image 504 of 505; County Court. — Mary (Barber) Watson’s 1869 petition for custody of her daughter Ella Jane Watson.