

# Identifying the First Wife of Revolutionary War Patriot Benjamin Twitchell As Patience Tucker of Cumberland, Providence County, Rhode Island.

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A genealogy of the Twitchell family contains a biographical account of **BENJAMIN<sup>5</sup> TWITCHELL**, born 7 March 1748 in either Walpole or Medway, Massachusetts. Benjamin<sup>5</sup> was the son of Benjamin<sup>4</sup> (*Benjamin<sup>3-2-1</sup>*) and Lydia (Fisk) Twitchell.<sup>[1]</sup> The parents of Benjamin<sup>5</sup> were married 25 November 1740 in Medway.<sup>[2]</sup> In childhood he lived in Keene, New Hampshire, where his father was kidnapped by Indians for ransom, transported to Quebec, and died on the journey home.<sup>[3]</sup> On 11 May 1790, Benjamin<sup>5</sup> Twitchell married **HANNAH TUCKER** and lived with their five children near Bellingham, Massachusetts.<sup>[4]</sup>

The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution recognizes Benjamin Twitchell as the man of that name of Bellingham, Massachusetts, who served in Massachusetts and Rhode Island military units during the Revolutionary War. His spouse is identified as Hannah Tucker.<sup>[5]</sup>

Neither source references a spouse other than Hannah Tucker. It is clear that Benjamin Twitchell (or Twitchel), was married twice: to Hannah Tucker in 1790 and to **PATIENCE TUCKER** of Rhode Island in 1771.<sup>[6]</sup> A relationship between the two Tucker women has not been found.

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *Genealogy of the Twitchell family: Record of the Descendants of the Puritan – Benjamin Twitchell, Dorchester, Lancaster, Medfield and Sherborn, Massachusetts, 1632–1927* (New York: H. K. Twitchell, 1929), 85–86. Reference of Benjamin<sup>5</sup> Twitchell's service in the Continental Army and his first marriage to Patience Tucker are omitted from his biographical sketch.

<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001, Medway births ca. 1713–1848, marriages ca. 1713–1848, and deaths ca. 1714–1845, Marriages, image 145 [FHL 969336, DGS 7010687], online at FamilySearch.org; *Vital Records of Medway, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850* (Boston: NEHGS, 1905), 267.

<sup>3</sup> Salma Hale, *Annals of the Town of Keene, from its First Settlement, in 1734, to the Year 1790; with Corrections, Additions, and a Continuation, from 1790 to 1815* (Keene, N.H.: J. W. Prentiss, 1851), 32–33; Emma Lewis Coleman, *New England Captives Carried to Canada between 1677 and 1760, during the French and Indian Wars*, 2 vols. (Portland, Maine: Southworth Press, 1925), 2:313–314. Benjamin<sup>4</sup> Twitchell was kidnapped by Indians in 1755.

<sup>4</sup> Twitchell, *Genealogy of the Twitchell Family* [note 1], 85–86.

<sup>5</sup> National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, Benjamin Twitchell, Ancestor #A117543. As of December 2020, this organization does not acknowledge Patience Tucker as a spouse of Benjamin Twitchell. The author has submitted a supplemental application as a descendant of Benjamin Twitchell and Patience Tucker.

<sup>6</sup> Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001 [note 2], Medway Marriages, image 152. The published version of the 1771 marriage says their marriage intentions call the bride “Mrs. Patience Tucker” (see note 2). In the mid-eighteenth century, ‘Mrs’ did not describe a married woman. It described a social rather than a marital status (Amy Louise Erickson, “Mistresses and Marriage: or, a Short History of the Mrs.” *History Workshop Journal* [Oxford,

## Benjamin Twitchell's Revolutionary War Service

When the news of Lexington and Concord reached the small town of Bellingham, the residents were ready to fight for independence. Out of her meager population, ninety-three men served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.<sup>[7]</sup> Benjamin Twitchell, aged 27, was among the men who responded to the call. On 19 April 1775, he served 6 days marching 64 miles on the Alarm in Captain Jesse Holbrook's Massachusetts militia company.<sup>[8]</sup> He subsequently served 8 months in the Massachusetts militia in Captain Samuel Cobb's company, Colonel Joseph Read's regiment.<sup>[9]</sup>

On 15 February 1778, Benjamin enlisted for a 3-year term in the Continental Army engaged for Rhode Island and was deployed to Captain William Allen, Colonel Israel Angell's Second Rhode Island Regiment.<sup>[10]</sup> During his enlistment, the Second Regiment engaged in numerous battles and wintered in the legendary 1777–78 encampment at Valley Forge. Benjamin Twitchell is listed on the muster roll of the Society of the Descendants of Washington's Army at Valley Forge.<sup>[11]</sup> Valley Forge has been described as the location where the Continental Army, under General George Washington's leadership, was transformed into a cohesive and disciplined fighting force that went on to win the Revolutionary War.<sup>[12]</sup>

In July 1779, the Second Regiment was encamped in Barber's Heights, North Kingstown, Rhode Island, overlooking the British-occupied harbor. The troops were uneasy and distressed over failure to be paid, poor living conditions, lack of stores, and suspected hoarding of food by the officers.<sup>[13]</sup> Another factor contributing to the men's frustration was the location of the encampment in their home colony and the knowledge that their families were suffering nearby.<sup>[14]</sup>

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England: Oxford University Press], No. 78 [Autumn 2014]:39-57 at 39 [<https://jstor.org/stable/43299025>].

<sup>7</sup> Louis Atwood Cook, ed., *History of Norfolk County, Massachusetts, 1622–1918* (New York: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1918), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775–1783, Turner, Thomas–Uttley, Samuel, Lexington Alarm Roll, 15 April 1775, Captain Holbrook's Militia Company, Bellingham, image 904 [FHL 2048133, DGS 7843843]; online at FamilySearch.org. Payment for 6 days service, 64 miles travel.

<sup>9</sup> Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775–1783 [note 8], Order for Bounty Coat, 6 November 1775, Colonel Read's Regiment, image 905. Receipt of money in lieu of Bounty coat for 8 months service.

<sup>10</sup> Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775–1783 [note 8], Return of Men Raised for Continental Army, 16 February 1778, Colonel Howe's Regiment, image 655. 3-year enlistment engaged for Rhode Island.

<sup>11</sup> Society of the Descendants of Washington's Army at Valley Forge, The Muster Roll, (<http://valleyforgemusterroll.org/muster.asp>; accessed 1 July 2021), Benjamin Twitchell.

<sup>12</sup> Foundation Document Valley Forge Historical Park (U.S. Department of Interior: National Park Service, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Christian M. McBurney, "Mutiny! American Mutinies in the Rhode Island Theater of War September 1777–July 1779," *Rhode Island History*, Summer/Fall 2011, vol. 69, no. 2 (Providence, R.I.: Rhode Island Historical Society, 2011), 59–60.

<sup>14</sup> Fred Zilian, "British and Hessian Forces Occupy Newport and Aquidneck Island in 1776," 7 April 2017, The Online Review of Rhode Island History (<http://smallstatebighistory.com/british-hessian-forces-occupy-newport-aquidneck-island-1776>).

The sergeants organized a protest, and to avoid direct involvement and retaliation, solicited participation of the rank-and-file soldiers. They persuaded a literate soldier, Private Stephen Hazard, to draft a petition, and Private Benjamin Twitchell to present the petition to the commanding officer. On 24 July 1779, Benjamin Twitchell hand-delivered the petition to Colonel Israel Angell, who reacted by having him arrested for a mutinous act, placed in shackles, and transported to East Greenwich, Rhode Island, for court martial. On 28 July 1779, Benjamin was convicted of mutiny and sentenced to death. The death sentence infuriated most of the enlisted men who felt their comrade should not be jailed or hanged when all the men were equally guilty. They devised a plan to free the prisoner. On the morning of 29 July 1779, a group of soldiers assembled with loaded guns, bayonets affixed, and paraded around the camp. A confrontation with an officer involving threatening sword motions and a cocked musket further enraged the men. The number of mutineers had grown to approximately two hundred men who proceeded outside the camp marching toward East Greenwich, approximately six miles away, where Benjamin was awaiting execution.<sup>[15]</sup>

A firsthand account of the mutineer's determination to free the prisoner is described in Samuel Smith's memoirs. Smith was a fifer in the Second Regiment and participated in the mutiny. He stated the mutineers were determined to a man to lose their lives to rescue their brother. Numerous attempts by officers to stop the march were unsuccessful until General Horatio Gates, the Commander of the American forces in the Rhode Island theater, intervened. According to Smith's account, the men agreed to return to camp if the prisoner was brought to them and if the General pledged his honor that no one would receive punishment for their actions. The General reluctantly accepted the terms and dispatched an officer to retrieve the prisoner. Twitchell was soon delivered, and the mutineers marched back to their encampment with their freed comrade in the center with colors flying in his hands.<sup>[16]</sup> Benjamin's death sentence, pardon, and order to return to duty were recorded on 8 August 1779.<sup>[17]</sup> Private Benjamin Twitchell remained in the Second Regiment until completion of his three-year term and was honorably discharged on 16 May 1780 in Morristown, New Jersey.<sup>[18]</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel M. Popek, *They "... Fought Bravely, but Were Unfortunate: The True Story of Rhode Island's "Black Regiment" and the Failure of Segregation in Rhode Island's Continental Line, 1777-1783* (Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2016), 440-443.

<sup>16</sup> Charles I. Bushnell, ed., *Memoirs of Samuel Smith, A Soldier of the Revolution, 1776-1786* (New York: privately printed, 1860), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Records of Military Operations and Service, 32 - Orderly Books, 06/23/1775 - 10/27/1783, Vol. 32, Benj Twitchell, image 105, online at Fold3.com. Court martial and pardon.

<sup>18</sup> Revolutionary War Service Records, Compiled service records of soldiers who served in the American Army during the Revolutionary War, 1775-1783, Rhode Island Second Regiment, Individual, Twitchell, Benjamin, image 48, online at Fold3.com.

## Benjamin and Patience (Tucker) Twitchell

On 17 June 1771, Benjamin Twitchell of Medway and Patience Tucker of Cumberland [Rhode Island] were married in Medway, Norfolk County, Massachusetts.<sup>[19]</sup>

Patience Tucker, the daughter of Mores and Esther Tucker, was born 25 January 1751 in Glocester, Providence County, Rhode Island.<sup>[20]</sup> The given name of Patience's father is transcribed as Moses; however, a handwriting analysis of the original birth record indicates the spelling is consistent with Mores. Indirect evidence suggests that Patience's father was Morris Tucker. A derivative source verifies the marriage of Moses Tucker and Esther Tower on 2 April 1741 in Smithfield, Rhode Island.<sup>[21]</sup> An account of the Tucker family shows Morris Tucker and Esther Tower as marrying on the same date and place and settling in Burrillville, Rhode Island.<sup>[22]</sup> Prior to 1806, Burrillville was part of the town of Glocester, the place of Patience's birth. On 6 December 1766, Morris Tucker and two young children died in a tragic dwelling fire in Cumberland, Rhode Island.<sup>[23]</sup> Patience's 1771 marriage record says she was of Cumberland (see above). Lastly, Patience and Benjamin had a son named Morris (see below).

Children of Benjamin and Patience (Tucker) Twitchell, born in Bellingham, Worcester County, Massachusetts:

- i. PATIENCE TWITCHELL, b. 17 March 1772;<sup>[24]</sup> d. prior to Feb 1799, probably in Smithfield, Providence Co., R.I.;<sup>[25]</sup> m. Smithfield 28 June 1789, JONATHAN MOWRY.<sup>[26]</sup>
- ii. MORRIS TWITCHELL, b. 26 Oct 1774;<sup>[27]</sup> m. Mendon, Worcester Co., Mass., 9 Nov. 1797, CATHARINE FRENCH.<sup>[28]</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See note 6.

<sup>20</sup> Rhode Island Births and Christenings, 1600–1914, Glocester, Rhode Island, births, marriages, deaths (1726–1815) and deaths (1902–1915), image 124 [FHL 2188721, DGS 4250814], online at FamilySearch.org.

<sup>21</sup> James N. Arnold, *The Narragansett Historical Register: A Magazine Devoted to the Antiquities, Genealogy and Historical Matter Illustrating the History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, Volume 8: Old Smithfield Records (Providence, R.I.: Narragansett Historical Publishing Company, 1890), 206.

<sup>22</sup> George B. Thayer, *Ancestors of Adelbert P. Thayer, Florine Thayer McCray and Geo. Burton Thayer, Children of John W. Thayer and Adaline Burton* (Hartford, Conn.: Press of the Plimpton Mfg. Co., 1894), 126–127.

<sup>23</sup> *Providence Gazette* (Providence, R.I.), 13 December 1766, vol III, issue 153, p. 3, col 2.

<sup>24</sup> Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001 [note 2], Bellingham records of births, marriages, marriage intentions, and deaths 1716–1858, image 52 [FHL 901871, DGS 7009658], online at FamilySearch.org.

<sup>25</sup> Rhode Island, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1630–1945, Smithfield records of births, marriages and deaths, Vol. 1–2, 1725–1851, image 264 [FHL 959589, DGS 4250616], online at FamilySearch.org. Patience (Twitchell) Mowry's estimated death is based on her husband's second marriage on 10 February 1799. This marriage and Patience Twitchell's 1789 marriage identify the groom as Jonathan Mowry of Smithfield, son of Philip Jr.

<sup>26</sup> Rhode Island, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1630–1945 [note 25], Smithfield marriages, image 168.

<sup>27</sup> See note 24.

<sup>28</sup> Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001 [note 2], Mendon Births, intentions of marriages, deaths and miscellaneous land and property records, 1677–1826, image 100 [FHL 855373, DGS 7011110], online at FamilySearch.org.

Benjamin and Patience (Tucker) Twitchell's marriage was dissolved in 1786 in Mendon, Worcester County, Massachusetts.<sup>[29]</sup> In May 1786, Benjamin placed the following announcement in a Worcester County magazine:<sup>[30]</sup>

WHEREAS PATIENCE, wife of the subscriber, has broken the Marriage Covenant, and behaved in such a manner as renders any further connection between us impossible : This is therefore to caution all Persons from [t]rusting her on my account, as I am determined to pay no debts of her contracting from the date hereof.

Worcester, April 26th, 1786.

BENJAMIN TWITCHELL.

A subsequent newspaper article, published 4 May 1786, announced a Supreme Court guilty conviction and the sentence of Patience Twitchell and Ichabod Hayward for the crime of adultery.<sup>[31]</sup>

At the Supreme Court, lately, held at Worcester, Ichabod Hayward and Patience Twitchell, were convicted of ADULTERY, and sentenced, poor Ichabod, to sit one hour on the gallows, with a rope about his neck, one end thereof cast over the gallows : to be publicly whipped on the naked back 30 stripes, and suffer three months imprisonment - Twitchell to sit one hour on the gallows with a rope about her neck, one end thereof cast over the gallows, to be publicly whipped 20 stripes on the naked back.

A local newspaper acknowledged the sentence was carried out on 11 May 1786 omitting descriptive information about the public event.<sup>[32]</sup> The *London 1787 Annual Register of History, Politics and Literature*, a publication of major events throughout the world, reprinted a newspaper article describing the crime and sentence and included an observation by a witness of the public punishment.<sup>[33]</sup>

This sentence was literally executed in the presence of a gentleman just arrived from America; and as it happened to be the first of the kind, an innumerable quantity of people were assembled. The culprits were both young and handsome, and by no means in low situations of life.

Benjamin Twitchell of Mendon in the County of Worcester, Massachusetts, Yeoman, filed a petition for divorce. Benjamin alleged that Patience had committed the crime of adultery on 3 April 1786 and several times prior to that time, destroying the peace, happiness, and prosperity of their family.<sup>[34]</sup> By order and decree of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, the bonds of matrimony of Benjamin and Patience Twitchell were dissolved in October 1786.<sup>[35]</sup> The court record states that Benjamin Twitchell of Medway and

<sup>29</sup> Court Records 1686–1799 (Suffolk County, Mass.), Court Records 1786, images 433–434 [FHL 947018, DGS 7942999], online at FamilySearch.org.

<sup>30</sup> “The Worcester Magazine,” *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester, Mass.), 4 May 1786, Issue 4, unnumbered.

<sup>31</sup> *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, Mass.), 10 May 1786, vol. V, issue 15, p. 3, col. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester, Mass.), 18 May 1786, issue VII, p. 86, col. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Annual Register, or A View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year of 1787* (London: J. Dodsley, 1787), 223.

<sup>34</sup> Suffolk County (Mass.) Court Files, 1629–1797, Court files v. 1107 cases 154689–154756 1785–1786; image 337–344 [FHL 944832, DGS 8297178], online at FamilySearch.org.

<sup>35</sup> Court Records 1686–1799 (Suffolk County, MA), [note 29], image 434.

Patience Tucker of Cumberland lawfully married on 17 June 1771 in the First Church of Christ of Medway, Massachusetts.<sup>[36]</sup> Mrs. Patience Twitchell died in Mendon on 22 June 1822.<sup>[37]</sup>

### Benjamin and Hannah (Tucker) Twitchell

Details of the family of Benjamin and Hannah (Tucker) Twitchell and their children have been previously published and will not be repeated in this article.<sup>[38]</sup> Prior to 1810 Benjamin and his family moved to Ontario, Ontario County, New York.<sup>[39]</sup> On 21 August 1820, Benjamin, a New York resident, submitted a Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application.<sup>[40]</sup> His affidavit describes him as a 70-year-old indigent farmer, unable to perform labor due to age and infirmities, living with an unnamed 55-year-old wife.

The significantly younger spouse was, presumably, Hannah Tucker, reported to be born in October 1767. A marriage record for Benjamin and Hannah has not been found; however, the Twitchell genealogy (see note 1) gives a marriage date of 11 May 1790 and enumerates five children including a son Asa. Enclosed in the pension folder is a letter of correspondence from Asa Twitchell who gives the death of his father on 13 September 1824 and mother on 11 August 1836.<sup>[41]</sup> Benjamin's final pension payment was issued in the 3rd quarter of 1824, which corresponds with his reported death date.<sup>[42]</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Suffolk County (Mass.) Court Files, 1629–1797 [note 34], Court files v. 1112 cases 154985–155041, 1786, image 596 [FHL 935880, DGS 8296540], online at FamilySearch.org.

<sup>37</sup> Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626–2001 [note 28], Mendon deaths, image 341. The death of Mrs. Patience Twitchell is recorded in the Mendon town register. Unlike the majority of entries with a Mrs prefix, the spouse of the deceased is not identified.

<sup>38</sup> Twitchell, *Genealogy of the Twitchell family* [note 1].

<sup>39</sup> 1810 US census, Ontario, Ontario County, New York, roll 33, p. 783 (penned), line 13, entry for Benj Twitchell household.

<sup>40</sup> Revolutionary War Pensions, Application S42560, Benjamin Twitchell, images 1–14, online at Fold3.com.

<sup>41</sup> Revolutionary War Pensions [note 40], Benjamin Twitchell, image 12.

<sup>42</sup> Final Payment Vouchers Index for Military Pensions, 1818–1864, Benjamin Twitchell, New York, New York; Fold3.com (<https://www.fold3.com/image/255336063?terms=twitchell>).