

Western Massachusetts Families in 1790 Sketch: Richard Morton of New Salem

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[Editors' note: This article is an example of the sketches in the Western Massachusetts Families in 1790 study project sponsored by NEHGS. The first 200 sketches have been published, and more — like this sketch — appear on AmericanAncestors.org.]

MORTON, RICH^p 1 – 3 – 1 – 0 – 0
New Salem, Hampshire County^[1]

RICHARD MORTON, son of Martin and Jerusha (Twitchell) Morton, was born in Athol, Worcester County, Massachusetts, on 16 June 1755.^[2] He died in Orwell, Vermont, between 31 October 1809, when he deeded land, and 22 December 1809, when his administrator, Pliny Smith, first met with the probate judge.^[3] Richard married first in New Salem on 30 May 1782, **THANKFUL EATON**,^[4] who was born in Middleborough, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, about 1763 and died about February 1790, daughter of Silvanus and Deborah (Caswell) Eaton.^[5] He married second in New Salem 2 December 1790, **DEBORAH EATON**,^[6] sister of Thankful, born about 1765. Deborah died between 1 December 1791 and 5 July 1796,^[7] almost certainly childless.

The probate records of her father, Sylvanus Eaton, in 1792 and those of her brother, Sylvanus Eaton 2nd, in 1795, both of New Salem, name Thankful, Deborah, and Thankful's children. On 23 April 1796, Richard Morton

¹ 1790 U.S. Census, New Salem, Hampshire County, Massachusetts, roll 4, p. 405, one male 16 or over, three males under 16, and one female.

² Helen Schatvet Ullmann, CG, "A Morton Line: From Richard¹ Morton of Hatfield, Massachusetts, through Richard⁵ Morton of Athol, Massachusetts, and Orwell, Vermont," computer printout (Acton, Mass., 2000) [FHL 1,425,369 item 11], 12, 14; *Vital Records of Athol, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Worcester, Mass.: Franklin P. Rice, 1910), 64. The probate file of Jerusha's brother Abner, who died in Athol in 1825, names all of his brothers and sisters, including "Jerusha Morton, Vermont, deceased" (Worcester County Probate, Abner Twitchell, File 60262).

³ Orwell Deeds, 5:254–255; Pliny Smith's account, Fair Haven District Probate, 8:64. Orwell was then in Rutland County but since 1847 has been in Addison County.

⁴ *Vital Records of New Salem, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Salem, Mass., Essex Institute, 1927); intentions in Athol 12 January 1782 (*Vital Records of Athol* [note 2], 151).

⁵ Helen S. Ullmann, "Silvanus Eaton, 1734–ca. 1791/2," *The Mayflower Descendant*, 39 (1989):17–20; Lee Douglas Van Antwerp, MD, CG, revised by Robert S. Wakefield, FASG, *Mayflower Families Through Five Generations, Volume Nine: Family of Francis Eaton*, (Plymouth, Mass.: General Society of Mayflower Descendants, 1996), 117–118.

⁶ *Vital Records of New Salem* [note 4], 96.

⁷ Ullmann, "Eaton" [note 5], *Mayflower Descendant*, 39:20.

requested that Seth Twitchell of Athol be appointed guardian to his children. Seth Twitchell was not only Richard's uncle (his mother's brother), he had also married Huldah Eaton, sister of Thankful and Deborah. At the settlement of Sylvanus Eaton, Sr.'s estate 5 July 1796 the accounting reads: "to Deborah Morton (she being now dead . . . to be paid to her husband)."^[8]

Richard married third, sometime before 23 December 1807, and probably a few years earlier, **ELECTA POWELL**. On that date "Mrs. Electa Morton now residing in Sudbury," Vermont, was warned out of town.^[9] Since Richard was clearly a resident of Orwell, one wonders whether she had left him, taking her child, and the town of Sudbury did not want to incur expenses on their behalf. After Richard's death, Electa married again in Orwell on 6 December 1810, James Ballard.^[10] According to one account, he was born about 1784 in Rhode Island, died in 1882 in Monroe County, New York, married in Rutland County, Electa Powell, born in Massachusetts about 1792 and died in 1880. They had eight children.^[11] However, it appears that Electa was born considerably earlier, in Lanesborough, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, on 17 December 1785, and was baptized at St. Luke's Church in Lanesborough on 15 September 1793, daughter of Miles Powell and his first wife.^[12]

On 16 November 1820, James Ballard of Ogden, Monroe County, New York, sold to Levi Ballard his right as an heir to the estate of Luke Ballard. On 18 October 1827 Elizabeth Ballard and Levi Ballard of Orwell and Gideon and "Maribah" Morton of Sudbury quitclaimed to John Jackson of Orwell on two pieces of land in Orwell, "all the lands that Luke Ballard died possessed of excepting James Ballard and Huldah Sisters [*sic*, a surname?] share as heirs to sd estate."^[13] The relationship between them all to Luke is not mentioned, but they were probably his widow and children. There is no probate for Luke in Fair Haven District.^[14]

⁸ Hampshire County Probate, Box 52, #43 and 44.

⁹ Sudbury Town Records, 1790–1840, p. 71 [FHL 2,025,059 item 1].

¹⁰ Orwell Town Records, 5:382 [FHL 0,028,634].

¹¹ *Ballard–Ballard Bits*, no author (1978), 104, copy at NEHGS, compiled principally from printed sources. Their eighth child was named Miles, which supports Electa's parentage. This compiler understandably either ignores or was unaware of Electa's brief marriage to Richard Morton.

¹² Lanesborough Vital Records [FHL 1,901,559], p. 58; St. Luke's Church records as transcribed in the Rollin H. Cooke Collection, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts [FHL 0,234,569, item 4], p. 36. According to Mary Ann Wheeler, who has compiled *Sudbury, Vermont: Genealogies, Vital Records, and Census Records* (Rockport, Maine: Picton Press, 2000). Electa's aunt, Elizabeth (Powell) Wheeler, lived in Lanesborough from at least 1778 and the Sudbury area from about 1798 to 1810 (Mary Ann Wheeler, "The Wheeler Family of Sudbury, Vermont," *Vermont Genealogy* 4 [1999]:69–72).

¹³ Orwell Town Records [note 10], 9:155, 199.

¹⁴ The 1790 census shows a Luke Ballard in Adamstown in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, and another in Whitestown, Montgomery County, New York (1790 U.S. Census, Adams, roll 4, p. 23; *ibid.*, Whitestown, roll 6, p. 68). The Luke Ballard of Montgomery County is the author's ancestor on an entirely different line. Berkshire County deeds show that the Luke in Adams was a resident there at least from 1784 to 1793. His wife's name appears as Elizabeth in three deeds (Berkshire County Deeds, Middle District, 27:213, 217, 219; Northern District, 3:131, 132, 293, 296). He owned land together with an Ichabod Ballard whose wife was named Rhoda. A Luke Ballard took the freeman's oath in Orwell, Vermont, 6 September 1808 (Orwell Deeds, 5:519, mentioned in Helen S. Ullmann, "Beyond the Printed Genealogy: Some Descendants of Sherebiah³ Ballard," *Register* 146 [1992]:120, which distinguishes between the two Lukes. The Luke Ballard of Orwell,

At some point, apparently after his marriage to Electa, Richard fathered a child by Philinda Morton. While she was not Richard's daughter (see below), Philinda was probably a fairly close relative unless she was the wife of someone named Morton.

It was probably this Richard Morton who enrolled in the First Baptist Church in Athol in 1773. There was also evidently a Baptist church in New Salem to which many of the West Royalston (Athol) members moved in the 1790s.^[15] However, no trace of any Mortons has been found in Orwell Baptist church records.^[16]

Richard was a private in Capt. Ichabod Dexter's Company, Col. B. Ruggles Woodbridge's Regiment. He enlisted 1 May 1775 and served three months, eight days. He signed a receipt for advance pay at Cambridge Camp 20 June 1775.^[17] This was three days after the Battle of Bunker Hill, so presumably Richard was among the 1,200 men under Colonel William Prescott and Major-General Israel Putnam who occupied Breed's Hill on the night of June 16 and faced three waves of British assaults the next day. Although the Americans had to retreat, the British suffered 1,054 casualties in contrast to the Americans' 420, and the incident aroused the confidence of the colonies that they could succeed.^[18]

Probably the first land Richard Morton bought was two tracts totaling 58 acres in Athol for which he paid his father £100 silver on 1 May 1780. Six weeks later, on 16 June 1780, Richard Morton and Eleazer Graves bought part of lot 4 "in what was called Kendall's farm" from Josiah Kendall of Lancaster for 316 bushels of rye.^[19] On 22 April 1784, Richard "of Athol" sold to Jesse Kendall one of the tracts he had bought from his father. Evidently, some deeds were not recorded; the only other deed of sale in Worcester County was on 1 April 1796 when Richard, being of New Salem, sold 15½ acres in Athol.^[20]

As noted above, at the 1790 census, Richard, three males under 16, and one female (daughter Sarah) were living in New Salem. On 20 November 1796, Richard Morton of New Salem sold two 4th division lots in New Salem (lots 115 and 36), 50 acres each, to Amos Adams of Charlestown for \$500.^[21]

In 1800 Richard was in Orwell along with his father Martin and brother Martin Jr. Richard's household contained, besides himself, one female 10–16

born in Smithfield, Rhode Island, 29 January 1749, son of Jeremiah and Abigail (____) Ballard, had a brother named Ichabod (James N. Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island 1636–1850*, 21 vols. [Providence, R.I.: Narragansett Historical Publishing Co., 1891–1912], 3 [Smithfield]:90).

¹⁵ William G. Lord, *History of Athol, Massachusetts* (Athol, Mass.: the author, 1953), 116; William G. Lord, *History of the First Baptist Church of Athol, Massachusetts* (Athol, Mass.: Goulay, 1912?), 9, 11.

¹⁶ Photocopies of typed copies of "A Book of Records for the Baptist Church of Christ, in Orwell, Vermont, 1787–1826" at the Orwell Historical Society were supplied by Doris Wickman of Orwell. The original records are in Special Collections at the Bailey/Howe Library at the University of Vermont in Burlington.

¹⁷ Massachusetts Secretary of State, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the War of the Revolution*, 17 vols. (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1896–1908), 11:145.

¹⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1949), 4:383–384.

¹⁹ Worcester County Deeds, 88:45; 112:217.

²⁰ Worcester County Deeds, 95:123; 295:426, recorded 5 December 1833.

²¹ Franklin County Deeds (copies from Hampshire County), 11:64, with reference to Proprietors' Records. New Salem town records burned in 1855.

and a male 10–16,^[22] presumably Sally and Gideon or Elisha. Thus Richard married Electa after the 1800 census was taken.

On 9 March 1801 Richard Morton “of Orwell” bought “at vendue” (i.e., auction) some land from Pliny Smith, Collector.^[23] In March 1804 Richard “Mortin” was elected a surveyor of highways, and 10 March 1807 he was chosen hayward.^[24] On 31 October 1809, he deeded the farm he was living on to Pitt W. Hyde who would maintain Richard’s parents.^[25]

Administration on the estate of “Ritchard Morton” of Orwell took place in Fair Haven, Vermont, Probate District.^[26] The agreement between the heirs, which was signed 5 March 1811, reads:

We Gideon Morton, Elisha Morton, Sally Morton, Phila Morton and Electa Ballard late widow of the sd Ritchard Morton now the wife of James Ballard and the said James Ballard for himself have agreed that . . . shall be appointed a committee . . . to divide . . . the sd Gideon and Elisha is to have set over to them . . . each two parts out of ten as in other words to have each one for himself double the value and amount out of said estate to either of the girls and the late widow now Electa Ballard and her daughter [*sic*] Abigail and Phila and her two daughters Innocence and Virtue and Sally who is daughter to the said Ritcher shall all receive equal . . . [signed] Gideon Morton, Elisha Morton, Philinda Morton, Sally Morton, Electa Ballard, James Ballard; [witnesses:] Pliny Smith, Joab Smith.^[27]

Thus Electa, Abigail, Phila, Innocence, Virtue, and Sally received the remaining six equal shares after the two sons took their two double shares. This is confirmed by the distribution document dated 10 July 1812 in the probate book but recorded 27 June 1811 in town records. In this, land was first set off to Sally and Abigail and then,

Recently set off to the Remainder of heirs to said Estate to wit Gideon Mortin Elisha Mortin Philinda Mortin and her two Children Innocence and Virtue though not Legal heirs yet by an Express agreement of all the Legal heirs to said Richard Mortins Estate the said Philinda Mortin was to Draw and Receive three tenths of the whole of said Richards Estate Both Real and Personal for the support of her self and two Children Innocence and Virtue and as a consideration to the said Philinda for indemnifying said Estate against a bond which the town of Orwell held against said Richard Mortin previous to his Decease for the sum of four hundred Dollars conditioned that the said Richard should save said town or the inhabitants thereof from all or any Expence in supporting the said Innocence [*“and Virtue”* is written and crossed out in the probate district copy] one of said children which was supposed and considered to be the said Richard Mortin’s child though not born in lawful wedlock and of course not a Legal heir to any part of said estate also to Electa Ballard, the Late widow of the said Richard Mortin Deceasd, making in the whole Eight tenths of said Estate and set off all together in one peice [*sic*] on the South Part of the said Richard Mortins farm as the said Gideon Elisha Philinda and Electa and her

²² 1800 U.S. Census, Orwell, Rutland County, Vermont, roll 52, p. 117.

²³ Orwell Town Records [note 10], 3:191.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4:313; 5:48–49.

²⁵ Orwell Deeds, 5:254–255.

²⁶ Fair Haven District Probate, 8:63–70.

²⁷ Fair Haven District Probate, 8:63.

Present Husband James Ballard Requested they having each one for themselves sold their undivided share of said land to Joab Smith, Esq.^[28]

This document as it appears in town records was signed by “Phylinda” Mortin, James and Electa Ballard and Elisha and Gideon Mortin. Miss Philinda Morton married in Orwell on 5 October 1814, Jared Palmer of Castleton, Rutland County.^[29] For further disposition of Richard’s estate, for speculation as to Philinda’s identity, and for additional detail on the children listed below, see the author’s papers cited in notes 2 and 40.

Children of Richard and Thankful (Eaton) Morton, birthdates of the first four from a paper in Silvanus Eaton’s probate file:

- i. GILBERT MORTON, b., probably in Athol, 27 April 1783; living 23 April 1796;^[30] d. before administration on his father’s estate.
- ii. GIDEON MORTON, b. Athol or New Salem 20 May 1787; d., probably in Sudbury, Rutland Co., Vt.,^[31] 2 April 1870, aged 82 years, 10 months, and was buried in Hill Cemetery, on the main road just north of the center of Sudbury.^[32] He m. in Orwell, Vt., 5 Feb. 1810, MARYBATH BALLARD,^[33] probably daughter of Luke and Elizabeth (____) Ballard and sister of the James Ballard who married Gideon’s stepmother, Electa. Marybath was b. 11 April 1792,^[34] d. 4 Feb. 1854, aged 61 years, 9 months, and was bur. in Hill Cemetery.^[35]
- iii. ELISHA MORTON, b. Athol or New Salem 29 April 1788; d. probably Chester, Geauga Co., Ohio, before the 1870 census; probably m. BETSEY _____, b. ca. 1785.^[36]
- iv. SALLY MORTON, b., probably in New Salem, 8 Feb. 1790; d. Athol 20 Dec. 1827, aged 38,^[37] bur. Central Cemetery there;^[38] m. New Salem 13 Feb.

²⁸ Fair Haven District Probate, 8:63, 67–68; Orwell Town Records [note 10], 5:400–402.

²⁹ Orwell Town Records [note 10], 6:336; *Columbian Patriot*, Middlebury, Vt., 26 October 1814, p. 3, “In Orwell, Mr. Jared Palmer, of Castleton, to Miss Philinda Morton.”

³⁰ Silvanus Eaton 2nd probate (Ullmann, “Eaton” [note 5], *Mayflower Descendant* 39:19).

³¹ H. Perry Smith, *History of Rutland County, Vermont* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Co., 1886), 816; his death was not recorded in Sudbury, nor was it noticed in the *Rutland Herald* during the week after his death.

³² Photograph of the gravestone online at FindaGrave.com, memorial no. 124603793; Margaret R. Jenks, *Benson, Hubbardton, and Sudbury Cemetery Inscriptions, Rutland County, Vermont*, (n.p.: the author, 1993), 68; visit by Helen S. Ullmann in October 1998.

³³ Orwell Town Records [note 10], 5:300 say “Meribee” (there is no dot over the second to last e); her gravestone says “Marybath.” Meribah in the Bible is the place where Moses smote the rock and rivers of water gushed forth (Numbers 20:13 and other places). There is no spelling “Marybath” in the King James version of the Bible.

³⁴ Note addressed to R. G. Morton “from someone in Sudbury, Vt., postmarked May 3, 1880,” supplied to the author by Robert Morton. In the 1850 census her birthplace was given as “unknown” (1850 U.S. Census, Sudbury, roll 927, p. 160B).

³⁵ Sudbury Vital Records, 4:28, a volume in the town clerk’s office, evidently compiled from the cemeteries; Jenks, *Sudbury Cemetery Inscriptions* [note 32], 68; photograph of the gravestone online at FindaGrave.com, memorial no. 124603929.

³⁶ Ullmann, “A Morton Line” [note 2], 32–33.

³⁷ *Vital Records of Athol* [note 2], 229.

³⁸ Photograph of the gravestone online at FindaGrave.com, memorial no. 140163560.

1815, “BARTHOLOMUS WOODARD” of Athol,^[39] son of Joseph and Hannah (Woodward) Woodward.^[40] b. ca. 1785;^[41] d. Athol 6 March 1827 aged 42 years, bur. Central Cemetery in Athol.^[42] They are ancestors of the author.

Child of Richard and Electa (Powell) Morton:

- v. ABIGAIL MORTON, b., probably ca. 1803–1807; no guardianship found. On 28 May 1811, Pliny Smith of Orwell, for \$1, deeded to Abigail Morton of Orwell 10 acres and 12 rods of land, “the same piece set off to Abigail Morton as her share of the estate of her father Richard Morton . . . reserving the use and improvement of the same for Martin Morton during his own and his wife’s natural life.”^[43] She was still a landowner in 1823 in Orwell.^[44]

Child of Richard Morton and Philinda Morton:

- vi. INNOCENCE MORTON, illegitimate, b. ca. 1807–1808; d. 12 Sept. 1841 in her 34th year; bur. in the Old Castleton Cemetery, Castleton, Vt., where her stone says “Innocence P.,” suggesting she used her stepfather’s name, Palmer;^[45] m. OBADIAH C. SMITH, b. ca. 1808, d. 27 Oct. 1871 age 63, bur. Hillside Cemetery, two stones away from Innocence’s mother, Philinda, along with his second wife, Roxana Seamans.^[46] In 1850 in Castleton, Obadiah C. Smith was 42, a farmer, with Roxana 45, Orson 14, Mary 12 and Julia 10, all b. Vt.^[47]

Child of Philinda Morton, included in the settlement of Richard’s estate:

- vii. VIRTUE MORTON. When her mother Philinda married in 1814, she was called “Miss Philinda Morton,” so Virtue was probably born out of wedlock. Given the language in the probate record, it appears that Richard was not Virtue’s father even though his legal heirs agreed that she should have a share in the estate.

Helen Schatvet Ullmann, CG, FASG, is associate editor of the Register.

³⁹ *Vital Records of New Salem* [note 4], 127.

⁴⁰ Helen S. Ullmann, “Our Woodward Lines in Massachusetts and Vermont,” typescript (Acton, Mass., 1992), [FHL 1,697,632, item 8; copy also at NEHGS].

⁴¹ Age 42 at death in 1827; probably age 10–16 in the 1800 census, but Percy Emmons Woodward, *Some Descendants of Nathaniel Woodward, Mathematician*, Mary Lovering Holman, ed. (Concord, N.H.: Rumford Press, 1940), 21, says he was born in 1777.

⁴² *Vital Records of Athol* [note 2], 228; photograph of the gravestone online at FindaGrave.com, memorial no. 140164218, completely illegible, also called the Old Pleasant Street Cemetery.

⁴³ Orwell Deeds, 8:527.

⁴⁴ On 7 April 1823, when Peter Reynolds sold some land, it was described as abutting on Abigail Morton’s land, on that of the widow Ballard, and on the Sudbury line (Orwell Deeds, 8:240).

⁴⁵ Margaret R. Jenks, *Castleton Cemetery Inscriptions, Rutland County, Vermont* (Richardson, Texas: the compiler, 1989), 7. Dawn Hance of Rutland, Vermont, says that Jenks, who gave the year as 1811, could not read the year on the stone correctly because it is so worn; a 1917 transcription of Castleton cemeteries in the town clerk’s office says 1841.

⁴⁶ Jenks, *Castleton Cemetery* [note 45], 28.

⁴⁷ 1850 U.S. Census, Castleton, roll 927, p. 185A.