

The Identity of Tamar Church (d. 1789), of New Marlborough, Massachusetts.

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February 2026.

Genealogical investigations are frequently stymied by an inability to fully identify links in the chain(s). My efforts over the past several years have focused on constructing a tree of my direct-line grandparents; this, largely because more than a thousand of these 'GGPs' exist as the central figures in my known New England and New York colonial and post-colonial ancestry. One particularly intriguing such ancestor is Tamar Church, a fourth GGP on my father's side of the family. The direct links through to myself from her seem clear enough:

Amos Chapin, 4GG, married Tamar Church in New Marlborough MA, 1776; Noah Wright (3GG, m. daughter Chloe Chapin in New Marlborough MA, 1805); son Gurdon Howland Wright (2GG, m. Eliza Betsy Lounsbury in Sheffield MA, 1832); Nelson Eliada Gordon (GG, m. daughter Caroline Augusta Wright in Sheffield MA, 1863); George Edward Smith (G, m. daughter Luella Brinsmaid Gordon in Sheffield MA, 1905); son George N. Smith (father, m. Hazel L. Munson in Hillsdale NY, 1935); son Charles H. Smith.

So, too, does Tamar's actual existence, as confirmed by her 1776 marriage and 1789 death records, and the various documentations on her several children. Her first name as given does sometimes vary – to Tamor, Tamer, and Tamur – but her last name, Church, seems to be altogether without reference, an important missing clue. Neither are there any solid referrals to a date, or place, of birth, though sometimes the latter is given, undocumented, as 'Hampshire' (county?), Massachusetts, or New Marlborough MA.

The key problem emerges when one finds out that there are no referrals anywhere as to who Tamar's *parents* might have been. If the few recordings of her last name are correct, her father's surname should have been Church, but to my knowledge there are no guesses as to which Church, or from where. This leaves us only with a suggestive set of clues combining elements of geography, family lineage, and historical happenstance.

Considering the multidimensional sea of potential relations involved, it may seem premature to argue for a particular set of answers, but I will do so anyway. My suggestion is that Tamar may have been the daughter of Caleb Church (1741-1827) and Tamar Warner (1738-1764), at her supposed time of birth residents of Harvard, Worcester County, Massachusetts. The reasoning goes as follows.

Caleb Church came from a long line of New World Churches (Joshua 1709-1766, Isaac 1678-1752, Caleb 1646-1722, Richard 1608-1668) who originally arrived in the Massachusetts Bay area in 1630, and over the next few generations spread westward in Massachusetts and southward into Rhode Island. Caleb himself seems to have lived a rather impulsive early life; although not a lot is known about him, he was connected to several central and eastern Massachusetts towns before finally settling down in the north-central village of Ashfield in 1785. Along the way he was married three times: to Tamar Warner in 1762 (at Harvard), Elizabeth Walker in 1764 (at Bolton), and Hannah Pool in 1772 (at Middleborough).

Beyond these simple facts, it turns out that Caleb was apparently something of a lothario. Consider his three marriage dates against the dates of birth for his first child in each: (1) married 11 May 1762, first (unnamed) child *died* 18 February 1763; (2) married 11 July (or possibly 2 October) 1764, first child Hannah born 17 February 1765; (3) married 23 June 1772, first child Caleb born October 1772. This pattern of jumping the gun suggests the possibility of a previous pregnancy with Tamar Warner, perhaps as early as 1755, when he would have been about fourteen and she, around seventeen. Considering their ages, the families may well have discouraged a marriage, opting instead to pass the illegitimate youngster, also named Tamar, on to a relative within the Church or Warner family, or even to someone outside of them. (Making the last two scenarios more likely is the fact that Nathan Warner, Tamar Warner's father, was, judging from the inscription on his 1792 headstone, quite the square-shooter, while Joshua Church (d.1766), Caleb's father, was a slave owner: perhaps the Warners couldn't stand the thought of the child being raised in a Church household...) Concerning Caleb, there appears to be no record of death for his second wife Elizabeth, though her final child with Caleb, Silas, was born "about 1771." Did she die (just before Caleb married Hannah Pool), or was there an undocumented divorce, or an abandonment, or some other event?

There is in fact some hard evidence that supports this overall theory. DNA tracings established through Ancestry.com reveal matches between myself and current-day descendants of two of Caleb's children, one each from his second and third marriages. These latter are Hannah Betsey Church (1765-1814), described as a half 4th great-grandaunt, at 11 centimorgans; and Sarah Church (1784-1854), also a half 4th great-grandaunt, at 9 centimorgans. Meanwhile, there are four matches between myself and current-day descendants of Tamar Warner, but only through Tamar Church: two through my 3rd great-grandmother Chloe Chapin (Tamar Church's daughter), at 195 centimorgans (direct-line) and 21 centimorgans (through a great-grandaunt); and two through a great-granduncle, at 8 centimorgans, and 9 centimorgans. Finally, there are eight matches between myself and current-day descendants of three of Tamar Church's children: (1) Chloe Chapin (1778-1835), at 21, 54 and 195 centimorgans (2) Chloe's brother (my 3rd great-granduncle) Amos Chapin (1782-1872), at 8, 9 and 9 centimorgans (3) Chloe's sister (my 3rd great-grandaunt) Anna Chapin (1784-1874), at 11 and 11 centimorgans.

It of course should also not be ignored that Tamar Warner and Tamar Church share the same first name, as Tamar was not a common name in general then (but see later discussion). Nor is it necessarily irrelevant that the name 'Tamar' itself is taken from a lesser-known Biblical character who was conceived through incest.

Even if that construction of the lineage turns out to be correct, an arguably equally larger mystery remains: How did Tamar Church find her way to the western Massachusetts town of New Marlborough, halfway across the state, to be married there to Amos Chapin (1751-1833) in 1776? At the time of Tamar's birth, this small town in the Berkshires was barely fifteen years old, having first been settled in 1739 by Benjamin Wheeler (1693-1759). Wheeler, after marrying in 1717, had previously lived in Lancaster and Bolton MA before moving west.

It is surely not coincidental to this story that Lancaster, Bolton, Harvard, and Groton (the last, the birthplace of Nathan Warner) lie only a few miles from one another (to the northeast of Worcester), with Marlborough sitting just several miles further to the south. These were all very small towns at that point, so it seems almost certain that Wheeler must have known Caleb Church's father Joshua (1709-1766), who in 1728 married Annis Johnson (1712-1792) at Lancaster, to which her father Josiah (1683-1727) had moved previously. This is all the more certain because Benjamin Wheeler's nephew, the Revd. Mr. Joseph Wheeler (1735-1793, born in Concord and died in Worcester) was the official who presided over the Church-Warner wedding in Harvard in 1762. Joseph Wheeler's father Joseph (1691-1780, born in Concord and died in Lancaster), was thus Benjamin Wheeler's brother.

Most interesting, however, is the fact that the other most significant New Marlborough town father, born in Marlborough, Massachusetts in 1712, was a man named Noah – wait for it – Church. Noah's father David (abt. 1677 – aft. 1717) was married to Mary Howe, one of a large group of Howes also living in the Marlborough area. Noah Church joined in on the planning for a new town (*i.e.*, New Marlborough) in about 1740, and a year or two later married Lydia (née Barnard; b. 1717). Beginning in 1743, they had a total of at least nine children, all born in Marlborough – and with startling regularity: nearly exactly every two years without break, ending with the arrival of Noah Jr. in 1760.

I have so far been unable to connect the Noah/David line of Churches to the one including Caleb Church (the identity of David Church's father is uncertain, leaving a two-generation gap in affinities going back to original settlement times), but a direct link is likely, and in any case only one of several connections in the present context. Consider the following passages, taken from pages 24-27 of the monograph *Four Brothers in the American Revolution* by Herbert Barber Howe (privately printed in 1957) :

A decade prior to Darius Howe's [one of the 'four brothers' of the book's title] birth, the General Court granted a large tract of land, part of it designated as Township #2,

to seventy-two proprietors. [This took place in 1736.] They were mostly Marlborough men and their meeting place was the Howe Tavern of which we have heard, established by John Howe the pioneer and maintained by his descendants. In its spacious common room these enthusiastic expansionists laid out a new community on paper, sought to interest purchasers and to secure migrants. ...about 1744 [actually, 1739-40?], Benjamin Wheeler, a respected citizen anxious and ready for new fields of endeavor, became the original settler in New Marlboro. ...Nehemiah Howe, a cousin of Darius, built the first grist mill in the western community and marrying Beulah Wheeler, a daughter of the first settler, constructed one of the earliest comfortable homes in the new town. Noah Church acquired land in the Berkshire Hills district but for a while continued to live in Marlborough. These men and the other proprietors devoted themselves to the undertaking with one of their chief accomplishments, of course, the organization of the church. As minister they called the Rev. Thomas Strong, Yale 1740 [Strong later performed the wedding ceremony marrying Tamar Church to Amos Chapin in New Marlborough.]... With settlers coming in, a good preacher secured, the future was bright with promise with the incorporation of the town in 1759.

About 1761 Noah and Lydia Church with their eleven children, all born in Marlborough, migrated to New Marlboro. With them went the fifteen year old Darius Howe, for the Howes and the Churches had long been friends. ...In the Church family were seven daughters and it was not long before Louise, their sixth child, and Darius Howe were greatly enjoying each other's society.... On 11 July 1771 the Rev. Thomas Strong united in marriage Darius Howe and Louise Church – the groom was twenty-four and the bride nineteen.

...In his seventy-eighth year, 7 March 1789, Noah Church died at his New Marlboro home [*maybe* : see below]. He was one of the last of the proprietors who had used the Howe Tavern in Marlborough as a center for planning the Berkshire County town.

There are several interesting items in these words. First, it is apparent that there was a good deal of familiarity among the members of the families named here – Church, Wheeler, Strong and Howe – through multiple generations and places (including many intermarriages). The timing of Noah Church's move to New Marlborough is also relevant; he probably waited for the town to be incorporated (and the birth of his last child Noah Jr. on 19 October 1760) before heading out. It is also consistent that he allowed the Howe teenager Darius to tag along, as the "Howes and the Churches had long been friends." Did they allow another outsider, a very young Tamar, to go with them as well? She would later marry in New Marlborough on 12 December 1776, and if she was, say, nineteen at the time she would have been about four in 1761 (born in approximately 1757, several years before Caleb Church married Tamar Warner in 1762).

Importantly, there is also the mention above of the "eleven children" and "seven daughters." In any accounting I have seen of the family, there are only nine children identified, six of whom are daughters. Was Tamar the "seventh daughter"?

This chronology also casts some doubt on the sometimes-seen statement that Tamar was born in New Marlborough. The Noah party's 1761 arrival date would leave her at fifteen or less for her marriage into the respectable Chapin family in 1776. And there were no other Church families in town until at least the 1780s.

Noah Church was a man of some wealth, a sought-after surveyor and respected deacon in the local New Marlborough church (which he had helped found). Forgetting some of the above, one might think Tamar was another (possibly illegitimate) child of Noah Church. The regularity of appearance of his other children argues both for and against such a proposition, as there is both the mere fact of the otherwise unbroken regularity, and the reality that the gaps involved are just large enough to fit an additional child into the sequence in the late 1850s. But it just doesn't quite make sense, especially if she was legitimate: why would she have been ignored in the official town statistics records? I know of no mentions of any connections between her and Noah Church, which brings up the subject of the latter's date of death, and will.

Almost all recorded secondary sources on the date of Noah's death give this as 7 March 1789. This is apparently incorrect. Not only is his will dated 15 May 1790, but the *Register of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, in the Town of New Marlborough, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1734-1918, Vol. 1, 1734-1858* (hereafter referred to as 'RTNM'), Image 251, gives a death date of "Noah Church Sen." On 10 August 1798 (this may have been overlooked because it consists of an image of the original handwritten text only, and is not electronically searchable). Further, Noah and his son Noah Jr. appear as separate entries (household heads) in the New Marlborough pages of the Federal Census of 1790. Tamar is not mentioned in Noah Church Sr.'s 1790 will, though all of his regularly documented children are, but this is immaterial, as RTNM (Image 254) reports that Tamar (Church) Chapin died on 9 August 1789 (so in any case would not have been mentioned in Noah's will). This assumes, of course, that he actually *didn't* die on 7 March 1789, and what appears obvious, really isn't for some reason.

A Confusion of Characters

The identities of some of the characters in this story have apparently been mixed up in many cases – due in large part, likely, to name duplications. Following is my 'corrected' list of the main parties involved, largely based on the RTNM data:

--Amos Chapin Sr. [husband of Tamar (Church) Chapin d.1789, and secondly Tryphena (Sheldon) Chapin 1759-1850]: born 7 June 1752 in Mendon MA; died 13 November 1833 in Sheffield MA.

--Peter Chapin [Amos Chapin Sr.'s uncle; husband of Tamar/Tamartha Younglove]: born 1736 in Mendon; died 1793 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 251 listing: "date lost"].

--Tamar/Tamartha (Younglove) Chapin [wife of Peter Chapin]: born 1738/40 in Mendon MA; died 1790 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 251 listing: "date lost"; "wife of Peter Chapin"].

--Tamer (Chapin) Austin [daughter of Peter and Tamar/Tamartha (Younglove) Chapin]: born 4 September 1784 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 66 listing: "parents: Peter and Tamer Chapin"]; died 1835 in Moriah NY.

--Tamor (Church) Chapin [wife of Amos Chapin Sr.]: died 9 August 1789 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 254 listing: "first wife of Amos Chapin"].

--Tamor (Chapin) Austin [daughter of Amos and Tryphena Chapin]: born 20 July 1794 [RTNM Image 84 listing]; died 1879 in Sheffield MA.

--unnamed (Tamor?) Chapin [daughter of Amos and Tryphena Chapin]: born 4 December 1790 [RTNM Image 84 listing: "parents: Amos and Tamor" {an error: should be Tryphena, not Tamor, if other dates are correct}]; died 15 December 1790 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 84 listing].

--Noah Church Sen. [husband of Lydia (Barnard) Church]: born 18 September 1712 in Marlborough MA; died 19 August 1798 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 251 listing; parents not given].

--Lydia (Barnard) Church [wife of Noah Church Senior]: born 12 October 1717 in Andover MA; date of death unknown, but probably after 1790 [often recorded as 4 April 1789, but this confuses date given below for Lydia Church b. 1788].

--Noah Church Jr. [son of Noah Church Senior]: born 1760 in Marlborough; died 1807 in New Marlborough.

--Noah B. Church [grandson of Noah Church Senior]: born 14 January 1802 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 102 listing: "parents: Osgood and Nancy Church"]; died 1876.

--Lydia Church [granddaughter of Noah Church Senior]: born 17 July 1772 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 67 listing: "parents: David and Elizabeth Church"]; died 3 June 1789 [RTNM Image 67 listing].

--Noah Church [grandson of Noah Church Senior]: born 24 May 1791 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 67 listing: "parents: David and Elizabeth Church"]; died 1812.

--Noah Church [grandson of Noah Church Senior]: born 14 December 1788 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 78 listing: "parents: Noah Jr. and Lucy Church"]; died 7 March 1789 [RTNM Image 250 listing]. Twin brother of Lydia Church born 1788.

--Lydia Church [granddaughter of Noah Church Senior]: born 14 December 1788 in New Marlborough [RTNM Image 78 listing: "parents: Noah Jr. and Lucy Church"]; died 4 April 1789 [RTNM Image 250 listing]. Twin sister of Noah Church born 1788.

Previously it seems to have been accepted that Noah Church's wife Lydia died on 4 April 1789, but this seems to be a mistake appropriated from the date of death of the last person listed directly above. Not only does Lydia appear in Noah's 1790 will, but the Federal Census of 1790 lists two women as living in his house: one is presumably her, the other, probably, a servant (all of the daughters had long since married and moved away).

The data presented above also account for some other previous uncertainties; for example Tamar (Church) Chapin as possibly having been born in 1738 (Tamar/Tamartha Younglove, born in 1738 or 40, married Peter Chapin, Amos Chapin Sr.'s uncle, to also become "Tamar Chapin").

This leaves the geographical association sometimes made between Tamar (Church) Chapin and her place of birth as possibly being 'Hampshire', probably meaning County. Originally, Hampshire County consisted of the entire central and western portions of Massachusetts. In 1731 Worcester County was split off from it; further reductions defined Berkshire County in 1761, Franklin County in 1811, and Hampden County in 1812. If Tamar in fact was born in New Marlborough, this would mean she actually was born in Hampshire County, as defined at that point. Further, her possible father Caleb spent the second half of his life in the town of Ashford, which at that point was still a part of Hampshire County, though later being assigned to Franklin County.

Moreover, and although I have dwelled here on possible connections between Tamar and Noah Church, other Church families from the core of (present-day) Hampshire County could instead have been the ones mediating her move to New Marlborough. As of the mid-1700s there were many Churches in the Northampton and Hadley areas, and many of these would have known members of the Wright and Sheldon families, representatives of which were also among the earliest settlers of New Marlborough (in 1745). Further, there was at least one Warner family living in New Marlborough at the time Noah Church settled there in 1761: headed by Samuel, born in Suffield CT in 1738 (d.1824 in New Marlborough). Samuel and his first wife and family had moved there sometime between their 1759 marriage in Suffield and the birth of their first known child in New Marlborough in 1765 (*RINM* record). Samuel's father Samuel (1707-1737), it should be noted, while spending most of his short life in Suffield, had married one of the Northampton MA Sheldons, further extending the web of possibilities.

Still, Tamar may have lived all along in the Noah Church household, had someone sent her there at an early age from 'back-East,' or had she been adopted from someone locally not named Church, only taking the surname by association. As mentioned earlier, I have so far been unable to connect Noah Church to the Caleb Church line, as the previous descent of Noah's father David is uncertain. Still, there are further Churches from the immediate Marlborough area (not to mention the

Northampton-Hadley area, and elsewhere) that could have been Tamar's father (and whether or not Tamar Warner was her mother), as follows.

In an effort to examine other possible candidates for paternity, I manipulated my Ancestry.com family tree, substituting several other local Churches for Caleb Church as father. After each such substitution I checked A's ThruLines feature, which identifies present-day members who have DNA ties to ancestors who are also in my lineage. The results were underwhelming. The alternate prospective fathers I checked were: Noah Church b.1712, Adonijah Church 1710-1787 (Noah's brother), Ephraim Church 1714-1775 (another of Noah's brothers), David Church b.1745 (Noah's oldest son), Joshua Church 1709-1766 (Caleb Church b.1741's father), and Joshua Church b.1743 (Caleb Church b.1741's younger brother). *All* of these produced DNA hits at low-centimorgan levels (8 to 20), as many as five, and as few as one.

The problem seems to be that I have multiple, various generations, potential GGP's among all of the family lines involved here; specifically, the Wrights, Churches, Sheldons, Chapins, Strongs, Warners, and Howes. Thus it is not surprising that numerous remote-level associations can be identified. Further, Tamar Warner had no other surviving children beyond, possibly, Tamar Church, so there are no descendants of siblings to gauge DNA connections from.

This means that for now, at least, the final word on Tamar Church's ancestry remains elusive. The first scenario outlined above, with Caleb as father and Noah as connecting element still seems the most likely to be correct, especially considering the mother/daughter Tamar name connection and the "seven daughters" remark, but this cannot be considered conclusive. Ultimately, a better-targeted DNA analysis effort might spell the difference, but I don't have the means for such at the moment.

—Charles H. Smith, February 2026.