

John Brown
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

John Brown was the grandson of **Joseph Brown** the youngest of the eleven children of **John and Esther Makepeace Brown**. It is interesting and frustrating that the births of Joseph's 10 siblings are recorded, but I have not found the same for Joseph.

"John Brown and Ester Makepeace daughter of Thomas Makepeace of Boston were married 24th—2nd month [April 24] by Capt. Humphrey Atherton."¹

Joseph is thought to have been born in Marlborough, MA in 1677, but his name does not appear within the vital records, nor does Charles Hudson mention him in his *History of Marlborough*, although he missed the names of two other children born to John and Esther in Marlborough.²

Children of John and Esther Makepeace Brown.

The births of their first four children are listed in the vital records of both Cambridge and Lexington with slight differences in notation.

1. Cambridge—Joseph Feb 8, 1655/56 Jno and Hester; Lexington—Joseph Feb 8, 1655/56 John and Esther
 2. Cambridge—Elizabeth March 26, 1657 Jno and Hester; Lexington— Elizabeth March 25, 1657 John and Esther
 3. Cambridge—Sarah July 18, 1661 John and Ester; Lexington—Sarah July 18, 1661 John and Esther
 4. Cambridge—Mary Dec 19, 1662 John and Ester; Lexington—Mary Dec 19, 1662 John and Esther
- The remainder of their children were born in Marlborough, MA and appear in the Vital Records there.
5. Deborah April 20, 1663 John and Hester
 6. John Nov, 27, 1664 John and Esteher
 7. Hester Dec 11, 1667 John and Esteher—Hester, d. John and Hester, buried Dec. 15, 1667
 8. Ruth Dec 8, 1668 John and Esteher
 9. Thomas March 16, 1670/71 John and Hester
 10. Abiga(i)l March 9, 1674/75 John and Esther (Hester)
 11. Joseph 1677 (Marlborough)? Does not appear in the Marlborough records.

In the Marlborough records the following appeared: "Joseph, s. John, Sept. 24, 1671. Was slayne with a cart."

With the death of their first son, Joseph, John and Esther honored him by naming their last child Joseph, which it was customary to do in those times.³ Although the record of Joseph's birth was not found, he was mentioned in his father John's will, dated November 20, 1696 and probated December 14, 1696⁴

Joseph Brown, the grandfather of John, the subject of this essay, settled in Watertown Farms, now Weston, MA. There he was chosen one of the three town constables for 1701-02 and was cited on March 16, 1701/02 for not delivering his accounts. Apparently he settled the matter for he was chosen as a Selectman 1707 to 1709 and Sealer of Leathers in 1709. "The leather sealer was the town officer who had authority to see that all sales of leather were made honestly as to quality and quantity. The sealer of leather was authorized to put his 'seal' or stamp of approval on items he inspected, tested and certified."⁵

Joseph married **Ruhamah Wellington** in Watertown on November 15, 1699, born about 1680, probably in Watertown, died July 1, 1772 in Lexington, age 92, daughter of Benjamin and Elizabeth Sweetman Wellington. Their first four children were born in Watertown: 1. Ruhamah, born July 15, 1701; 2. **Daniel, father of John, the subject of this essay**, born December 21. 1703; 3. John, born May 5, 1706; 4. Joseph, born September 2, 1708.⁶

Joseph and Ruhamah moved to Lexington sometime between 1709, when he sold a piece of property in Watertown, and March 10, 1711, the date of the baptism of their son, Jonas, in Lexington. They were admitted to the Lexington church on May 31, 1713. Joseph served in Lexington, as assessor in 1714. 1715, 1721, 1722 and 1726. He was a selectman in 1722, 1724, 1725 and 1727. He was chosen Deacon of the Lexington church in 1727 and held that office until his death. He was frequently referred to as “Deacon Joseph.”⁷

Joseph and Ruhamah had their 5th through ninth children in Lexington: 5. Jonas, baptized in Lexington May 20, 1712; 6. James, baptized July 26, 1713; 7. Josiah, baptized August 21, 1715; 8. Benjamin, born June 30, 1720, and 9. William, baptized April 28, 1723.⁸ Ruhamah had her first child when she was about 21 and her last when she was about 43. Despite bearing nine children, she lived to age 92, dying July 15, 1772. Joseph had preceded her dying January 11, 1764 in his 86th year. They were both buried in Lexington’s Old Burying Ground.⁸ It was unusual to have nine children and have them all survive to adulthood.



From Death's arrest no Age is free
 Memento mori
 Here lyes Buried the
 Body of Mr JOSEPH BROWN
 who having for many years
 used the office of a Deacon
 well in the Church of Christ
 in Lexington, purchased to
 himself a good Degree and
 great Boldness in the faith which
 Is in Christ Jesus, who departed
 this Life January ye 11th A D 1764
 in the 86th year of his Age



Memento Mori
 Here lies the Body
 of Mrs. Ruhamah
 Brown wife of
 Deacon Joseph
 Brown, who depar-
 ted this Life July
 15th 1772. Aged 92 years.
 Tis but a few whose days amount
to three score years and ten;
 And all beyond that short account
To sorrow toil and pain
From death's arrest no age is free

Daniel Brown came to Lexington when his father, Joseph, moved the family there before 1711. He married his first wife Eliot Poulter about 1728. Eliot was born in Lexington on June 19, 1709, the daughter of John and Hannah Hammond Poulter. She was named in honor of her great, great uncle, John Elliot (1604-1690) who was called “the Apostle to the Indians.” John Elliot was a teacher and pastor in Roxbury for sixty years, founded the Roxbury Latin School and translated the bible into the “Massachusetts or Wampanoag” language of the local Native Americans.

Daniel served the Lexington community as assessor in 1744 and 1753, as selectman in 1752 and 1761, and was a tithingman in the church in 1735. Daniel and Eliot had two children: 1. John, baptized November 30, 1729, died March 21, 1730, less than four months old; and 2. Ruhamah, born April 7, 1731. Eliot died on March 11, 1734 at not quite 25 years of age.⁹

Daniel then married on July 16, 1736, Anne Bright of Watertown, born February 27, 1715/16, daughter of Nathaniel and Anne Bowman Bright. Daniel and Anne had eleven children: 1. Nathaniel Bowman, named to honor both his Grandfather and Grandmother, born July 1, 1737; 2. Abisha, baptized August 13, 1738; 3. Anna, born April 27, 1739; 4. Daniel, born December 20, 1741; 5. Esther, born August 12, 1744; 6. Jerusha, born March 18, 1746; 7. Martha, born June 18, 1749; 8. **John, the subject of this essay**, born August 12, 1751; 9. Hannah, baptized April 14, 1754; 10. Hannah, born April 8, 1756; and 11. Mary, born May 5, 1758.¹⁰

John Brown, the subject of this essay was 24 and 1/2 years old when the events of April 19, 1775 took place. He was a member of Captain Parkers company of Lexington militia and mustered on the Common on the morning of April, 19th. John’s first cousins, James, Solomon and Francis Brown, also responded to the alarm. As the spreadsheet on page 7 illustrates, so many in the small tight-knit community were family members, neighbors and close friends.

Where John stood in line on that fateful morning is not known. Whether he stood alongside his Brown cousins or not is also not known. What is known is that the British Regulars hurried onto the Common, formed ranks and faced off against the still-forming militia. Captain Parker, aware of the danger, stated later that “upon their sudden approach, I immediately ordered our militia to disperse and not to fire.” Some heard the order, others did not, some had already turned away and some were determined to remain in place.

The tenseness was probably palpable. The British troops were noisy and unruly, their officers not in command of the situation, and the militia was confused and in a state of some disorder. With loaded muskets on both sides, it just took an accidental discharge of a weapon or the intentional action of a zealous individual to begin the tragedy. Someone did fire. Who, or which side fired first has been a source of inquiry and controversy. Was it Cousin Solomon, as some would claim, or another eager individual who accidentally or with purpose fired that first shot?

However, the shot was fired, and the British response was at first a scattered volley and then a shattering fusillade that tore into the ranks of the militia. John was among the first to fall, killed at the first fire. The Regulars kept firing until all those who were able to, ran from the field. They left behind eight of their company dead, as well as those wounded who were not able to escape and lay writhing in agony on the Common.

After the Regulars were brought back to order, shouted their victory huzzah and marched off to Concord, the dazed survivors returned to the Common to tend the wounded and gather the dead. The eight fallen were brought into the Meeting House, coffins were hastily constructed and the slain were hurriedly buried in the Old Burying Ground, their common grave covered with branches to avoid desecration by the British should they return through town.¹¹

In 1835, the bodies of seven of the fallen were disinterred and their remains placed in a tomb behind the Revolutionary War Monument on Lexington Common.* A plaque was inscribed and affixed to the monument. The inscription on the plaque was written by Reverend Jonas Clarke who served as the minister to Lexington from 1755 until his death in 1805.

Sacred to the Liberty and the Rights of Mankind!!!
The Freedom and Independence of America,
Sealed and defended with the Blood of her Sons.

This Monument is erected
By the inhabitants of Lexington,
Under the patronage and at the expense of
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts,
To the memory of their Fellow Citizens,
Ensign *Robert Munroe*, and Messrs. *Jonas Parker*,
Samuel Hadley, *Jonathan Harrington, junr.*,
Isaac Muzzy, *Caleb Harrington* and *John Brown*,
Of Lexington, and *Asahel Porter*, of Woburn,
Who fell on this Field, the First Victims to the
Sword of British Tyranny and Oppression,
On the morning of the ever memorable
Nineteenth of April, An. Dom. 1775.
The Die was cast!!!
The Blood of these Martyrs
In the cause of God and their Country
Was the Cement of the Union of these States, then
Colonies, and gave the spring to the Spirit, Firmness
And Resolution of their Fellow Citizens.
They rose as one Man to revenge their Brethren's
Blood, and at the Point of the Sword, to assert and
Defend their native Rights.
They nobly dar'd to be free!!
The contest was long, bloody and affecting.
Righteous Heaven approved the solemn appeal,
Victory crowned their arms: and
The Peace, Liberty, and Independence of the United
States of America was their Glorious Reward.

*The body of Asahel, Porter of Woburn, the eighth casualty, was buried April 21, 1775 in Woburn's First Burial Ground. In 1975 a commemorative marker was put in place to honor him.



Revolutionary War Monument on The Common, Lexington, MA

Daniel Brown was seventy two when his son, John, was killed on the Common. I am not sure whether he was still living in Lexington at the time. His son, Nathaniel Bowman Brown, had moved to Lunenburg, MA in 1772. Daniel's second wife, Anne Bright Brown, died there in 1780.¹² They may have been living with Nathaniel and his family. Nathaniel moved to Plymouth, VT in 1789 and Daniel either came with him or moved there shortly afterward.¹³ He died there in 1796, and is buried in the Plymouth Notch Cemetery in Plymouth VT.



Grave of Daniel Brown, Plymouth Notch Cemetery, Plymouth, Windsor County, VT¹⁴

Nathaniel, who evidently preferred to be called “Bowman,” was a lieutenant during the Revolutionary War and an important man in Plymouth He is considered to be the fourth individual to settle there.¹⁵ He was buried in Plymouth and his grave marker reads: “Bowman Brown died July 30, 1806 aged 69 years.”¹⁶

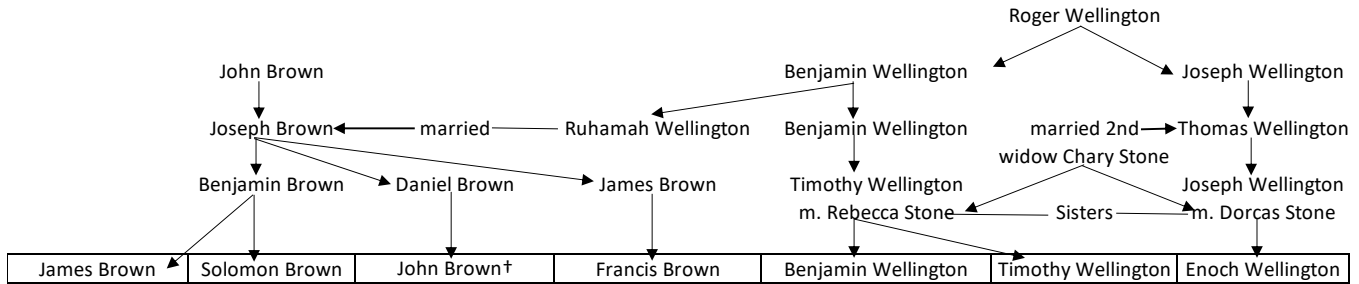


Grave of Nathaniel Bowman Brown in Plymouth, VT

Although his grave marker is simple, there is a granite boulder at the location of his homesite that is more celebratory of his accomplishments and the fact that his home served as the center of town activities.¹⁷



Most of the families in Lexington were related either directly or through marriage. This spreadsheet shows for example how the three Wellingtons and the three Browns all of whom stood on Lexington Common were related.



James, Solomon John and Francis Brown are 2nd cousins to Benjamin and Timothy Wellington & 3rd cousins to Enoch Wellington, while Benjamin and Timothy are 1st cousins to Enoch.

You can find interweaving relationships with almost every family in Lexington in 1775, and you can see why David Hackett Fischer used the term "cousinage" to describe the complex family interrelationships.

An unusual relationship occurred when Thomas Wellington took as his second wife his son's mother-in-law, and then had a child.

Footnotes

¹Boston, MA: Births, Baptisms, Marriages and Deaths, 1630-1699, Report of the Record Commissioners, Volume, Boston, 1883, page 52.

²Hudson, Charles, *History of the Town of Marlborough, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, from Its First Settlement in 1657 to 1864, with a Brief Sketch of the Town of Northborough & Genealogy of the Families in Marlborough to 1860, and an Account of the Celebration of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town*, Boston, Press of L.E. Marvin & Son, 1862

³Vital Records of Marlborough, MA to the End of the Year 1849 at on the Common.

⁴Middlesex County File Probate File Papers, 1648-1871, Volume Middlesex Cases 2000-2999, pages 3064:1 to 3054:6

⁵Vital Records of Watertown MA to the End of the Year 1849 at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Watertown/>

⁶Ibid.; Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868, Revised and Continued to 1912*, Two Volumes, Lexington Historical Society, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1913, Volume II, *Genealogies*, p. 63; Vital Records of Watertown, MA.

⁷Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 63-64.

⁸Ibid.; *Lexington Vital Records*; Brown, Francis M. M.D., *Lexington Epitaphs, A Copy of Epitaphs in the Old Burying Ground of Lexington, Massachusetts*, The Lexington Historical Society, 1905, pp. 15-16.

⁹Hudson, *Genealogy*, p. 64.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Letter of Elizabeth Clarke, daughter of Reverend Jonas Clarke, written to her niece, Lucy Ware Allen on April 20, 1835, describing the events of April 19, 1775 and the burial of the victims, collection of the Lexington Historical Society.

¹²Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 64. I have not been able to corroborate Anne's death in Lunenburg.

¹³Bryant, Blanche Brown and Gertrude Elaine Baker, compilers, *Genealogical Records of the Founders and Early Settlers of Plymouth, Vermont*, DeLand, FL, The E.O. Painter Company, 1967, pp. 32-33.

¹⁴<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/20508228/daniel-brown>

¹⁵Bryant, *Genealogical Records*, op. cit., p.33

¹⁶<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/20508097/nathaniel-bowman-brown>

¹⁷<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/20508097/nathaniel-bowman-brown>