

IN SEARCH OF EBENEZER WARREN OF LEICESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

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Ebenezer Warren of Leicester died in that Massachusetts village on 4 October, 1800, at the age of 81 years and one month¹. This person is clearly the subject of the profile in Henry Warren Wheeler's history: Wheeler and Warren Families². This is my family line, well-documented down through the next six generations. But Ebenezer's ancestry has been the subject of much confusion and debate... until recently as DNA makes it possible to sort out the line.

I inherited a numbered copy of H. W. Wheeler's 1892 book from my grandfather, William Howe Warren, who inscribed it: "received from Mother, February, 1934." Family lore and many notes jotted by my grandmother continued Wheeler's claim that we're descended from Peter Warren of Boston, and therefor cousins of Gen. Joseph Warren, III, early and vocal advocate of independence, and martyr of the battle at Bunker Hill, who died there 17 June 1775.

Wheeler acknowledged that several of his assertions were undocumented, yet were then repeated by later authors who credited him as the source. Most well-known is Thomas Warren's more extensive work, *A History and Genealogy of the Warren Family* in 1902,³ which is generally highly-regarded.

But I believe these authors were wrong: Henry Wheeler's undocumented claims, and generations of repetition – that Ebenezer Warren of Leicester was a grandson of Peter Warren of Boston, and therefore a cousin of Gen. Joseph Warren – are disproven by DNA evidence.

Wheeler must have wanted very much to attach his ancestry to Gen. Joseph Warren, great-grandson of Peter Warren of Boston. In doing so he went to great lengths to demonstrate that the well-documented immigrant, John Warren of Nayland, who came to the Massachusetts Bay Colony with Winthrop on the *Arbella* in 1630, was not the only John Warren who was in the area at the time. There was another, he said: John Warren of Boston, father of Peter Warren. While this may possibly be true, there's so little evidence currently available that it may never be proven.⁴

¹ Leicester, Massachusetts Vital Records, pg. 71

² Henry Warren Wheeler, *Descendants of George Wheeler, Concord, MA, 1638 through Deacon Thomas Wheeler, Concord, 1696 and of John Warren, Boston, MA, 1630 through Ebenezer*, Joel Munsell's Sons, Publishers (Albany, NY, 1892), pg. 63-64.

³ Thomas Warren, *A History and Genealogy of the Warren Family in Normandy, Great Britain and Ireland, France, Holland, Tuscany, United States of America, Etc. (A.D. 912 - 1902), With Numerous Pedigrees* (London: Richard Clay & Sons, Ltd., 1902)

⁴ Article on Richard Warren of the Mayflower, NEHGR, vol 55, pg. 71 (1901) footnote: "...The late Dr. Henry Bond, compiler of Watertown Genealogies, told me that he had found ample proof that Peter Warren (of Boston) was not the son of John Warren of Watertown."

Regarding Ebenezer's birthdate and place, Henry Wheeler cites a written statement by Joseph Warren of Leicester, Ebenezer's grandson, that Ebenezer was born in 1714, and then states this is "...not substantiated by the records of Charlestown, but no evidence has been found to refute it."⁵ While inference – or negative evidence – has an important role in genealogical research, in today's arena of Internet databases and digital resources the careful researcher can find records that weren't accessible even a few years ago. Old, unsubstantiated theories can be more effectively re-examined.

In claiming the Boston line, Wheeler dismissed the birth record for an Ebenezer Warren born 23 June 1719 in Weston, Massachusetts, the fifth son of Deacon John Warren and Abigail (Livermore) Warren.⁶ This Warren line is descended from John Warren of Watertown. Wheeler also overlooked the Leicester record that Ebenezer died 4 Oct 1800, and was judged to be 80 years and 1 month. This confirms a birthdate in 1719 and not 1714; though there's still the wrinkle that the inferred birthdate would have been August-September 1719, not June, as Weston Town Records show.

From that point, depending on adequate documentation in public records, we can substantiate others of Wheeler's claims, specifically that Ebenezer was known to be in Leicester in 1744 when he bought property there,⁷ and that he then married Lydia Harrington of Brookfield on 7 July 1745.⁸

Further, autosomal DNA testing has shown that I, a documented descendant of Ebenezer Warren of Leicester, have several cousins who are documented descendants of John Warren of Watertown, and none apparently descended from Peter Warren of Boston.

This research update obviously suggests other questions that are beyond the scope of my current work, e.g.:

- were there two men named John Warren among the fleet of Winthrop, arriving at Salem in 1630, though only one is shown on the passenger lists?
- If there were two, did one go to Boston and the other to Watertown?
- Were both admitted as Freemen of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1631?
- Did John Warren of Boston and his un-named wife have a son Peter, and other children? If so, where are the records?

To be continued!

⁵ Wheeler, pg. 64

⁶ Weston VR, V1, pg. 9: "Ebenezer Warren the son of John Warren and Abigail his wife Was born in Weston the 23d Day of June 1719."

⁷ Wheeler, pg. 64: "at which time he bought of Patrick Watson, for £112 10s., three acres of land with a dwelling house, bark-house, mill-house, beam-house and tanyard."

⁸ "Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626-2001," database with images, Familysearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FHW6-6YH> : 4 November 2017), Ebenezer Warren and Lydia Harrington, 07 Jul 1745; citing Marriage Notice, Leicester, Worcester, Massachusetts, United States, Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth, Boston; FHL microfilm 007009441.