

Hepzibah Crosby (1727-1797)¹
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Hepzibah Crosby was born on October 17, 1727, one of three children of David and Sarah Crosby of Billerica, a town about thirty-five miles from Westborough.² The records are silent on when and why she came to Westborough, although her parents may have moved to the neighboring town of Shrewsbury.³ Thus, Ebenezer Parkman noted, on one occasion, “I rode up to Mr. David Crosbys in Shrewsbury to get him to make me a pair of Boots” (Aug. 17, 1738).⁴ If David Crosby were a cordwainer, that occupation may not have provided much security or prospects for Hepzibah. As was the case for many young persons in eighteenth-century New England, the search for work and opportunity may have been at the root of her appearance in Westborough.

Whatever her motives and circumstances, Hepzibah Crosby first appeared in Parkman’s diary in 1748, at the age of 20, when he noted that several members of Capt. John Maynard’s household had fallen ill (Sept. 9, 1748).⁵ Several months later she “watch’d” (Feb. 5, 1749)

¹I have followed the spelling of her name as she signed in on her relation.

²*Vital Records of Billerica, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1908), 44, 46, 48. The other children were David, b. June 5, 1729, and Sarah, b. May 5, 1731. On the marriage of David Crosby to Sarah Foster, the *Vital Records*, 237, merely note the event without giving a date. Since the records list only three children of David and Sarah Crosby and are silent with respect to the death of either parent, the Crosby family may have been only temporary residents of Billerica.

³There are no references to David and Sarah Crosby or to their children in the *Vital Records of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Worcester, MA: Franklin P. Rice, 1904).

⁴Dates in parentheses refer to the diary of Ebenezer Parkman (1703-1782), minister of Westborough, 1724-1782. The extant portions of the diary through 1755 (except 1736 and 1742, which were acquired by the American Antiquarian Society in 1985) appear in *The Dairy of Ebenezer Parkman, 1703-1782: First Part, Three Volumes in One, 1719-1755*, ed. Francis G. Walett (Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1974). The years 1737 and Nov. 1778 through 1780 are printed in *The Diary of Rev. Ebenezer Parkman, of Westborough, Mass., for the Months of February, March, April, October and November, 1737, November and December of 1778, and the Years of 1779 and 1780*, ed. Harriette M. Forbes ([Westborough:] Westborough Historical Society, 1899). Unpublished portions of the diary are held by the American Antiquarian Society (1736; 1742; 1756 - May 1761; June 1764 - June 1769; Nov. 10-21, 1772; June 1773 - Oct. 1778) and by the Massachusetts Historical Society (Aug. 1771 - June 1773; 1781-1782). For Clifford K. Shipton’s sketch of Parkman, see John Langdon Sibley and Clifford K. Shipton, *Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts* (18 vols.; Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Boston, 1873-1999), 6:511-27

⁵“Visited also Captain Maynards Family, Six of which are ill, viz. Stephens wife and son John -- Rody Smith, and Josiah Lock, Hepzibah Crosby and Hepzibah Rice.”

with Hannah Parkman in her recovery after the birth of her son Breck.⁶ Later that month Parkman noted that Hepzibah had been there “some Days spinning” (Feb. 25, 1749), and she was still there a week later (Mar. 1, 1749). Over the next week or so, Hepzibah talked with Parkman “about her making a profession” (Mar. 3, 1749) and “about her joining with the Church” (Mar. 10, 1749). She was at his home again several weeks later (Apr. 5, 1749) and was admitted to the church four days later,⁷ but Parkman did not mention when he examined her knowledge or spiritual experience, when she was propounded for admission, or when he received her relation, a document that he wrote on her behalf.

At the age of 21, Hepzibah thus became a full member of the church, fitting into a pattern that was common for young women who frequently joined the church before or soon after marriage. She undoubtedly already knew twenty-two year-old Benjamin Whipple whom she married four months later (Aug. 7, 1749).⁸ Whipple was born in Ipswich,⁹ the oldest of Francis and Abigail Whipple’s ten children. The Whipple family had come to Westborough in the early 1730s, with Francis and Abigail being dismissed from the Third Church in Ipswich and admitted into the Westborough church on January 6, 1734.

Benjamin first appeared in Parkman’s diary when he was 14 years old, mowing the ministerial meadow (July 15-16, 1740). Later work for Parkman included hoeing, raking, and cutting wood.¹⁰ Although Benjamin had been baptized in Ipswich, he did not join the Westborough church; he thus fitted into a common pattern for young men who rarely joined the

⁶Breck Parkman was born on Jan. 27, 1749.

⁷Westborough Church Records, Apr. 9, 1749.

⁸*Vital Records of Westborough, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Worcester, MA: Franklin P. Rice, 1903), 141.

⁹*Vital Records of Ipswich, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Salem, MA: The Essex Institute, 1910), 1:391, noting Benjamin’s baptism on July 2, 1727. According to the *Vital Records of Westborough*, 105, he was born on Apr. 23, 1727.

¹⁰July 6, 1740; Jan. 4, 1744; Feb. 18, Mar. 11, 1745; Dec. 17, 1746; June 20, Dec. 18, 25, 1747; July 21, 1748; Mar. 22, 1749.

church before marriage. But he did belong to a young men's society whose membership Parkman vetted (Mar. 11, 1745; May 4, 1749).

Hepzibah and Benjamin moved to Hardwick soon after their marriage, with Hepzibah receiving a dismissal to the Hardwick church on November 4, 1750. Their first child, Nehemiah,¹¹ was born in Hardwick on March 25, 1750, somewhat less than nine months after their marriage, a circumstance that may have fallen comfortably within the two-month grace period that some churches granted in the case of early births.¹²

Why the move to Hardwick? It would be tempting to suggest that they were part of the separatist movement that, most noticeably, persuaded members of the Fay family to leave Westborough and settle in Hardwick.¹³ The first record of the separatists' dissatisfaction with the Hardwick church appeared in mid-July 1749 when the church voted to send to three ministers, including Jonathan Edwards, to advise them whether to dismiss the separatists "or proceed to censure them as irregular, disorderly members."¹⁴ While the records are silent on the motivation of Benjamin and Hepzibah in moving to Hardwick, they may have been seeking opportunities that were less spiritual in nature. Hardwick was a newer town and may have had

¹¹The name may have been chosen to honor the memory of Benjamin's younger brother, Nehemiah, who was born on Nov. 28, 1745, and died a year later, Nov. 18, 1746. *Vital Records of Westborough*, 106, 256.

¹²Nearly fifty years ago, Harold Field Worthley stated emphatically about records for the Hardwick church, "There are no records whatsoever antedating 1820." Worthley, *An Inventory of the Records of the Particular (Congregational) Churches of Massachusetts Gathered, 1620-1805* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 265. More recently, however, Douglas L. Winiarski notes that a microfilm of records for 1736-1786 is held at the Genealogical Society of Utah (no. 868519); Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 2017), 377, n. 16. Hepzibah and Benjamin had six more children in Hardwick; *Vital Records of Hardwick, Massachusetts, to Year 1850* (Boston, 1917), 122-23.

¹³On the Fays, see Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*, 374-77. As Winiarski observes, "Collectively, the Fay clan plagued Parkman's ministry for a decade."

¹⁴Lucius R. Paige, *History of Hardwick, Massachusetts, with a Genealogical Register* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1883), 225.

more abundant and less expensive land. Perhaps also important was the fact that Benjamin's younger sister, Lucia or Lucy, had moved to Hardwick after her marriage to Moses Pratt.¹⁵

Once married and a father, Benjamin joined the Hardwick church. At the relatively young age of twenty-six, in 1753 he was chosen as a member of a committee that sought to bring about a reconciliation with the Hardwick separatists. Whatever his role in that committee, Benjamin was eventually persuaded that the separatists' understanding and vision of a godly church were correct, and his name, along with that of Hepzibah, appears on the list of those who signed the separatists' covenant.¹⁶ When Whipple visited Parkman in 1755, the minister noted that Whipple "is become a Separate at Lambs Town. I had Some free Talk with him upon it" (Oct. 20, 1755).¹⁷

While the Whipples found a spiritual home with the separatists, Hardwick did not long remain their earthly home. Within a few years they moved yet again, taking their seven children in a journey that led the separatists to what became Bennington, Vermont, where they helped to found the first church in Vermont. While in Bennington, their last two children were born. But all was not well among the separatists in Bennington who, almost from the start, were themselves divided. "By 1780," writes Douglas L. Winiarski, "fewer than half the families in Bennington remained affiliated with the town's shattered religious institution."¹⁸ Hepzibah and Benjamin Whipple were undoubtedly among those who were disaffected, and so they moved yet again, this time to Rutland, Vermont, where, in 1785, they joined what became the First

¹⁵Lucy Whipple married Moses Pratt of Hardwick, Nov. 16, 1747; *Vital Records of Westborough*, 198.

¹⁶Paige, *History of Hardwick*, 228.

¹⁷Lambstown was the name by which Hardwick was originally known.

¹⁸Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*, 394-95.

Congregational Church.¹⁹ Celebrated as a “SAINT” on her gravestone, Hepzibah died on May 16, 1797;²⁰ Benjamin joined her nine years later.²¹

¹⁹http://www.nekg-vt.com/church/church_w-rutland.htm?h=whipple (accessed Dec. 29, 2017)

²⁰https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/39416126/person/20483969853/media/2dc6b1bf-ac47-412e-9067-6fc382603ade?_phsrc=PiN8&_phstart=successSource (accessed Dec. 29, 2017).

²¹ Benjamin Whipple died on Apr. 30, 1806; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/30609514/benjamin-whipple> (accessed Dec. 29, 2017).