

Who Was Pelatiah Metcalf?

By Ross W. Beales, Jr.

Pelatiah Metcalf was admitted to the Westborough church on Wednesday, July 27, 1763. The day of the week was unusual, as members were typically admitted on a Sunday before the administration of the sacrament. But when he was propounded on Sunday, July 24, “it was very unlikely that he would continue to our usual Time for Persons in Health.” He was in “a dangerous Languishment,” with his “Distemper greatly increasing upon him.” After the pre-communion lecture on Wednesday, July 27, the church voted to go immediately after the blessing to Benjamin Hills’s house where Metcalf “resides and is confined, that we may attend upon his profession of Religion and his admission into the Church.” This was despite the “Custom in this Church of persons Standing propounded, ordinarily, a fortnight.” Accordingly, the church members went to Hills’s house, and Metcalf was admitted by their unanimous vote.¹

The church record of his admission and his relation, written by Parkman and signed with a weak hand by Metcalf, are the only extant records of Metcalf’s connection to Westborough. His name does not appear elsewhere in the church records, and Parkman’s diary is not extant for 1763. If Metcalf did in fact die in Westborough, no one recorded that event with the town clerk, and the index to the Worcester County probate records is silent. If he was married or had children, those events do not appear in the vital records of Westborough or the surrounding towns.

A clue to his identity is the fact that he lived with Benjamin Hills, an individual whose connection to Westborough was certainly stronger but also transient. Described as a “trader” in the probate records, Hills first appeared in Westborough (or at least in Parkman’s diary) in 1760 when Parkman learned that he had “come to live in Capt. *Storers* House that was Mr. *Ebenezer Rice’s*” (Mar. 14). Benjamin Hills was born in Wrentham in 1732² and married Molly Metcalf in Providence in 1757.³ But what was Molly (Metcalf) Hills’s relationship to Pelatiah Metcalf – daughter, sister, cousin?

There were Metcalfs in Wrentham– but no Molly (or Mary, for that matter), although there were two males named Pelatiah. The first, the son of Michael and Abiell, was born in 1714 and died in 1770.⁴ He and his wife, Hepzibah (Man) Metcalf, had eleven children between 1742 and 1762.⁵ Among the children was a namesake, Pelatiah, born in 1744, although it is

¹Westborough Church Records (Westborough Public Library), 126 (July 27, 1763).

²Benjamin, son of Jabez and Martha Hills, b. Mar. 16, 1732 (*Vital Records of Wrentham, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850* [Boston, 1910], 1: 124); d. Nov. 21, 1766 in Grafton (*Vital Records of Grafton, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* [Worcester, MA: Franklin P. Rice, 1906], 343).

³Aug. 11, 1757; Hills Family Genealogical and Historical Association, *Seventh Annual Report of the Directors* (Boston, June 4, 1091), 3.

⁴*Vital Records of Wrentham*, 1:151, 2:478.

⁵*Ibid.*, 1:147-51.

likely that this Pelatiah moved to Royalston where he and his wife Lydia had twelve children, the first in 1771, the last in 1794.⁶

That leaves another Pelatiah, this one born in Medway in 1739, the son of John and Tamer Metcalf. He had a sister, Molly, who was born in 1736.⁷ There is no record of her marriage in Medway, but that town was close enough to Providence (and Wrentham, too) for her to have met Benjamin Hills in either place. At this point, it is likely that Pelatiah Metcalf was the brother of Molly (Metcalf) Hills, was twenty-four years old, and was probably single when he was admitted to the Westborough church.

⁶*Vital Records of Royalston, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Worcester, MA: Franklin P. Rice, 1906), 50

⁷Pelatiah, son of John and Tamer Metcalf, b. Apr. 12, 1739; Molly, b. Sept. 9, 1736 (*Vital Records of Medway, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850* [Boston: New-England Historic-Genealogical Society, 1905], 92).