

Widow Jemima Hardy and Her Children

In early 1777, 33-year-old Lydia Hardy of Westborough, Massachusetts, “broke out with the Small Pox,” having, as the Rev. Ebenezer Parkman wrote, “tis supposed, taken the infection from a Soldier as he passed in the high Way” (Feb. 15, 1777). She recovered, but her brother, 44-year-old Constantine, was also infected and died three weeks later “by means of the *Dysentery* setting in with the *Small Pox*” (Feb. 26, Mar. 16). As Parkman lamented, “Another, and very worthy, member of this Church hereby taken away from us! Help, Lord!” The day after Hardy’s funeral, Parkman “visited, comforted and prayed” with Hardy’s 40-year-old widow, Jemima, describing her as “in a good, Sedate, Pious, resigned, though very afflicted, Frame” (Mar. 17).¹

Jemima Hardy had every reason to be “very afflicted,” for the untimely death of her husband left her a widow with six young children, pregnant, and few resources. Both of Constantine Hardy’s parents were dead, his widowed father Phinehas having died six months before Constantine, leaving “12 grown up Children” (Oct. 12, 1776) and apparently little or no property.² If, before his death, Phinehas had provided anything for his six sons, Constantine’s estate was nonetheless modest. When an inventory was taken on July 4, 1777, there was no land, dwelling, or barn, although there was a “Stable Near the Meeting house and a few Shingles.” The estate was appraised at slightly over £355, with the largest part “in Notes and Money” totaling nearly £230.³ After the payment of debts, appraisers’ expenses, administration costs, fees, and the family’s “allowance,” Constantine’s estate was valued at £238-1-4-2. Levi Lincoln, the probate judge, ordered that one-third be given to Jemima Hardy, with the remainder paid to the children, “their guardians or Legal Representatives,” with the eldest son, Constantine, receiving a double share (July 6, 1778). While the estate was being settled, Jemima received “an allowance of necessary provisions etc. consumed by the family after the decease of the Intestate.” Even with these funds, caring for all her children was too much. On September 1,

¹Constantine Hardy had been admitted into the Westborough church on Nov. 27, 1763, and Mindwell, the daughter of Constantine and Jemima, was baptized week later; Westborough Church Records, hereafter abbreviated as WCR (Westborough Public Library), 127. For digital images and a literal transcription of the church records, see: <https://www.colonialsociety.org/node/3955>. Jemima Hardy was admitted to the church on Feb. 12, 1764; WCR, 128. Jemima Hardy was a week shy of forty. She was born on Mar. 23, 1737, the daughter of Silas and Mindwell (Grout) Brigham; *Vital Records of Westborough, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Worcester, MA: Franklin P. Rice, 1903), 26, (spelled Gemima), hereafter cited as *WVR*.

²Phinehas’s wife Prudence (Warrin) d. Nov. 14, 1764; *ibid.*, 241. Phinehas d. Oct. 12, 1776 (Parkman diary). The record of Phinehas Hardy’s probate is limited to one document, Elijah Hardy’s bond as administrator of his father’s estate, Dec. 3, 1776 (Worcester Co. Probate Series A, Case 27048); <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeld=30209&pageName=27048:1&rlid=52067096>.

³Worcester County Probate Series A, Case 27030; <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image/?volumeld=30209&pageName=27030:1&rlid=682451860>. The inventory was taken on July 4, 1777 by Phinehas Forbes of Westborough and Ephraim Whitney and Deacon James Bradish of Upton who were appointed “to take a true Inventory of all and Singular the Goods and Chattels of Mr. Constantine Hardy.” Did this mean there was real estate not appraised? The warrant appointing the appraisers directed them to “apprize (in Lawful Money of this Province) all the Estate” (Apr. 11, 1777).

1777, the probate court appointed 60-year-old James Bradish of Upton as guardian for Mindell, aged 13; Constantine, 10; Rachel, 8; Silas, 6; Mary, 4; and Tabitha, 2.⁴

In early October, “at a private Meeting, at the House of Mrs. *Jemima Hardy*,” Parkman preached on Phil. 4:6, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Oct. 7, 1777). Eleven days later, Jemima gave birth to a daughter whom she named Prudence and had baptized on December 7. When Prudence was seven months old, the probate court appointed Jemima as her guardian.⁵

With her one-third of Constantine’s estate and the share that she held as guardian for Prudence, Jemima probably had enough to live on, but her health had clearly deteriorated. In a torn and partly illegible portion of his diary for April 17, 1778, Parkman noted that he visited “a Number of sick,” including “the Widow *Jemima Hardy* [*torn, illegible*] of *Delirium*.” Several months later, Jemima came to Parkman “with Objections against Ruth Buck” (Aug. 3, 1778) who had been propounded for membership in the church and offered a confession for breaking the seventh commandment (Aug. 2, 1778).⁶ Parkman advised Jemima to “go to her, and discourse with her,” to which Jemima replied that “she had Seen and spoke with her. [But to?] little [effect?].” Capt. Seth Morse came to Parkman “in Defence of Ruth Buck,” asserting that Jemima Hardy was “distracted” (Aug. 11, 1778). The next day, Parkman went to the home of Isaac Parker “where dwells the widow *Jemima Hardy*, that I might direct her with respect to *Ruth Buck*. But I found her much out of her Head, and incapable of any regular Conversation.”

Jemima was apparently unable to fend for herself, with the warrant for the town meeting of June 7, 1779, stating, “As there is a Number of poor persons Lately Cast on this Town for Support, Namely Mrs. Mary Kelly, Bulah Gale widow and her two Children, also Mrs. Jemima

⁴The guardianship files are at: <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=30209&pageName=27043:1&rId=682451978> (Mindwell); <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=30209&pageName=27031:1&rId=682451870> (Constantine); <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=30209&pageName=27051:1&rId=682452064> (Rachel); <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=30209&pageName=27054:1&rId=682452079> (Silas); <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/RecordDisplay?volumeId=30209&pageName=27042:1&rId=682451975> (Mary); <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=30209&pageName=27055:1&rId=682452082> (Tabitha).

Bradish, a Westborough native and church member, moved to Upton after his marriage (Apr. 14, 1748) to Mary Whitney. By the time that he was appointed guardian for Jemima Hardy’s children, six of his eleven children had died, and three had married, leaving only 24-year-old Elisha and 12-year-old Amos at home. See the *Vital Records of Upton, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Worcester, MA: Franklin P. Rice, 1904), 15, 81-82, 157-58.

⁵*WVR*, 58; *WCR*, 176 (<https://www.colonialsociety.org/node/4004>); June 8, 1778, Worcester County Probate Series A, Case 27049 (<https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=30209&pageName=27049:4&rId=52067102>).

⁶Ruth Buck had met with Parkman on July 30, desiring “to be propounded in Order to her *Humiliation* and *joining with the Church*.” On Aug. 2, she was propounded and two weeks later, “Ruth Buck, offerd Confession of breacking the Seventh Commandment and was restord. She was also admitted to full Communion”; Westborough Church Records, 178 (Aug. 16, 1778); <https://www.colonialsociety.org/node/4006>.

Hardy widow and her youngest Child. Therefore it is put in this artecul to See What the Town will Do with Regard to the aforesaid persons or Either of them — or act any thing Reletive to the abovesaid poor as they Shall think proper when met.” At that meeting, the town appointed selectman Abijah Gale as its agent to appear before the Court of General Sessions of the Peace to secure an order that Jemima’s father, Silas Brigham of Shrewsbury, “Support his Daughter Jemima Hardy widow and her youngest Daughter Prudence which persons are Cast on Said Town of Westborow for Support.”⁷

The town meeting on November 6, 1780, authorized a payment to Lt. Jonathan Grout for boarding Jemima and her daughter. A year later, Abijah Gale and two others were appointed both to ask Jemima’s brother, David Brigham, to reimburse the town for the cost of supporting Jemima and to ask the same of her daughter’s guardian. The warrant for the town meeting on December 13, 1784, asked the town “to Come to Some agreement Respecting taking care of the Widow Jemima Hardy who is disordered in mind.” The town meeting voted to take care of Hardy “when ever it Should be desired by her Guardiē in Case Some Sutable person will become her Guardiē.” This seemingly strange vote with the proviso, “in Case Some Sutable Person will become her Guarsdien,” presumably took place with the knowledge that selectman Phineas Gleason was planning to take the case of Jemima Hardy to the probate court.

Three days later, on December 16, Gleason informed the court of probate that Hardy, “a Widow woman upwards of forty Years of Age and who has no Children to [*sic*] who can take Care of hur is a person non Compos mentis and so Disordered in hur Mind as not to be capable of taking care of hur person or Estate.” The court requested the selectmen to “to make Inquisition into the Premises. And Examine and Determine Whether the said Jemima is a person non Compos and so Disordered in her Mind as not to be capable of taking care of her person or Estate and Certify the Same in Writing under your hands.” At the same time, the court ordered James Hawes to inform Jemima of Gleason’s petition and request her appearance in court “if you see Cause Either in person or by your next of kin or some person in your Behalf to offer your objections if any you have why the Prayer of said Gleason should not be granted and you shall be heard.”

The selectmen “examined the Situation and Circumstances of Widow Jemima Hardy” and determined that she was “so disorderd in mind as to be incapable of taking care of her person and Estate,” recommending that the court appoint Hawes as her guardian.⁸ There is no record that Hardy or anyone acting on her behalf appeared before the court. Appointed guardian for Jemima Hardy, on January 4, 1785, James Hawes posted bond that he would “do well and faithfully take Care as well of the Person as Estate both Real and Person of the said Non-Compos,” and the court appointed Nathan Fisher, Daniel Chamberlain, and Samuel Forbush to

⁷Westborough Town Records, 1:389-90 (<https://archive.org/details/townrecords01west/page/389/mode/1up> and <https://archive.org/details/townrecords01west/page/390/mode/1up>). At the motion of Westborough, the complaint against Silas Brigham was dismissed, Dec. 1779 (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CS4T-1W2W?i=595&cat=301449>), possibly because Brigham had agreed to give Jemima a legacy.

⁸Worcester Co. Probate Series A, Case 27038 (<https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=30209&pageName=27038:1&rId=682451928>).

take an inventory of Jemima's estate. As a doctor and leading citizen of Westborough, Hawes were well positioned to serve on Jemima's behalf.⁹

Dated March 1, 1785, the inventory (see the appendix) totaled £55-18-6, more than half of which consisted of a legacy (£26-13-4) from her father, Silas Brigham, a "State Note" (£15-3-4), and "Cash due from Col. Levi Brigham" (£3-19-6), her uncle. Since her father was still alive when the inventory was made, the "legacy" may have resulted from Abijah Gale's appearance before the Court of General Sessions of the Peace. Upon his death on March 11, 1791, Silas Brigham's estate totaled £54-18-1, one third of which was paid to his widow as her "thirds," with the remainder distributed in equal shares of £9-3-0 to his four surviving children or "their guardians or Legal Representatives."¹⁰

Other than the legacy, state note, and cash owed from her uncle, the most valuable items in the inventory were "a Bed and Bedding" (£3-12). There were modest cooking utensils; some old pewter; earthenware, woodenware, and crockery; and furniture. Other items suggest how Jemima might have clothed her children or earned some money: a "great Wheel," a "foot Wheel," and hetchel. Less clear is the presence of "67 Nails and 20 Posts."

Over the next nine years, James Hawes's accounts, submitted to and approved by the probate court, provide some insight into Jemima Hardy's circumstances. The first account, covering the period from May 3, 1785 to November 2, 1786, included various foodstuffs (rye meal, Indian meal, veal, lamb, beef, beans, malt, salt, sugar, and tea) and services (plowing, hauling and cutting firewood, washing clothes). A lad was paid 9d. for going "4 Miles after a Sheep and Lamb," suggesting a source of food and fiber. Jemima's daughter Prudence received new shoes. Asa Forbush received £1-4-0 for boarding Jemima for six weeks (May 9, 1785), and a year later Phinehas Haskel was paid £0-11-6 for "prudences board 7 weeks." The periods in which Jemima and Prudence were boarded were only a small part of the time covered by the first account. Where had they lived when not boarded, and was Jemima's health a reason to be boarded if she was not able to care for herself or her daughter? The account also included a payment for medicine and the services of Dr. Stephen Ball.

A second account for the period from December 12, 1786 to February 6, 1788, is similarly ambiguous. In addition to foodstuff, there was a charge of £1-5-0 on January 24, 1787, for "Boarding the Said Jemima 5 Weeks Medicine and Attendance," presumably by Dr. Ball. A year later, on January 24, 1788, there was a charge of one shilling, six pence for "going after her daughter Rachal 3 Miles to take Care of her Mother." Rachel was then eighteen years old, presumably still living in James Bradish's family in Upton, but did Rachel return to help her mother? A charge for "5 pounds of flax" suggests that the hetchel and spinning wheels may have been in use.

⁹Hawes served as selectman (1775-77, 1782, 1783, 1786); town clerk (1776, 1777, 1783, 1784); treasurer (1797, 1798), and representative (1778-80). He was also a deacon in the church (1780-1813).

¹⁰Brigham's death was noted in Breck Parkman's diary, Mar. 11, 1791 (Parkman Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society). Worcester Co. Probate Series A, Case 7459 (<https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=26968&pageName=7459:1&rId=521945704>).

Later charges to the account suggest a deterioration of Jemima's health. An account that was approved on July 6, 1790, included payments for boarding to John Fay, Joseph Grout, and Elisha Forbes, the latter for both boarding and nursing. James Hawes, the guardian, was also paid for boarding and for "Nursing Sundries Supplied." Hawes also report receiving £5-12-0 from the estate of her father, Silas Brigham; selling the "state note at loss"; paying for a license to "sell Person [*sic*] Estate"; and receiving an unspecified amount for the sale of a side saddle, presumably the saddle listed in the inventory.

James Hawes's last account, approved on December 3, 1793, when Jemima was 56 years old, included payments to five individuals for boarding Jemima, but there is nothing in the file to indicate when or why Hawes's guardianship of Jemima Hardy ended. While one might imagine that she died, with no one bothering to record her death with the Westborough town clerk, that was not the case. She died at the age of 87 in Shelburne, Massachusetts, a town about seventy-five miles from Westborough.

How she got to Shelburne brings us back to her children. While Jemima was under the guardianship of James Hawes, three of her seven children married. The oldest, Mindwell, was 21 years old when she married Elijah Whitney on May 29, 1785, four months after Jemima was placed under guardianship. Constantine was 25 years old when he married Sally Flagg, and Mary (or Polly) was 19 when she married John Forbush, with both marriages on June 21, 1792.¹¹ Eight months later, on February 21, 1793, Constantine's two youngest sisters, 17-year-old Tabitha and 15-year-old Prudence, appeared before James Hawes and chose Constantine as their guardian. Constantine and Sally Hardy, presumably with other members of his family, including his mother, moved to Shelburne, where Lucy, Constantine's and Lucy's first child, was born — or at least registered.¹² Other than the date of Jemima's death, there is no record to document her move to Shelburne or her life there. Her name was handed down to her son and daughter-in-law's eighth child.¹³

¹¹*Vital Records of Upton, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (Worcester, MA: Franklin P. Rice, 1904), 103.

¹²June 6, 1793, *Vital Records of Shelburne, Massachusetts to the End of the Year 1849* (Salem, Mass.: The Essex Institute, 1931), 44.

¹³Jemima Hardy, b. Sept. 14, 1805, *ibid.*, 43. What happened to Jemima's children? Her oldest daughter, Mindwell, was 21 when she married Elijah Whitney of Westborough, on May 29, 1785; Jemima was then still living in Westborough under the guardianship of James Hawes. Mindwell's husband Elijah died in 1817 of "Intemperance"; she died in 1853. Constantine died in Shelburne on July 23, 1841. Rachel Hardy died, unmarried, in Shelburne on January 26, 1844. Silas Hardy stayed in the Westborough area long enough to marry Bulah Furbush in Grafton, but moved to Shelburne where, on April 24, 1819, he drowned, with his body "found and buried" on June 5. Mary Hardy married John Forbush on June 21, 1792. When her husband died within a year, she declined administration of his estate, asking that her brother Constantine serve as administrator. Mary then married Thomas Goldthwaite of Northbridge; Polly Furbush (Forbush) int. Thomas Goldthwait, Aug. 21, 1797 (*Vital Records of Northbridge, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850* [Boston, 1916], 127); Thomas Goldthwait d. Apr. 22, 1846, a. 77 y. 19 d. (*ibid.*, 186). Tabitha and Prudence, the youngest children, did not marry, and both died in 1842 in Westborough. In their joint will, dated Nov. 11, 1830, they described themselves as milliners. See: <https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=30209&pageName=27056:3&rId=52067159>. While Tabitha and Prudence chose their brother Constantine as their guardian, they may not have moved with him to Shelburne, or, if they did, they returned to Westborough.

There is no way to make a clinical diagnosis of Jemima Hardy's health, but it is certainly worth noting that she had experienced significant losses: a stillbirth (Feb. 10, 1766); the death of father-in-law (Oct. 12, 1776); the death of her husband (Mar. 16, 1777) when she was pregnant with their seventh child; and the appointment of a guardian for her six children about six weeks before the birth of that seventh child. What she had not lost, however, was the connection to her children and particularly to her oldest son and husband's namesake, Constantine. It was he, along with his siblings who settled in Shelburne, who released Jemima from guardianship and brought her to their new home.

Inventory of Jemima's Hardy's Assets, March 1, 1785¹⁴

	£ S d
A Legacy given to her by Her Hon ^d Father	26-13-4
Silas Brigham and Ordered to be paid to her By her Brother David Brigham	
one State Note fourteen pound with the Interest added	15-3-4
<u>Cash due from Col^o Levi Brigham</u>	3-19-6
House Hold Furniture we apprise as follows (viz)	
One old Brass Kittle 10/ one old warming pan 3/	0-13-0
1 old Frying pan /8, 1 Iron pot 2/6, 1 Small Ditto 2/	0-5-2
1 Iron Kittle 1/8. 1 Goose Iron 1/6, fire peal and Tongs 2/8	0-5-10
1 Pair of Handiron 6/, 1 old Side Saddle 10/	0-16-0
1 great Wheel 1/4 1 foot Wheel at 6/	0-7-4
2 old pewter platters 4/6 4 Pewter plates 2/8, 4 Basons 4/	0-11-2
1 pint pot 1/ one Small Coffee pot and Dipper 1/	0-2-0
1 Dye Pot and Sundry Articles of Wooden ware	0-2-6
Earthen and Crockery ware 2/ 1 Looking Glass 3/	0-5-0
1 Fall Table 10/ 3 Sitting Chairs 5/ 2 Candlesticks /10 ^d	
1 Chest of two Draws 3/6 1 Glass Bottle /8 ^d	0-4-2
£ Sh	
1 Bed and Beding 3 - 12 – one Old flock Bed 3/	3-15-0
5 Sheets 1 Pillar Case	1-4-4
1 Hetchel 8/ - 67 Nails and 20 Posts 7/	0-15-0
The Whole of the Above Estate	
We Apprise at	£55-18-6

¹⁴<https://www.americanancestors.org/databases/worcester-county-ma-probate-file-papers-1731-1881/image?volumeId=30209&pageName=27038:1&rId=682451928>.