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1

A Puritan Family's Progress

THE WELLS'S MIGRATION FROM ENGLAND TO AMERICA

1634–1814

Daniel H. Wells was born in upstate New York on October 27, 1814. By the time of his birth, his ancestors had been living in America for almost two hundred years. Both his father's family and his mother's immigrated from England to Massachusetts colony in 1635. Thomas Wells stayed only a year or so in the Boston area before moving with his children to the new Connecticut colony. Deacon Samuel Chapin remained in Massachusetts for his lifetime, but his grandson Ebenezer also relocated to Connecticut. By the last third of the 1700s both families were deeply rooted there, the Wells clan in Wethersfield, Hartford County, and the Chapins in nearby New Hartford, Enfield County.¹

Joshua Wells, Daniel H. Wells's paternal grandfather, born September 3, 1726, farmed land that he inherited from his father in Wethersfield.² In 1757, he married Experience Dickenson and together they had nine children, all born in Wethersfield during the years 1759 to 1773. Their youngest child, Daniel Wells, born in 1773, was the father of Daniel Hanmer Wells. Less than two weeks after Daniel Wells's birth, his mother died, whether as a consequence of childbirth complications or from other causes is not known.³

Although the oldest of their nine children was only fourteen at the time of Experience's death, Joshua did not remarry. He relied instead on the homemaking and parenting skills of his two eldest daughters, Experience Wells and Hannah Wells, to care for and help educate their younger siblings. They seem to have accepted this heavy burden willingly and to have performed it admirably.⁴

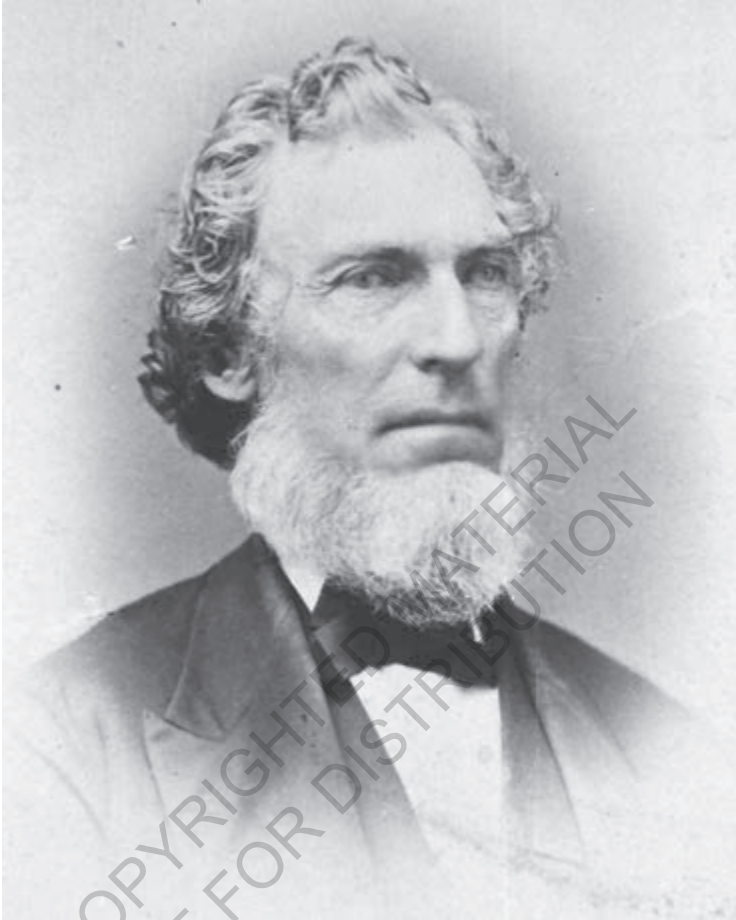


Figure 1.1. Mayor Daniel H. Wells, portrait by C. R. Savage, Great Salt Lake City, ca. 1866.

Joshua Wells was confident enough in the capacity of his family to manage without him (probably with the assistance of other family members and friends) that he volunteered to go to war. He was almost fifty when the Declaration of Independence was signed, older than most of those who enlisted to fight in the Revolution, but he served throughout the conflict and survived another fifteen years beyond it.⁵

As early as 1776, three years after his wife's death, Joshua Wells, along with many of his Wells, Deming, Dickenson, Goodrich, and Robbins relatives, is listed as a member of Captain H. Welles's Company of the Third Battalion of Connecticut militia headed by Col. Roger Enos.

By April 1777 he had moved to the Wethersfield Company of Captain Chester Wells in the regiment led by Col. Thomas Belden.⁶

On February 26, 1778, Joshua enlisted for the duration of the war and was assigned to Captain Joseph Walker's company in Col. Samuel B. Webb's infantry regiment.⁷ This regiment and its service in the war from 1778 through the end of 1780 is described in abbreviated text in the Connecticut Military Record, 1775–1848, Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the War of the Revolution:

One of the sixteen "additional" regiments of infantry raised at large for the "Continental Line" of [17]77, to continue through the war. Recruited mainly in Hartford County and eastern part of the State. Went into camp at Peekskill in the spring of [17]77 and served in Parson's Brigade under Putnam during movements of following summer and fall. On advance of the enemy and the loss of Forts Clinton and Montgomery, Oct., [17]77, it crossed to west side of Hudson and served under Gov. Clinton of N. Y., for a time. On Dec. 10, the regiment engaged with other troops in an expedition against L. I. [Long Island], which met with accidents, leaving Col. Webb and other officers prisoners in enemy's hands. Regt. wintered with Parson's Brigade at West Point and assisted in construction of permanent works there. Redoubt "Webb" doubtless named after the Col. In summer of [17]78 it was attached to Varnum's Brigade and marched to R. I. [Rhode Island], engaging in the battle there of Aug. 29, [17]78; commended for its conduct. Wintered in R. I. [17]78–79 and remaining there till fall of [17]79 marched to winter quarters, Morristown, N. J., [17]79–80; assigned to Stark's Brigade, Lt.-Col. Huntington commanding. Present at battle of Springfield, N. J., June 23, [17]80, and during following summer served with main army on the Hudson. Upon a memorial of Col. Huntington, the Assembly of Conn, on 2d Thursday of May, [17]80, adopted the regt. as one of the "Conn. Line" and a Committee of Congress in Camp Preakness, N. J., June 23, [17]80, approved the measure. It was designated the 9th Regt. and went into winter quarters. [17]80–81, with the Division at Camp "Connecticut Village" above the Robinson House. There it was re-organized for formation of [17]81–83.⁸

At the beginning of January 1781, Webb's regiment, now designated the Connecticut Ninth, was consolidated with the Connecticut Second

Regiment to form the new Connecticut Third Regiment. Joshua Wells remained in the army, serving in the company of Captain Samuel W. Williams, and is listed on the paymaster's rolls as being present with his unit for the entire year. He marched with his regiment to Yorktown and there participated in the final major battle of the Revolution in October 1781.⁹

Joshua remained with the victorious army throughout 1782 and was finally mustered out of service, after a period of paid leave, in January 1783.¹⁰ He returned home to find his family had come through the war relatively unscathed. None of his children had married, but all had cooperated as a unit to run the family farm and provide for their own needs, while at the same time sending what logistical support they could to the revolutionary cause.¹¹

Joshua Wells resumed his active leadership as patriarch of the family and continued to operate his farm as, one by one, his children married and began their own families.¹² Daniel Wells, the father of Daniel Hammer Wells, was the last sibling to marry in 1799, a few months after his father Joshua's death at age seventy-one.¹³

Prior to the date on which Joshua Wells signed his will, Daniel Wells and his older brother Gideon borrowed money from him against their coming inheritance to finance a trip to the "Western Territory," which had been ceded to the United States by the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War in 1783. They probably departed Wethersfield in the spring of 1795. Gideon left his wife Emily and two young sons at home; Daniel was still unmarried, although he was already making plans.¹⁴

They arrived after a journey of some 630 miles, in Marietta, Northwest Territory (located in the southern tip of present-day Ohio). Marietta was one of the first settlements founded after the northwest area was formally organized as a US territory under the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. There was a well-established trail to this destination, but as yet no road sufficiently wide for a wagon. Consequently, the Wells brothers traveled mostly on foot leading pack animals loaded with tools and equipment they would need.¹⁵

They immediately established claim to some land and began clearing it for farming. They probably intended to pay for this property using warrants given to their father, Joshua Wells, in partial payment for his Revolutionary War service. These land warrants were authorized for veterans by Congress and, under provisions of the Northwest Ordinance, could be used for purchases in the Ohio basin. Gideon apparently stayed in Marietta only one summer before returning to his wife and family in Wethersfield, but Daniel remained over two years, developing his claim in spring, summer, and fall months and teaching school in the winters.¹⁶

Daniel's relatively extensive education is confirmed not only by his being hired to teach the children of other settlers, but also by a letter

he sent to Miss Honor Francis, the young lady with whom he had “kept company” before his western adventure and whom he married after his return. This letter was written when he had been over eighteen months in Ohio and was obviously longing to return to his family and his true love.

Mrs. Honor Francis,
Wethersfield, Connecticut.

Marietta. December 12th, 1797

Dear Honor:

It is with pleasure I write to inform you that I enjoy my health very well, hoping you are enjoying the same blessing.

I have had hopes of receiving a letter from you once more but waiting till I was out of patience I write again to let you know I have not forgot you but not able to say but you have me. I should be sorry to hear such news for it is my design to enjoy a happy life together if possible and I hope you will join me with pleasure. I should be glad to pay you a visit this winter but the journey is long and so tedious to attempt I hope their will be no friendship lost by neither of us for my not coming. I should be fond of living where I could enjoy your company as in former times, if I thought it would be for our advantage hereafter. I have not determined to settle in this country that induces me to tarry here so long, but I want to see more of it before I return.¹⁷

Daniel may have returned from Ohio by the time Joshua Wells died in Wethersfield in August 1798, but if not, news of his father's death surely brought him home.

Six months after Joshua's death, Daniel Wells and Honor Francis, who was born in September 1774, married in Wethersfield on March 26, 1799¹⁸ and almost immediately embarked together on a new westward journey. They did not, however, return to Marietta or to any other settlement in the Northwest Territory. Daniel's decision to abandon his claim in Ohio, as he wrote Honor in late 1797, was probably based on his observation that the area was too remote and too dangerous because of continual Indian threats. It was reinforced by the fact that his father's eligibility for land warrants redeemable in the Northwest Territory expired at his death. Since Daniel would now have to purchase his land for cash, he determined to choose a more civilized site nearer to his and Honor's long-established family base in Wethersfield.¹⁹

The place they chose was the Holland Patent in Oneida County, New York. It was located a few miles north of Utica. Land in the Holland

Patent, so named for the Holland Land Company which owned it, was first offered for sale to new settlers in 1793 after title to the property was cleared and transferred to the Dutch owners of the Company.²⁰ By the time Daniel and Honor Wells arrived in mid-1799, a number of farms were already established, but plenty of good land remained available for purchase. They settled on a tract in the town of Trenton, which had been organized in 1797, among a number of neighbors who had also come from Connecticut. These included the Wolcott, Storrs, Hubbard, Willard, Rockwell, and other families from Hartford and Wethersfield. Both of these towns were only about 215 miles away from Trenton over developed roads that made the transport of both goods and people much easier than in the far west.²¹

Daniel Wells purchased 102 acres next to the farm of William and Ephraim Storrs from William Johnson for the sum of \$665. The deed is dated December 28, 1800, but Daniel and Honor had probably been living on the property and building a home for a year or more under a rental agreement until Daniel's inherited property in Wethersfield was sold and the money forwarded to him.²²

A few years later Daniel added another fifty acres of land to his holdings. This parcel was purchased directly from the owners of the Holland Land Co. for \$365 and was transferred to Daniel by a deed dated January 19, 1807 and signed by Adam G. Mappa, the attorney for all of the absentee owners. The new acreage was located on the opposite side of Wethersfield Road from Daniel's original purchase and on lower ground. He continued to farm the original plot, on which his home was also built, and constructed a barn and other outbuildings on the lower piece. The surrounding meadowland was mainly used as pasture, although he probably intended to plow and sow some of it when he had sons old enough to assist him. Subsequent events did not make that plan feasible.²³

Eliza Wells, Daniel and Honor's first child, was born in 1800. Four additional daughters were born in Trenton during the following years as Daniel developed his property and prospered as a farmer. Pamela Wells arrived in 1803, Abigail Wells in 1805, Lucy Ann Wells in 1809, and Honor Francis Wells in 1812.²⁴

In September 1812, less than three weeks after the birth of her fifth child, Honor Wells died, likely as a result of complications from childbirth. She was eleven days short of being 38 years old. Her body was laid to rest in the Holland Patent Cemetery less than three months after the United States declared war on Great Britain.²⁵

The War of 1812, which commenced with the signing of the congressional act in favor of it by President James Madison on June 19, 1812, was not popular in New York or in the rest of the northeastern US. Business and commercial interests opposed the closing of trade with Britain and

were fearful of a blockade of American ports. Farmers, such as Daniel Wells, and other rural New Yorkers were less concerned about the economic aspects of the war, but anxious lest it be fought in their back yards by English forces invading southward from Canada.

In the event, it was the Americans who invaded Canada, despite the small size, lack of training and inexperience of the US Army and its associated state militias. Gen. William Hull led a force of about one thousand untrained and poorly-equipped militia across the Detroit River in July 1812 and occupied the Canadian town of Sandwich. A month later Hull's troops retreated to Detroit where they surrendered to a force of British regulars, Canadian militia and Native Americans. The Americans soon launched a second invasion of Canada in the Niagara isthmus of western New York where they attempted to establish a foothold on the western side of the Niagara River. United States forces, consisting of regular army and New York militia troops, were again defeated at the Battle of Queenston Heights on October 13, 1812 by a combined force of British regulars, Canadian militia, and Mohawk warriors.²⁶

Although an early biographer of Daniel H. Wells states that his father Daniel Wells left his Trenton farm "for a short period at the call of his country to serve as a soldier in the War of 1812," there is no historical evidence to support this claim. No person from Oneida County named Daniel Wells is recorded as serving in either the regular army or the New York militia during the war. While it is possible that Daniel was a member of the 1812 Niagara expedition into Canada, it seems unlikely that he would leave his five young daughters so soon after the death of their mother.²⁷

It is more reasonable to conclude that Daniel did not feel comfortable leaving his children, all of whom were under twelve years of age at the time of their mother's death, even for a ninety day summer enlistment, the shortest period for which he could have served. He probably volunteered, along with his neighbors, to defend their homes and property should the British follow up their defeat of the American invasions of Canada with a thrust into Oneida County or the surrounding area, but this possibility never materialized.²⁸

Daniel was only thirty-nine at the time of Honor's death and, unlike his father, who was forty-six when his wife died, was not resigned to rearing his children alone after her passing. The population of Oneida County was not large and the number of eligible women only a small fraction of the total, but Daniel had to search only as far as Sangerfield, some thirty miles southwest of Trenton, to find a suitable prospect. She was Catherine Chapin, born 1788, who had just turned twenty-four when she began "keeping company" with the widower who was fifteen years her senior.

Catherine's family, like Daniel's, came from Connecticut. She was born in New Hartford, about twenty-five miles northwest of Wethersfield

where the Wells clan had lived for generations. She was the eldest surviving child of David Chapin, born 1762 in New Hartford, and his wife Ruth Seymour, born 1767. David Chapin was a direct descendant of Deacon Samuel Chapin, born 1598 in Paignton, Devonshire, England, who immigrated to Massachusetts in 1635, the same year that Thomas Wells arrived in the colony. Like Wells's descendant Joshua Wells, David Chapin was also a Revolutionary War veteran.²⁹

On March 1, 1778, David Chapin enlisted as a private for a period of three years in a Connecticut regiment of the "Connecticut Line," serving in Captain Joseph Walker's company. His enlistment at age fifteen was three days after that of fifty-one-year-old Joshua Wells in the same company.³⁰ Both men were fifth generation descendants from the original immigrants to North America in their respective families. There is no record that Joshua Wells and David Chapin were acquainted prior to beginning their military service together, but they doubtless became comrades during the following years. David was near the age of Joshua's three oldest sons, Joshua Jr., Levi, and Gideon. He had never known his father and his stepfather was past sixty when he married David's mother. He would have seen Joshua as a father figure, someone to turn to for guidance and counsel as they fought together through the long conflict.³¹

David Chapin marched with Joshua Wells and the rest of the Fourth Connecticut Militia Regiment through the campaigns described earlier in this chapter: to Long Island in December 1777; to Rhode Island in the summer of 1778 and into battle there on August 29; to Winter Quarters in Morristown, New Jersey, in the fall of 1778; and into the Battle of Springfield on June 23, 1780. After the Springfield battle, the regiment served in New York along the Hudson River through the summer of 1780 and went into Winter Quarters at the Connecticut Village camp in the fall of that year. David's period of service drew to a close during the winter of 1781 and, perhaps at the urging of his older companions, he decided not to re-enlist. Having served his country through three years of war, his fellows may have encouraged him to go home and marry so that he could bring new citizens into the country he had helped create.³²

David was honorably discharged from service at Newburg, New York, on February 19, 1781. While Joshua Wells and the rest of his old regiment joined with other elements of the Continental Army and French forces under the Comte de Rochambeau for the march south into Virginia and the climactic Battle of Yorktown, David returned to his New Hartford home and his family. For him, though not yet for the country, the war was over.³³

David Chapin married Ruth Seymour in New Hartford, in 1784. Their first five children were born there between 1786 and 1793. David worked on the parcel of land left to him by his father to support himself

and his family, but it was not a large holding and provided only a modest income.³⁴

In early 1795 the Chapin family moved to the newly surveyed town of Sangerfield in Chenango County, New York. David Chapin was one of the original residents who organized the community at its first town meeting held on April 7, 1795. He was among the town officers chosen, being elected as Constable and Collector along with Jonathan Porter.³⁵

David and Ruth Chapin had three additional children after their move to Sangerfield, bringing their total family to eight. Their oldest child, Archer Chapin, died early in 1799, but the remainder of the family fared well in their new community.³⁶

Catherine Chapin, the eldest daughter, had just turned seven years of age when the Chapin family arrived in Sangerfield. She appears to have received a good basic education as she taught school later in her life. Since she was only two years old when Daniel Wells left New Hartford, she could not have known him there, but it seems likely that he was at least aware of her existence and was known to her family in Sangerfield before he traveled there to seek her hand in marriage early in 1813. Daniel's father Joshua may have maintained his wartime friendship with Catherine's father and other members of the Chapin family. The journey from Trenton required a long day's ride, both going and returning, and would only have been worth making if Daniel was assured of a welcome at its end.

His courtship of Catherine was brief, a few hours spent together on the occasions when he could visit before returning to work his farm during the spring planting and summer growing seasons. But despite the age difference between them, they were well matched. After the fall harvest, on November 30, 1813, Daniel Wells and Catherine Chapin were married in Trenton. She became mistress of his household and stepmother to his five daughters. Their first child, Daniel Hanmer Wells, was born the following year on October 27.³⁷