

## Sarah Hatfield Clark

The ideals of representative government flowed through the veins of Sarah Hatfield from the time of her birth in Elizabethtown, New Jersey in 1728. Hatfield, sometimes spelled Heathfield or Hetfield was the eldest daughter of Isaac Hatfield and Sarah Price. Her mother, was the daughter of Benjamin and Mary Price. Hatfield's father, Isaac, was the son of Matthias Hetfield (a weaver and juryman in Elizabethtown) and Marie Melyn.<sup>1</sup> Melyn's parents were Cornelius Melyn (1600-1661) born in Antwerp, Belgium and Jannetie Adryiaens (1604-1681) born in Mydrecht, Netherlands making them Sarah Hatfield's great-grandparents. The Melyn's settled in New Amsterdam in the 1630's. Cornelius Melyn was a member of the Council of Eight in the New Amsterdam colony in the 1640s, and hated by Director-General, Peter Stuyvesant for his insistence that colonists deserved a voice in their governmental affairs. It is said that "Cornelis Melyn was the first great democrat of this country."<sup>2</sup>

The Hatfield's were a well-to-do and respected family who had lived in Elizabethtown, New Jersey for decades. Little is known of the siblings of Sarah Hatfield except the mention of two brothers, Isaac, referred to as an Elder, presumably in the First Presbyterian Church where the family were members, and Andrew Hatfield.<sup>3</sup> A first cousin was Mrs. Robert Ogden, who was the mother of General Mathias Ogden, and Governor of New Jersey, Aaron Ogden. The Ogden's were one of the first families to arrive following the Elizabethtown Grant of 1664, and the family was synonymous with public service.<sup>4</sup> Another cousin of Hatfield's was Cornelius Hatfield, a "Ruling Elder of the Presbyterian Church and a staunch Patriot." His son, Cornelius Jr., sided with the British during the Revolution and led them to the family church, which they burned to the ground on January 25, 1780. Cornelius Hatfield, Jr. reportedly set the church on fire himself.<sup>5</sup> Following the catastrophe, the elder Hatfield offered his barn, called the Red Barn, to the congregation where they met until 1787.<sup>6</sup> The church was rebuilt and still serves as a Presbyterian Church located on Broad Street in what is now Roselle, New Jersey.

In 1748 at the age of twenty-one, Sarah Hatfield married Abraham Clark who became one of the New Jersey signers of the Declaration of Independence. Clark was her second cousin, once removed. Their shared grandparents (pictured below) were Cornelius Melyn and Jannetje Adryiaens Melyn: Sarah's great-grandparents and Abraham's great-great grandparents. Their

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<sup>1</sup>Barthelmas, Della Gray, *The Signers of the Declaration of Independence: A Biographical and Genealogical Reference* (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997), 49.

<sup>2</sup>Baskas, Richard Scott, *Cornelius Melyn, 3<sup>rd</sup> Patroon of Staten Island, New York His Children and Some Descendant* (United States: Xlibris Corporation, [www.xlibris.com](http://www.xlibris.com), 2008), 34.

<sup>3</sup>Hatfield, Edwin Francis, *History of Elizabeth, New Jersey: including the early history of Union county* (Hatfield, Edwin Francis, 1806-1883 [from old catalog], ULAN Press reprint, original prior to 1923), 588. Andrew Hatfield, brother-in-law of Abraham Clark, Sarah Hatfield's spouse, is listed as an executor to Abraham Clark's will proved January 18, 1800 allow with their son, [Dr.] Abraham Clark (Calendar of New Jersey Wills – Vol. IX).

<sup>4</sup>Fridlington, Robert J., *Union County Yesterday* (New Jersey, Union County: Union County Cultural and Heritage Programs Advisory Board, 1981), 13.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, *Union County Yesterday*, 21.

<sup>6</sup>Ellison, Harry C., *Church of the Founding Fathers of New Jersey: A History. First Presbyterian Church, Elizabeth, New Jersey, 1664-1964* (Cornish, Maine: Carbrook Press, Prepared Under the Authority of the Session by Harry C. Ellison, Ruling Elder, 9/1/1964), 9.

marriage reignited the intergenerational ideals of representative government, equality, and justice into eighteenth-century Elizabethtown, New Jersey via their shared Melyn ancestry.



(Cornelius Melyn trading with the Indians. Staten Island Borough Hall Murals)

Upon their marriage, Sarah moved to the Clark family home and farm belonging to Abraham's father Thomas Clark. Her husband was an only child and logically would inherit the property.<sup>7</sup> The farm was located "about two miles west of Elizabethtown in the county of Essex and about three or four miles from the channel that divides New Jersey from Staten Island" in present day Roselle, New Jersey.<sup>8</sup> The couple raised their children in the Clark house, and remained in the home throughout their lives.

The Clark's were members of the aforementioned Presbyterian Church located on Broad Street, and had a pew close to the front of the sanctuary. It was Sarah's Great-Grandfather, Matthias Hatfield, who gifted the land in 1677 to build the Presbyterian Church in

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<sup>7</sup>Judge Thomas Clark left the property to Abraham, and additional property to grandsons Aaron and Thomas Clark, dated September 10, 1765.

<sup>8</sup>Bogin, Ruth, *Abraham Clark and the Quest for Equality in the Revolutionary Era, 1774-1794* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982), 163.

Elizabethtown. The pastor, James Caldwell, who was called the “Fighting Chaplain” and his wife, Hannah Ogden Caldwell were close friends of the couple. It is likely Hannah and Sarah Hatfield were related through the Ogden connection. The congregation was fiercely and vocally devoted to the Revolution and reportedly provided as many as one-hundred fifty (150) congregants for the cause, many of whom are buried next to the church. The Caldwell’s were assassinated during the Revolution in two separate incidents. The congregation was “badly demoralized and upset by the pastor’s untimely and horrid death by murder. Reverend Caldwell’s loss was a catastrophe” to the Clarks and the congregation.<sup>9</sup>

Biographers state Sarah Clark was a “resourceful and intrepid” woman. David Freeman Hawke wrote of Sarah that [Abraham] “married an intrepid, enterprising girl who ran the family farm and reared their ten children while he gave all his time to politics.”<sup>10</sup> Her industry allowed her husband’s involvement in four decades of public service, initially for the crown, during the Revolutionary period in Philadelphia, and Annapolis. All-the-while Sarah ran the family farm and raised their children who had not yet reached adulthood. Abraham Clark’s biographers have consistently described him as “frail” and not suited to farm work. Sarah’s strength and resourcefulness made her an especially valuable wife and mother.

The Clark’s had three African American servants who undoubtedly assisted Sarah in the household and with the work of the farm. Their names appeared in Abraham’s will along with directions as to their future; “two negro men named Tobe and Peter, with their mother Rose shall all three . . . be manumitted and set free at my said wife’s marriage or death which ever first happens.” A further condition of their freedom was the support their mother “during her life.” Abraham left “Wife, Sarah, [the] silver teapot; also use of real and personal [property] while widow. Daughters Hannah Miller, Sarah Edgar and Abigail Clark, homestead plantation adjoining lands of John Robinson and Robert Clark, to be divided among them after wife’s marriage or decease.”<sup>11</sup> The inventory of the Clark estate was not made (for unknown reasons) until Sarah’s death in 1804 which listed “a negro girl, a negro man by the name of Peter, and an old negro woman by the name of Rose.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ellison, *Church of the Founding Fathers of New Jersey*, 79. Note: During a visit to the Church some years ago the author of this biography had the privilege of holding Caldwell’s Bible located in an attic museum belonging to the congregation.

<sup>10</sup>Hawke, David Freeman, *Honorable Treason: The Declaration of Independence and the Men Who Signed It* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 146.

<sup>11</sup>Will of Abraham Clark, May 15, 1793.

<sup>12</sup>Inventory of the Estate of Abraham Clark, June 6, 1804. Ruth Bogin states in *Abraham Clark and the Quest for Equality in the Revolutionary Era* that Clark was “permitted . . . to present their [Joseph Smith of Burlington and Joseph Cooper of Gloucester who were Quakers] bill, which they now titled ‘An Act to prevent the Importation of Slaves . . . and to authorize the Manumission of them under certain Restrictions and to prevent the Abuse of Slaves.’” The New Jersey legislature passed the measure on February 21, 1786. Clark, aware of the political climate in New Jersey at the time knew the legislature would not pass both an end to importation and abolition of slavery, 114-15. Bogin goes on to state on page 115; “It marked the first legal recognition in the state that slavery involved ethical considerations.” (Footnote #76: *Votes & Proc.*, 10<sup>th</sup> sess., 1<sup>st</sup> sit., p. 34.). The British Empire did not abolish the slave trade until 1807 through the efforts of William Wilberforce’s Save Trade Act. It was the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act which finally abolished the practice through gradual means in the British Empire.

Ten children were born to the marriage, and the couple had the misfortune of losing five of their children before their own deaths. The Revolution was directly responsible for the death of two of their sons, and the smallpox epidemic during the conflict brought the loss of a beloved daughter. Their eldest son Aaron (1750-1811) was a Second Lieutenant and Captain during the Revolution and left service prior to 1781. He married Susanna Winans, and following the Revolution moved to Washington, Pennsylvania. (Susanna's father, Benjamin Winans also served as a Captain during the conflict).<sup>13</sup> Some biographers point to Aaron as one of the sons who suffered imprisonment in the New York *Sugar House* or on the *Jersey* during the war, but his robust health and longevity suggests otherwise and proof of imprisonment has not been substantiated. Their second oldest child, Thomas, was a First Lieutenant and Captain and thought to be one of the sons incarcerated on the prison ship, *Jersey*. Reportedly, the other prisoners attempted to keep him alive by pressing some meager resources (moldy bread) through a keyhole during his confinement. His harsh treatment resulted in an early death in 1789 at the age of thirty-seven (37) years.<sup>14</sup> Both Aaron and Thomas served in the Eastern Company under Captain Daniel Neil in Colonel Henry Knox's Regiment Continental Artillery; a company who fought at the battles of Trenton and Princeton. Sources state that a cannonball from the artillery regiment is still lodged in the wall of Nassau Hall at Princeton University. The Clark's fourth son Andrew (born 1759) died unmarried in his nineteenth year, likely due to his imprisonment by the British.

The third son, Abraham, born about 1755 died as a youngster on July 26, 1758. Hannah (born c. 1757), the eldest daughter, married Captain Melyn Miller, while daughter, Sarah, born in 1761 married General Clarkson Edgar as his second wife. Their child, Hanrietta died childless. Cavalier Clark (born c. 1762-63) died November 4, 1764 in infancy. Elizabeth (born c. 1765) died from smallpox during the epidemic that spread across the Revolutionary landscape.<sup>15</sup> Abigail, born in 1773 married Thomas Salter. A fifth son named Abraham after his father and deceased brother born in October, 1767, became a physician and married Lydia Griffith. Many of the Clark's children died childless, or their offspring's children failed to reach adulthood.<sup>16</sup>

Letters between Abraham Clark and members of Congress reveal to some extent the ill health and epidemics Sarah, her husband, and the family experienced in a two month time period in the fall of 1776. In a letter to John Hart in September, Clark writes, "At my return home I found my family down with the bloody Flux. One I have buried, Another is Dangerously ill, the others appear upon the recovery. My indisposition remains. I was by it confined to my house, So till yesterday I remained a stranger to my disorder which Appears to be the jaundice. My

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<sup>13</sup>Aaron and Susanna Winans Clark are the fourth great-grandparents of the author, and Benjamin Winans a fifth great-grandfather.

<sup>14</sup>Pyne, Frederick Wallace, *Descendants of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence*, Volume 3, Part 1, New Jersey (Rockland, ME, Picton Press, 1998, 2009), 233-34. Thomas Clark, son of Abraham and Sarah Clark, reportedly married Elizabeth Dixon circa 1775, and had three descendants from that union. Proof of that marriage has not been established.

<sup>15</sup>For more on the Smallpox Epidemic which killed at least 130,000 North Americans, significantly more lives than lost to the Revolution, see Elizabeth A. Fenn, *POX Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

<sup>16</sup>Gardner, Charles Carroll "Genealogical Collections: 1665-1800, Richard Clark and Descendants, Vol. 29, Clark (New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, New Jersey), 5.

exceeding Languid state gives me no hopes of being able to Attend my duty with you soon."<sup>17</sup> On September 28, 1776 Clark again writes to Hart, "I think it my duty to inform you that I yet remain in a weak, Languid state tho' I am in hopes my disorder is upon the Remove, but were I in health the weak and dangerous State two of my Children are in would not suffer me to leave home."<sup>18</sup> The next month Clark refers to the illness of Sarah and other family members writing to Col. Elias Dayton, "I had then just returned from Phila. much indisposed and was Elected into the Assembly, which, tho' very infirm I Attended for About ten days & returned home Sick where I have remained ever since with my self and most of my family much indisposed. (1) We are all got tolerable Well except my wife who hath the 3d day Ague, and one of my younger Children I lost."<sup>19</sup> Ill health was a constant companion of the Clark family.

Sarah Hatfield Clark's contribution to the cause of independence was substantial and long-lasting. She lived her entire life in New Jersey, and her home was located in the colony some historians call the "Cockpit of the Revolution."<sup>20</sup> The number of significant battles, armed conflicts, and skirmishes made New Jersey a major battleground. The geographical location of Elizabethtown was in direct relationship to New York and Staten Island, which was a launching pad for attacks by the British. Her home and family, friends, church, and town were continuously at risk for raiding, looting, and burning. Indeed, in the years between "1776 and 1782 the area experienced some seventy-five raids, skirmishes, or battles."<sup>21</sup>

As a woman, Sarah Hatfield Clark was called to endure the ravages of war, fear, insecurity, shoulder huge amounts of domestic and labor-intensive responsibility, and the death of children. As a wife, she endured the long absences of her spouse who committed the treasonous act of declaring independence from the tyranny of the British, an act of which she obviously supported. As a mother, she bore ten children and suffered the loss of five to death before her own. The mother lost an infant, toddler, and nursed a daughter who succumbed to smallpox. She ached for the fate of her three sons who participated in numerous battles during their Revolutionary War service, and endured the loss of two due to imprisonment at the hands of the enemy with the full knowledge of their mistreatment by the British during their captivity.

Sarah Hatfield and Abraham Clark were married forty-five years. Clark outlived her husband nearly ten years from the time he passed away on September 15, 1794. The notice of Sarah's death on June 2, 1804, in her 77<sup>th</sup> year, appeared in the *New-Jersey Journal* and simply stated; *Elizabeth-Town*, June 5 "Died, on Friday last, Mrs. Sarah Clark, [relict] of the late Abraham Clark, Esqr. Of Rahway."<sup>22</sup> She is buried at the side of her husband, surrounded by the graves of her father-in-law, Thomas; son's Aaron, Thomas, Cavalier; and her husband's uncle, also by the name of Abraham Clark. The stones marking both Abraham and Sarah's burial site

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<sup>17</sup> Abraham Clark to John Hart, September 17, 1776. Letters of Delegates to Congress: Volume 5 August 16, 1776 - December 31, 1776 Abraham Clark to Elias Dayton. Continental Congress 1781, 19:137. Letters of Delegates to Congress: Volume 5 August 16, 1776 - December 31, 1776 Abraham Clark to Elias Dayton. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwdg.html>, accessed 5/17/20.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Abraham Clark to John Hart, September 28, 1776.

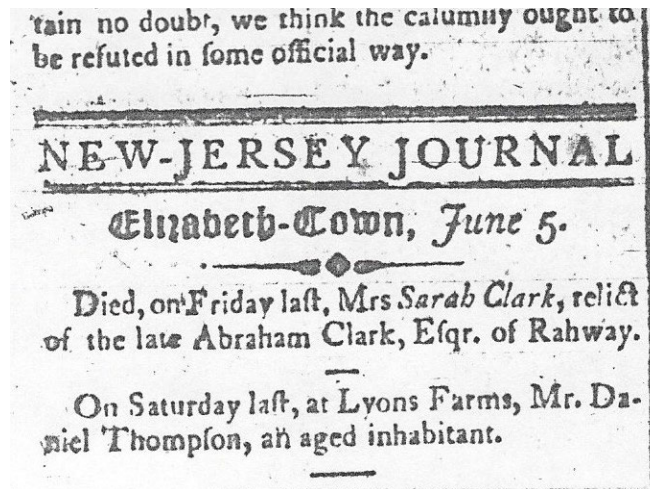
<sup>19</sup>Ibid., Abraham Clark to the Hon. Elias Dayton, October 26, 1776.

<sup>20</sup>Fridlington, *Union County Yesterday*, 20.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>22</sup>*New-Jersey Journal*, #1075, Vol XXI.

in the Rahway Cemetery on St. Georges Avenue were encased in a monument at the site in 1924 by the Rebecca Cornell Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). The monument which placed their stones side-by-side attests to the equality of their sacrifice, devotion, and service. Sarah Hatfield Clark's fortitude as a woman, wife, and mother during the dark days of war, pestilence, and loss, signifies the qualities and character of numerous women in the early days of our country's history.



Sarah Hatfield Clark Obituary – *New-Jersey Journal*



Sarah Hatfield Clark tombstone



Abraham and Sarah Hatfield Clark tombstone

*Shirley Hunter Smith, Ph.D.*

Descendant – 5<sup>th</sup> Great-Granddaughter of Sarah Hatfield and Abraham Clark

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Images – In order of appearance

Sarah Hatfield Clark Obituary – *New Jersey Journal*, Tuesday, June 5, 1804, #1075 Vol XXI.  
Author's copy.

Sarah Hatfield Clark tombstone. Image courtesy of the author.

Abraham Clark and Sarah Hatfield Clark combined tombstone. Image courtesy of the author.

Melyn portrait by artist Frederick Charles Stahr, 1940. Staten Island Borough  
Hall Murals. Staten Island, New York.

[https://www.google.com/search?q=staten+island+borough+hall+murals&client=firefox-b-1-d&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=qaGB1sGQmRpx\\_M%253A%252C3OKi9JtOgkBmGM%252C\\_&vet=1&usg=AI4\\_-kRwVToNAJZd-R4F5I71qTH1gMqjifA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiN7ZTEhsPoAhXPGM0KHau3DpIQ9QEwCHoECAoQGg#imgrc=qaGB1sGQmRpx\\_M](https://www.google.com/search?q=staten+island+borough+hall+murals&client=firefox-b-1-d&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=qaGB1sGQmRpx_M%253A%252C3OKi9JtOgkBmGM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kRwVToNAJZd-R4F5I71qTH1gMqjifA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiN7ZTEhsPoAhXPGM0KHau3DpIQ9QEwCHoECAoQGg#imgrc=qaGB1sGQmRpx_M)

Accessed: March 30, 2020.