

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR ANCESTORS ...

### FIRST SETTLER OF BURKE, VERMONT, AND OTHER EARLY SETTLERS OF CALEDONIA COUNTY, VERMONT

Lemuel Walter (1749 – 1798) & Mehitabel Osborn (1741 – ?) / Ebenezer Burrington (1746 – 1818) & Mary Moulthrop (1747 – 1835) / Ira Walter, Sr. (1770 – 1884) & Esther Greenwood Burrington (1775 – 1861) / Ozias Humphrey, Sr. (1752 – 1826) & Mary Parsons (1756 – 1809) / Ozias Humphrey, Jr. (1779 – 1805) & Clarissa Barber (1780 – 1805) / Ira Walter, Jr. (1798 – 1873) & Mary “Polly” Humphrey (1803 – 1851) / Archelaus Miles (1743 – 1816) & Sarah Salley Simonds (1750 – 1804) / Caleb Heath (1769 – 1820) & Susannah Miles (1775 – 1849) / William Hawken (1757 – ?) & Elizabeth (“Lydia”) Bickford (1757 – ?) / Moses Hall (1771 – 1844) & Alinea “Eleanor” Hawken (1778 – 1844) / Archelaus Heath (1793 – 1871) & Sally Ann Hall (1799–1849)

— *Bradley Rymph*

The first major influx of European-ancestry settlers in the area that eventually became the state of Vermont began in the 1760s. Prior to that time, a few French settlements had been attempted in the northern parts of the area, and a very few New Englanders had made their initial ventures into its south.

Parts of the area that eventually became Vermont were, during the American colonial era, claimed by either New York or New Hampshire — and sometimes both — as within their colonial borders. Hence, Vermont did not have delegates representing its residents at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1776, at which the Declaration of Independence was proclaimed and signed.

However, the year after that momentous declaration was issued, the landowners of Vermont issued their own declaration: that Vermont was itself independent — not only of England but of New York and New Hampshire as well. Vermont finally

#### VISITS TO CALEDONIA COUNTY, VERMONT:

*July 4, 2010 (with José Baquiran)*

*September 1, 2013 (with José Baquiran and Karen Rymph Smarsh)*

*Original text © 1996 by Bradley B. Rymph.  
Revised text and most photos © 2010–2014  
by Bradley B. Rymph.*



1796 map of Vermont

joined the Union in 1791, becoming the 14th state (i.e., the first state admitted after the original 13).

From its establishment, Vermont has been unusual among the states in the Union in that its primary unit of local government is the town, not the county. Although this profile focuses on Heath-line ancestors in three towns in Caledonia County, the local identification of all discussed ancestors would almost certainly have been with the town in which they lived — Burke, Sheffield, or Danville — rather than with the county itself.

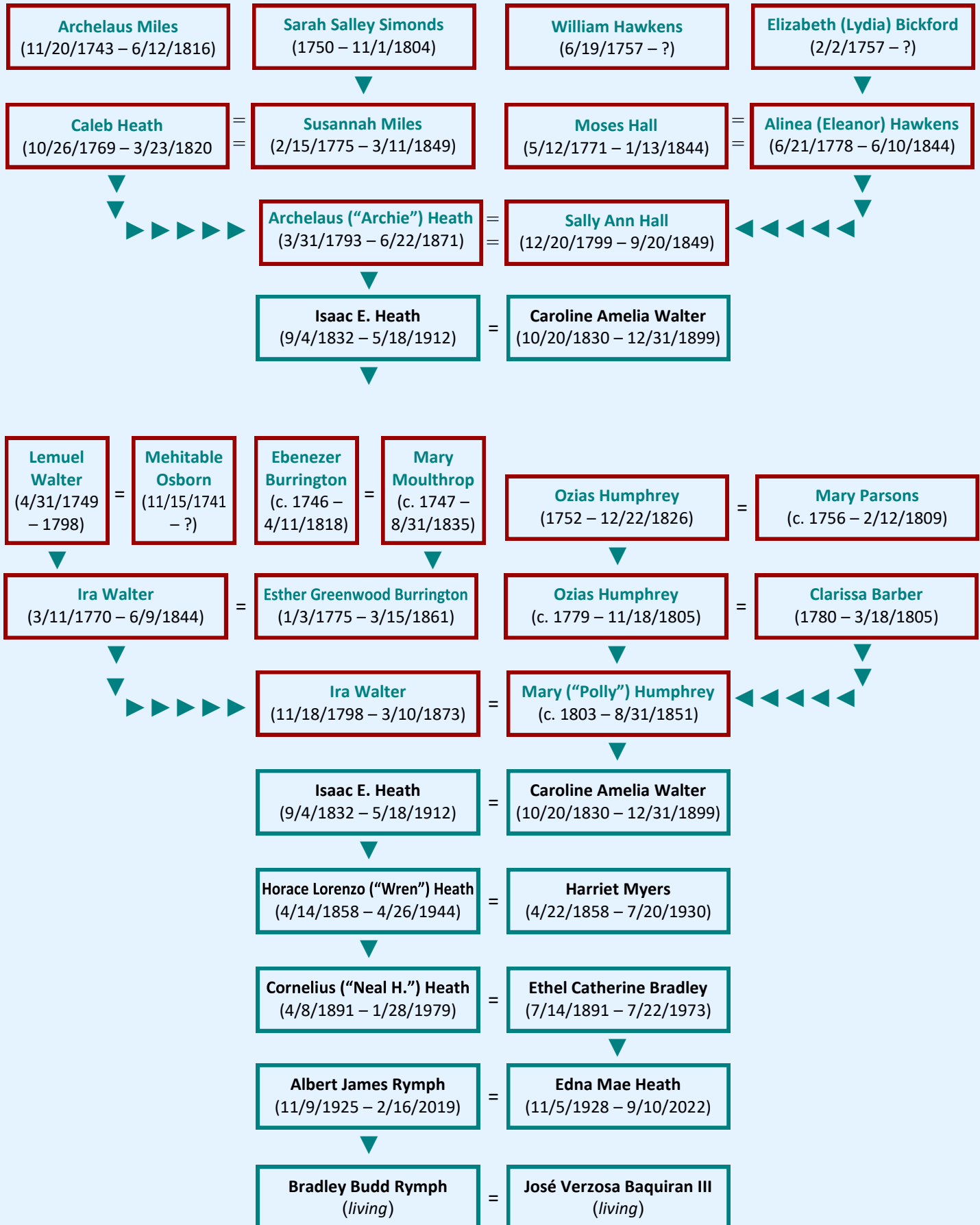
Caledonia County was established by the Vermont government as a separate county on November 5, 1792. Previously, its lands had included been part of Orange County, which

essentially had included the northeastern quarter of Vermont. Caledonia's northern limits were near to, but not along, Vermont's northern border with Canada. Today, Caledonia County — along with Orleans and Essex counties to its north — are collectively known as the “Northeast Kingdom.”

### First Settler of Burke, Vermont: LEMUEL WALTER and His Family

The first of the three Heath-line-ancestry Caledonia towns to receive a charter for its establishment was Burke, in the northeastern part of the county. On February 16, 1782, the governor of Vermont signed a grant authorizing a company of 65 men and women to establish a new township, to be called Burke. A few years later, two men in

# HOW WE'RE RELATED





## BURKE HOLLOW MEETING HOUSE AND CEMETERY

On April 2, 1825, the “Burke Meeting-house Company” met for the first time and committed to building a joint worship space for the Burke community. Each of four denominations — Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, and Universalist — was to use the resulting “Union Meeting House” every fourth Sunday. **Ira Walter, Sr.** (son of Lemuel Walter) served as the meeting house’s first “collector.”

The list of the meeting house’s original pew holders includes three ancestors (or presumed ancestors): Ira Walter, Sr., “slip” 8; **Ira Walter, Jr.**, slip 55; and **Ozias Humphrey**, the presumed

grandfather-in-law of Ira Walter, Jr., slip 4. Behind the meeting house is its cemetery. In it are the graves and tombstones for Ira Walter, Sr., and his wife Esther Burrington Walter. Next to these two graves is a stone for a Mary Walter (c. 1803–1851), on which it is inscribed that she was the “wife of Ira” and died at age 48.

I believe that this stone marks the grave of **Mary “Polly” (Humphrey) Walter**, the wife of Ira, Jr., and my great-great-great-grandmother. Unverified family genealogical records passed down through the generations had indicated that Mary migrated west with her husband and died in Jackson County, Kansas, on September 20, 1872. However, the name on the shared tombstone for Ira and his wife is a “Sally L. Walters”



who died on that date. Apparently, Mary died while Ira, Jr., and she were still living in Burke. Ira then remarried and moved west with Sally as his second wife. *(In studying the evidence to reach this conclusion, I believe that I may also have resolved a remaining inconsistency/mystery about Mary Walter’s parents. See separate box, “A Genealogy Family Mystery Resolved?”)*

The Union Meeting House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on January 4, 2008.

*Tombstones for Ira Walter, Sr., Esther Burrington Walter, and Mary “Polly” Humphrey Walter.*





this company divided the new township's lands into lots of 160 acres each. Each proprietor in the company was assigned two lots. The first of these grantees to settle in the township was **Lemuel Walter**.

A hand-written genealogical note in the Burke community library relates:

Lemuel Walter, of Litchfield Co., Conn., came to Burke alone in the summer of 1792. He cleared land and built a cabin on the land just south of the Mr. Darling place and now a part of his farm. Here Lemuel Walter lived alone for two summers and one winter. In the winter, wild rabbits would come into his cabin and sit by the fire-place to warm themselves. He said they were great company and he liked them better than the bears (*underlined text is best-guess of handwriting*) who scratched on the doors or climbed trees outside. In 1794 he brought his family consisting of his wife and three sons to Burke. He was at this time fifty years old.

Several other families followed them to Burke the next year. At some point, if not in this initial settlement, these families included the parents of Lemuel's wife, **Esther Greenwood Burrington** — **Ebenezer and Mary (Moulthrop) Burrington**. They are

buried, with gravestones still legible, in Burke's oldest cemetery — Burke Green Cemetery.

Life was hard for the new settlers. Burke was primarily covered by dense forestland. The few roads they had were terrible, and St. Johnsbury, the nearest community where business could be conducted, was 16 to 17 miles away. The settlers lived in log cabins, covered with bark peeled from spruce trees. During winters, they had to endure severe cold and hunger. Being quite poor, the settlers could not obtain comfortable, warm clothing or household furnishings. Children were known to run barefoot through the snow. Families slept on straw beds or animal skins.

House fires were common. The chimneys of the houses often were nothing but a few boards fastened together to form a cone that smoke could go through. Because these chimneys easily caught fire, most families had a large instrument they called a "squirt-gun," through which they could shoot water on any part of their houses. The *Vermont Historical Magazine* relates an occasion when Lemuel Walter's chimney caught fire: Walter was

sitting at his table in his log cabin, with a wooden chimney, at noonday,

taking his frugal meal, when a stranger on horseback rode up to his door, and with an earnest voice enquired, “Sir, do you know that your house is on fire?” Ah, said the owner, well, no matter, I will see to it as soon as I have finished my dinner. “But,” said the stranger, “your house will all be in flames before that time.” Be not alarmed, sir, said Walter, I am used to fire and have no fears. Thank you, sir, for your trouble. “If you are disposed to stay there and let your house burn down over your head,” rejoined the stranger, “it is no business of mine,” and rode off, and left the owner to take care of his own house. Whereupon, Walter deliberately took his squirt-gun and soon extinguished the fire.

On September 5, 1796, Burke’s inhabitants met in the Walter home to organize the town’s governance. Lemuel Walter was unanimously elected Moderator and Town Clerk, as well as one of the three Selectmen. His son Ira was elected Constable. On March 23 of the following year, elections were again held, and Lemuel

and Ira Walter were reelected Town Clerk and Constable, respectively.

Burke’s first settlers lived by growing what crops, and raising and hunting what animals, they needed to survive. Cattle grazed by roaming in the forest, which was home to many wolves, panthers, and bears. Thus, it was quite dangerous to travel far from home without proper guns — including to retrieve lost cattle who had wandered away. Bears were especially known to attack the people of Burke while walking through the forest. Family historical lore tells that Lemuel Walter very likely may have suffered such a fate. One day in 1798 after leaving his home, he disappeared in the forest, never to return again.

The handwritten note from the Burke community library says, “As his name disappears from the records with the year 1798, and as [name unclear] certified in 1799 that the notice made by Thomas Bartlett was true — copies of the original papers and records made by Lemuel Walters then Town-clerk, as may infer either that he died, removed from town or was incapacitated for business in the year 1798.”

*(The plot of land on which Lemuel Walter’s cabin once stood was sold by his grandson and great-grandson Lemuel (1815–1888) and Chandler C.*

Previous page:

Top left, center: *Tombstone for Ozias, Sr., and Mary (Parsons) Humphrey*

Bottom row: *Tombstone for Ozias, Jr., and Clarissa Barber Humphrey*



## A GENEALOGY FAMILY MYSTERY RESOLVED?

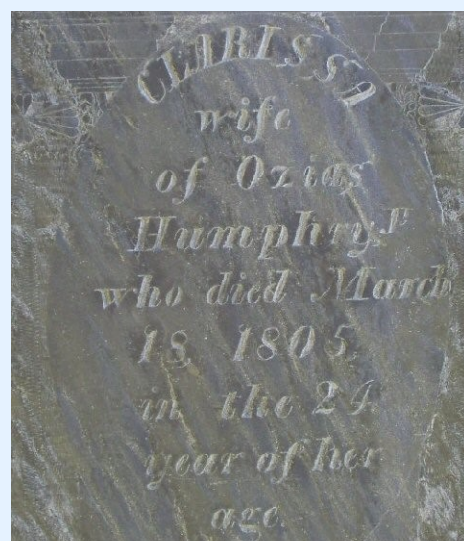
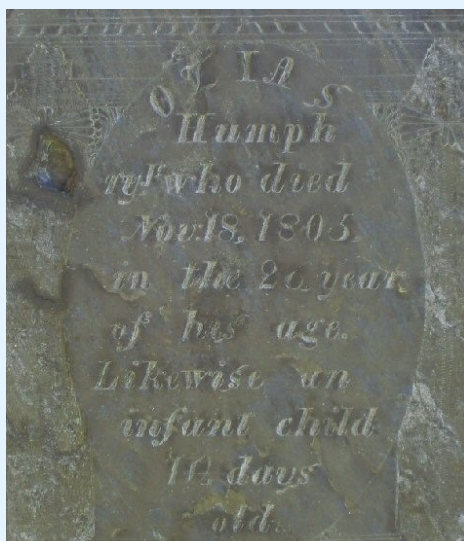
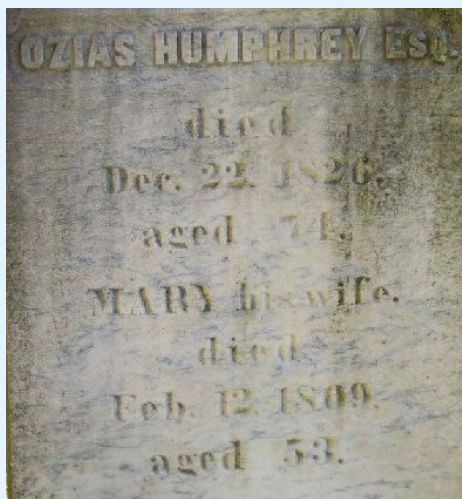
An unresolved family mystery related to **Mary “Polly” (Humphrey) Walter** is her parentage. Traditional family records indicated that she was the daughter of **Ozias and Mary (Parsons) Humphrey** (1752–1826, 1756–1809). This claim, however, is not consistent with the information in Frederick Humphreys’ book, *The Humphreys Family in America*. That book records that this

Ozias and Mary Humphrey had a daughter named Mary, but that (a) she was much older than the woman buried in the Union Meeting House Cemetery would have been and (b) “she did not remove to Vermont with her parents.”

Frederick Humphreys’ book does record that Ozias and Mary Humphrey had a son **Ozias, Jr.** (b. 1775) who married a **Clarissa Barber** (b. 1780). Frederick Humphreys does not record any further information about this couple. However, a short distance down the road from the Union

Meeting House is Burke’s oldest cemetery, known as the Burke Green Cemetery. In it are the graves not only for Ozias, Sr., and Mary Humphrey but also for Ozias, Jr., and Clarissa Humphrey. The tombstone for this second couple records that Clarissa died on March 18, 1805, and that Ozias, Jr., died eight months later, on November 18, 1805, along with an infant child. Mary “Polly” Humphrey would then have been about two years old.

My expectations (though I cannot prove them yet) are that (a) Mary “Polly” Humphrey was the daughter of Ozias, Jr., and Clarissa and (b) after being orphaned, she was raised by her grandparents, Ozias, Sr., and Mary. Her grandparents would have, effectively, been the only parents she could remember knowing, and she would, in fact, have been the daughter of an Ozias Humphrey.



*(1847–1924) Walter in 1873 to Benjamin F. and Sarah Jenkins. They subsequently sold it in 1886 to Elmer Darling. The original house burned down around 1890. In 1892, Darling financed construction of the current house, commonly known as the Lucius A. Darling House, and associated carriage house which currently stand on the land. The land and current structures are part of the Darling Estate Historic District, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2011, and are privately owned and not accessible to the public.)*

### **Early Settlers of Sheffield: ARCHELOUS MILES, CALEB HEATH, WILLIAM HAWKENS, MOSES HALL, and Their Families**

A few miles northwest of Burke in a somewhat more rugged and mountainous part of Caledonia County, Sheffield was organized as a town on March 25, 1796. It had been chartered by the Vermont state legislature on October 25, 1793, and the first settlement occurred in the spring of 1794.

Among the initial town officers elected at the first organizational meeting was Archelous Miles, Jr., as the first town clerk; he held that office for the next 12

years. Archelous Miles, Jr., was the son of **Archelous Miles, Sr. and Sarah Salley (Simonds) Miles**, who were also among the town's initial residents. Their daughter, **Susannah Miles**, had recently married **Caleb Heath** on October 14, 1792, in Northfield, Merrimack County, New Hampshire. The Miles and Heath families migrated north from New Hampshire to Caledonia County to be part of the initial settlement of Sheffield.

Other early settlers of Sheffield were **William and Elizabeth (Bickford) Hawkens**, their daughter **Alinea Hawkens**, and her husband **Moses Hall**.

The challenges of establishing a new settlement in such a rugged environment were severe. Town historian Alfred S. Lamb wrote in the *Vermont Quarterly Gazetteer's* history of Caledonia County:

It is impossible at this day to form a just conception of the hardships encountered by early settlers, leaving the comforts and conveniences of an older country, moving to a distant wilderness into dwellings insufficient to protect them from the wintry blast, and with but scanty fare; yet with unremitting toil they sought to clear them up a home. The first year proved favorable for the growth of grain,



## SHEFFIELD FREEWILL BAPTIST CHURCH AND BURIAL GROUNDS

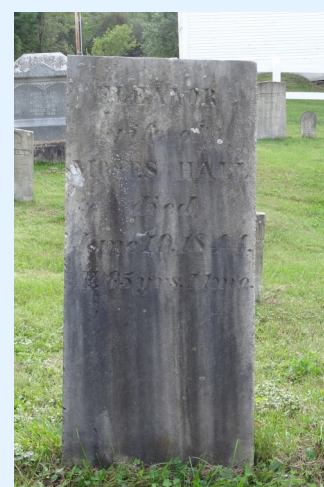
The old Freewill Baptist Church was the church home to most early settlers of Sheffield, Vermont — Including members of the Hall, Heath, Miles, and Hawkens families. Many family members are laid to rest in the burial grounds behind the old church structure, which was built in 1829.



### Moses Hall Family Plot



Grave of Moses Hall  
(1771-1844)

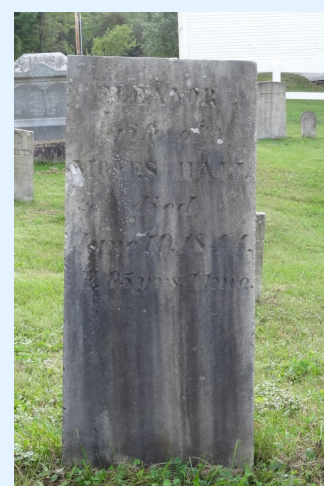


Grave of Alinea Hall  
(1778-1844)

### Caleb Heath Family Plot



Grave of Caleb  
Heath (1769-1820)



Grave of Susannah  
Heath (1775-1849)





*Site of Sheffield's first schoolhouse, built on land owned and donated by William Hawkens.*

and as early as the 28th of July, they had wheat harvested and at the mill. At no time since, has wheat been harvested in town so early.

And yet with all their industry and frugality, for the first few years they were unable to raise sufficient provisions to subsist upon. Their corn had to be brought from the river towns upon horses, a great part

of the distance through the forest, guided by marked trees....

The first buildings erected by the settlers were rudely constructed log cabins, with a bark roof and stone chimney outside the house. The floors were of short, thick plank split from the bass, sometimes from other trees, and confined with wooden pins in place of nails. The



*Land in Sheffield owned by Moses Hall was about one-fourth mile down this road.*





*Mosher Cemetery, Sheffield, Vermont — possible burial place of Archelaus and Sarah Salley (Simonds) Miles. Findagrave.com says they are buried in Freewill Baptist Church Cemetery, but Sheffield town historian Norma Lee-Williams says her records indicate they are buried here.*

doors were formed in the same rude manner, and all combined to give the cabins a unique and shaggy appearance. If they could secure a few panes of glass and a pound or two of nails, they considered themselves provided with a very convenient and tasty dwelling.

While the men were laboring in the field, their wives with commendable zeal were striving, what time they could well spare from other duties, to improve the condition of their cabins.

Most of Sheffield's earliest settlers were Freewill Baptist, and the Miles, Heath, Hawkens, and Hall families were no exceptions. The cemetery of Sheffield old Freewill Baptist Church (built 1829) contains the marked graves of Caleb and Susannah (Miles) Heath

and of Moses and Alinea (Hawkens) Hall. The burial sites of Archelaus and Sally Miles and of William and Elizabeth Hawkens are not known with certainty. Archelaus and Sally Miles died in 1804 and 1816, respectively —well before the construction of the Freewill Baptist Church's building. The death dates of William and Elizabeth Hawkens are not known, but as members of the same generation as Archelaus and Salley Miles, their deaths may also have preceded construction of the Freewill Baptist Church. (Note: Caleb Heath died in 1820. His burial in the Freewill Baptist cemetery does indicate that these grounds were used for burials prior to construction of the 1829 building.)

Albert Lamb's history of Sheffield includes the following information about William Hawkens:

Old North Church,  
Danville —  
Whether Archelaus  
and Sally Ann (Hall)  
Heath worshiped in  
this church building  
(built 1832) after  
moving to Danville  
is unknown.

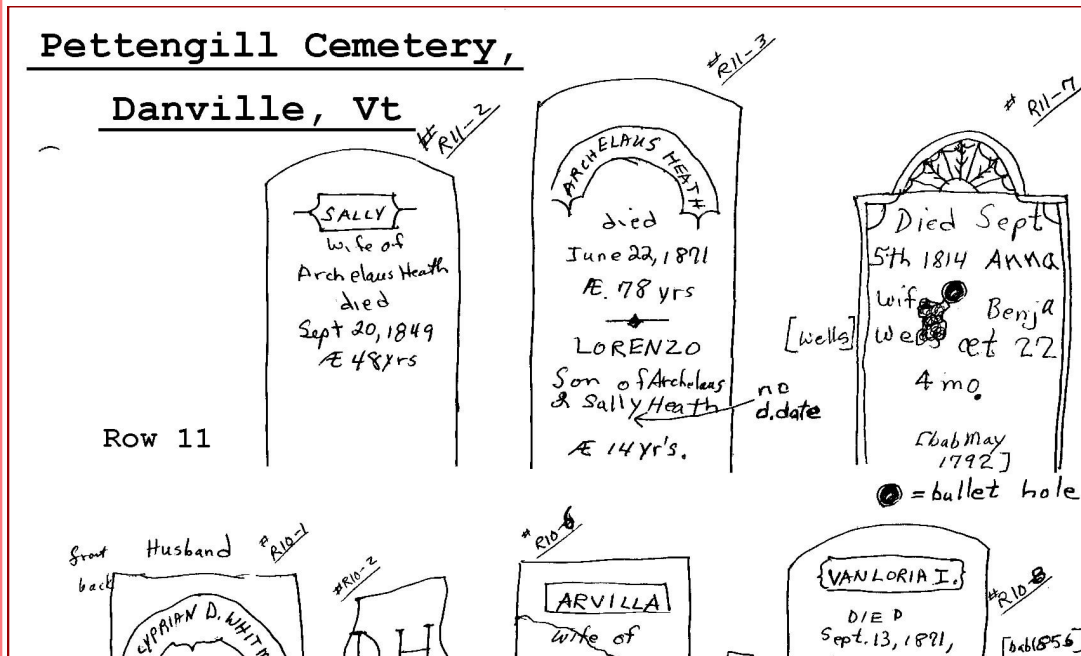


The first trees were felled in this place by Jonathan Gray and Samuel Daniels, in 1794, near where the school-house now stands, on land then owned by Deacon Wm. Hawkins. The first house was built by Deacon Hawkins in 1794. In 1797 he also built a saw and gristmill, upon the above mentioned stream, near where the mills now stand.

## Transplants to Danville: ARCHELOUS HEATH and His Family

**Archelaus ("Archie") Heath**, the son of Caleb and Susannah Heath, and **Sally Ann Hall**, the daughter of Moses and Alinea Hall, married each other in 1830. The U.S. census for 1840 records them as living in the Caledonia County town of Barnet. At some point in the 1840s,

### Pettengill Cemetery, Danville, Vt



Sketch of tombstones of Sally and Archelous Heath in Pettingill Cemetery, Danville. (Source: Alphabetical Transcript of the Pettengill Cemetery, Southern Danville, Caledonia County, Vermont, US; c. 2007, Upper Connecticut River Valley; <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~upperconnriver/DanCems/Pettingill/PETROW07.HTM>)



the couple moved with their family to (what was then) the Caledonia County seat of Danville. Sally Ann died in Danville in 1849; Archelous continued to live there until his death in 1871. Both were buried there in the Pettingill Cemetery (which remains today in a not easily accessed, mountainous, wooded part of the township).

Danville had been first settled in March 1764 by a Captain Charles Sias (1742 – 1837) and his family. Sias would have been a 1st cousin, 3 times removed, of Archelous Heath (and thus was my 1st cousin, 8 times removed). Charles Sias' grandfather, John Sias, Sr. (1670 – 1716 ) was also the grandfather of Archelous Miles (one of the above-discussed early settlers of Sheffield). Charles Sias left Danville in 1802, when he purchased land in the town of West Derby in adjacent Orange County, Vermont.

In his history of early Danville, historian M.T.C. Alexander relates the experience of Charles Sias in bringing his family to be the first European-ancestry settlers of what became Danville:

Capt. Charles Sias, with his family, made the first actual settlement here. His wife was the first white woman who dared to breast the long and dreary winter of this deep, unbroken wilderness. Mr. Sias drew

his family and effects into town from Peacham on a handsled. Mr. Sias brought with him 10 children, seven sons and three daughters, as follows: Solomon, Joseph, Charles, John, James, Nathan, Samuel, Sarah, Polly, and Abigail. The snow was very deep, and the way was trackless. No mark was there to guide them, save the long line of spotted trees leading away into the dark forests. The father, with Solomon, Joseph, Charles, and John, and the three daughters, made the first company. Mr. Sias, with two men to assist, went forward on snow-shoes, and drew the sled, loaded with the girls and some goods, the boys following.

They reached their log cabin early in the afternoon, dug it out from beneath the snow, which had nearly buried it, left John and the sisters to take care of themselves through the night,—the others remained to Peacham. John was but 11 years old, and was the first male child that ever slept in Danville. The next day, came the mother with the other children, on the hand-sled. In three days more the effects were all removed, and the lone family began their hard labors upon the wilderness. They commenced by tapping the maples, which stood thick around them in the most beautiful groves, affording them sugar in abundance, and

supplied, in a great degree, the lack of other food. Thus was settled the first family in this town. The father, Charles Sias, was the first captain of the first military company in town, and was one of the first members of the Calvinist Baptist Church in Danville.

## TO LEARN MORE

Alexander, M.T.C.. "Danville — To 1860." *Vermont Quarterly Gazetteer: A Historical Magazine*. April 1862. Pp. 312–323.

Burrington, A. "Burke." *Vermont Quarterly Gazetteer: A Historical Magazine*. April 1862. Pp. 302–310.

Child, Hamilton. *Gazetteer of Caledonia and Essex Counties, VT*. May 1887. Pp. 151–172. (excerpted online at

[www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~vermont/CaledoniaBurke.html](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~vermont/CaledoniaBurke.html)).

Eichholz, Alice. *Collecting Vermont Ancestors*. Montpelier, VT: New Trails!, 1993.

Humphreys, Frederick. *The Humphreys Family in America*. 1883. Salem, MA: Higginson Book Company.

Jeffrey, William H. *Successful Vermonters: A Modern Gazetteer of Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties*. East Burke, VT: Historical Publishing Co., 1904.

Lamb, Alfred S. "Sheffield." *Vermont Quarterly Gazetteer: A Historical Magazine*. April 1862. Pp. 412–423.

U.S. Department of the Interior.

National Park Service. Nomination papers to place

Darling Estate Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.