

This article is part of a larger family history, **The WATSON Family of West Greenwich, Rhode Island**, which can be found via [this link](#).

A branch of the Watson family of Rhode Island settled in West Greenwich and lived there for nearly one hundred years. The patriarch of this branch was Samuel, designated #7 in *The American Family of John Watson of the Narragansett Country, Rhode Island*. Samuel was the grandson of John Watson, and the son of Samuel² and 1st wife Mercy (Helme) Watson. His line of descent as a 3rd-generation Watson is rendered Samuel³ (Samuel², John¹).

Children of the Patriarch: Freeborn⁴ Watson

Freeborn⁴ WATSON (Samuel³, Samuel², John¹) was born in Rhode Island. He died sometime after late July 1818 – the time when his brother Silas⁴ Watson, drawing up his will, mentioned Freeborn. The dates of Freeborn's birth and death are unknown.

Freeborn Watson is first of record in Rhode Island in 1762, the year in which he was mentioned in his brother Hazard's will, along with his parents and siblings. Freeborn's name next appears in 1776 in the records of the town of West Greenwich.

Freeborn⁴ Watson in the Revolutionary War

On February 24, 1776, the following item was entered in the West Greenwich town council records:

In compliance to an act of the General Assembly for equipping the inhabitants of the Colony, it is resolved by this Council that the following persons are unable to equip themselves whose Names are as follows:

... THIRD COMPANY ... Freburn Watson

Every man in the colony was expected to equip himself with at least one good firearm to aid the war effort. Freeborn Watson (whose given name got spelled in a variety of ways) apparently didn't have a gun.

West Greenwich town council records for the last Saturday of January 1777 provide a lengthy list of those "unable to equip themselves with firearms and other accoutrements." Notations for the Third Company include the name Freeborn Watson.

In 1777, Freeborn's brother Samuel Jr. served a month as a substitute for him in the Rhode Island state troops.

Freeborn's name appears in West Greenwich town council records only once after January 1777. We view that final entry, made on September 3, 1808, as likely erroneous, knowing what we do about his later years. The absence of Freeborn's name in the Rhode Island 1777 military census, taken between March and April of that year, suggests that Freeborn left West Greenwich between January and March of 1777, when he probably headed for the New York-Vermont border area where his brother Silas lived.

Was Freeborn Watson a Tory?

Freeborn Watson married Sarah WILLCOX, born in 1762 in Westerly, Rhode Island, the daughter and firstborn child of Hazard Willcox Sr. and his wife Eunice Babcock. Sarah's father was a well-known Tory who settled in Albany county, New York, very near Bennington, Vermont. Some say that the Battle of Bennington was fought on farm land that Hazard Willcox Sr. owned in that town.

Did Freeborn himself have Loyalist leanings? Quite likely. His marrying into the family of a Tory who died fighting for King George III against the Patriot rebels points strongly to that possibility. Documents from West Greenwich, RI, record Freeborn's successful avoidance of conscription into the Patriot cause. We wonder if Freeborn's brother offered to do that month of substitute service in the state troops just to keep him out of trouble.

That Freeborn and Sarah (Willcox) Watson chose to live in post-war Vermont suggests that the victorious Patriot population was willing to let bygones be bygones – especially as returning Tories boosted Vermont’s population toward statehood status.

We can’t help but think about Freeborn and Silas Watson and their father Samuel³ (the patriarch) all living in Pownal, VT, after the war. Samuel³ Watson served King George II in the Old French and Indian War. Silas served the Patriot cause against King George III. Freeborn avoided military service and married into the family of a flaming Tory. The conversations among these three Watson men must have been interesting. We wish we knew where the patriarch’s sympathies lay during the war for independence from Great Britain.

Various Wilcox researchers place the marriage of Sarah Wilcox and Freeborn Watson in the year 1781 or 1782, though no one specifies where this wedding happened. Given that Freeborn disappears from West Greenwich, RI, town records after 1777 and reappears in Pownal, VT, town records in 1786, there is a gap of nearly ten years during which he could have been anywhere, including Canada.

We know that Freeborn and Sarah gave Sarah’s youngest brother a home when they lived in Pownal. Hazard Wilcox Jr., born December 25, 1775, would have been approaching his fourteenth birthday when Freeborn formally assumed guardianship in late 1789.

Freeborn⁴ Watson in Vermont

Freeborn Watson of Pownal bought land in that town in 1786. He purchased “part of Lot 34” in the 4th Division, from Anthony Goff of Little White Creek, NY, for £90 on February 18, 1786 (Pownal land evidence, 2:382). This tells us that Freeborn was already residing in the town by this date.

Freeborn continued to buy and sell land, obtaining twenty acres in April 1788 from Minajah Bennett (3:55) and ten acres near Silas Watson in January 1789 from Stephen Harrington (3:65). In 1788 he deeded land to John Stanton (3:67) and, in 1789, to Silas Moon (3:66). By 1792 Freeborn was selling land “with appurtenances” to Silas,

though it couldn't have been much; the transaction involved £3 (4:159). In December 1809 Freeborn sold three acres to Silas for \$30 (7:97).

Freeborn Watson signed his name by making an X.

Perhaps Freeborn was liquidating his land holdings in 1809 in anticipation of moving elsewhere. He and his family do not show up in the US census record in 1810 or in any subsequent census year.

We assume that Freeborn and Sarah Watson had offspring. The 1790 census for Pownal – which actually was taken on April 4, 1791, a month after Vermont achieved statehood – shows Freeborn's household as having five people: a male and a female both over the age of 16 (Freeborn and Sarah) and three males under the age of 16. One of those boys likely was Hazard Wilcox Jr., Sarah's brother.

By 1800 this household had increased to six people: one male aged 45 and over (Freeborn); one female aged 26 to 44 (Sarah); one male aged 16 to 25 (possibly Hazard Wilcox Jr.); one male aged 10 to 15; and two males under age 10.

These census accounts of Freeborn's household reflect the likelihood that he and Sarah had three sons. One of these sons may have been named William: Silas Watson's will mentions a nephew named William Watson. We believe this William Watson probably was the son of Freeborn and Sarah (Wilcox) Watson. Given that Sarah had a brother named William, we think it entirely likely she named one of her children after him.

Freeborn Watson's name appears in two other records that don't exactly shed light on his whereabouts or doings.

First, a West Greenwich town council record (Vol. 5) for September 3, 1808, mentions Freeborn Watson in the District 10 work crew for town road repairs. We have seen the original record in the West Greenwich Town Hall and can attest to its veracity. We also suspect that the writer may have meant to write Freeborn Letson. Both Ephraim and Freeborn Letson appear on the same page in the 1810 federal census for West Greenwich. Ephraim, who may have been Freeborn Letson's father, is listed for the District 10 road crew also. We have absolutely no

reason to believe that Freeborn Watson returned to West Greenwich to live and work. Therefore we view this town council record with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Second, there is an item in *Nailer Tom's Diary* for November 17, 1815, mentioning Freeborn Watson. The entry for that date, on page 455 of the published version of this diary, reads thus:

Joseph Taylor workt here. I workt in the Shop: Lett George ammons have one bushel of Corn on James Wormsley's account. Finisht Puling Turnips. Samul Wilbur Freburn Watson and Daniel R Tiffit all paid me what thay owed me, so we are Eavan. no recipts past.

Thomas B. Hazard (1756-1845), called "Nailer Tom" (he made nails) to distinguish him from numerous other (related) men named Thomas Hazard, lived in Kingstown, Rhode Island. Nailer Tom's diary entry could be a brief glimpse of the patriarch's son Freeborn Watson. Why Freeborn might have been in Rhode Island in 1815, we couldn't tell you. But we are pleased to know that he made good on his debts.

We think that Freeborn and Sarah Watson went to live in Canada after 1809.

Wilcox researchers apparently have found records documenting the Wilcox children's petitions for land grants in Canada by virtue of their father Hazard Wilcox Sr.'s service to the Crown during the American Revolution. According to one [web page containing Wilcox info](#), when Sabrah (Wilcox) (Wright) Purdy petitioned for land in December 1810, she "noted that her sister Sarah Watson and [her] brother William live in Ernestown, while her brother Hazard lives in Loughborough." There is no mention of Freeborn in this, but we may suppose he relocated to Ernestown in Ontario province, Canada, with his wife. We don't find him anywhere else.

Freeborn Watson was mentioned in his brother Silas's will, which was drawn up in 1818. He may not have been alive by the time Silas's will was proved in early 1827, since he was not mentioned in subsequent probate documents. (Neither was William Watson.)

The aforementioned Wilcox web page – regarding Eunice, the wife of Hazard Willcox Sr. – provides a list of dates and places for the Wilcox siblings (near the bottom of the page). It includes an item saying that Sarah (Willcox) Watson was “granted two hundred acres in Cartwright Township, Con 9, Lot 22 (near present-day Lindsay, Ontario)” in October 1816. As to where and when Sarah died, it says “7 July 1832 Sarah Wilcox Watson died in Whitby, Ontario, ‘in the 70th year of her age’ (Death Notices of Ontario, Christian Guardian, 1829-1835).”

Section Summary:

Freeborn⁴ Watson, son of Samuel³ Watson, was born in Rhode Island. He lived in West Greenwich, Kent county, Rhode Island before removing to Pownal, Bennington county, Vermont, likely in the early years of the Revolutionary War. Freeborn married Sarah WILLCOX, the daughter of Hazard Willcox Sr. Very likely they had children, one of whom may have been a son named William Watson. Freeborn died sometime after late July 1818, possibly in Canada.