



The Many Wives of Dr. Jonathan Shearer

- Date:** November 15, 2015
- To:** Shearer Family
- Subjects:** Dr. Jonathan Shearer, born 29 March 1762 in Palmer, Massachusetts.
- Goal or Objective:** The goal is to answer the question, "Who was the wife of Dr. Jonathan Shearer, son of John Shearer and Margaret Little, born March 29, 1762 in Palmer, Massachusetts?"
- Background Summary:** Tracing the Shearer family has been a relatively straightforward process since the earliest New England Shearer ancestors arrived from Ireland around 1720 and many of their descendants remained in Palmer, Massachusetts and the surrounding towns for seven generations and nearly 300 years. According to the family, the last direct descendant to live in the area died in 2012.
- In his time, Dr. Jonathan Shearer was a prominent doctor in the small town of Palmer who practiced his profession from early adulthood until he died in 1828 at the age of 67.² Family stories suggest that he fathered twelve children by at least three wives, and there are hints of a fourth wife.
- This is one of several reports about the Shearer Family.
- Restrictions or Limitations:** No more than four hours will be spent on answering this research question.
- Repositories Used:** No repositories were used. All research was done online
- Online Resources Used**
- *Ancestry.com*: found marriage records for various family members
 - *Books.Google.com*: found book on inscriptions from Palmer Cemeteries and the History of Palmer
 - *FindaGrave.com*: found digital images of gravestones for Mrs. Hannah Shearer, Mrs. Nancy Shearer, and Dr. Johnathan Shearer
- Summary of Research Findings:** Direct evidence shows that Dr. Jonathan Shearer had three wives (and only three) who were Hannah Dickinson (m. 24 May 1790), Nancy Fay (m. 26 November 1812) and Lucy Sessions (m. 31 January 1821.) Negative evidence for the existence of Nancy Young provided corroboration for the marriage to

¹ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," database and images, *Ancestry.com* (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/41254_265580-00068 : accessed 1 November 2015), image 67, entry for Shearer, Jonathan, Dr., Mar. 29, 1762; citing Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records*, (Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute) n.d.

² Orrin Peer Allen, *Inscriptions from the Two Ancient Cemeteries of Palmer, Mass* (Palmer: Cemetery Commissioners, 1902); Ebook, *Google Books* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=4mJAAAAAYAAJ> : accessed 19 October 2015), 58.

Nancy Fay. The only conflicting evidence was provided by an authored source, the *History of Palmer*, and it can be explained as a lack of author credibility. The author used multiple sources that he did not cite, including records from descendants of ancestors, some town records and other records from New England Genealogical and Historical Society. Since he did not provide citations, we are not able to review and verify his sources and must consider them lower quality.

Research Notes

Marriage 1

Dr. Shearer married Hannah Dickinson in Connecticut. Four items of direct evidence correlate to verify the first wife's name, and three of them verify the date of the marriage:

- Dr. Shearer's first marriage to Hannah Dickinson in Somers, Connecticut on 24 May 1790³ appears in a list of marriages abstracted from original church records. The description of the original source says it is taken from the lists of Reverend F. W. Bailey, Official Copyist of Parochial Archives, published in 1902. Although this is not likely an independent source from the following and it is a derivative, the records appear trustworthy and provide direct evidence of the name of the bride and date of the marriage.
- The marriage to Hannah Dickinson⁴ also appears in an index of marriages abstracted from original church records with names, dates and references to the volume and page where the original record, which provides secondary information, can be found at the Connecticut State Library in Hartford. The bride's name and the marriage date correlate with the listing in the book of early Connecticut marriages.
- Information from Hannah's gravestone⁵ correlates with the fact of the marriage but does not include information about its date.
- The marriage date and bride's name correlate with the information found in the genealogy of the Shearer family in the *History of Palmer*, although it is an authored source and should be treated with caution.⁶

³ "Early Connecticut Marriages, Book 5," *Ancestry.com*

(http://interactive.ancestry.com/3719/GPC_EARLYCTMARRIAGES-0708 : accessed 2 November 2015,) database on-line, image 87, entry for Jonathan Shearer of Palmer & Hannah Dickinson; citing Frederic W. Bailey, "Early Connecticut Marriages as Found on Ancient Church Records Prior to 1800," (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1997), 98. The description of the original source says, "Reverend F. W. Bailey documented more than 30,000 early Connecticut knot-tyings in this seven-volume collection."

⁴ "Volume 105 Somers, Connecticut, Church Record Abstracts, 1630-1920," *Ancestry.com*

(http://interactive.ancestry.com/3032/41107_620303988_0398-00063 : accessed 1 November 2015) entry for Dickinson, Hannah of Somers, m. Jonathan Shearer, of Palmer, May 24, 1790; citing Connecticut, "Church Records Index," Connecticut State Library, Hartford, 60.

⁵ Findagrave.com, *Find A Grave*, digital images (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fq.cgi?page=pv&GRid=8109555> : accessed 1 November 2015), gravestone for Mrs. Hannah (d. 9 October, 1818), Palmer, Massachusetts.

No other sources for records of this marriage could be found but the above sources provide direct evidence for the marriage with Hannah Dickinson on 24 May 24 1790. It is possible that some of these sources originated with the same informant.

Hannah (Dickinson) Shearer died in Palmer at the age of 59 on 27 November 1817⁷ leaving 49-year-old Jonathan Shearer without a wife— but not for long.

Marriage 2

Dr. Shearer's second wife was either Nancy Young or Nancy Fay, a discrepancy that was resolved with primary information as direct evidence of a marriage to Nancy Fay.

- An original source was located for a marriage between Dr. Jonathan Shearer and Nancy Fay in Palmer on 26 November 1812.⁸ The hand-written original record provides primary information that was recorded at the time of the marriage.
- Nancy's gravestone does not provide a maiden name and refers to her only as Mrs. Nancy, wife of Dr. Jonathan Shearer, died 9 October 1818.⁹ Multiple searches produced no record of a marriage between Dr. Shearer and a Nancy Young, nor any record of a Nancy Young living in Palmer during the period 1811-1812.¹⁰ This negative evidence supports the evidence for the marriage to Nancy Fay.
- The *History of Palmer* lists Dr. Shearer's second wife in error as Nancy Young.¹¹

The record of marriage to Nancy Fay does not conflict with information from Nancy's gravestone; the only conflict is with the information from the *History of Palmer* in regard to Nancy's maiden name. The best explanation for the discrepancy is that J. H. Temple did not consult the original record when he wrote the Shearer genealogy in his *History of Palmer* in 1889; and if he did, he made an error when recording Nancy's maiden name. The direct evidence in support of the marriage between Dr. Shearer and Nancy Fay is more convincing than that provided for a marriage with Nancy Young in the *History of Palmer*, an authored source that should be used with caution. The lack of records for Nancy Young provides negative evidence that further supports the marriage with

⁶ J. H. Temple, *History of the town of Palmer, Massachusetts, early known as the Elbow Tract: including records of the plantation, district and town. 1716-1889. With a genealogical register.* (Palmer: Town of Palmer, 1889), 543; Ebook, Google Books (<https://books.google.com/books?id=8bZorMFMWckC> : accessed 14 Oct 2015).

⁷ Find A Grave, gravestone for Mrs. Hannah (d. 9 October, 1818), Palmer, Massachusetts.

⁸ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," database and images, *Ancestry.com* (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/40143_271505__0001-00014 : accessed 2 November 2015) image 15, entry for Jonathan Shearer Esq. of Palmer & Nancy Fay of Monson; citing Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records*, (Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute) n.d.

⁹ Findagrave.com, *Find A Grave*, digital images (www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=8109556 : accessed 1 November 2015), gravestone for Mrs. Nancy (d. 9 October, 1818), Palmer, Massachusetts.

¹⁰ Searches were conducted on *Ancestry.com*, *FamilySearch.org*, *American Ancestors*, and Google for any possible Nancy Young marriage to Dr. Jonathan Shearer, Palmer, Massachusetts, between 1811 when Hannah died and 1818 when Nancy died.

¹¹ Temple, *History of Palmer*, 543.

Nancy Fay.

While the date of this marriage is just one year after the death of Dr. Shearer's first wife Hannah, a rapid second marriage may have been desirable, especially if there were young children in the household who needed a mother. Unfortunately, Nancy (Fay) Shearer did not live long; she died just short of seven years after she married Dr. Shearer.¹² However, Dr. Shearer was still very much alive; and as a well-respected doctor in his community, he was probably considered a "good catch" even as he approached his late fifties.

Marriage 3

Dr. Shearer wasted little time in finding another wife; he married Lucy Sessions in Brimfield in 1821.

- A third marriage for Dr. Shearer with Lucy Sessions in Brimfield, Massachusetts on 31 January 1821¹³ appeared in an original, hand-written source that provided primary information and direct evidence for this marriage.
- The marriage record correlates with a second (also hand-written) original source in the Palmer Births, Marriages and Death records.¹⁴

These two original sources provide primary information and convincing direct evidence that the marriage date and name are correct. No other records of this marriage were found. Although the informant in both records is probably Dr. Shearer himself, there is no reason to question their accuracy.

Dr. Shearer lived for seven years after marrying Lucy and died on 1 September 1828.¹⁵ Mrs. Lucy Shearer was married again, on 10 January 1832 in Palmer to Amos Hamilton,¹⁶ the clerk who recorded her previous marriage to Dr. Jonathan Shearer. Lucy died eleven years later and was buried in a grave in Palmer next to Amos Hamilton.¹⁷

¹² "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," database and images, *Ancestry.com* (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/41254_265580-00227 : accessed 1 November 2015), image 226, entry for Shearer, Nancy, w. Dr. Jonathan, Oct. 9, 1818; citing Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records*, (Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute) n.d.

¹³ "Brimfield Marriages, Births & Deaths," database and images, *Ancestry.com* (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/40143_263954__0001-00018 : accessed 16 Oct 2015.), image 27, entry for Dr. Jonathan Shearer of Palmer and Lucy Sessions, 31 Jan. 1821; citing Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records*, (Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute) n.d.

¹⁴ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/40143_271505__0001-00014, image 15, entry for Shearer, Nancy, w. Dr. Jonathan, Oct. 9, 1818.

¹⁵ Findagrave.com, *Find A Grave*, digital images (www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=8109554 : accessed 1 November 2015), photograph, gravestone for Doct. Jonathan Shearer (died 1 September, 1828), Palmer, Massachusetts.

¹⁶ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," database and images, *Ancestry.com* (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/40143_271505__0002-00040 : accessed 2 November 2015), image 41, entry for Col. Amos Hamilton and Mrs. Lucy Shearer both of Palmer; citing Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records*, (Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute) n.d.

¹⁷ Allen, *Inscriptions from the Two Ancient Cemeteries*, 49.

The Many Wives of Dr. Jonathan Shearer: Timeline

DATE	EVENT	SOURCE
29 March 1762	Jonathan Shearer was born. ¹⁸	1. From <i>History of Palmer</i> 2. Calculated from gravestone inscription
24 May 1790	Dr. Jonathan married Hannah Dickinson. ¹⁹	1. <i>History of Palmer</i> 2. <i>Church record abstracts</i> 3. <i>Early Connecticut marriages</i>
27 November 1811	First wife Hannah died at age 59. ²⁰	1. Gravestone inscription 2. <i>History of Palmer</i> 3. Palmer Births, Marriages and Death
26 November 1812	Dr. Jonathan married Nancy Fay. ²¹	1. Palmer Births, Marriages and Death (original source) 2. <i>History of Palmer</i> (last name in error as Young)
9 October 1818	Second wife Nancy died at age 31. ²²	1. Gravestone inscription 2. Palmer Births, Marriages and Death
31 January 1821	Dr. Jonathan, age 58, married Lucy Sessions. ²³	1. Massachusetts Town and Vital Records Brimfield, 1696-1893 (original source) 2. Palmer Births, Marriages and Death (original record)
1 September 1828	Dr. Jonathan died at age 67. ²⁴	1. <i>History of Palmer</i> 2. Gravestone inscription 3. Palmer, Vital Records Transcripts
10 January 1832	Mrs. Lucy Shearer m. Amos Hamilton, Palmer. ²⁵	1. Palmer Births, Marriages and Death (original source)
3 August 1843	Mrs. Lucy Hamilton d. Palmer. ^{26,27}	1. Palmer Births, Marriages and Death 2. Gravestone inscription

¹⁸ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/41254_265580-00068, image 67, entry for Shearer, Jonathan, Dr. Mar. 29, 1762.

¹⁹ "Early Connecticut Marriages, Book 5," http://interactive.ancestry.com/3719/GPC_EARLYCTMARRIAGES-0708, 98, entry for Jonathan Shearer of Palmer & Hannah Dickinson.

²⁰ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/41254_265580-00227, image 266, entry for Shearer, Hannah, w. Jona(than) Esq., Nov. 27, 1811, entry for Jonathan Shearer Esq. of Palmer & Nancy Fay of Monson.

²¹ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/40143_271505_0001-00014, image 15, entry for Jonathan Shearer Esq. of Palmer & Nancy Fay of Monson, Oct. 9, 1818.

²² "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/41254_265580-00227, image 226, entry for Shearer, Nancy, w. Dr. Jonathan, Oct. 9, 1818.

²³ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/40143_263954_0001-00018, image 27, entry for Dr. Jonathan Shearer Esq. of Palmer & Miss Lucy Sessions of Brimfield.

²⁴ "Massachusetts, Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988," database and images, (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/41254_265580-00227 : accessed 3 November 2015), image 226, entry for Shearer, Jonathan, Dr, [h. Hannah], Sept. 1, 1828; citing Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records* (Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute) n.d.

²⁵ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," database, *Ancestry.com* (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/40143_271505_0002-00040 : accessed 2 November 2015), image 41, entry for Col. Amos Hamilton and Mrs. Lucy Shearer both of Palmer; citing Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records*, (Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute) n.d.

**Suggestions
for Further
Research**

Since Dr. Jonathan is such a prominent figure in the Shearer family tree, the family may want to continue to explore the offspring of his three marriages.

Project	Sources
Investigate and document the offspring of the marriage between Dr. Jonathan and Hannah Dickinson	Vital records of Palmer, Massachusetts via <i>Ancestry.com</i> , <i>FamilySearch.org</i>
Investigate and document the offspring of the marriage between Dr. Jonathan and Nancy Fay	Vital records of Palmer, Massachusetts via <i>Ancestry.com</i> , <i>FamilySearch.org</i>
Investigate and document the offspring of the marriage between Dr. Jonathan and Lucy Sessions	Vital records of Palmer, Massachusetts via <i>Ancestry.com</i> , <i>FamilySearch.org</i>

Source List:

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²⁶ "Palmer Births, Marriages and Death," database and images, *Ancestry.com* (http://interactive.ancestry.com/2495/41254_265580-00227 : accessed 2 November 2015), image 208, entry for Hamilton, Mrs. Lucy, Aug. 3, 1843; citing Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records*, (Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute) n.d.

²⁷ Allen, *Inscriptions from the Two Ancient Cemeteries*, 49.