



The above daguerreotype, which includes a 20th-Century handwritten note indicating it was once held in the collection of the Ossining, New York Historical Society, shows Avis Burr Wooster in about the fifty-fifth year of her life.

Avis was born on 26 May 1796, in Southbury, New Haven County, Connecticut, in the ember glow of a hot century that had seen Connecticut change from a British colony to a sovereign state inside a new nation. By the time the Revolution exploded, Southbury was already a venerable place, having been established on land bought from the Paugusset tribe in 1659. The area remains much as it was in Avis's day: rural, agricultural, quiet.

The Burr family's transplantation to the New World was courtesy of Jehue Burr, born in about 1605, who sailed with Governor Winthrop to Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1630. Jehue eventually removed to Fairfield, Connecticut, and planted the seeds of a lineage that would include the noted vice president and unfortunate dualist Aaron Burr. Avis's line was through Jehue's son Nathaniel (1635-1712) to Avis's great-great-grandfather Colonel John Burr (1673-1750) to her great-grandfather Captain John Burr (1698-1752) to her grandfather of the same name and rank (1728-1771), who married Eunice Booth (abt. 1728-bef. 1786) circa 1750.

Avis's father, William Burr (23 June, 1762-28 Jan., 1841), lost his own father tragically when he was less than ten years old. According to the parish record of Stratfield, on 28 July 1771, "Capt. John Burr, a farmer, son of... John Burr, was killed by lightning at the old Pequonnock meeting-house.... The congregation was standing in prayer. Parson Rose stopped praying, and after a pause he uttered the following words, 'Are we all here?' When the congregation moved out it was found that David Sherman and John Burr were dead. They were both in the prime of life, with families (the very pick of the flock). There was no rod on the steeple at that time."

A mere five years thereafter, when the Revolution began, teenaged William Burr joined the Connecticut Militia, enlisting on 1 April 1776. His pension files, included in the tome [Revolutionary War Records of Fairfield, Connecticut](#), indicate that his postings were many and varied, and that he served for a time as a substitute for another man, Andrew Curtiss. One of Burr's postings was to the "Battery at Black Rock," or [Black Rock Fort](#) in New Haven, later Fort Nathan Hale. The Connecticut Sons of the American Revolution note, "Fort Hale is situated upon an insulated rock, two miles from the end of Long Wharf, New Haven.... The Americans

[had] a battery of three guns upon this point, which greatly annoyed the enemy when landing.” Many years later, Aaron Turney of Fairfield attested that in 1779, Burr was 1st sergeant at the battery and second-in-command under Captain Jarvis. Burr appears to have left military service sometime in 1780.

Having reached manhood during the fight for independence, Burr beat his sword into a plowshare, **marrying Sarah Hubbell** (1770-1857) (ME# 309), the daughter of Jeremiah (1725-1801) and Sarah (1724-1775) Hubbell, on 23 November 1786. The above-cited pension records include testimony by friend Aner Wheeler, who was “born and lived in Sarah’s neighborhood, and knew her from childhood,” that she “saw William Burr and **Sarah Hubbell** married in Huntington in the fall of 1786” by Congregational Minister Rev. Elisha Rexford.



The gravestones of Avis Burr’s parents, William and **Sarah (Hubbell)**, at Southford Cemetery, Oxford, New Haven County, Connecticut. Photo by Steven Smith.

The couple was blessed with a multitude of children whose names and dates of birth were presented by **Sarah Hubbell Burr** during her attempts to gain a pension increase and land bounty based on her husband’s service. Although it may at first seem tedious to list them, doing so illustrates the spacing between infants that was either natural to, or practiced by this American family, and is illustrative of the sibling maelstrom in which Avis Burr was raised: Alvan (1788); Abigail (1790); Sally (1792); Betsey (1794); Avis (1797); Olive (1800); George (1803); Erastus (1805); Eliza (1808); Harry (1811); and William, Jr. (1814).

As is sadly the case with bygone women, there is little to fill the story of Avis’s days until 15 November 1820, when she married farmer Russell Wooster (b. 25 April 1791) in Southbury. Wooster was the son of Joseph Wooster (abt. 1743-1819) and Hannah Woodruff (abt. 1755-1835). He was descended from the early immigrant Edward Wooster, born in 1622 in Cheddington, Buckinghamshire, who became the first permanent settler of Derby, Connecticut, and died there 8 July 1689.

Whilst running a prosperous farm (the value of the real estate was \$6,000 in 1870), Russell and Avis had four children: William Burr (1821-1900); Cynthia Cordelia (21 Dec., 1824-17 Aug., 1868); Samuel R. (22 April, 1830-5 Feb., 1906); and Avis Amanda (1839-1889).

Avis's eldest daughter Cynthia married Thomas Merwin Downs (15 July, 1823-19 Feb., 1874) on New Year's Day 1845. Downs was the son of Henry Downs and Sarah Ann Botsford. He was listed on the 1850 Census as a farmer, and on both the 1860 and 1870 censuses as a "laborer." By the latter enumeration, two years after his wife's death, he had amassed \$5,500 in real estate and \$3,000 in personal wealth. The couple had three children: Imogene Amanda (5 Sept 1847-12 May 1881), Wilber Russell, and Avis Elena (b. abt. 1866-aft. 1931). The circumstances of Cynthia Wooster Downs's death are unknown, but she was buried in Pine Grove Cemetery, Ansonia, Connecticut. Her husband would remarry but have no further offspring.