

## ELIZABETH JANE MARSH BEARD

By Patricia Sheehan

The search for information about the wife of Joshua George Beard, 10<sup>th</sup> Mayor of Toronto, started with nothing but her portrait, that of a dignified and solemn lady. As was the custom of her day, she was known only as “Mrs. Joshua George Beard”. However, according to *Toronto “Called Back”* written in 1892, she was a woman of many accomplishments in her own right, active in charity works, particularly for the Girls Home, along with Mrs. John Beverley Robinson, wife of the one-time lieutenant-governor of Ontario. Mrs. Beard was also a noted singer, participating in many performances for charitable causes (again with Mrs. John Beverley Robinson – another woman with no first name of her own) as well as being the leading soprano in the choir of St. James’s Cathedral. But even in these accomplishments she was still just “Mrs. Joshua G. Beard”.

Information gathered in this search not only illuminates her talents and her prominence in the early life of Toronto, but also gives her a name, identifies her parents as Samuel William Marsh and Jane (Jean) Ostrum and places her in a family which has been traced back as far as 1600 in one branch and 1450 in another. (Both of these family trees seem well researched, but analysis of their accuracy is beyond the scope of this project.) The evidence for the identity of Elizabeth Jane Beard is outlined below.

The marriage record for Joshua George Beard gives the name of his bride as Elizabeth Jane Marsh. The marriage took place in St. Peter’s Anglican Church in Cobourg, Ontario on 29 September 1826. No parents’ names were given but one witness was a Mary Marsh.

Elizabeth Jane Beard’s death record on 10 October, 1890, in Toronto, lists her place of birth as Port Hope, Ontario, and her age as 86. This would make her year of birth 1804. Census documents from 1861 and 1871 indicate that she was born in 1803.

It seemed logical, given this information, to start by searching the internet for any references to Marsh families in the Port Hope/Cobourg/Hope Township area in this time period. One family immediately popped up, that of Colonel William S. Marsh and his wife, Sarah French. Col. William was a United Empire Loyalist with a most interesting history, first as a member of the Green Mountain Boys in Vermont and later in intelligence, involved with spies and diplomacy in Canada for the British during the Revolutionary War. After the war he received grants of land in Canada, as did his children, in various areas of Ontario, including Hope Township.

It is always tempting to try to connect one’s family to an interesting one such as this, however definite proof must be found for the relationship. In this case it was necessary to find an Elizabeth Jane Marsh of a suitable age in Col. William’s family. The existence of an Elizabeth Marsh in an unrelated family had to be ruled out as well. Fortunately, a lengthy and well-researched study of the Marsh family and all its branches exists, done

by Bruce Stinson and published as a book in 1997. Not only does Mr. Stinson give a record of the descendants of Col. William and Sarah, but he also accounts for several other Marshes in the area whom he has not been able to connect with the family. None of these have the name Elizabeth.

The only Elizabeth Marsh of a suitable age turned out to be the daughter of Samuel William Marsh, a son of Col. William Marsh and Sarah French. Samuel William had come with his brothers in 1792 to Prince Edward County, where he met Jane Ostrum and married her in 1794. Within the year they had moved to Port Hope, then called Smith's Creek. They were among the early settlers of Port Hope, the first ones having arrived in 1793. Samuel and Jane had nine children, the fourth one being Elizabeth or Betsy, born 30 October, 1802. The next child after her was called Mary.

This all sounded very promising – everything fit. There was just one problem: All the internet commentary said that Elizabeth (Betsy) had died and was buried in the Marsh family vault. Definitely a problem.

The evidence for Elizabeth's death would have to be examined, starting with Bruce Stinson's book. Fortunately this was available in the stacks in the Canadiana Room at the North York Central Library.

Elizabeth's date of birth was recorded in her father's daybook which has survived. A photo of the page is in the Stinson book. A transcription of his will is also given with Elizabeth listed as one of his children. He wrote the will in 1813, just before he died. Thus Elizabeth was alive at that time. No further record of her has been found, so it was assumed that she died young. The family vault was built by one of Elizabeth's brothers on Samuel William Marsh's homestead, but not until many years after his death, in about 1856. Samuel William's remains were then moved from the graveyard in which he had been buried and placed in the vault. It has been assumed that any family members who had died before 1856 were moved there also at the same time, with the bones all placed in Samuel's coffin together. The last burial in the vault was in 1885 and that body was stolen by grave robbers in 1908. So the vault was reinforced at that time. Still local people were able to get into it until about 1959 when it was sealed up with concrete. In 1908 a sketch was made of the interior of the vault with the positions of the bodies listed. It was not complete as some coffins were unidentifiable. There is no official list of all those buried in the Marsh family vault. Thus there is no proof that Elizabeth died young or was ever buried in the family vault. It was just assumed since she was not found elsewhere. (A French family history by Mansfield Joseph French which mentions the family of Col. William Marsh and Sarah French was referred to in the Stinson book. This was also checked at the Toronto Reference Library to be sure it did not have further information about Elizabeth and her death. No more definite information was found.)

Jane (or Jean as she was often called) Ostrum Marsh outlived her husband by many years, dying sometime after the 1861 census. Bruce Stinson, in the course of his research on the Marsh family, came across two references to a "Jane Marsh Beard". He wondered if Jane

(Jean) had remarried but could find no evidence of it and noted that she still was listed as “Marsh” on the 1861 census at age 90. (There is a picture of her in the book.)

Another interesting fact is that one of Joshua and Elizabeth’s sons was named Samuel William.

Taken as a whole, this is persuasive evidence that Elizabeth Jane Marsh (daughter of Samuel William) and Elizabeth Jane Marsh Beard are one and the same person. There is one final piece of evidence which seems to make the case all but certain: records from St. James’s Cemetery in Toronto give the birth date of Elizabeth Beard as October 30, 1804. According to her father’s daybook, Elizabeth Jane Marsh was born October 30, 1802. It is easy for a year or two to disappear from one’s age but the day and month stay the same.

The establishment of Elizabeth Jane Beard as the daughter of Samuel William Beard places her in a family which has been traced back to a James Marsh (b. about 1600) in Kent, England. He was either the father or brother of William Marsh, the ancestor of the Marsh family in the USA. James was killed at the battle of Edgehill in 1642, fighting in King Charles’s army in the English Civil War. William also became involved as a young man and later escaped to Connecticut where he stayed and established a family. Elizabeth would be his great great granddaughter.

On the side of Col. William Marsh’s wife, Sarah French, the family has been traced even further back to a William French who was born about 1450 in Suffolk, England.

Although both these family lines have been traced back by the two authors referred to below and both men seem to have done a thorough job of it, caution is always advised in accepting everything they say as proven fact unless the sources they used have been viewed personally. Of course this is not always possible so a judgment will have to be made as to their professionalism and the types of sources they have used and quoted.

In any case, Elizabeth Jane Marsh Beard has now been identified, her talents and contributions to society remembered and she has been recognized as part of a family with a very interesting and romantic history. It would not be surprising if another look at the dignified lady in the portrait now found her wearing a big smile.

#### REFERENCES:

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*Toronto “Called Back” from 1892 to 1847: its wonderful growth and progress*  
1892  
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<http://www.archive.org/index.php>

Stinson, Bruce C.

*William S. Marsh and his Descendants*

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929.2 MARSH

French, Mansfield Joseph

*The Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French, the Joiner, of Stratford (vols. 1, 2)*

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Toronto Reference Library (Stacks)

929.2 F674 (Vol. 1), F675 (Vol.2)

(This book can also be read online on Ancestry.com - either with a subscription or on a library computer.)

Interesting Websites:

1) [www.treesbydan.com/index.htm](http://www.treesbydan.com/index.htm) shows Marsh descendancy from James Marsh, Kent, England c. 1600-1642

2) WorldConnect <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>  
Use “Advanced Search” for “William French, born 1450”  
I looked at the Tree belonging to “wcfrench” but there are many others. His main source is the book by Mansfield French (above).

3) Ancestry Message Boards <http://boards.ancestry.myfamily.com/surnames.marsh>  
Use “Advanced Search” of the “Marsh” board for “Colonel William Marsh”, authors either “leslie wilson” or “WBROWN” – especially the leslie wilson post of 23 July 2001 and WBROWN post of 18 Oct. 2006 at 1:02 pm.