

## Otis Taft (1771-1835) son of Samuel and Mary (Murdock) Taft: Research and Documentation by Brad Lawhead

When I talk about doing genealogy research, I only hope that others are skeptical as I am. Too many times I've run across the novice "genealogist" who questions nothing and makes connections across family generations as though millions lay in trust, or who acts like there's a prize for completing a 10-generation tree in 3 weeks. The odds are, finding out you're the long lost heir to a fortune just isn't going to happen-- that's stuff for T.V.-- and the "just add water" family tree doesn't exist except for the actual tree you planted in the back yard. Accurate family research takes months, oftentimes years, and a healthy mix of skepticism / optimism, more than a dash of ingenuity and 100% honesty! Oh, and yes, money.

In researching my TAFT family line, like many others that share the TAFT surname, I was spurred by family members to prove or dispel the relationship to president William H. Taft, to whom Grandpa Taft maintains the family is related. Whether documentation existed at any prior time that proved the connection, when I began my research none could be found. Like all research, you start with what you know: who was the TAFT in the family and who were their TAFT parents. With that done, I could easily proceed to document TAFT ancestors unimpeded through to the 1850 census. Or so I thought.

I encountered the first hurdle with 3great-grandparents Otis Taft (1831) and wife Jane. Not only could I not find Otis in the 1850 census, Otis is listed in 1860 as being born in England, a departure from prior censuses showing him born in NY. So I said "okay, perhaps I won't be able to prove we are related to W. H. Taft", and that was just fine, because Rule #2 (see below) removes all preconceived notions of fame or notoriety from my research -- I'm really just after the truth. Despite this information, and since wife Jane is shown as born in Ireland in the second enumeration of the 1870 census, it could be that it is she that is foreign-born and not Otis. I've seen more than once the freedoms enumerators take collecting data. I'm not deterred, I just proceed with my research and document findings in detail.

At this point in my research I have a few side lines of census research:

- 1 - Wm Taft (1840 census, Ward 8, NYC)
- 2 - Susan Taft (1840 census, Ward 8, NYC, next door to Wm Taft)
- 3 - L M Taft (1840 census, Ward 8 , NYC, on next page of census after Susan and Wm)
- 4 - Otis Taft (1830 census, Grand St, Ward 8, NYC)

... and some compelling death notices and a cemetery website:

- 1 - "Federal Mortality Schedules, Year Ending 31 May 1880" (Jane E Taft, Jun 1879.)
- 2 - "Barber Collection New York Deaths Newspaper Extracts, 18 Jun 1835" (Otie (sic) Taft, "This morning in 65th yr, Otis Taft 80 Grand St.") - I know that Grand St is in the 8th Ward.
- 3 - "New York Evening Post, 4 Nov 1841" (Lyman M Taft, "This morning Lyman M Taft in 28y. Brother in law Peter Schersten of Greene & Grand Sts.") - another reference to Grand St, is this just coincidence?

4 - "New York Times Obituary, 30 Jul 1880" (William Yonge Taft, full obit with place of burial.)

5 - With a stroke of luck I happened upon a NYC-area cemetery with a website and burial index; there I found the interment for 3great-grandfather Otis Taft (1831). Otis now has a middle name: Otis Abner Taft (1831). I know I'll need further documentation to corroborate these findings, but it is compelling evidence since he, his wife Jane, and two of his known children are buried there.

I keep in mind that I'm pursuing a paternal parent for 3g-grandfather Otis Taft (1831), and the above findings provide me with "likely opportunities" of lateral research that could turn up something. With the above information I am armed to request the following:

- 1 - Request NJ death cert for Jane Taft (wife of Otis Taft (1831))
- 2 - Request NJ death cert for Otis Taft (1831 - 10/28/1893)
- 3 - Request NJ death cert for William Y Taft

Impatience gets the best of me and I drive to NJ Archives to pull death certificates. I've budgeted for such a trip so I gas the car and head out.

The death certificate for Otis Taft (1831) reveals his father is Lyman M Taft and mother is Esther (no last name.) While I'm at the Archives, I scan marriage licenses as well--voila!, a second marriage for Otis that confirms his father is L M Taft and mother is H Winans. Incidentally, Otis married Caroline Parrott who is listed with the family in the 1880 census as a widowed "sister-in-law." Having already followed Step #7 about researching the unlikely, I immediately knew who Caroline was. That aside, Esther now has a last name: Winans. I now have identified 4g-grandparents as Lyman M. Taft and Esther/Hester Winans.

Upon returning home, I contact cemeteries for records. The cemetery interments for Otis (1831) return a Hesta Estabrook in the Taft lot. Being familiar with the many variations of Esther, one of which is Hester -- Hesta is not too far off -- it's only about half a blink before I find Hester Estabrook with son Otis (yes, my Otis (1831)) in the 1850 census: Otis Estabrook. Otis is no doubt taking his step-father's name due to his age or the enumerator's lack of accuracy. This matches up to the 1840 census for L M Taft household (sex and age of individuals).

However, as far as I'm concerned, Hester's burial in the Taft lot does not actually confirm her identity, and a death certificate was not available from New Jersey, so further research is necessary. Furthermore, their residence in Essex Co., NJ is not where I expected to find them.

It is not long before I encounter the Estabrook lineage, fully documenting Hester's marriage to William Estabrook in Essex Co., NJ, with references to both her maiden (Wyman) and former married (Taft) names. Using both the Wyman and Winans spellings I was able to identify a likely match for Hester's parents, Abner Winans and Margaret Heard, which I am working now to verify. I can only surmise that 'Wyman' was used for Hester's name as there are many other Wymans in this Estabrook volume; it could be a simple oversight by someone compiling the data, or by the publisher. I then

run across the marriage record for Hester Taft and William Estabrook on file in NJ so I'm requesting it as we speak (Step #6 / Step #1).

In a simultaneous line of research, death records and cemetery records (different cemetery than the one where Otis is buried) for William Yonge Taft's burial uncover a Susan Taft in the same lot. Upon further request for detailed cemetery information (and a full year's wait and numerous phone calls for an update), cemetery records arrive for Susan that include her date of death and age at death. This new information conclusively confirms her as Susanna (Yonge) Taft, daughter of John Yonge and Suzannah King. Also in this plot is Susanna's sister, Maria Yonge, who appears in the William Y Taft household in 1880; her death date and age at death are also corroborated in the Yonge ancestry documentation. I will need to confirm the Yonge ancestry, but it looks like I'm on the right track.

These subsequent findings in the NYC Directory for 1839-1840 reveals:

- 1 - "Susan Taft, widow of O., 99 Thompson, page 634"
- 2 - "Adah Yonge, widow of William, 99 Thompson, page 728"

I had to do lateral research, but it was necessary to confirm Adah Badeau as the wife of William Yonge (1797-1833), and William as a brother of Susannah and Maria. William's death in 1833 confirms Adah's widow status in 1839-1840.

At this point in my research it looks like Susannah is a 5great-grandmother, but is not conclusive, I can only say that Susannah appears to be the mother of William Y Taft. More documentation is required.

Three additional findings and the request of two Wills help correct and confirm a vital link in the lineage:

- 1 - "NY Genealogical and Biographical Society, Brick Presbyterian Church records":
  - Baptism of Rebecca Jane Taft on 7 Jun 1806, daughter of Otis Taft and Charity Watson; born 30 Apr 1806.
- 2 - "Personal records of the Brick Presbyterian church in the city of New York, 1809-1908":
  - Baptism of Frederick James Taft on 8 Mar 1811, son of Otis Taft and Charity Watson; born 11 Jan 1811.
  - Baptism of Lyman Murdock Taft on 4 Jul 1813, son of Otis Taft and Charity W.; born 13 May 1813.
  - Baptism of William Yonge Taft on Jun 1819, son of Otis Taft; born 6 Apr 1819.
- 3 - Trinity Episcopal burial records website:
  - Otis Taft, age 64-20-7, buried 19 Jun 1835 at St John's Burying Ground

It is important to note that a person's "age at death" is usually comprised of the year- month-day, in that order. "64-20-7" was likely not input correctly into this cemetery index since there is no 20th month of the year. Or the cemetery's documentation uses a year- day-month format. Either way, when this "age" is converted to the standard age format, "64-7-20", 64th year, 7th month, 20th day, it

yields a date-of-birth of 10/29/1770, which is in keeping with the birth and death dates of Otis Taft, the son of Samuel Taft and Mary Hyde Murdock.

I am close to confirming 5g- and 6g-grandparents. And the location and receipt of the following Wills was vital to this confirmation.

4 - Will #1 - Otis Taft, NYC, proved 8 Aug 1835

- wife, Susannah Taft
- daughter, Rebecca Jane Taft
- son, Lyman W Taft
- daughter, Sally Maria Steele
- son, John Watson Taft
- son, Frederick James Taft
- son, William Young Taft
- son, Samuel Taft

5 - Will #2 - Samuel Taft, Worcester Co., MA, proved 26 Nov 1816

- wife, Experience Taft
- son, Lyman Taft
- son, Merritt Taft
- son, Washington Taft
- son, Warner Taft
- daughter, Marcy Olds
- daughter, Phila Craggin
- daughter, Mary Taft
- son, Frederick Taft
- son, Willard Taft
- son, Otis Taft
- son, Dandridge Taft
- daughter, Sibel Ruggles
- daughter, Perley Wills
- daughter, Experience Taft

The above records, combined, confirms 5g-grandfather as Otis Taft (10/29/1771 - 6/18/1835), but replaces Susannah with Charity Watson (?????? - bef 4/6/1819), as the mother of 4g-grandfather Lyman. I list Charity's death date as prior to 4/6/1819 since that is when we know Susannah to have borne Otis's 7th child, William Yonge Taft (4/6/1819 - 7/31/1880). Divorce was rare in this era so it is more likely Charity was deceased by this date... I remain open to both options.

It was with this final record that I confirm relationship to president W. H. Taft's second cousin, three times removed, Samuel Taft (9/23/1735 - 8/2/1816), the 6g-grandfather in this lineage. Samuel being the father to 5g-grandfather, Otis:

1 - "Vital Records of Uxbridge Massachusetts, to the year 1850":

- "Otice, s. of Samuel and Mary, Oct 29, 1771"

I guess Grandpa Taft knew what he was talking about, but it's a comfort to be able to say this definitively, and show proof, rather than cite this as speculation.

1g-grandfather	Asa A Taft (1883 - 1948)
2g-grandfather	Theodore P Taft (1859 - 1930)
3g-grandfather	Otis A Taft (1831 - 1893)
4g-grandfather	Lyman M Taft (1813 - 1841)
5g-grandfather	Otis Taft (1771 - 1835)
6g-grandfather	Samuel Taft (1735 - 1816)

#### BRAD'S RULES FOR RESEARCH

- 1) Confirm EVERYTHING! (and with more than one source type whenever possible!)
- 2) Remove all preconceived notions of fame or notoriety -- view only the facts!

- 3) Keep accurate notes on all research!
- 4) When research on a line is conjecture, state that it is!
- 5) When research on a line is proven, documented sources are REQUIRED!
- 6) Trust no one else's work! When sources are provided, and especially when they're not, go back to Step #1 -- if they found the source you can too -- it's amazing how many times the source being cited is someone's unsupported third-party GEDCOM conjecture (yikes!)

#### BRAD'S RULES FOR BREAKING DOWN THE WALL

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- 1) Change what you're researching to break the monotony and frustration
- 2) Change the research source (e.g. use the internet today, call funeral homes tomorrow)
- 3) Don't let frustration take over -- be creative -- try something you haven't tried before
- 4) Don't discount information because it cannot be proven -- list it as conjecture and work to prove it; it might lead to a break where it CAN be proven
- 5) Budget for expenses; you will inevitably have to fork out some cash for that death certificate or courthouse record, or a trip to your state or national archives, or a genealogy website subscription
- 6) Research lateral lines (great-grand siblings and their descendants, etc.); researching only the direct ancestor or decedent lines is a limiting view -- the more you see the more you know!
- 7) Research the unlikely (someone listed as "boarder" in a census might end up a relative)
- 8) Hone your skills (interpreting census handwriting / evolution of census forms / evolution of townships and counties in the state you're researching / how various website query tools work and how to use wildcards / how county courthouse records are indexed and stored, etc.)
- 9) Ask for help (there are others in your boat that are willing to help or provide tips)
- 10) Sometimes you just gotta get up from the desk and leave it for a week or two

#### **Article for Outstanding Questions on Otis Taft Research:**

While our lineage to the founding ancestor, Robert Taft of Uxbridge, appears to be in the bag, my research is far from over. I am still in pursuit of the following:

1 - Charity (Watson) Taft - parents, date-of-birth, date-of-death, place of burial. We question whether Watson is possibly her married name from a marriage prior to Otis Taft (1771), or whether Watson is her maiden name. Arguably her maiden name is Watson, as the first born from Otis's subsequent marriage to Susanna Yonge, carries his mother's maiden name as his middle name: William Yonge Taft. In keeping with this apparent naming convention employed by Otis, the naming of John Watson Taft is a likely indication that Watson is Charity's maiden name. But we wish to confirm. Does anyone have access to Brick Presbyterian church records prior to 1809?

Based on holdings at the Taft Family Association, it is reported that Otis (1771) had a first wife by the name of 'Doyle'. Based on the separation in birth dates of Otis's first two children it is very likely Samuel's mother is not Charity Watson:

Samuel Taft (1795-1840)

John Watson Taft (between 1801-1810)

2 - Lyman Murdock Taft (5/13/1813 - 11/4/1841), 6th born child of Otis (1771-1835). We are looking for his place of burial and children (other than Otis (1831)). From newspaper clippings we know he had a daughter Emma Maria Taft (abt 1840 - 2/7/1842): "This morning Emma Maria inf dau of late Lyman M Taft. Uncle Peter Schersten. Grand & Greene Sts." There is at least one other daughter per the 1840 census, born between 1831-35. This female individual could perhaps be a non-family member, but we're researching her as a family member at this time.

3 - Robert Steele, son of Sally Maria "Sally" (Taft) Steele. Robert is not 21 at the time of Otis's death in June 18, 1835, so his birth is between 1815-1835. Based on Sarah's estimated date-of-birth using a combination of the 1810 and 1820 censuses, Sarah's birth is between 1801-1804, making Robert's earliest likely birth 1819 and his latest birth 1835. Looking for Robert's actual date-of-birth, date-of-death, place of death, place of burial; wife; in-laws; children.

4 - Samuel Taft, 1st born son of Otis (1771-1835). From census and other records we know Samuel was born 1795 in NY and died 1840. We are looking for is full date-of-birth, date-of-death and place of burial. Is his mother a Miss Doyle?

5 - John Watson Taft (born between 1801-1810), 2nd born son of Otis (1771-1835). John shows with the family only in the 1810 census. We cannot affirmatively identify him in any other census. Looking for John's full date-of-birth, date-of-death, wife, in-laws, children.

6 - Sarah Maria "Sally" (Taft) Steele (born between 1804-1810 - bef 6/18/1835), 3rd born child of Otis (1771-1835). Sarah is referred to as Sally Maria Steele in Otis's Will. Her name could actually be Sally, but Sally is a known nickname for Sarah. We are looking for Sarah's full date-of-birth, date-of-death, husband, in-laws, children (see 'Robert Steele' above.)

7 - Frederick James Taft (1/11/1811 - 2/4/1862), 5th born child of Otis (1771-1835). Frederick died in Glastonbury, Hartford Co., CT and is buried there (cemetery unknown). We are looking for his place of burial, wife Caroline M's (7/6/1811 - 4/23/1893) maiden name and parents, and more information on his children: Sarah (1832); Frederick James Jr (1836); Philura R (1838-1854); Caroline (1840); Joel C (1849-1904).

8 - William Yonge Taft (4/6/1819 - 7/28/1880), 7th born child of Otis (1771-1835). William's children and their wives are pretty well documented. We are, however, looking for his wife Catherine's (born between 1821-1825 - 12/1894) maiden name and parents; and the Van Wart in-laws of his son Richard Von Houghton Taft (9/30/1840 - 2/19/1908); Richard's wife, Mary Ellen Van Wart (1/1842 - 5/1919).