



FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

Female Ancestor Number: 169

Name: Hallett, Elizabeth (Fones) Winthrop Feake

Dates: 21 Jan 1609/10-c.1653

Colonial Society: CT

Date added to ROA: September 19, 2024

Service: A Founder of Greenwich, 1640

Authority: Mead, Daniel M., *A History of the Town of Greenwich, Fairfield County, Conn.,...* (New York: Baker & Godwin, Printers, 1857), 22-23.

Biography:

Born in Groton, Suffolk, England, Elizabeth Winthrop's life spanned continents and defied expectations for women of her era. At the age of 21, she boarded the *Lyon* in 1631, sailing for New England as the widow of Henry Winthrop, son of Governor John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Her husband had tragically drowned the very day his ship reached the New World in July 1630, leaving her a young widow with an infant daughter.

Upon arrival in Boston, she was received into the household of her powerful and politically significant father-in-law. But Elizabeth's story would not end in mourning — instead, it would evolve into a tale of controversy, independence, and survival.

Elizabeth's second marriage to Robert Feake was marked by instability. Feake, a prominent settler and co-founder of Greenwich, Connecticut, eventually suffered from what was described as mental illness — likely hereditary. By the mid-1640s, his condition had deteriorated to the point that he became incapable of managing his affairs, requiring care from the town of Watertown for the last 13 years of his life.

In 1647/8, Elizabeth reportedly separated or divorced Robert, a highly unusual and legally murky step for a woman at that time, and one that led to accusations of adultery. These accusations were likely influenced by her subsequent relationship with William Hallet, a man who had already been involved in managing Robert Feake's property and legal matters. Their eventual marriage only fueled public suspicion, though it also signaled a form of pragmatic partnership in a world where legal and social systems offered women little protection.

Elizabeth's ownership of land — notably her purchase of "Elizabeth Neck" in Greenwich — was radical. In July 1640, she and Feake acquired territory from Native leaders: Amagerone, Nawhorone, Amfsetthhone, and Keofferam, paying with 25 coats. This land, now part of modern-day Greenwich, Connecticut, reflected not only colonial expansion but the rare instance of a woman as a principal in land acquisition.



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Her ownership challenged both legal and social norms, particularly in a patriarchal, Puritan society where women's rights to property were constrained, and where female independence — especially when linked to land — could be interpreted as subversive.

Elizabeth's life intersected with the powerful Winthrop family, the turbulent politics of early colonial settlements, and the limited — yet evolving — roles of women in 17th-century America. That she navigated three marriages, accusations of moral transgression, and property ownership at a time when women had virtually no legal identity, marks her as a figure of resilience and complexity.

Her story not only reflects the struggles of women in colonial society but also their ability to assert agency, even in the face of rigid religious and cultural norms.



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