



## FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

**Female Ancestor Number: 104**

**Name:** Davenport, Elizabeth (Wooley)

**Dates:** (c. 1603-15 Sep 1676)

**Colonial Society:** CT

**Date added to ROA:** 2-12-2024

**Service: Woman of Distinction: Medical Practitioner**

**Authority:** Tannenbaum, Rebecca J. "What is Best to Be Done for These Fevers": Elizabeth Davenport's Medical Practice in New Haven Colony." *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 70, No. 2 (Jun., 1997), pp. 265-284.

### **Biography:**

Elizabeth Wooley was born c. 1603 in Coventry, Warwickshire, England to Margaret (Tellett) and Ralph Wooley.

In 1625/7 Elizabeth married The Reverend John Davenport also of Coventry. John was a prominent Puritan minister and removed to The Hague in 1663 fleeing persecution. The family emigrated on the *Hector* and arrived in Salem, Massachusetts in 1637. John is considered one of the founders of New Haven Connecticut and Yale University.

Elizabeth was an early New Haven Colony medical practitioner. A lot can be gleaned about her practice from letters between John Davenport and John Winthrop, Jr., a university educated physician, asking advice on Elizabeth's behalf and requesting imported drugs to care for the ill in the area. In fact, Elizabeth's own son, John, Jr., is named as one of her patients during a serious illness in December 1660, in which he requested a special treat of an apple, baked, and delighted in its taste. Surviving letters requesting advice, drugs, and reporting on illnesses took place between 1654 and 1666. Elizabeth was meticulous in all dealings associated with her practice, in which she initially took to "watching" at the bedside of the sick, carefully observing symptoms and keeping patients as comfortable as possible. As a watchful observer, Elizabeth became an excellent diagnostician. Elizabeth attended to both the poor and the elite of New Haven, to include the epidemic of 1658. In addition, Elizabeth crafted many of the compounds that she utilized in her practice from plants grown in her own household garden. Plants found here consisted of mallow, anise, flaxseed, fennel, rue, comfrey, mint, cinquefoil, licorice, wormwood, and quinces. Elizabeth was known to discuss medical concerns with others, all the while leaning on the advice of the learned physician with whom she trusted and held mutual respect. Indeed, Dr. Winthrop entrusted Elizabeth as his apothecary to distribute large quantities of "rubila and powders" throughout New Haven. There is also a record of Elizabeth having sent Dr. Winthrop medicinal plants to use in preparing his own healing creations. Thus, the two practitioners supported each other's practice as they collaborated for the mutual benefit of both patient and practitioner.

John died March 15, 1670 in Boston, Middlesex County, Massachusetts at 72 years of age.

Elizabeth died September 15, 1676 in Boston and is buried in King's Chapel Burying Ground.