

Tribute to Eunice Hall
Written by Heather Belnap, BFO Treasurer
(Read by Marcia Flanders Stornetta)

Almost 50 years ago, historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich made a declaration that has become one of the mantras in the field: “Well behaved women seldom make history.” This statement is often interpreted as a suggestion that the only way to make history is to be wild and unruly and unconventional—and so women should make a little noise. But what she was trying to get at is that those who work in the fields of history and genealogy should seek to know and understand women who were not necessarily rebels or exceptionally gifted, but who had meaningful lives as traditional, ordinary sorts of people. Their stories too are worth knowing and telling.

Such a person, it would seem, was Eunice Hall, who married the Revolutionary war hero Jesse Belnap. Very little of Eunice’s life is known to us today. No letters or diaries can be attributed to her, and there is very little reference to her in documents. She is mentioned in legal and genealogical records, but these only record relationships and nothing about her individual character, hobbies and interests, personality or values.

Even these scanty records prove problematic. Recent genetic testing disputes her long-assumed parentage. Previously, it was believed that her parents were Eleazer Hall (1732-1789) and Mary Lake (1733-1791) or some other Hall family of Connecticut. We now believe that her parents were actually James Hall (1735-1804) and Abigail Beers (1731 to about 1801).

What we do know is that Eunice was born in Redding, Connecticut, on May 25, 1762, that she married the soldier Jesse Belnap on April 28, 1779, that together they had 8 sons and 7 daughters, and that she passed away on March 12, 1849, in North East Township in Erie County, Pennsylvania.

Although we only have the most cursory information about Eunice Hall, the paternal grandmother to Gilbert Belnap (who is my great-great grandfather), we know that she is central to our family story and that someday—most likely on the other side of the veil—we can come to know the story of this almost certainly well-behaved woman even better.