

In 1623, Elizabeth and her five daughters—Mary, Anna, Sarah, Elizabeth and Abigail—sailed to Plymouth Colony on the *Anne*. The Warrens joined in the life of the small but growing Colony. Richard played a role in public affairs and worked the fields. Elizabeth ran the large household that also included their farm workers and hired help. On occasion, she joined Richard in the fields.

Two sons were born to the Warrens after Elizabeth's arrival at Plymouth Colony. Their names, Nathaniel and Joseph, are listed in the **1627 Division of Livestock**.

Richard Warren died in 1628, leaving Elizabeth with 7 children—five young women, ranging from early teens to early twenties, and two boys under the age of 5. She never remarried.

A Female Undertaker?

Legally, married women, even those conducting business on their own, were regarded as representatives of their husbands. But widows were recognized as agents in their own right. Many widows didn't take advantage of their unique position, but Elizabeth Warren surely did.

In 1626, fifty-three male colonists agreed to underwrite some of the Colony's debt in an arrangement with its financial backers in London. These men were called the Undertakers, and Richard Warren was one of them. The names weren't listed in the Plymouth Colony records until a few years later. In the meantime, Richard Warren died.

In a startling break with tradition, the list of *Undertakers* included the name of "Elizabeth Warren, widow." The General Court of Plymouth Colony explained their decision by noting that Richard, "dying before he had performed the bargain, the said Elizabeth performed the same after his decease."

Unlike the majority of **Plymouth Colony women**, Elizabeth Warren's name appeared regularly in the records of Plymouth Colony during the 45 years she was a widow. In 1635, Elizabeth appeared in the Records as a totally independent agent.

This Land is Your Land?

The Warren daughters had matured and married: Mary to *Anne* passenger Robert Bartlett, Anna to Thomas Little, Sarah to *Mayflower* passenger John Cooke, Elizabeth to Richard Church and Abigail to Anthony Snow. Relations within the large extended family seemed amicable. In the late 1630s, Elizabeth deeded some land in Plymouth's Eel

River Valley to her sons-in-law.

In 1652, the Plymouth Colony Records recorded a petition brought by Elizabeth's son-in-law Robert Bartlett.

Someone had questioned her right to the land she had deeded to Bartlett. The Court once again confirmed her status as an Undertaker and ruled that Elizabeth had the right to dispose of her lands as she saw fit, including the gifts of land she had made to her sons-in-law.

But that didn't settle the quarrel. And as the dispute continued, the identity of those "who pretend themselves to be the sole and right heirs" was revealed to be Elizabeth's son Nathaniel Warren!

Nathaniel claimed that he "hath right as heir unto the lands of Mr. Richard Warren, deceased."

The two sides in the quarrel agreed to submit the argument to arbitration, each choosing two members to sit on the four-man arbitration panel. The expected outcome would certainly have favored Elizabeth's son. But the panel found that Elizabeth "shall enjoy all the rest of her lands and all of them to whom she hath already at any time heretofore disposed any part thereof by gift, sale or otherwise, or shall hereafter do the same, to them and their heirs for ever without any trouble or molestation."

The Court bade Nathaniel to "forever cease all other or further claims, suits, questions, or any molestations or disturbance at any time hereafter concerning the premises, but that his said mother and all her children, or any other to whom she has any way disposed any lands or shall hereafter do the same, but that they may quietly and peaceably possess and enjoy the same."

Plymouth Colony records indicate that she was a woman of power and social position in the community, and referred to her as Mistress Elizabeth Warren, a rarity in itself. And she remained a widow for 45 years at a time when there would have been great social pressure to remarry.

Elizabeth Warren died at Plymouth on October 2, 1673, at more than ninety years of age. She received the unprecedented tribute of a eulogy in the Records of Plymouth Colony.

SOURCES

[The Women Who Came in the Mayflower](#)

[Notes for Elizabeth Walker \(Warren\)](#)

[Elizabeth Walker Warren](#)

[A Woman of Valor: Elizabeth Warren of Plymouth Colony, by Peggy M. Baker](#)