

Elizabeth Murray: A Biography



Elizabeth Murray was born on July 7, 1726 in Unthank, Scotland. Her parents John Murray and Mary Bennett Murray had three other children, James, William and Barbara, all older than Elizabeth. By the year 1737, when Elizabeth was only eleven years old, both of her parents had died. Elizabeth and her brother William were left in the care of her oldest brother, James. Upon the death of their parents, James assumed the role as head of the family. In 1739, he made the decision to move his siblings to the American colonies. The Murray's first settled in Cape Fear, North Carolina. In the early 1740s, Elizabeth traveled with James to London where her brother wed Barbara Bennett. Having started a family in London, it was not until 1749 that the Murray's returned to America; this time to Boston.

In Boston, Elizabeth decided to stand on her own feet and not be dependent on James. She opened her first shop in Boston in 1750, selling women's goods from London. Elizabeth placed advertisements in the Boston Gazette and other local newspapers to publicize her luxury merchandise. Between the years 1750 and 1760, Elizabeth made several trips to London to better acquaint herself with business and bookkeeping. She used her knowledge and skills to help other women, especially her nieces, open businesses in Boston.

In 1755, Elizabeth married Thomas Campbell, a man of Scottish descent like herself. Unfortunately, the marriage only lasted four years. Thomas succumbed to the measles epidemic that spread through Boston. Elizabeth remarried a year later in 1760 to James Smith, owner of a sugar refining business in Boston. Being married to Smith gave Elizabeth greater financial independence and legal standing in the colonies. Smith fell ill in 1768 and died the next year.

By the late 1760s the Elizabeth and her brother James stood out in Boston as supporters of the British cause. In 1768, Elizabeth allowed British troops to be quartered in the sugar plant owned by her husband. James Murray was called out by Boston newspapers for defending the accused attacker of James Otis, a leading patriot in Boston. Elizabeth made the decision to marry for the third time in 1771. She married long-time friend Ralph Inman. As loyalists, the Inmans were in political danger as tensions between the Bostonians and the British were heightened. With the outbreak of war, Ralph made the decision to stay close to Redcoat protected areas in Boston. Elizabeth decided to move to Brush Hill, a farm in Milton, Massachusetts. In the midst of the American Revolution, Elizabeth found herself in support of the British cause. She was accused of spying in 1777 when she helped a British colonel who a prisoner of war. She wished to improve the conditions for prisoners and because of this she was considered a spy by the Boston press. Having taken ill as victory for the Americans was imminent, Elizabeth was unable to return to Great Britain. She died on May 25, 1785 at the age of 58.