

# A Puritan Named Bathsheba?

By Mary Ferm

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When my grandparents introduced me to genealogy when I was in high school, it was the names that first appealed to me—names like Scots Irish Laura Ella McElhany and German Katerina Bibelhausen. Even some of the Puritan ancestors had great names, like Adonijah Pangman, Thomasina Lumpkin, and Bathsheba Pratt. Wait a minute—Bathsheba?

Wasn't Bathsheba the gorgeous woman from the Bible who bathed naked on the roof of her house, whom King David watched and desired so much that he arranged to have her husband killed? King David then married her, and they had a son, Solomon. What were the parents of this Puritan ancestor thinking? (Bathsheba married Joshua Pratt before 1630 in Plymouth Colony, so she was definitely Puritan.) This was a question that has been tickling me in the back of my mind for years.

So here's an example of how social history is helpful—in this case "Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750" by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, which I recently read. Ulrich says that Puritans took for their model of the perfect wife a passage from Proverbs (31:10-31) believed to be written by Solomon. And who would Solomon be describing but his own mother? The Puritans conveniently ignored the story about the hot babe on the roof, and adopted the perfect wife role for Bathsheba.

"Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies...  
She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands...  
She also riseth while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household...  
With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard...  
She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness..."

It was this paragon of female virtue and industry who was cited as an example for women in many Puritan sermons and writings.

This was another reminder for me, that when something in my family history seems funny or odd, it is likely that something is missing in my understanding.