

This article is part of a larger family history, **The WATSON Family of West Greenwich, Rhode Island**, available at this [link](#).

A branch of the Watson family of Rhode Island settled in West Greenwich and lived there for nearly one hundred years. The patriarch of this branch was Samuel, designated #7 in *The American Family of John Watson of the Narragansett Country, Rhode Island*. Samuel was the grandson of John Watson, and the son of Samuel² and 1st wife Mercy (Helme) Watson. His line of descent as a 3rd-generation Watson is rendered Samuel³ (Samuel², John¹).

Children of the Patriarch: Silas⁴ Watson

Silas⁴ WATSON (Samuel³, Samuel², John¹) was born likely on March 28, 1739, in North Kingstown, Rhode Island. He died on January 20, 1827 in Hoosick, Rensselaer county, New York. Silas is designated #24 in *The American Family of John Watson of the Narragansett Country, Rhode Island*.

Silas⁴ Watson is first of record in Rhode Island in 1762, the year in which he got married and in which he was mentioned in his brother Hazard's will. In 1763 his father Samuel³ gave him fifty acres of land in West Greenwich "for Love Good will and Effection" [sic]. In the document recording the transfer of land from father to son, both are named as residents of West Greenwich. The deed was signed on the "first Day of December in the fourth year of his most Sacred Majesties Reign George the third King of great Britain France and Ireland Defender of the faith &c Anno Domini 1763" (West Greenwich Land Evidence, Old Book 4: page 358).

On December 26, 1762, Silas married Sarah BOWDICH in West Greenwich. While this matrimonial event happened nearly a year before Silas was given those fifty acres by his father, it tells us more about the bride than the groom. Longstanding tradition has a wedding taking place in the hometown of the bride. While it's likely that Silas was indeed resident in West Greenwich at the time he and Sarah wed, the record of his marriage is not proof of that.

More property records involving Silas suggest that he was in the process of leaving West Greenwich not too many years later.

In 1767, Silas Watson sold his fifty acres of land in West Greenwich to Latham Stanton of Exeter for the sum of “thirty pounds Lawfull Money” (Old Book 5: page 106). Silas’s wife Sarah joined in this transaction.

The record of the release that Silas gave to his brother Robert Watson for twenty pounds (Old Book 6: page 392) is dated in *John Watson* as 1777; but the hand-written record preserved in West Greenwich Town Hall has the date 1770 written on it. This irregularity is buttressed by the record being sandwiched among others dated 1774 and referring to an “above sd deed” that does not appear above. It looks to us as though the record got copied from an earlier version, possibly the original, and lost something along the way.

Silas Watson arrived in Pownal, Bennington county, Vermont, after 1766, the year in which men from that town signed a petition to the King’s Council regarding incursions by the colony of New York. (What eventually became the state of Vermont was originally part of the New Hampshire land grants. That didn't stop “Yorkers” from trying to lay claim.) Over sixty men, none of them named Watson, signed that petition. Given that in 1773 Silas Watson was on record as a freeman in Pownal, Vermont, the 1770 date might well be the correct one, marking the time when Silas and his family left Rhode Island for good.

Silas⁴ Watson in the Revolutionary War

Revolutionary War records for Pownal, Vermont, tell us that Silas Watson served the Patriot cause as an officer of the town militia. A communiqué from the Vermont Council of Safety, dated August 27, 1777, directed Lieutenant Watson thus:

You will please to send all the evidence you have against Jonathan Card & Peleg Card, [of Pownal.] As we propose to bring them on tryal on the 29th Instant, we shall depend on hearing from you by said day.

By order of Council, Ira Allen, Sec’y

Another Council of Safety record for August 27, 1777, tells us that “Capt. Joseph Farnsworth addressed as Commissary. Lieut. Silas Watson and Lieut. Benjamin Chamberlin and three men to have three days’ provisions as they are Bold Volunteers.” The record does not mention what this mission entailed.

Silas Watson was one of the Commissioners of Sequestration, the men involved with the confiscation and sale of Tory property (ostensibly to pay for uniforms and arms).

A pay roll record for October 1780 lists Lieut. Silas Watson as having served six days in Capt. Nathanael Seeley’s company of Alarm Men in Col. Samuel Herrick’s Regiment of Militia in the service of the state of Vermont.

In October 1781 Silas Watson (not designated as lieutenant) served eleven days with the Alarm Company of Pownal “as marched to Castleton in the alarm in October 1781 with Capt. Benjamin Bates.” Most of the men in this 1781 pay roll list marched 70 miles, a journey matching the distance between Pownal and Castleton, Vermont, due north. This trek was made, apparently, in response to an alarm caused by British Major Christopher Carleton’s raid into the Lake Champlain valley and beyond.

Silas⁴ Watson in Vermont

As mentioned above, by 1773 Silas Watson was on record as a freeman in Pownal. His first deed was recorded in August 1779, when Samuel Robinson of Bennington sold him 76 acres in Pownal (Pownal Land Evidence, Vol. 2: page 34). This deed refers to Silas as a “gentleman.” In November 1781, Asa Douglas of Hancock, MA, sold 45 acres in Pownal’s “4th Div.” to Silas Watson for £20 (2:417).

The late Theodore M. Atkinson Jr. told us that 4th Division land was “not ideal.” After looking at descriptions of the various Watson deeds for Pownal, Ted felt certain that the Watson properties were located in the vicinity of West Carpenter Hill Road, formerly known as Cold Storage Road.

“In my opinion the Watson deeds clearly show that they had property along the Pownal-Benn. line, just like the Carpenters, after the death of Joshua in 1794. But their lots were more to the west, Hippieland, as I call it, or West Carp. Hill Rd. today. In one deed, as you will see, they owned a ‘Fay’ lot, which was in Bennington but prob. contiguous with their property in Pownal.” – letter from TMA, 23 July 2007



Ted’s notations on the map, shown at left, include “Hippieland.” He was remembering a 20th century summer when a group of hippies were encamped in the area indicated. Ted’s X, which we have circled in red, shows what he believed might have been the site of a Watson residence, based on the deeds. Indeed, along the steep hillside of West Carpenter Hill Road, a cellar hole is visible from the road.

In April 1792, Silas paid £3 to his brother Freeborn⁴ Watson for an undisclosed amount of acreage (4:159) in Pownal. The land included “appurtenances” and abutted property belonging to John Stanton. In January 1793, Silas made a large purchase of land from Job Eldridge (whose surname

appears in later Watson deeds spelled “Eldred”). This \$600 transaction involved two tracts of land in Pownal totaling 89 acres (5:66). In 1809 Silas paid \$30 to Freeborn for three acres of land that likely abutted his own (7:97).

Possible children of Silas⁴ and Sarah Watson

We have census data on Silas Watson and his family. But there are no vital records or other documents to tell us *unequivocally* who his children were (if any) and what became of them.

In 1790, the household of Silas Watson included eight people: 1 male under age 16; 3 males 16 and over; and 4 females (no age categories).

In 1800, the household of Silas Watson increased to nine people: 1 male under age 10; 1 male between the age of 16 and 25; 2 males 45 and over; 2 females between the ages of 10 and 15; 1 female between the ages of 26 and 44; 2 females 45 and over; 3 total people under age 16; 5 total people over age 25.

To understand the composition of Silas Watson's household – which could have included unrelated folks – it is necessary to keep Sarah (Bowdich) Watson's age in mind.

Sarah and Silas wed in 1762, when she likely was in her late teens or early twenties. Assuming that Sarah's childbearing years extended into her early forties, she could have given birth to her last child as late as 1786 or '87. The male child under age 16 enumerated in 1790 in the household of Silas Watson therefore could have been her son. By 1800, however, the youngest male in Silas's household – under age 10 – is more likely to have been a grandson. The two females between the ages of 10 and 15 could be daughters, granddaughters, or unrelated girls who worked for and resided with the Watsons.

The oldest males and females enumerated in that 1800 census were Silas, Sarah, and – almost certainly – Silas's parents, Samuel³ and Hannah (Hazard) Watson.

While any daughters born to Silas and Sarah have left no paper trail by which to trace them, there are a few records for three Watson men who might have been their sons.

The first is **Oliver Watson**, who shows up in the 1790 census in Pownal. His household consisted of only two people – one male aged “16 and over” and one female, likely a young couple. We dismiss the idea that Oliver Watson of Pownal was the same man as the Oliver Watson who “came to Montpelier [VT] about 1816, and subsequently settled in Worcester [VT].” (<http://genealogytrails.com/ver/windsor/1891bio2.html>) That particular Oliver Watson was born in Massachusetts in 1785, far too late to be the same person.

Trouble is, we have not succeeded in locating Oliver Watson in any later records, anywhere. It’s possible that Oliver wasn’t the son of Silas and Sarah; he could have been the child of Freeborn⁴ Watson and his wife Sarah Willcox. We know that Sarah (Willcox) Watson ended up living in Canada, possibly with Freeborn; perhaps Oliver “disappeared” to Canada with them. We know that Silas⁴ Watson’s will, drawn up in 1818, does not mention Oliver (though it does mention Freeborn and a nephew named William Watson). It’s possible that Oliver Watson died relatively young. Whatever the case, we are left to wonder whose child he was.

The second is **Stukely Martin Watson**, whose given name sometimes appears as “Stutely.” Stukely M. Watson shows up in a series of land records in Pownal between 1809 and 1814, involving and/or mentioning Silas Watson. One of those records preserved his middle name, Martin.

The first of these land transactions, dated December 14, 1809, involved 90 acres of land being sold for \$1000, with Silas as grantor and Stukely as grantee. These 90 acres were described as “being the whole of the Job Eldred farm,” land in Pownal that Silas had purchased in January 1793 from Job Eldridge (note the spelling variation of the last name). At that time, the acreage was described as 2 tracts (65 acres and 24 acres) in Pownal; in the 1809 record, it was defined as being on the southern boundary line of Bennington, abutting Freeborn Watson and others – with appurtenances (7:98-99). A significant detail: *Stukely leased this property back to Silas and Sarah for their use “during their full term natural lives.”*

Interestingly, this same date, December 14, 1809, corresponds to the last land evidence on record in Pownal with Freeborn Watson’s name. Freeborn sold three acres “adjacent to his farm” to Silas, for \$30 (7:97).

Stukely might have been Silas and Sarah's grandchild rather than their son. Either way, Stukely had to be an established adult by 1809, especially since he shows up in the 1810 census as head of a household of four people. If Stukely were a son, likely he was born at the far end of Sarah's fertile years. And yet, we are surprised that he had a second given name. Middle names came into vogue around the year 1800. Before that time, most people had only one given name.

We pause here to make a Public Service Announcement about how the **1810 census for Bennington county, Vermont**, is presented at Ancestry.com:

Image-records for the town of Pownal *seem* to be missing.

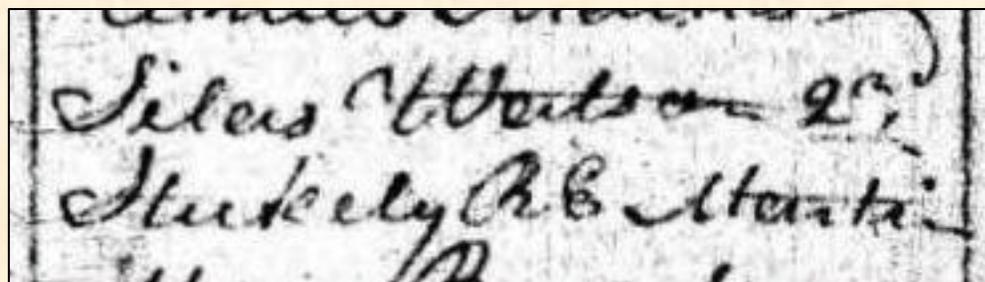
Fear not – they're just mis-indexed. More specifically, they got lumped together with records for the town of Peru (which precedes Pownal, alphabetically). The first two pages are for Peru; the 3rd through 12th pages are for Pownal; and the 13th (last) page in this image set begins the census record for the town of Readsboro (spelled "Readsborough" in the page header).

We have reported this indexing error to Ancestry.com.

There are *three* Watson households listed in Pownal in 1810, though you wouldn't know it easily.

Silas Watson's household is the last one listed on the last page for Pownal (the 12th image in the set for Peru/Pownal/Readsboro). This census records only three people in his household: One male aged 45 and over (Silas); one male under age 10; and one female between the ages of 16 and 25. We don't know who the young people in Silas's household were. The reduced numbers reflect the absence of Silas's wife. Sarah (Bowdich) Watson died on February 11, 1810, at the age of 67 years, eight months. She was laid to rest in Pownal Center Cemetery.

Two pages ahead of Silas's listing (the 10th image in the set for Peru/Pownal/Readsboro), we found something remarkable: Two households, one headed by "Silas Watson 2nd," the next by "Stukely R E Martin." In Ancestry.com's index for this census, Silas 2nd's surname shows up as "Walson" instead of Watson, though that T looks pretty crossed to us.

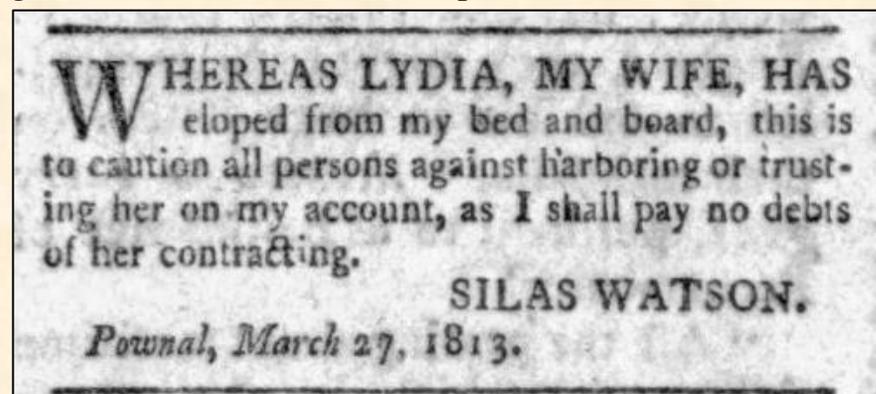


We already know, through the land evidence abstracted for us by Ted Atkinson, that Stukely Watson's middle name was Martin. How his surname got left out of this record is a mystery, although we amuse ourselves by imagining the conversation with the census taker:

"Name?" Stukely. Silas Watson 2nd and I both live in this dwelling house with our families, but I own the property. Census guy writes "R E" to indicate Real Estate. "Stukely what?" Stukely Martin. (Stukely assumes the census taker is smart enough to know that he and Silas 2nd are related, so he doesn't specify Watson as the rest of his full name. Big mistake.)

This is how we discovered a second Silas Watson in Pownal, VT, our *third* possible candidate for a male descendant of Silas and Sarah Watson. **Silas Watson 2nd** headed a household of four people. The immediate proximity of his household with that of Stukely is reasonably good evidence of a relationship.

The existence of this second Silas Watson in Pownal may explain a personal ad placed in the *Vermont Gazette* newspaper in the spring of 1813. It was identical for the 19th of April and again on the 27th; the date and place embedded in this item is March 27th, in Pownal. It read, "Whereas Lydia, my wife, has eloped from my bed and



board, this is to caution all persons against harboring or trusting her on my account, as I shall pay no debts of her contracting.”

We don't know what became of fugitive wife Lydia. We don't find this Silas Watson in the census record again; and he is not mentioned in the elder Silas Watson's will.

While the 1810 census numbers for Silas Watson 2nd's household resemble that of a young married couple with two children, the four people enumerated in Stukely's household – three males and one female – were all between the ages of 16 and 25.

Stukely Watson was last “of Pownal,” as far as we can tell, in 1817, when the *Vermont Gazette* printed an item in its April 15th edition regarding the Direct Tax of 1816. This article listed the properties that would be sold if the outstanding tax debt were not paid.

“Notice is hereby given that the DIRECT TAX of the United States for 1816, laid in conformity to the Act of Congress passed the ninth of January, 1815, upon the following described property, is now remaining unpaid, and that unless the said Tax with ten per cent in addition thereto, shall be paid to the subscriber on or before the fifteenth day of May next, the said property or so much thereof as shall be necessary to satisfy the said Tax and twenty per cent in addition thereto, will be sold at public sale at the house of Henry Huntington, in the town of Shaftsbury, in the county of Bennington. The Sale to commence at nine o'clock, A. M. on the said fifteenth day of May.”

Stutely M. Watson was cited as owing \$3.65 on 123 acres in Pownal, bounded “north on Bennington line and John Stanton, east on Abiatha Buck and Loderwick Buck, with the buildings thereon.”

The final years of Silas⁴ Watson

On May 25, 1813, Silas Watson (we believe this to be the *elder* Silas, not “Silas 2nd”) sold more land to Stukely Watson – 54 acres described as “the Fay lot in Bennington” and 30 acres of land in Pownal, “all the west part of my home farm” (7:305-6). On June 3rd of that year, another record was made referencing “the same land deeded to [Stukely] by the sd. Silas,” bordered on the north by the Bennington town line; land in Pownal with appurtenances (7:330).

And then Silas⁴ Watson got married again.

A transcription of an item in the *Boston Advertiser* newspaper for October 27, 1813, notes: “Married, in ‘Petersburg, Vt.’ [sic], Mr. Silas Watson, 76 [sic] & Miss Maria Bailey, 21 [sic]” (found in [Some Vermont Vital Records of the Early 19th Century](#), page 45, near the bottom). The repeated use of [sic] in quoting this startling news – *76-year-old man weds 21-year-old woman!* – is understandable. First of all, Petersburg is in New York, not Vermont. Such a marriage might not have been unheard-of in those days. Perhaps Silas wanted to extend some legal and financial protection to a young woman dwelling in his household. Perhaps Maria, in turn, cared for Silas in his last years.

On March 4, 1814, Silas sold 100 acres of land in Pownal with appurtenances, near Stukely Watson, to Eli & Reynolds Carpenter for \$3100 (7:354).

By July 26, 1818, the date that Silas made his will, he was living in Hoosick, Rensselaer county, New York, north of Petersburg and roughly ten miles northwest of Pownal, Vermont.

We have a copy of Silas Watson’s will, likely a probate copy made from an earlier version. Silas names his wife in his will; she shows up as “Rana.” Are we surprised by this? Not at all. The original handwriting could have been difficult to decipher. Both names have the same shape, if you will, and roughly the right amount of letters. We believe that Silas’s “well-respected wife” as mentioned in his will was in fact Maria, the same woman he wed in

the latter part of 1813. Note: The town of Hoosick, NY, is spelled “Hosick” consistently throughout the following document, transcribed by the author.

In the name of God. Amen. I Silas Watson of the Town of Hosick County of Rensselaer and State of New York being weak in Body but of sound and perfect mind and memory thanks be to God for the same do make and publish this my last will and testament in manner and form following. To wit: After my just Debts and funeral charges are paid by my Executors hereinafter named, I will and bequeath unto my well respected wife Rana Watson my Horse and Waggon and also the one equal third part of all the remainder of my estate. I also will & bequeath unto Stutely [*sic*] M. Watson one equal third part of my estate and property and the other one third part of my estate I will and bequeath the one half unto my Brother Freeborn Watson and the other half I will and bequeath unto my Nephew William Watson. And it is my will that Joseph Dorr and Benjamin Randall be my Executors to settle all my accounts and to make a distribution of my estate agreeable to the provisions of this my last will and testament, and that they be paid a reasonable compensation for their services and I hereby revoke all former wills by me made and hereby ratify and confirm this and this only to be my last will and testament – As witness my hand and Seal at Hosick this twenty Sixth day of July in the year one thousand Eight hundred and eighteen.

(signed) Jacob Case

 Polly Van Surdam

 Benjamin Randall

Silas Watson SS.

On August 7, 1820, the day Silas Watson was enumerated in that year's census, there were ten people living in his household – six males and four females.

There were two males under 10 years of age. One male was between the ages of 10 and 15. Another was between 16-18 (he got counted a second time in the next category). There were two males “of 16 and under 26 (there's that overlap), so this would account for a male who was between 19-25 years of age. One male fell into the category of 26-44 – perhaps that was Stukely. One male was aged “45 and upwards” – that would have been Silas.

The four females living under Silas Watson's roof in 1820 fall neatly into two categories – two girls under the age of 10, and two women between the ages of 26-44. Perhaps these two women were Maria (Bailey) Watson and the unidentified wife of Stukely M. Watson.

This household looks very much like a family, though we don't know if it was primarily Stukely's. Given that Stukely might have failed to pay the Direct Tax of 1816 debt on his Pownal property, it doesn't surprise us to see this expanded household in Hoosick.

And if Silas was a lucky man, Maria might have given him some children.

Silas Watson died on January 20, 1827, “in the 89th year of his life.” He was laid to rest with his first wife, Sarah Bowdich, in Pownal Center Cemetery. Silas's will was probated in Rensselaer county in the following months and years.

State of New York Rensselaer County fs: Be it remembered that on the twenty sixth day of February in the year of Our Lord One thousand Eighteen hundred and twenty Seven personally appeared before me Thomas Clowes Esquire Surrogate of the said County of Rensselaer, Jacob Case one of the Subscribing Witnesses of the will of Silas Watson late of the Town of Hosick in said County deceased who being duly sworn declared that he did See the said Silas seal and execute the annexed written instrument,

purporting to be the last will and testament of the said Silas, bearing date the twenty sixth day of July in the year of Our Lord one thousand Eight hundred and Eighteen and heard him publish and declare the same as and for his last will and testament; that at this time thereof he the said Silas was of sound disposing mind and memory to the best of the knowledge and belief of the said Jacob and that he the said Jacob together with Polly Van Surdam and Benjamin Randall the other Witnesses to the said will severally subscribed their hands and names to the said will as Witnesses Hereto in the presence of the Testator and each other.

In Witness whereof the said Surrogate hath hereto set his hand and Seal of Office at the said City of Troy the day and year first aforesaid.

(signed) Thomas Clowes
Surrogate

It took two-and-a-half years for Silas Watson's will to make its way through probate. During that time, it was found that "the personal estate of the said deceased was insufficient to pay his debts." Two men appointed as administrators – Dyer Richmond and Palmer S. Shrieves – determined that "a large sum of money yet remained due to the creditors," at which point they were given authority to sell all of Silas Watson's real estate holdings. This sale brought in the sum of \$800.

The documents produced during probate do not mention Silas Watson's wife, or his brother Freeborn Watson, or his nephew William Watson. The only beneficiary named in this process was Stukely Watson, whose name was written as "Stutely." Sadly, for those of us who care, *Stukely's relationship to Silas remained undefined.*

In the end, Stukely was due \$1,594.25 from Silas's estate. On September 15, 1829, he received \$741.57, the amount that remained from the sale of Silas's real estate after the administrators' expenses were paid.

More about Stukely M. Watson

In 1830 Stukely Watson was enumerated in Hoosick, New York. And he appears once again as “Stutely.” It seems like the K in his name morphed into the letter T as this man moved west from Pownal to Hoosick. For the sake of consistency, we will continue to refer to him as Stukely.

By 1830, of course, Silas was gone and his real estate had been sold to pay his debts. But Hoosick is where Stukely lived, per the 1830 and 1840 censuses.

Stukely Watson’s household in 1830 numbered eight. Five of these people – two males, three females – were kids, ranging in age from “under 5” to 15-19. One old lady – a female aged 70-79 – completed this family in 1830.

The age range for the likely parents in this household – 30 to 39 – seems off, based on our prior knowledge of Stukely Watson, especially the 1810 census. This age range suggests that Stukely was born circa 1791, making it more likely that he was Silas’s grandson, not son. Remember that Stukely was involved in real estate transactions with Silas⁴ Watson as early as 1809, when presumably Stukely would have been at least 18 years old. *(Even that seems young for such dealings. Where did this youngster get \$1000 to pay Silas for that property? We wish we could make sense of such shifting numbers but must admit, in this case, we cannot.)*

In 1840 the smaller size of Stukely’s household reflects the natural order of children growing up and moving out, and the elderly mother-in-law passing away. This family now numbered five people – two older girls, one younger son, and two parents aged 40-49.

Then Stukely disappears from the record. He doesn’t appear in cemetery records or in anyone’s online family tree.

We would guess that Stukely M. Watson had children; but we have no idea who they were or what became of them. The 1850 census for Hoosick lists only one Watson, a 21-year-old named Robert who was boarding with the family of James P. Agan. Robert Watson’s age does not fit with the pattern of male children listed for Stukely Watson’s household in 1830 and 1840.

Section Summary:

Silas⁴ Watson, son of Samuel³ Watson, was born circa 1739, in Rhode Island. He lived in West Greenwich, Kent county, Rhode Island, around the time of his marriage, but removed to Pownal, Bennington county, Vermont, before the Revolutionary War.

After the 1810 death of his wife, Sarah Bowdich, Silas moved to Hoosick, Rensselaer county, New York. And he married again, to a woman young enough to be his granddaughter.

Silas died on January 20, 1827, in Hoosick. He was buried next to his wife Sarah in Pownal Center Cemetery.

Silas and Sarah Watson probably had children, but they left almost no paper trail. Three possibilities include Oliver Watson, Silas Watson “2nd,” and Stukely M. Watson.

This article about the life and times of Silas Watson is dedicated to Theodore Mayo Atkinson, Jr., whose great help gave us so much insight into the Watsons of Pownal, Vermont. To read our brief tribute to Ted and to see a picture of him, click [here](#).