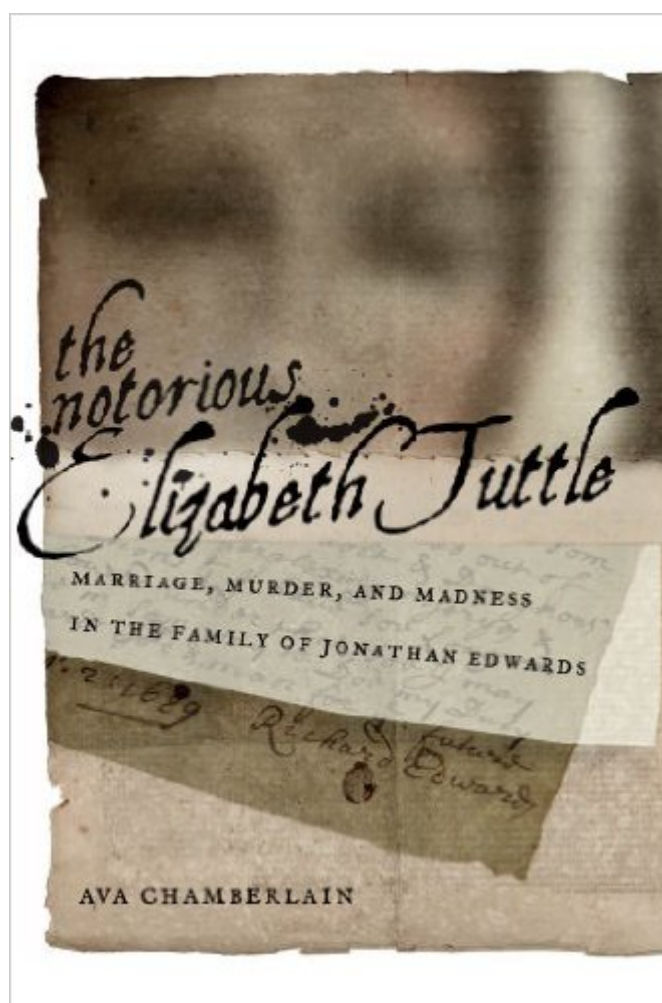


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# The Notorious Elizabeth Tuttle: Marriage, Murder, And Madness In The Family Of Jonathan Edwards (North American Religions)



## Synopsis

Who was Elizabeth Tuttle? In most histories, she is a footnote, a blip. At best, she is a minor villain in the story of Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the greatest American theologian of the colonial era. Many historians consider Jonathan Edwards a theological genius, wildly ahead of his time, a Puritan hero. Elizabeth Tuttle was Edwards's "crazy grandmother," the one whose madness and adultery drove his despairing grandfather to divorce. In this compelling and meticulously researched work of micro-history, Ava Chamberlain unearths a fuller history of Elizabeth Tuttle. It is a violent and tragic story in which anxious patriarchs struggle to govern their households, unruly women disobey their husbands, mental illness tears families apart, and loved ones die sudden deaths. Through the lens of Elizabeth Tuttle, Chamberlain re-examines the common narrative of Jonathan Edwards's ancestry, giving his long-ignored paternal grandmother a voice. Tracing this story into the 19th century, she creates a new way of looking at both ordinary families of colonial New England and how Jonathan Edwards's family has been remembered by his descendants, contemporary historians, and, significantly, eugenicists. For as Chamberlain uncovers, it was during the eugenics movement, which employed the Edwards family as an ideal, that the crazy grandmother story took shape. The Notorious Elizabeth Tuttle not only brings to light the tragic story of an ordinary woman living in early New England, it also explores the deeper tension between the ideal of Puritan family life and its messy reality, complicating the way America has thought about its Puritan past.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The famous "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" Minister Jonathan Edwards had a mad grandmother, a fratricidal Uncle and an Aunt who killed her teenage son. But there is more to the story than the strain of violence and depression, there is a portrait of "self-made" American men who easily blamed the victims and moved on to prosperity once the inconvenient women were left behind. From early English settlers in Hartford and New Haven to budding American revolutionaries at Princeton University and Litchfield, CT, including Edwards' infamous descendant Aaron Burr, Ava Chamberlain has uncovered a complicated American past.

I found this book really interesting. I am descended from a sibling of Elizabeth, so it has special family interest for me. The author brought the times alive. A side interest is the exploration of the ways different writers (biographers of Jonathan Edwards) emphasised, omitted, or were wrong about Elizabeth's life. The organisation and indexing of documents helped bring the truth to light. It is primarily an academic book.

Elizabeth Tuttle's tragic life embarrassed both her husband and her son. Her husband wanted a second marriage to younger, politically connected wife. Her clergyman son wanted respectability. Together, they erased nearly every trace of Elizabeth Tuttle's life. Ava Chamberlain took the fragments of her story, and researched the lives of the intertwined Edwards and Tuttle families. The results are a fascinating story of people leading complicated, conflicted lives in puritan New England. Ava Chamberlain's skill as a historian and as a storyteller make Elizabeth Tuttle's centuries long silence more eloquent than her famous grandson's sermons. Anyone who loves American literature or American history will be drawn to this book.

I am a Tuttle descendant from Nathaniel, the youngest brother, so I found this book fascinating. I have been researching this family a quite a lot there is a large amount of alcoholism, depression, and bipolar disorder in the descendants, as well as genius and accomplishment. It is fascinating to read a roster of Tuttle descendants, from Winston Churchill and his "black dog" of chronic depression to Ernest Hemingway in his alcoholism and suicide. My line is also afflicted with mood disorders and alcoholism; I can trace them back to my great-great-great grandfather. In Elizabeth's case, like many of the people in her immediate family, she may have been a bit "distracted," which is what psychotic symptoms were called at the time. However, her husband Timothy was what I would call an evil man who victimized and shamed her publicly from the beginning of their marriage.

Like most women of the time, Elizabeth was not allowed to tell her story, which was a tragedy. And because of the notorious family history, even if Elizabeth had been heard, she would never have been believed.

The book explores life in New England puritan communities in the 1600's through the thrilling and tragic story of Elizabeth Tuttle, grandmother of Jonathan Edwards. It is a detailed, scholarly book that tells a compelling and tragic story.

I was familiar with prior versions of this story, but utterly astonished at how worshippers of the Edwards family who turned this woman scorned for refusal to sleep with her awful husband into a slut. This book is masterful.

This book will be of interest, of course, to historians and scholars, but it is also a worthwhile read for those with an interest in the transformation of American values and culture in the last 350 years. The early English settlers can charitably be described as religious zealots. In the time of Elizabeth Tuttle, there was no such thing as separation of church and state. Indeed, to play a significant role in the community, it was essential that one be a significant member of a church. We live in an age in which people take considerable pride in their reluctance to judge others. In Tuttle's day, people were not only judged, but in accordance with very high standards. To be an "adult" in a community, you had to prove yourself worthy by your deeds. Among the valued qualities: maturity, rationality, responsibility, and self-control. Thus, before getting married, a man had to establish his financial ability to provide for a family. Was it all this enforced conformity that led to Tuttle's axe murder and (spoiler alert!) the other brutal murders that took place in New England in the late seventeenth century? Perhaps, but it is worth noting that the crime rate in Tuttle's time was a fraction of that in, say, thoroughly non-conformist modern Chicago. In conclusion, this book, besides introducing readers to the notorious Elizabeth Tuttle, will remind them of what an astonishingly different place America used to be.

I guess I'm in the minority here but I didn't care that much for this book. Part of my problem is there was so little historical documentation to base the story of Elizabeth Tuttle on, though I had to begrudgingly give the author credit for managing to stretch a book out of scant evidence. Because of this the book ends up being more about the Tuttle family than about Elizabeth. The book might have meant more to me if I had had more knowledge of, or been seeking, Puritan history. I was

attracted by the titillating title and I felt the book didn't match the title. It turned out Elizabeth was far from "notorious", instead being an ordinary housewife who suffered both an insufferable husband and a mental illness.

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