

# Elisha Williams: Cousin and Tutor of Jonathan Edwards

**PHOTO OF HIS GRAVESTONE hangs above the desk.**

**Elisha Williams** (1694-1755), a cousin of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), was a Congregational minister who served a sister church of First Church from 1722 to 1726.

Williams, who was nine years older than Edwards, was his tutor here in Wethersfield. Jonathan left home at age 13 to begin college, attending the “rival” Wethersfield branch of Saybrook’s Collegiate School (later Yale), from 1716 to 1719. While under Elisha’s direction during that period, Jonathan wrote his first major work, a thousand-word essay on the habits of spiders.

By shaking them off a stick, the young Jonathan discovered how spiders could fly through the air—by extending a lighter-than-air filament “with a great deal of their sort of pleasure.” He continued:

**We hence see the exuberant goodness of the Creator, who hath not only provided for all the necessities, but also for the pleasure and recreation of all sorts of creatures, and even the insects and those that are the most despicable.**

Interestingly, after our gravestone photo was enlarged, it was discovered that there was a spider on the flag.

Elisha Williams went on to become a legislator, militia soldier, jurist, and the rector of Yale College. He died at the age of 60 and is buried in the Village Cemetery, behind First Church. To visit his grave, walk about 150 casual paces straight back from the center of the church’s glass connector to the highest point of the cemetery, walking east. Or, for an easier walk, just “head for the hills,” roughly southeast from the church parking lot.

Elisha’s epitaph, barely readable on the original tablestone immediately behind his (replaced) gravestone, reads as follows:

**The Hon’ble Col’nl Elisha Williams, shin’d in excelling Gifts of Nature, Learning & Grace in Benevolence universal / Firm in Friendship, in Conversation pleasant & Instructive, in Religion Sincere, Unaffected Cheerful; truly Humble, Patient, Fearless in the cause of God & truth, a Pattern of Conjugal & Parental Affection & Humanity, a Wise Great & Good Man. 5 Years he was an Hon’r to the Sacred Ministry in Newington. 13 Years Yale College flourished under his Pious Learned Faithful Instruction & happy Govern’t - the Glory of ye College & Ornament of his Country, He after fitted & adorned Several Civil & Military Characters: Heaven claimed what was Immortal: that Glad obeyed: and drop’d here the Dust to rest till Jesus comes. obiit 24th Julii 1755 Aetatis 61mo.**