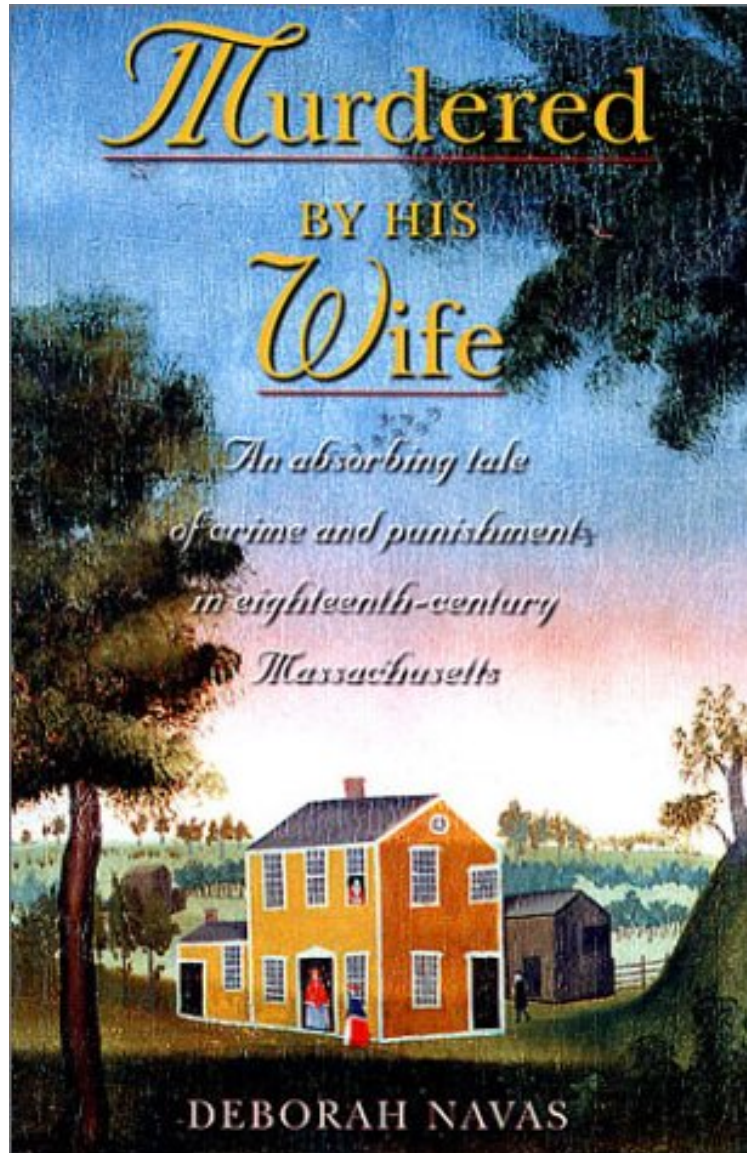


(Free pdf) Murdered by His Wife

## Murdered by His Wife

Deborah Navas

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**Deborah Navas : Murdered by His Wife** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Murdered by His Wife:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Sacrificed for politicsBy Rose KeefeWhen Joshua Spooner, a 'gentleman farmer' of Brookfield, Massachusetts, was beaten to death and his body stuffed down a well in March 1778, newspapers called his murder "the most extraordinary crime ever perpetrated in New England." Four people stood trial

for the killing- two British soldiers, a 17 year old Continental soldier, and the victim's wife, Bathsheba. They were found guilty and hanged before 5000 spectators the following July. Mrs. Spooner had attempted to secure a temporary reprieve by 'pleading her belly', but reports from two 'matron juries' sent to confirm her pregnancy were conflicting, and the Massachusetts Council rejected her petition. During the post-execution autopsy, she was found to be five months pregnant. Thirty-two year old Bathsheba Spooner was a figure of revulsion in the community after her participation in her husband's murder became known. Deborah Navas acknowledges Mrs. Spooner's guilt and condemns the crime as selfish and abhorrent. She had conceived a child with the young Continental soldier who was fated to become her co-defendant, and fearing the punishment meted out to adulteresses in eighteenth century America, persuaded her teenaged lover and two British deserters from General Burgoyne's defeated army to kill the spouse she despised. On the surface it appears that she instigated Joshua Spooner's death to prevent him from accusing her of adultery and subjecting her to public consequences, but Navas presents the intriguing possibility that Bathsheba wanted to be caught and executed by the state. She confessed to the crime without hesitation, and when led to the gallows, she seemed unnaturally calm and happy. The inference is that Bathsheba, whose behaviour could be erratic, may have committed the eighteenth century version of 'police suicide' by bungling a capital crime so thoroughly that the death she sought was guaranteed. Bathsheba Spooner's only real unselfish act was to request a stay of execution so that she could deliver her baby. But she was stonewalled by a politically hostile judiciary that despised her as the daughter of Brigadier General Timothy Ruggles, state's most prominent and hated Loyalist. The deputy secretary of the Council that considered her petition also happened to be the stepbrother of the murdered Joshua Spooner. Because justice was not blind, the whole affair claimed two victims instead of one. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Murder in our ancestry??!! Wow By molly123 This is astonishing family history of which my generation never knew. Amazing reflection of the time and its law. Researching our ancestry has revealed a very tragic event! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Murder by the Wife By V.R. RANNIGAN The book is what I expected. Very well done. Would recommend it to my friends who live in or around Brookfield.

In March 1778, Joshua Spooner, a wealthy gentleman farmer in Brookfield, Massachusetts, was beaten to death and his body stuffed down a well. Four people were hanged for the crime: two British soldiers, a young Continental soldier, and Spooner's wife, Bathsheba, who was charged with instigating the murder. She was thirty-two years old and five months pregnant when executed. Newspapers described the case as "the most extraordinary crime ever perpetrated in New England." *Murdered by His Wife* provides a vivid reconstruction of this dramatic but little-known episode. Beautiful, intelligent, high-spirited, and witty, Bathsheba was the mother of three young children and in her own words felt "an utter aversion" for her husband, who was known to be an abusive drunk. A year before the murder, she took in and nursed a sixteen-year-old Continental soldier who was returning from a year's enlistment under George Washington. The two became lovers and conceived a child. Divorces were all but impossible for women at that time and adulteresses were stripped to the waist and publicly whipped. Bathsheba's pregnancy occasioned a series of desperate plots to murder her husband, finally brought to fruition with the aid of two British deserters from General Burgoyne's defeated army. The plots, the crime, the trial, and the aftermath are presented against a backdrop of revolutionary turmoil in Massachusetts. As the daughter of the state's most prominent and despised Loyalist, Bathsheba bore the brunt of the political, cultural, and gender prejudices of her day. When she sought a stay of execution to deliver her baby, the Massachusetts Council rejected her petition and she was promptly hanged before a crowd of 5,000 spectators.

From Kirkus sPEN-Syndicated Fiction Award winner Navas's (*Things We Lost, Gave Away, Bought High and Sold Low*, 1992) nonfiction debut unearths the once-notorious Spooner murder of 1778, an event resonant with the concealed passions and darkness of Colonial Massachusetts. Repulsed by her husband, Bathsheba Spooner became sexually involved with an adolescent soldier from Washington's army recuperating in her care. The resulting pregnancy induced a desperate situation familiar from our own century: She convinced him and two rogue British soldiers to do in her husband. The guilty parties were almost immediately apprehended while drinking at a local tavern, wearing the dead man's clothes. Although all four were ultimately hanged, the most venomous public execration was, not surprisingly, reserved for Bathsheba, whose petitions for a delay of execution until the birth of her child were summarily denied, providing a chilling early example of the death penalty's paradoxical cruelty. In a telling that is mostly nimble if sometimes infatuated with digressive genealogy Navas revisits the case, noting especially the many quirky details that informed its tragic arc (the fact that Bathsheba's father was a prominent, hated Loyalist, for example, surely influenced the punitive measures taken against his immature and probably delusional daughter). At the same time, she skillfully evokes the heady American late 18th century, a time of revolutionary fervor, desperate militarized violence, and incipient lawlessness that was apparently less genteel and more frenzied than restorations like colonial Williamsburg acknowledge and, like our own time, most unforgiving of transgressors. Navas brings an acutely contemporary critical eye to this lost era, revealing nuances of gender roles, piety, patriotism, and class within the actions of both killers and prosecutors that make this slim volume a colorful contribution to current historical

dialogues. (12 illus.) -- Copyright 1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. "Navas has produced a little gemrock hard and glistening. Her story itself has great intrinsic fascination (sex, violence, betrayal, even a kind of 'redemption'). But her telling of the story is best of all: so simple, so direct, so utterly compelling. In short, one feels a very gifted writer at work here." John Demos, author of *The Unredeemed Captive* "PEN-Syndicated Fiction Award winner Navas's (*Things We Lost, Gave Away, Bought High and Sold Low*, 1992) nonfiction debut unearths the once-notorious Spooner murder of 1778, an event resonant with the concealed passions and darkness of Colonial Massachusetts. Repulsed by her husband, Bathsheba Spooner became sexually involved with an adolescent soldier from Washington's army recuperating in her care. The resulting pregnancy induced a desperate situation familiar from our own century: She convinced him and two rogue British soldiers to do in her husband. The guilty parties were almost immediately apprehended while drinking at a local tavern, wearing the dead man's clothes. Although all four were ultimately hanged, the most venomous public execration was, not surprisingly, reserved for Bathsheba, whose petitions for a delay of execution until the birth of her child were summarily denied, providing a chilling early example of the death penalty's paradoxical cruelty. In a telling that is mostly nimble if sometimes infatuated with digressive genealogy Navas revisits the case, noting especially the many quirky details that informed its tragic arc (the fact that Bathsheba's father was a prominent, hated Loyalist, for example, surely influenced the punitive measures taken against his immature and probably delusional daughter). At the same time, she skillfully evokes the heady American late 18th century, a time of revolutionary fervor, desperate militarized violence, and incipient lawlessness that was apparently less genteel and more frenzied than restorations like colonial Williamsburg acknowledge and, like our own time, most unforgiving of transgressors. Navas brings an acutely contemporary critical eye to this lost era, revealing nuances of gender roles, piety, patriotism, and class within the actions of both killers and prosecutors that make this slim volume a colorful contribution to current historical dialogues." Kirkus s "This history...recounts a case as sensational to contemporaries as the O. J. Simpson trial was to us...." *Virginia Quarterly* "This well-written book exposes the harsh realities of life in revolutionary New England." *Choice* From the Publisher An absorbing tale of crime and punishment in eighteenth-century Massachusetts