

= Moses Gill =

Moses Gill (January 18 , 1734 ? May 20 , 1800) was a Massachusetts politician who briefly served as the state 's Acting Governor . He is the state 's only acting governor to die in office . A successful businessman , he became one of the leading settlers of Princeton , Massachusetts , entering politics shortly before the American Revolutionary War . He served on the Massachusetts Provincial Congress 's executive committee until the state adopted its constitution in 1780 , after which he continued to serve on the state 's Governor 's Council .

Elected lieutenant governor in 1794 , he served in that office under Governors Samuel Adams and Increase Sumner until the latter died shortly after winning reelection in 1799 . Gill served an apparently undistinguished term as acting governor until his own death in 1800 , ten days before his successor , Caleb Strong , assumed office . Gill was a significant benefactor and founder of Leicester Academy , and supported the congregational church in Princeton , where the family had a large estate .

= = Early life and family = =

Moses Gill was born January 18 , 1734 to John and Elizabeth (Abbot) Gill in Charlestown , Massachusetts . He was one the younger sons in a long line of children which included John Gill , who would become well known in the colonies as printer of the Boston Gazette . Gill entered business as a local merchant in Boston . In 1759 he married Sarah Prince , daughter to pastor Thomas Prince of Boston 's Old South Church . Upon her father 's death the couple inherited Prince 's lands in western Worcester County , one of the largest tracts in what became the town of Princeton . In 1767 he retired from his business activities , and the couple divided their time between Boston and Princeton . Sarah died childless in 1771 . Gill remarried in 1772 to Rebecca Boylston , a scion of the influential Boylston family and sister of Harvard College benefactor Nicholas Boylston . They were also childless ; when his brother John died , Gill adopted one of his sons . The Gills were known to own several slaves .

= = Political career = =

In 1774 Gill entered politics , winning election to the provincial assembly . The assembly was dissolved by Governor Thomas Gage under the terms of the Massachusetts Government Act (a punishment of Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party) , but its members met shortly afterwards and reconstituted themselves as the Massachusetts Provincial Congress . Gill served on this body 's executive council , which functioned as the de facto executive of the state until its constitution was adopted in 1780 . When the American Revolutionary War broke in April 1775 , Gill became involved in the early military organization of the Siege of Boston , heading the provincial congress ' supply committee . He was also delegated , along with General Artemas Ward , to meet George Washington in Springfield and escort him to the army camps outside Boston .

Because of his prominence in Worcester County Gill was appointed to the county 's district court when it was reorganized after the revolution began . In this role he sat on the panel that heard the preliminary cases in 1781 involving Quock Walker , an African American seeking a declaration of his freedom . Gill 's panel decided in Walker 's favor , and the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court eventually confirmed the judgments on appeal , declaring that slavery was incompatible with the state constitution .

He continued to serve in the General Court (state legislature) , winning election to the state senate annually from 1780 , and being chosen by that body to serve on the Governor 's Council . He stood for election to the United States House of Representatives in the 1789 election (the first after the adoption of the United States Constitution) but was defeated by Jonathan Grout . After the death of the immensely popular Governor John Hancock in 1793 , the state 's gubernatorial election of 1794 was a wide open race . Gill was one of several nominees for lieutenant governor , and received more votes than all nominees except the winning gubernatorial candidate , Samuel Adams . With no

candidates for lieutenant governor receiving a majority , the General Court decided the election , choosing Gill . He thereafter won annual reelection to that post . In 1796 the aging Adams announced he would not run for reelection the following spring , and again the election was a wide open affair . The party system was still taking shape in the state , and the Federalists nominated Increase Sumner , while more populist factions that had previously supported Hancock and Adams nominated Gill and James Sullivan . Although Gill polled well in Boston and the eastern counties (present @-@ day Maine) , the Federalists won a decisive victory over the divided opposition . Since he was also nominated by one faction as lieutenant governor , Gill was again returned to that post . The principal issues in this and subsequent elections were over federal policy : specifically the national response to threats of war with Revolutionary France , and the consequent need for increased taxes to arm the nation . Gill 's politics are unclear : historian Anson Morse is of the opinion that his popularity was not sufficient to head the ticket of either the Federalists or the Democratic @-@ Republicans . Historian John Barry observes that Gill 's term as acting governor , even though it was for essentially a full year , was " too short to be particularly distinguished " .

Sumner easily won reelection in 1798 and 1799 , but was ill during the 1799 race , which he won by a landslide . Constitutional issues were raised because he was on his deathbed and it was uncertain that he could even take the oath of office . Sumner finally took the oath of office in early June , but died a few days later , at which point Gill became acting governor . Gill served out Sumner 's term , and was considered a candidate for the governorship as the 1800 election approached . The election primarily pitted Federalist Caleb Strong against Democratic @-@ Republican Elbridge Gerry , and was won by Strong . Gill was derided by his opponents as the preferred candidate of the wealthy , and Federalists were accused of promoting him as a candidate in order to divide the opposition . Gill died on May 20 , before Strong was informed of the victory , resulting in the only time in the state 's history when the offices of governor and lieutenant governor were both formally vacant . As a result , the Governor 's Council ruled the state for ten days . (The council had governed several times during the colonial period under similar circumstances ; the state constitution was amended in 1918 to remove the council from the gubernatorial succession .)

= = Charitable concerns and legacy = =

Gill was a member and major supporter of the Congregational Church in Princeton , and a founding trustee and benefactor of Leicester Academy . He was also for many years president of the Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Indians . Gill , Massachusetts is named in his honor .

Gill also made civic contributions to the town of Princeton . Land he donated became the town 's original center (located about one @-@ half mile from the current town center) . This land includes one the town 's earliest cemeteries , which is where Gill and other members of his family are interred . His estate , located near the town center , was reputed to be one of the largest and most magnificent of its time in Worcester County . His second wife 's nephew , Ward Nicholas Boylston , inherited the estate ; in addition to many other charitable works , Boylston was a major contributor to the establishment of Princeton 's present town center .