

Jesse Vawter & Elizabeth Watts

Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Indiana

LICENSE PLATES FROM INDIANA carry the slogan, *The Crossroads of America*. Our family reached the crossroads by around 1805, and they arrived by different paths. In the sixth generation from Carrie Carter our family divides into distinct Southern and Northern branches, each with a different heritage. In the north, we descend from pacifist English Quaker immigrants with business acumen. In the south, we were a mixture of a variety of nationalities, religions and occupations, with a strand of pioneering innovation.

Few lives of our ancestors are better documented than that of Jesse Vawter,¹ and his life exemplifies the courage and ambition found in that Southern branch. His was a colorful life that spans an interesting historical period that witnessed the end of British colonial rule and the establishment of the United States. By his own estimation, Jesse was a resident of four states during his life, and he was a pioneer in three of them. Unlike his forefathers, Jesse was willing to travel and relocate as he followed his dreams.

Jesse was one of six children of a poor Episcopalian farmer turned merchant in Culpeper County, Virginia. When he was eight years old he began to receive an education, but Jesse was interested in occupations that used his hands. He learned to make barrels and mill wheels; he built himself a lathe and used it to turn spindles and spokes for wheels. In those late colonial times, the father remained the sole authority for his family. The father, who could apprentice the boy and collect his wages for the family's use, chose a son's occupation. Jesse's father, David, apprenticed him to a house builder and joiner in the early 1770s. I think it likely that Jesse was apprenticed to a cousin, Augustine Vawter, who himself had been apprenticed to a builder in Caroline County in 1746.² Augustine was training his own apprentices by 1750, one of whom was another cousin, William Noel.

The colonies at that time were in a period of rapid change and readjustment. As separatist ideas began to invest the Atlantic seaboard, Americans grew to resent the traditional hierarchical structures that their English masters maintained by tradition. Ideas that each person was capable of making their own choices, or that the ruling classes had no inherent right to dominate, began filtering from the philosophical realm into the political world, and even into family life. Indeed, the realities of America were radically different from those in the mother country. Here, many common folk owned their own property and established their own businesses. Gordon S. Wood reminds us,

Two-thirds of the white colonial population owned land, compared with only one-fifth of the English population. There were propertyless (people) in America (maybe in some places as many as 30 percent of the adult males), but they tended to be either recent immigrants or young men awaiting their inheritance or an opportunity to move and acquire land... (America) had no

¹ *The Vawter Family in America* contains several pages on Jesse Vawter, including two of his autobiographical sketches. One of these is fairly practical and historical in tone while the other presents a spiritual recollection, his journey of faith. Most of what I include here is derived from those pages.

² Essex County, VA, Deed Book 1745-1749, page 29.

*oppressive established church, no titled nobility, no great distinctions of wealth, and no generality of people sunk in indolence and poverty.*³

The colonies and Virginia in particular, were also experiencing profound spiritual changes. Throughout the colonies the traditional Anglican or Episcopalian faith was being discarded as too hierarchical, paternalistic and worldly. Wood describes the changes that were coming:

*What was taking place in Virginia at mid-century was just one manifestation of a series of religious upheavals throughout all the colonies, later called the Great Awakening. Up and down the continent there were momentous religious stirrings and convulsions that ran through the middle decades of the century. They were often diverse, complicated, and local in their origins, but in general they grew out of people's attempts to adjust to the disturbing changes in their social relationships caused by demographic and commercial developments.*⁴

Family life mirrored the changes that were occurring on a continental scale, as ideas of equality began to erode traditional paternalistic family structure. In addition, children were surviving childhood at a greater rate than ever before. Parents, less fearful of losing their emotional investments, began spending more time with their children, treating them better and loving them more whole-heartedly.

*Parents paid more attention to the individuality of each child and sentimentalized the family's inner relationships. The practice now developed of giving children affectionate nicknames, and composite family portraits including father, mother, and children became much more common... The individual desires of children now seemed to outweigh the traditional concerns with family lineage.*⁵

Jesse Vawter's relationship with his father seems to demonstrate the very changes that Wood described. Jesse was given a nickname, Jasper. He dutifully performed his apprenticeship as a builder, which took him away from home for long periods of time, but in 1775 his father bowed to Jesse's desire to break his apprenticeship and to establish his own business with an uncle.

During one of these absences in 1774, Jesse had his own intense and personal spiritual awakening, and he sought baptism in the Rapidan Baptist Church. The Baptist faith was spreading so quickly in Virginia that in the last five years the number of churches of that denomination had grown from seven in 1769 to fifty-four in 1774. Rapidan Baptist Church had just been established in 1773. It currently serves the people of Wolfstown, Virginia.

The rise of the Baptist faith reflected profound social and political changes that engulfed Virginia around the time of the Revolution. More and more individuals were choosing to neglect their legal duty to attend and support Anglican parish churches. They met instead in private homes, in the streets, in fields or barns, even in churches when they could gain access. Essex County Anglicans brought a petition to the Virginia Assembly, seeking to forbid a favorite Baptist practice, the itinerant preacher, pleading that:

³ *The Radicalism of the American Revolution.* See the bibliography. This quote is from page 123.

⁴ Ibid, page 144-5.

⁵ Ibid. Page 148.

*...all Licentious and Itinerant Preachers be forbid collecting or assembling Negroes and others at unseasonable times. That every Minister of every Denomination have a stated place of Worship... That no doctrine be permitted to be preached which may tend to subvert Government or disturb Civil Society.*⁶

Official persecution of itinerant preachers failed to dampen their spirits, and those imprisoned would sometimes preach to their converts through the bars of their prison windows. One of the earlier and more famous preachers was Lewis Craig of Spotsylvania County, neighboring Orange County where the Vawters lived. One of the Noel descendants also heard the calling and in 1781, Theodorick Noel, a pastor in Upper Essex County, was granted a license to perform marriages.

At first the common folk and slaves were more likely to convert to the Baptist faith, but gradually the richer and more influential ranks would also prove ready to abandon the Anglican church. The Anglican church had reinforced a stratified society, where the wealthiest and most honored local leaders dominated both physically and politically. Those who occupied the front pews were often the same men who determined justice and law in the county. They were frequently members of the parish vestry, holding that office by the appointment of a retiring member of the vestry. Since Anglican vestries were vested with powers of local taxation, when influential members of the ruling class converted to the Baptist faith and other evangelical religions, Anglican control over local populations was endangered and finally doomed.

In the wake of the Revolution, the Virginia Assembly considered calls for "*Liberty of all Denominations.*" Anglicans lost their right to collect taxes from all citizens in their parishes. They also lost the fight to have a "general assessment," as Patrick Henry had suggested, that would be collected by the state and divided equally amongst all Christian denominations. In 1785 Virginia became the first government to adopt a policy that completely separated church and state. In the space of a single generation, Anglicanism lost its dominance over a stratified society to more democratic and vital evangelical religions.

One of the threats that the Baptists presented was their egalitarian attitude. Amongst the brethren, all were sinners and saved by the Grace of God. Rich and poor, privileged and slave, Black and white, Baptists were equal in the sight of God. They helped each other out in ways that few other religions in the area could do. The church became a family and a support for individuals in a day when the entire structure of society as it had been known crumbled, to be replaced by something as yet unknown.⁷

Jesse became a business partner with his "Uncle Oppill,"⁸ making and repairing flax wheels in a shop they built themselves. Two years later, Jesse's wanderlust got the better of him, and he hired himself out to another Baptist to drive a wagon three hundred miles over barely negotiable roads into the wilderness of North Carolina, to a community known as Holston, on the Holston River. Here he was hired to "*attend a farm with two negro men for Joseph Early.*"⁹ Nowhere in his writing have I been able to uncover Jesse's

⁶ Slaughter reproduced this quote in *Settlers Southerners Americans: The History of Essex County, Virginia*. See the bibliography.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ This would be the brother of Jesse's mother, Mary Offill, possibly John Offill.

⁹ Joseph Early's family followed nearly the same track as Jesse Vawter's. He was born around 1740 in Culpeper County, and died there around 1783. He purchased land near the Rapidan River in 1770, converted to the Baptists around 1772, and was also a member of the Rapidan Baptist Church. George

feelings about slavery, but in this instance, it appears that he worked as a slave master or foreman, which at that time was considered a perfectly respectable occupation. Jesse used his earnings to purchase some land from his employer.

The Holston Community was a young settlement deep in the frontier of what was then North Carolina (now Tennessee), on the approaches to the Cumberland Gap. Daniel Boone, who is credited with opening the road through that gap, passed through Holston many times, remaining in the settlement at times. It was about a day's journey out of Holston that Boone's family was attacked by Indians while moving to Kentucky. Several of the young men, including one of Daniel's boys, were killed. He later brought his family back out of Kentucky to the relative safety of the Holston settlement during Indian troubles in the latter part of the 18th century.

Jesse returned to Virginia late in 1778, once again doing carpentry and joinery, but the following year he again drove a team to Holston, this time moving a company of new settlers that included his uncles and a brother. He settled his relatives on the land he had purchased from Joseph Early and went to work at a saw and gristmill.

In the midst of the Revolution, Virginia began to seek ways to increase the number of recruits it raised. Each of the counties was required to produce a specific number of men. John Blankenbaker, on his Germanna Homepage, describes how Culpeper County managed the effort:

Late in 1780, the Virginia Legislature passed "An act for recruiting this state's quota of troops to serve in the Continental Army." This called for each county to supply a specific number of men. Culpeper County, then consisting of present day Culpeper, Madison, and Rappahannock Counties, was assigned to raise 106 men of the statewide total of three thousand men...

The act specified that the county Lieutenant, or Commanding Officer, should summon the field officers and the militia, including all the commissioned and noncommissioned officers under the age of fifty years, who were to be divided into as many divisions as the number of men required by the Act to be raised. Each division, later called a Class, was to be numbered. One man was to be drafted by the officers, "by fair and impartial lot", from each division. Each man who was drafted was permitted to hire a substitute.¹⁰

Jesse Vawter returned to Culpeper County in 1780, only to find himself in Culpeper Class 92 in 1781. His name was not selected as the draftee into the Continental Army, but Jesse was given duties with the militia, driving wagons and standing guard.

In March of 1781, Jesse married a neighbor's daughter, Elizabeth Watts. She was the daughter of John Watts, descended from a Culpeper County family. John lived on two hundred acres he had inherited from his father in 1749. Elizabeth was a dedicated mother, with definite beliefs about taking care of her home. As mentioned above, she had a reputation for tidiness that was hard to equal. She also must have been a tolerant woman, hardy and adaptable, for Jesse brought her to many uncivilized places to establish new homes under rough conditions.

Later in 1781, Jesse became seriously ill. Released from military duty, he was taken to the Watts home where he lingered for three months on the verge of dying. His

Washington visited the Earlys on several occasions. Joseph served in the Revolution as a Second Lieutenant and was promoted to First Lieutenant. Only one of his children seems to have moved to Kentucky. Most of the family returned to Virginia after his foray into North Carolina.

¹⁰ John Blankenbaker's Germanna web pages provide a community for historians and genealogists interested in the families who settled in Culpeper County and the Rapidan River Valley.

service in the Revolution was at an end. Upon his recovery, Jesse built himself a wagon, which he used the following January to transport his wife and new baby to Holston, where he “planted a tolerable crop of corn.” The following year twin boys were born to the Vawters. Elizabeth gave birth to two more daughters while they lived at Holston.

Over the next eight years Jesse built a trade making and mending wagons and performing other woodwork. He took time out to travel three times to Virginia and once to visit friends who had settled in Kentucky. So impressed was he with prospects in that region that he rushed back to Holston to sell his property so he could move to Kentucky.

The Vawters settled in the area of Georgetown, Woodford County, Kentucky in 1790. Over the next several years, Jesse returned to Virginia and the Holston settlements several times to move relatives, including his in-laws, John and Sally Watts, to new homes in Kentucky. Julia was born here in 1781, followed by another son and two more daughters.

After a five-year lease on his first land ran out, Jesse moved again to the forks of the Elkhorn River.¹¹ Here he purchased land, but he later discovered that the title wasn't clear and he lost his investment.

Always looking to the future, Jesse convinced several of his male relatives to accompany him on a prospect for new lands north of the Ohio River. It was territory that would be ceded by the Indians in August of 1805, and it was perhaps a little dangerous to try moving in before the treaty was signed.

Jesse and the others located likely farms and marked their claims before heading for the land office. When they arrived there, they were disappointed to learn that their lands had already been filed on. Once again the men began to search for land, this time in what would one day become Jefferson County. Jesse's son John wrote about their search for land, describing how “*Father, with six or eight other Kentuckians...visited what was then called the New Purchase at a very early date.*” Part of the group traveled by land and part by water.

The land party crossed the Ohio River at Port William (Carrollton), the others descended the Kentucky and Ohio rivers in a pirogue to a point opposite Milton. The pirogue answered the double purpose of carrying forward the provisions of the company and enabling the men to pass from one bank to another, swimming their horses along side. The company made their headquarters in the river bottom in the western extremity of (what is now) the city limits of Madison. In the day the company divided into two parties, exploring the adjacent highlands to the head of Crooked Creek and the neighboring lands of Clifty. They met at night and reported their discoveries. To Crooked Creek, they gave the name of Mill creek; to Clifty, Hard Scrabble; but subsequently, on learning the name of each stream the red men's name prevailed with the settlers.¹²

They located land they wanted and they purchased it from the original claimant, Colonel John Paul, founder of the city of Madison.¹³ John relates that in December, 1806, he and John Branham drove his “*father's cattle and fattened and stock hogs from his Kentucky residence to his new home in what was then a wilderness.*”

¹¹ His claim was located a few miles out of Frankfort on Cooper's Run, near present day Switzer, KY.

¹² Senator John Vawter's recollection dates from April 13, 1850. It is found on the Jefferson County INGenWeb site.

¹³ The story of Jesse's search for land is found on the Jefferson County INGenWeb pages.

The stay at the Elkhorn River had been spent farming, making and mending looms, wheels, reels and other mechanical devices. It was here, too, that Jesse Vawter became an ordained elder in the Baptist church. In February 1804, the County Court of Franklin County, Kentucky, had granted Jesse Vawter permission to solemnize the “holy rites of matrimony.”¹⁴ Long an adherent of the Baptist faith, Jesse “took a turn for preaching” while on the Elkhorn. In his words:

In 1799 a revival of religion broke out on the Ohio, and in 1800 it appeared to spread over the whole state. A number of my neighbors and four of my children had obtained hope in Jesus, which led us to form ourselves into a church and build us a house. About this time my mind got exercised about preaching, which soon led to my ordination...When my mind took a turn for preaching it was the greatest trial I had ever met with, for I thought no man ought to preach but such as the Lord called to that work, and I could not believe that I was called to preach, and to run before I was sent would be wicked, and to refuse to do what the Lord enjoined on me would be wicked. It appeared like death to go forward and death to be silent.

His decision to take up preaching had a worldly result. Jesse later reckoned that he earned half as much by performing the occasional marriage as he earned in his machine shop toiling long hours.

In June of 1806, Jesse and his son John worked to establish new homes on the heights over Clifty Creek outside Madison. They built what John later referred to as a “half faced shanty,” which Jesse named Mount Glad, and they planted a crop of corn amongst the stumps before returning to Kentucky. On September 6, 1806, after thirteen years in Kentucky, the Vawters and several other families, including their relatives, the Branhams and Underwoods, set out en mass for the new Indiana country.¹⁵

The following year on March 28th, Jesse and his neighbors established the second Baptist Church in Indiana, which they named the Crooked Creek Baptist Church. It was a log meeting house near the site of the present Fairmount Cemetery in Madison. Jesse was one of the featured speakers, and the congregation consisted of fifteen of the people in the four families that had moved out of Woodford County together. John tells us that Jesse delivered the first sermon ever preached in what is now Madison, “among the cottonwoods on the river beach, a little above the stone mill. The text was the first verse first chapter of the Gospel of St. John. It was a funeral occasion, the death of Widow Black.”

Jesse’s family was influential in the early government of southern Indiana, holding positions of power, such as Sheriff, Constable, and Justice of the Peace as appointees of Governor Benjamin Harrison. The Executive Journal of Indiana Territory begins to make note of Vawters on March 17, 1808, when 26-year-old William Vawter was appointed Captain of Indiana Militia in Clark County. Two months later he was also appointed Justice of the Peace, but he resigned this job in favor of his brother John, who won appointment on July 16. John became Sheriff of Jefferson County when it was formed in 1810. William was commissioned Captain of Militia in Jefferson County in May of 1811, and John became a Major in that body the following December. Two years later he was promoted again, this time to Lieutenant Colonel, and William was once

¹⁴ Court Records of Franklin Co., KY.

¹⁵ Jesse’s name appears on the 1810 Woodford County, KY, census. It’s possible he still owned his land there at that time. His household there contained four persons and no slaves.

again given a Captaincy. Their brother James became Sheriff of Jefferson County in 1814.¹⁶

They determined the location of thoroughfares, ferries, government facilities and jails. They watched over fences and social harmony, collected taxes, and eventually helped to write laws for the state.¹⁷ This close-knit structure resembles the old hierarchical form of government by patronage of pre-revolutionary Virginia.

The Vawters probably felt that they had a reasonably close relationship to Benjamin Harrison. When a Delaware Indian warrior named White Turkey ransacked one of the Vawter homes in June 1811, they appealed to Harrison for justice. He, in turn, demanded that Tecumseh hand over the thief. Tecumseh refused. Allan W. Eckert told the story in *The Frontiersmen*:

*Tecumseh declared that not until the whites who had murdered Indians were punished would any Indian be turned over to the governor for white man's justice. Still, in disobeying the explicit dictates of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa against theft, White Turkey had made a serious mistake. A council was held and the Delaware was executed for his crime.*¹⁸

John Vawter, also a Baptist preacher since 1804, became the first justice of the peace in Madison, appointed on July 16, 1808. Later he held similar positions for Clark and Jefferson Counties. He was elected Sheriff in 1810, and during the War of 1812, he joined the Rangers to fight Indians. He was elected Colonel of the militia in Jennings County in 1817. There he founded the town of Vernon¹⁹ and became the Baptist minister for the local church, from 1821-1848. He donated a new brick church to the community. He became an Indiana State Senator in the 1830s and later founded the town of Morgantown in Morgan County, Indiana.²⁰

James and William, the twins, both lived to a very old age. James was 91 when he died in 1872, surviving his brother by five years. He had developed a reputation as “*The King of Sheds*.” It was said that whenever he bought something and didn’t have a place to store it he built another shed. By one estimate, he ended up with about five acres of sheds on his property. An apocryphal tale also asserts that he liked hanging gates, and that he would hang a gate from any two trees that looked likely, whether or not a fence was nearby.²¹

Jesse himself was appointed to be an overseer of the poor in Madison Township at the birth of Jefferson County in 1811. But he doesn’t appear to have desired political influence, and with his active sons, he probably didn’t need to seek it. His family took care of each other. They married into many influential families in the community and built a powerful network of mutual assistance.

¹⁶ *Executive Journal of Indiana Territory, 1800-1816*, Edited by William Wesley Woollen, David Wait Howe, and Jacob Piatt Dunn. See the bibliography.

¹⁷ First Court Book of Jefferson County, Indiana, 1811-1817.

¹⁸ *The Frontiersmen*, by Allan W. Eckert, page 520. See the bibliography. By this date the Lenni Lenape, or Delaware Indians, had abandoned their original homes in New Jersey and Pennsylvania for lands in Ohio.

¹⁹ The entire town of Vernon, located in Jennings County, IN, has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

²⁰ Bicknell tells John’s story in *The Vawter Family in America*. To distinguish him from other John Vawters, I have chosen to refer to Jesse’s son as Senator John Vawter, a post he held in the Indiana government.

²¹ *Jefferson County Indiana Sheriff’s Journal, 1814-1815*. See the bibliography.

Mount Glad fronted on the Ohio River. In the early days, before Madison had a mill of its own, Jesse would stand on the point of his property and holler across the river to a mill on the Kentucky side to see if the miller would be able to grind his corn for him.²² Jesse lived at Mount Glad until 1830 when Elizabeth died. He then moved in with his daughter Polly (Frances) Branham for the rest of his life.

As he neared 80 years of age, his mind turned to recording his personal history. He produced two detailed versions of his life, one of which was written to testify to his spiritual journey. He lived near Harbert's Creek, the creek that flowed near the Rodgers' farm, until March 20, 1838. He was buried in the Wirt Baptist Cemetery next to his wife. The DAR and the government later erected memorials to him to honor his Revolutionary War service. Jesse's memorial and the tombstones of he and his wife read:

Vawter, Elder Jesse, d. Mar 20, 1838, age 82y 3m 20d Lived in Indiana 32 yrs. Left surviving him, 4 sons. 4 dau., 71 gr. & 54 great grandchildren.

The government marker reads: "Jesse Vawter, U.S. Soldier, Rev. War"

Vawter, Elizabeth, consort of Jesse, b. Feb 13, 1762; m. Mar 29, 1781; d. Sep 10 1830, age 68y 7m.²³

Generation Seven:

David Vawter & Mary Offill

Virginia

RESearchers of Genealogy have extended the Vawter family and related families back through several more generations, sometimes somewhat fancifully and without documentation. By studying these genealogies, you can take your pick of having descended from George Washington's grandfather, the kings of Scotland or John of Gaunt, or you might find yourself descended from Alfred the Great by way of some of the more powerful Norman invaders and the Plantagenet family. I will lay out what to me is the most viable track, but with cautionary notes when we encounter a paucity of documentation.

Documentation does exist for this generation of Vawters,²⁴ although there is some dispute about who really was Jesse's mother. The information that appears to be erroneous in this case is taken from Senator John Vawter's 1850 articles about his family, and there seems to be much in those articles that is actually imprecise or incorrect. John was in his 81st year when he wrote the articles.²⁵ He claims to have known his grandmother, who remarried later and moved with her new husband to Kentucky, where

²² This tale was printed in *History of Jefferson County*. I found a copy of the page it was on in the Fauna Mihalko file on the Wise Family, at the Jefferson County Historical Society, where it was probably mis-filed.

²³ Tombstone inscriptions from Wirt Community Baptist Church are transcribed on the Jefferson County INGenWeb pages.

²⁴ Much of the information about the Vawter family is again drawn from Bicknell's *The Vawter Family in America*. See the bibliography. I have supplemented or corrected Bicknell's work using records from Virginia and materials from Georgene Jurgensen.

²⁵ John's articles were first published in local newspapers in Indiana, including *The Vernon Journal*. They are reproduced on internet in various places, including Jefferson County INGenWeb.

they died. He actually provided her with the maiden name of his great-grandmother, the same error made by Paul R. Carter generations later on his mother's death certificate.

Jesse Vawter was born to an Episcopalian couple in Culpeper County, Virginia, on the first of December, 1755. David Vawter was his father, and it seems most likely that his mother was Mary Offill. There is little information available about her aside from a note about her enduring distress after the death of her husband.²⁶ John Vawter described the couple as "*poor, frugal, honest and industrious.*" There are no marriage records that authenticate the marriage of David Vawter to Mary Offill. There are some genealogical transcriptions that show that David was married to Mary Rucker, but Georgene Jurgensen has persuasively argued that those transcriptions are erroneous.²⁷ The transcriptions appear to be based solely on Senator John Vawter's recollection. Jesse's own reference to his "*Uncle Oppill,*"²⁸ seems to indicate that Jurgensen's interpretation is more likely the truth.

Unlike their children, most of whom seem to have taken the pioneer trails into Kentucky, David Vawter and his wife remained fairly close to the homes where they were born.²⁹ Nobody knows the exact birth dates of either David Vawter or Mary Offill. David was born around 1725,³⁰ one of six children in his family, while Mary was born about ten years later. Both appear to have been born in Essex County, Virginia.

It was probably as a result of his father's bequest that David Vawter moved his family to Orange County. When David's father John Vawter died in 1752, David was willed 380 acres of his land in Orange County, Virginia. In the neighborhood of the Vawter land were several families that were or would become linked to the family, including Ruckers, Tinsleys, Earlys and Offills. In 1763 he sold all but eighty acres of the land. He seems to have attempted to set himself up as a merchant. Indeed, in March of that same year Thomas Stanton, Jr. of Culpeper County, sold to David his share of his father's tobacco crop and a variety of planters goods:

*two mares, one being a sorrill branded M on the near buttock, the other a black colt paces naturally, seven head of cattle, one bed with all the bedding, furniture, one shed cart, one rifle gun, one smooth bore gun, and two pistols, one sword, two iron potts, four pewter dishes, and one dozen plates, one chest, one box and two trunks.*³¹

The same document refers to David as a merchant. A few years later he negotiated a road easement through neighbors' lands so he would have access to the river.³²

²⁶ The Virginia Genealogist Vol. 27 # 3 July-Sep 1983 p. 206, British Mercantile Claims 1775-1803. It is not clear whether this was financial or psychological distress.

²⁷ Jurgensen is an active contributor to genealogy discussion groups. She stated her case several times on the Vawter Family Board of Ancestry.com. She is said be working on a new history of the Vawter family that will rectify some of Bicknell's mistakes.

²⁸ Jesse's use of this spelling may support John Blankenbaker's speculation that this surname was originally the German word for apple, "Apfel."

²⁹ Many of the Vawter descendants continued into Indiana with Jesse's family. Some remained in Kentucky. Vawter descendants were found serving on both sides during the Civil War.

³⁰ This is Jurgensen's estimate. Bicknell places his birth in 1720.

³¹ Culpeper County, VA Deed Book 3.

³² The proof of this transaction lies in an unidentified Old Order Book of Orange County, VA. It is contained in notes given to Georgene Jurgensen and compiled by Henry Strother who worked in the early 1900s on the Vawter family records.

The year 1763 appears to have been a busy time for David Vawter. Perhaps this was the time when his financial state began to deteriorate. Not only did he sell most of his property, but abstracts of the Culpeper County Court Minute Book indicate that David was in court dealing with lawsuits ten times that year, mostly as the plaintiff in a series of lawsuits, and he won most of the suits. In March his first two suits against the estates of Samuel Young and Richard Stanton were continued.

In April he and two of the Ruckers, Ephraim and James, were defendants in a suit that was brought against them by members of the Walker family. The three cousins appeared in court and declined to oppose the suit. The debt of three hundred thirty nine pounds and six pence was discharged instead at one hundred sixty nine pounds, ten shillings and three pence, plus interest computed “*after the rate of five percentum per annum from the last day of July 1762 till paid.*”

One of the earlier suits was brought up again, but continued again. July was a busy month, with four new suits entered. Two of these either settled or surrendered, while the other two were continued to the next session. An old suit was also tried, and David won. In August he completed his case against two of the earlier defendants and added two new cases, all of which he won five pounds, twelve shillings and his court costs.³³ Most of these appear to be attachments for debt. I do not know the substance of these cases, but I suspect it had to do with a sale of merchandise that David held about that time. The sale is referred to in the will of Mark Finks of Culpeper County in 1764.³⁴

David’s migration to the uplands was a move that many of the smaller planters from the Tidewater made, and one that made economic sense. Land was cheap there. As transportation improved inland, a new, higher quality of tobacco was cultivated which wouldn’t grow well in the Tidewater, but upland planters had good success with it. As they grew richer, the Tidewater communities they left behind went into a decline that was exacerbated by blockades and raids by the British during the Revolution. Many of the Tidewater regions, like Essex and Middlesex Counties, never recovered from the blow.

David was promised a monetary gift upon the death of his mother, who survived her husband.³⁵ David’s mother, Margaret Vawter wrote a will, dated September 18, 1756, which seems to indicate that he was not a success. While other members of the family received inheritance in money or property, David’s inheritance consists of forgiveness of his debts to his mother’s estate and the gift of what tools, furniture and crops he had that belonged to her. In the last recorded instance of slavery in our Vawter family, Margaret also allowed David the use of “*a Negro girl named Cloe*” until October of 1757.³⁶

I think it likely that David kept at least one slave as late as 1768, based on my reading of documents that list tithables. The lists refer to members of a household who were charged tithes to support the local Anglican parish. The head of a household, whether a man or a widow, was considered one tithable, as were any slaves and any male children 12 or above (although some tithable laws didn’t consider children until they were 16). David’s household contained two tithables in 1766, although his children were too young to be counted. The count remained at two until 1768, the year that Jesse

³³ Culpeper County, VA, Court Minute Book, 1763-1764. Jurgensen referred to these in a communication with me. I used abstracts of the minutes from The Antient Press to enlarge her notes. See the bibliography.

³⁴ Culpeper County, VA, Will Book A, 1749-1770. Finks was married to a Vawter woman.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Vawter turned 12. By 1769, David's tithable count was back down to two, which might mean that he no longer had the slave.³⁷ Then again, he might have bound out Jesse as an apprentice. Before 1775, David decided to put Jesse into an apprenticeship with a house builder and joiner. He collected the wage to help support the family.

I have little information about the Offill family of Essex County, Virginia. They appear to have been part of a community of German Huguenot settlers who emigrated as a body to settle on the Rapidan River. Like the river, their community was named after Queen Anne when the governor of Virginia combined their ethnic origin with her given name and called the community "Germanna."³⁸ The Vawter family was a neighbor of the Germanna settlers, and they had frequent interaction with them, eventually intermarrying with some of the families.

David Vawter and Mary Offill appear to have married about 1753. Their eldest child, Winifred, was born around 1754. Jesse was the second child, born on December 1, 1755. Sometime between 1757 and 1760, William was born. Three more children were born in the next decade, Philemon, Margaret and Mary.

The Virginia of 1775 was a place where massive social changes were underway. There was an egalitarian movement in government of the colony, rejecting autocratic royal governors in favor of rule by parliamentary processes. Similar processes were at work in jobs, on farms and plantations, in churches and even in the family. Anger at British insensitivity and what was viewed as exploitation was erupting into open violence. In April of 1775, colonists in Massachusetts exchanged fire with British soldiers, initiating open rebellion that spread throughout the American colonies.

David Vawter had enrolled in a local militia as early as January, 1775. Service in the militia was considered a civic duty throughout the colonies, where organized armies were virtually unknown and communities had to protect themselves from brigands or Indians. In the South, the militia served another purpose, which was to enforce laws that kept slaves in their places and on their farms. By the time David was discharged from this militia service, on June 15, 1775, Virginia had still not openly and violently rebelled.

David must have re-enlisted, although no documents can be found to verify that event. His name appears on the muster of a company at the Albemarle County barracks, under the command of Captain Ambrose Madison, the brother of the future president. Madison's Company of Foot served in the Regiment of Volunteer Guards at Albemarle Barracks, under Colonel Francis Taylor.³⁹

On December 9, 1775, the First Virginia, including David's regiment, met British forces under Captain Fordyce at The Battle of Great Bridge, the first Revolutionary War battle to be fought on Virginian soil. Lord Dunmore, the despised Colonial Governor, had become alarmed at what he considered anarchical activity of the American patriots. He retreated to Norfolk, Virginia, and ordered a fort erected at the northern end of Great Bridge, the only land access to the town, located some nine miles south of Norfolk on the southern branch of the Elizabeth River. Patriots under Col. Woodford erected an opposing fort about 500 feet south of the southern end of the bridge.

³⁷ *Orange County, Virginia, Tithables 1734-1782*, part one, by Barbara Vines Little. See the bibliography.

³⁸ John Blankenbaker's Germanna homepage provides extensive research and interpretation of historical documents concerning the Germanna community.

³⁹ *Virginia Magazine of History*, 1893-4.

The British were unsure of the strength of the patriot forces, which were daily increasing. One of the Virginians' black servants volunteered to "escape" to the British to join their "Ethiopian Brigade," composed of escaped slaves and indentured servants. He told the British that there were only about 300 patriots at the other end of the bridge, while in fact there were closer to 900.

Lord Dunmore ordered Captain Fordyce to advance across the bridge at daybreak. The captain was at the head of 60 grenadiers or British sailors and a corps of regulars, totaling about 150 men. They carried two cannons with them. During the battle there were only 70 to 80 patriots manning the barricades. The rest remained in camp 400 yards away, surprised by the British advance.

The Americans, under Lieutenant Travis, held their fire until the British were 150 yards away. The British, meeting no opposition on the bridge, decided that the barricades were unmanned, so Captain Fordyce charged the redoubt, crying, "The day is our own!" As his force drew near, eighty Americans arose and delivered a withering fire. Captain Fordyce died, shot fourteen times a few paces from the American line. Confusion followed, in which more British soldiers died.

Col. Woodford's men chased the retreating British back across the bridge, capturing some, and enduring fire from the two British twelve pound cannons flanking the causeway before overwhelming their crews. Estimates of British losses run from the official British statement of 62 to an escaped patriot's avowal that the British knew of 102 killed. Damage to the patriot forces consisted of one slightly wounded thumb. The entire battle lasted some twenty-five minutes and it took place seven months before the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia.⁴⁰

Lord Dunmore lost face with his own forces and with the loyalists of Virginia as a result of the battle. By early 1776, he realized he couldn't maintain his hold on Norfolk, so he fled, shelling the city that had provided him a haven. He remained headquartered on a fleet of ships in the Roads off Norfolk until summertime, when he retreated to New York.

How extensive David Vawter's service was during the war is unknown. In the aftermath of the Battle of Great Bridge, his regiment was assigned guard duty, escorting British prisoners back to the Albemarle Barracks. David was shown to have re-enlisted again in January of 1779, again being discharged in June of that year. It is also known that David Vawter died while in the service. The record of his death coldly refers to his poverty, "*Died at the Albemarle Barracks during the war, worth nothing at all.*"⁴¹

The same quotation recalls that his widow "*lived for several years near William Lucas of Orange [County], in great distress.*" I suspect that the distress referred to was financial.

In 1782 and again in 1784, Mary Vawter signed permissions for two of her children to marry. Mary eventually married a man named Renfro, and moved with him to Kentucky. She died sometime around 1797 and was buried at Versailles, Kentucky.

It is not known where David Vawter was buried.

There may be more to the story of David Vawter's poverty, an underlying flaw in the economic structure of Virginia, and indeed the south as a whole, which was only

⁴⁰ *The Spirit of Seventy-Six*, edited by Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris. See the bibliography.

⁴¹ *The Virginia Genealogist* Vol. 27 # 3 July-Sep 1983 p. 206, British Mercantile Claims 1775-1803.

beginning to become apparent. In a study of wills in Middlesex County, the Rutmans found that primogeniture, the practice of bestowing land intact on only one son, usually the eldest, became increasingly evident after 1699. Before 1700, their sample of wills showed that 93% of younger sons received some of the family land, but that rate dropped to 71% in the next twenty years and to 62% after 1719. The practice of primogeniture was outlawed in most states after the Revolution.

Choices available to landless younger sons were limited. By marriage to the daughter of a landed man without sons, or by marriage to a local landed widow, the younger son might gain a foothold on the land. Parents who bound their younger children as apprentices, as David Vawter bound out Jesse, were often attempting to provide a craft by which the child could earn a living without owning property. But even if the landless son earned enough to purchase or rent property, land was less frequently available.

As the practice of slavery became more widespread, owners of surplus property became increasingly unwilling to part with land. By investing in slaves they were able to bring more and more property into productivity, while the less fertile portions of their estates were needed for slave quarters and workshops. Slaves were also trained in crafts and industries, further limiting the livelihoods of dispossessed younger sons like Jesse Vawter.⁴² The dearth of opportunity in Virginia probably motivated Jesse's wanderlust, for one of his first actions in North Carolina, as in Kentucky and Indiana, was to find and purchase property.

David Vawter was himself a younger son. His father left his primary lands to the eldest boy, Bartholomew Vawter, providing monetary gifts for the younger sons. But he also gave land to David, his brother Angus and sister Margaret. Their lands were located elsewhere: at the "*Great Mountains*" and, in David's case, "*Three Hundred and Eighty Acres of Land adjoining to the old Courthouse Tract in Orange County.*"⁴³ His mother left David the use of Cloe, the slave girl, but only for a year.⁴⁴

David sold most of his property in 1763 and attempted to earn a living as a merchant. How successful he was is questionable. Clearly by his death, his family was virtually penniless. David didn't leave a will that I know of, but Jesse, being the eldest son, would have been the natural candidate to inherit his father's property.⁴⁵ As we've seen above, David chose to train Jesse as a house builder or carpenter, an indication that there would be little property available for him to inherit.

Generation Seven:

John Watts & Sarah Barnett

Virginia, Kentucky

E LIZABETH WATTS, WIFE OF JESSE VAWTER, and mother of our poor boy, was a daughter of John and Sally Watts, of Orange county, Virginia. John Watts was a small man of English stock. His wife was a Barnett, of fine figure and form, mother partly of English descent.

⁴² *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia 1650-1750*. See the bibliography.

⁴³ This interpretation is from Georgene Jurgensen. My first transcription of this location read "*old Office tract*," and on further consideration, I wonder if it ought not to read "*old Offill tract*."

⁴⁴ Culpeper County, VA, Will Book A, 1749-1770.

⁴⁵ Destruction of local courthouses during the Civil War makes it difficult to precisely research families in those counties. It is possible that David's will, if it existed, was lost in that conflict.

These were the grandparents of our poor boy on his mother's side. He had many interviews with them on their coming into Kentucky to live, in the year 1793. They lived to a good old age and both died in Kentucky. His grand-mother outlived his grandfather several years."

So Senator John Vawter (who was hardly a poor boy) described his mother's parents when he wrote about his family in 1850, at the age of 81. Beyond this quotation, little is known of Sarah (also known as Sally) Barnett. Jesse Vawter and his wife Elizabeth seemed to be closer to her parents than to his. Jesse and Elizabeth were willing to leave their young twins with the Watts' in Holston when they made one of their many trips back to Virginia.

The name John Watts is frequently found in that era of Virginia history. It occurs in at least five counties, making it a little difficult to trace the family precisely. Adding to the confusion is the fact that Virginian counties had not yet reached stasis. They were being divided and reformed, in some cases disappearing altogether. The boundary changes were usually caused by population growth and the desire for more localized government. So we might have an individual who was resident in Rappahannock, Lancaster, Culpeper and Orange County without having moved at all. This may be the case with the confusion over the birthplace of Elizabeth Watts. It is likely that she was born in Orange County, as Senator Vawter claimed.

The December 22, 1746, will of John's father, Thomas Watts, provided John with *"a share in the use and income of his still,"* as well as *"the plantation he now is possessed with the lands bounded accordingly estimated 200 acres."*⁴⁶

It was unusual to inherit a still. Most farmers stuck to raising corn and tobacco, with maybe a few hogs and cattle let out to range in the woods. Sometimes plantations specialized in crafts of one sort or another, especially if there were talented slaves who could be loaned to neighbors: woodworkers, builders or veterinarians, for instance. It's possible that Thomas Watts' still worked in the same way a mill might have. Neighboring farmers might bring their corn or barley to the mill to trade for distilled liquor. Whiskey was easier to store and transport than grain was, and it was less likely to spoil or be attacked by vermin. It was also easier to sell. Beer was daily fare for most of colonial America. It was served at every meal, including breakfast, in most households. There was a practical reason for this, since much of the water was polluted by grazing animals, salt or mud, and drinking it might lead to illness. Distilled liquors were less prevalent, but then as now, a certain demand for the stuff existed.

John, like his father, was a planter. The 200 acres might have been used to raise cattle and a number of different crops. During the Revolution, a John Watts of Orange County, Virginia, was paid for providing beef to the army, on November 19, 1781.⁴⁷

Sarah's parents had been residents of Middlesex County, but moved to Orange County in the early 1730s, probably as a result of an epidemic that took away enough of their slaves to make working the Tidewater land impossible. When Sarah's father, John Barnett, died in 1750, he left Sarah and her siblings money. Sarah was given 10 shillings less, because she had already received that amount from her father. During the inventory, however, Marran Barnett, Sarah's mother, further distributed goods and property that had

⁴⁶ Will of Thomas Watts, 1749: Culpeper County, VA Will Book A. Will proved March 16, 1749.

⁴⁷ C. B. Heinemann, in Tyler's Quarterly Magazine.

belonged to her late husband. Sarah received some pewter houseware and a feather bed. John was given a slave girl named Sylvia, valued at 23 pounds.⁴⁸

The Barnett family were members of Christ Church parish in Middlesex County. A parish register was maintained there from 1623, providing evidence of births, marriages and deaths. Middlesex County itself was formed of Lancaster County in 1667. It was located on a ridge of high ground that formed a peninsula between the Rappahannock River on the north (downstream from Essex County) and the Piankatank River, with The Dragon Swamp it flows out of, on the south. In its early days there was a division of interests in the county, with two distinct communities centered on northwestern and southeastern, or upper and lower, parish churches. With the formation of Middlesex County, however, a third church, Christ Church, was established more centrally on the peninsula. It was built on land that was judged to be about the middle of the parish, near present day Urbana, Virginia.⁴⁹

Churches were a weekly center of social intercourse for early residents, each in its part of the county. The Rutmans collected descriptions of the Sunday gatherings, and provided this description of Christ Church in the 1680s, from the memoirs of a traveler in that era:

A graying frame building in the woods, as dilapidated as the houses, with an array of plank benches surrounding it; the families straggling in, some on foot, some riding, striking conversations with each other. What struck the traveler most was the smoking. "When everyone has arrived the minister and all the others smoke before going in. The preaching over, they all do the same thing before parting. They have seats for that purpose. It was here I saw that everybody smokes, men, women, girls and boys from the age of seven years."

Another vignette from the 1770s proved strikingly similar, although the church was brick by that time. The weekly service provided an opportunity to discuss business and politics, arrange social occasions, read advertisements that were posted on the door of the church, discuss horses and racing, and the prices of commodities. The Sunday gathering was still organized around smoking and socializing before and after a service with a sermon that was "*seldom under and never over twenty minutes, but always made up of sound morality.*"⁵⁰

There is some confusion concerning John Watts' service in the Revolutionary War, and I don't have a definitive answer to the problem. One John Watts became a Captain, serving with Colonel George Baylor's regiment of the First Continental Dragoons. This John Watts was wounded at the Battle of Eutaw Springs and received a substantial land grant in Kentucky for his service. In some listings, the DAR credits our John Watts with this service. In another DAR listing, however, it is made clear that the John Watts in question lived until 1830 and remained active in the army after the war. He could clearly not have been our John Watts. Our John Watts was probably the one whose rank was not given. The DAR credits him with "patriotic service" during the revolution.⁵¹

⁴⁸Will of John Barnett, April 1, 1750: Orange County, VA, Will Book 2, page 145. John, Jr., may be the John Barnett whose name appears on the 1810 Woodford County, KY, census. At that time he held three slaves.

⁴⁹*A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia 1650-1750*, by Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman. See the bibliography.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹DAR Patriot Lookup Service.

John and Sarah Watts left Virginia around 1781, moving first to the Holston Settlement of North Carolina to live on the property their son-in-law, Jesse Vawter, had purchased. They later removed to Kentucky, again with the assistance of Jesse.

It does not appear that our John Watts moved to Kentucky in order to claim a Revolutionary War Land Grant. He seems to have followed the Vawter family to central Kentucky, where he took up land in a community of friends and relations. John left his Virginia property to his eldest son, Barnett Watts, in exchange for which Barnett was left out of John's will of February 5, 1796. John must have died in the first half of that year, since his will was proved in court on July 5, 1796, in Madison County, Kentucky.⁵² One of the executors of the will was Jesse Vawter.

Generation Eight:

Thomas & Esther Watts

Virginia

JOHN WATTS WAS THE FIFTH of twelve children born to the Culpeper County, Virginia planter, Thomas Watts and his wife Esther.⁵³ Thomas must have been an estimable man, for when he died he bequeathed land totaling about 1,200 acres to some of his children. Upon inventory, his estate was valued at 342 pounds.⁵⁴ John received a plantation of 200 acres from his father, as well as a share in the profits of the still he ran. The still was valued at 19 pounds in the inventory. Thomas also left a variety of farm and construction equipment, including plows, saws, reapers and a "shod" cart. He had 40 pounds worth of livestock and "Negroes" worth 190 pounds.⁵⁵

As with his son, Thomas Watts has been a subject of dispute amongst researchers for generations now. The maiden name of his wife, Esther, is unknown, although she has been tentatively identified, as Wilkins or Stone. Documentary evidence is at this time, but it now appears that Esther Wilkins was the wife of a different Thomas Watts, resident in Northampton County, Virginia.⁵⁶ There were several individuals named Thomas Watts living in Virginia during this time.

Thomas Watts received a land grant of 250 acres near Black Walnut Run in what was then Spotsylvania County on September 28, 1728.⁵⁷ At the same time, the Edward Watts, his father, received a grant of 900 acres adjacent to Thomas' land. These grants may have been a headright, rewarding the family for sponsoring indentured servants from England. In June of 1732, Thomas bought 400 acres on the north side of the Rapidan River in what is now Madison County. He gained 600 more acres by patents in 1733, and an additional 333 acres in the same area in June of 1735. Amongst the many properties he owned at his death was a plantation he called "*The John Stone Plantation*" in his will.

⁵² Will of John Watts, 1796: Madison County, KY, Will Book A-1, page 120.

⁵³ Orange County was formed out of part of Culpeper County in 1734.

⁵⁴ Will of Thomas Watts, Dec. 22, 1746: Culpeper County, VA, Will Book A, page 10. Will proved on March 15, 1749.

⁵⁵ *An 18th Century Perspective: Culpeper County*, compiled and edited by Mary Stevens Jones, published by the Culpeper Historical Society, Inc. Culpeper, VA, 1976, pa. 129-132. This analysis was found on the Watts Family On-line Newsletter site, on internet.

⁵⁶ Watts Family On-line Newsletter, excerpted.

⁵⁷ Spotsylvania County, VA, Deed Book, page 96

The fact that he owned this property is used as defense of the theory that Esther was the daughter of John Stone. John Stone's will also supposedly mentions Esther by her married name, but I have not been able to locate that document.

The will of Thomas Watts of Culpeper County has been mentioned above. There is some evidence that Esther was not completely satisfied with the will. In 1750, she filed a repudiation of the will.⁵⁸ She had only been granted 100 acres, the same as several of her children had received, but Esther chose not to keep hers. She preferred to receive the one third of Thomas' estate allowed her under statute in the colony. In 1751 she received that amount.⁵⁹ Her own will was filed in 1772, in what was then Orange County.⁶⁰ In it she left her estate, a slave and her personal properties to her eldest son, Edward. She must have died later that same year.

Most researchers of the Watts family provide an Edward Watts as the father of Thomas Watts. An unpublished manuscript reposed in the Library of Congress and in the Mormon archives at Salt Lake City asserts the relationship,⁶¹ and there may be some evidence around to support the opinion. I have not seen it.

The will of a woman known as Anne McPherson appears to be that of Thomas Watts' mother.⁶² Beginning her life as Anne Martin, she had first married Jason Hubbard. After Hubbard died, Anne married Edward Watts. Anne was evidently a spirited woman. She was fined for kicking and hitting Christopher Herring in a house near the Potomac in 1689. Edward and Anne lost the judgement and paid a fine of 100 pounds of tobacco, with another 62 pounds levied for court costs.⁶³ Widowed again at the death of Edward around 1728, she married Daniel McPherson. Her will mentions her son Thomas Watts.

Darrett and Anita Rutman, in their fine local history of Middlesex County, Virginia, described the scene of a county court day on the south shore of the Rappahannock River in 1677. The day Edward and Anne Watts were fined was probably very similar to what the Rutmans portrayed:

*The assemblage was primarily male, but women and occasionally children were frequently before the court officially, while women and children, at least those from the immediate vicinity, were undoubtedly on hand as onlookers. The county's taverners, closing their ordinaries on court day, set up stalls in the yard or along the road, selling their beer and hard cider. A nearby field became an impromptu race course, for inevitably conversation about horses led to wagering. Milling in the yard, our people met, talked, smoked, and read the potpourri of announcements attached to the Robinson's door—intentions to leave the country...proclamations by the governor: notices of stray horses, of distress sales, and of missing heirs; and the rules of the court...
...Case followed case to the figurative bar of justice. And always a constant coming and going, even of justices, as men traded places with each other, some crowding into court, others pushing outside to smoke, imbibe, relieve themselves against the fence, and talk. Court day! A once-a-month event in the life of the county.⁶⁴*

⁵⁸ Culpeper County, VA, Deed Book A, page 260.

⁵⁹ Culpeper County, VA, Will Book A, pages 37, 38.

⁶⁰ Will of Esther Watts, 1772: Orange County, VA, Will Book 2, page 450.

⁶¹ *Watts Families Descended From Early Immigrants Who Settled In The Tidewater Counties of Virginia*, by Charles Brunk Heinemann, 1940. See the bibliography.

⁶² Will of Anne McPherson, 1741/2: Stafford County, VA, Will Book M.

⁶³ Stafford County Court Book page 35; Virginia Will book, page 314.

⁶⁴ *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia 1650-1750*. By Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman. See the bibliography.

Generation Eight:

John Barnett & Marran Gibbs

Virginia

THE PARISH REGISTER AT CHRIST CHURCH, Middlesex County, Virginia, records the fact that on November 13, 1728, Marran Gibbs married John Barnett. It was a planter marriage: held late in the year, when the heavy loads of summertime work and tobacco processing that took place in the Fall were finished, but before the new crop had to be seeded and new fields hilled. People had time to travel to weddings after the tobacco was packed in barrels and loaded aboard the waiting ships.

The tobacco planter's year was limited by and driven by the necessities of the crop. It began in mid winter, when the new crop had to be painstakingly planted in seedbeds. As the seed germinated the fields where the plants would be grown had to be prepared. Every four years or so new fields had to be created as the soil wore out on the old. Manure, which might have extended the life of a tobacco field, was avoided because the buyers claimed it left a foul taste in the leaf of the plant. Breaking new ground meant girdling trees, fencing the fields to keep out free ranging cows and hogs, plowing and weeding, breaking the soil into a fine texture and creating hills into which the seedlings would be transplanted. This work proceeded until approximately March, when the planter had a few spare weeks in which to plant a food crop, usually corn. In April the work of hilling the fields continued, depending upon the size of the plantation. The Rutmans, in their study of Middlesex County from 1650-1750, write that

...with no more equipment than a hoe, a single laborer could set and tend two to three acres of semicleared land, between six and ten thousand plants, making a crop of eleven to twelve hundred pounds cured and packed in a good year, seven or eight hundred in a bad one, roughly three to six pounds sterling at Virginia's mid-century price.

By May it was time to transplant the seedlings into the fields. Then began the tedious work of keeping the plants alive and flourishing. They had to be weeded, topped, cleaned of pests and worms, re-hilled every time a heavy rain occurred. The suckers had to be removed and the plants had to have the right amount of water. This work continued through the hot and humid Virginia summer, until it was time to cut the leaves in August. The harvested leaf was toted to the nearest drying shed, loosely clad barn-like shacks that were erected quickly and which could be knocked apart to be moved elsewhere. The leaf was hung on racks and periodically turned to prevent mold or mildew from growing as the leaf dried.

As the leaf cutting drew to an end, September approached, and it was time to harvest the corn. At the same time tobacco casks had to be prepared, great hogsheads that when loaded would weigh hundreds of pounds. When it was properly cured the tobacco had to be packed into hogsheads, dragged, rolled or carted to the nearest wharf and loaded aboard ships bound for Europe.

Each year toward the end of the [17th] century, some 150 ships arrived in the Chesapeake in the late fall carrying goods consigned to planter-merchants at their various locations or sent on speculation to be bartered for tobacco on the spot. For three or four months the ships sailed the

waters of the bay and its rivers, each taking its own course until, their English goods gone and their holds filled with tobacco, they set canvas for England.⁶⁵

The leaf was also used as currency within the colony, where coin was scarce.⁶⁶ Planters who lived too far from navigable waters depended on neighbors who owned wharves or sold their crops to middlemen who warehoused the hogsheads and retailed imported goods in limited plantation stores.

So it was that November and December, when there was a brief respite from the demanding cycle of raising tobacco, became the favored months for marrying and socializing in colonial Virginia.⁶⁷

It was partly due to the labor required to raise tobacco that slavery became so prevalent on Virginia plantations. The Rutmans report that in 1668 there were 334 white servants and 65 blacks laboring in Middlesex County, a proportion of five to one in favor of the white indentured servants. Only thirty years later, at the turn of the century, blacks, mostly imported directly from Africa, outnumbered white servants by four to one.⁶⁸

John Barnett was probably born in late November, 1704, in Middlesex County. His baptism is recorded in the Parish Register: "*John Barnatt ye Son of John and Ann Barnatt his wife was Baptized Decembr ye 3d Anno Domini 1704.*" Further records concerning the Barnetts are scarce.

It is thought that the elder John Barnett, the one who was married to Ann, was the son of Thomas Barnett, who served as a Burgess for various locations in Virginia, in 1632 and 1642.

Marran Gibbs was born to John and Mary Gibbs of Christ Church Parish in the Spring of 1707. She was baptized on April 7th. Her mother's maiden name is usually given as Marran, although there appears to be some dispute about it. Assuming that "*Marran,*" sometimes spelled Maran, Maron, and so forth, is a surname, I have searched early Virginia records to see if I could trace possible ancestors to Mary Marran. The only name I have found is on a note about a shipment of lead shot to Virginia, dated May 27, 1631. Captain John Maron sent the shipment from London, aboard the *Warwick*, with Master John Dundas commanding.

Shortly after Marran Gibbs married John Barnett, the couple moved to Spotsylvania County, farther inland, where they settled in St. Mark's Parish. A deed of 1733 bears John Barnett's name and identifies him as a planter from St. Mark's.⁶⁹ Their move reflects what was happening amongst the Virginia colonists as the Tidewater filled up with plantations. Virginia's plantation system discouraged the development of towns, and the earliest plantations were situated along navigable streams for ease of transport. Land was still available in the interior for those venturesome enough to find it and rich enough to buy it. Inland property had to be cleared and its produce shipped overland to the nearest wharves, an expensive and laborious enterprise.

⁶⁵ Ibid. The Rutmans also point out that the ships would convoy across the Atlantic during times of war.

⁶⁶ For example, note that the fine Edward and Anne Watts had to pay for her assault on a neighbor was levied in terms of tobacco (see above).

⁶⁷ Most of the information about the planter's yearly cycle was obtained in *A Place In Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750*. By Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman. See the bibliography.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Spotsylvania, VA, Deed Book B.

The Rutmans point out that Zacharias Gibbs and two of his married sisters and their families all moved to Spotsylvania County at about the same time. The authors claim that the move was partially motivated by the loss of slave labor in an epidemic that occurred in the late 1720s. One of these married sisters was undoubtedly Marran Gibbs.

In 1734, Orange County was formed of Spotsylvania and John Barnett sold his interest in 800 acres of land at the forks of the Rapidan River. John and Marran had a family of at least seven children. They built up a sizeable estate both in goods and property. By the time of his death around 1750, John Barnett possessed a water mill, lands throughout central Virginia, and an inventory of moveable property that amounted to a value of at least 476 pounds, 10 shillings and 29 pence (exclusive of the land).⁷⁰ Included in that inventory were eight slaves, dishes, pewter vessels, furniture, beds, forty pounds of feathers,⁷¹ cattle, horses and pigs.

The children of this union spread throughout the South. Some went to North Carolina, others to Kentucky, Tennessee and Indiana.

Generation Eight:

Mary Rucker & William Offill

Virginia

BOTH OF THE PARENTS OF MARY OFFILL,⁷² wife of David Vawter, were from the same ethnic origins. They both represent members of a large Germanic infusion into early Virginia, many families of which ended up settled in an area known as the Forks of the Rappahannock in what was then Essex County. Although they arrived at different times, the Germans as a whole came to be called after a community that the English governor of the time labeled *Germanna*, a coined term based on Queen Anne's name and Germany. Residents of this area used the German tongue as their daily language, although French was also in use. They worshipped as Protestants, but in the Huguenot or German Reformed traditions.

When many Americans think about immigrants coming to America for religious freedom, they tend to think about the Pilgrims and New England. In fact, Virginia provided a better environment for practitioners of minority faiths. In New England, and even in the Quaker colonies of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, the majority of settlers in the earliest days tolerated only their own faiths. Particularly in New England, where those who differed from Puritan practices, or who wished to live and worship in their own ways, were frequently subjected to punishment and fines, even to torture or death. As Alan Taylor explained:

⁷⁰ Orange County, VA, Will Book 2, 1744-1778. The value of the estate places John Barnett in the middle ranges of fortunes in Virginia. The Rutmans (see above) place about 36% of Middlesex County's population in this range. Including the land, Barnett's worth would have been substantial in the Virginia of those days.

⁷¹ Jack Larkin, in *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840*, comments: "...Not only did the feathers with which they (mattresses) were stuffed make them valuable, but they were rare sources of bodily comfort in houses without cushioned seating. Men making their wills often divided their feather-filled beds, along with their frames or bedsteads, specifically and painstakingly among their heirs."

⁷² The Offill name was variously spelled, for example, as Offell, Aufel, or even as Offitt.

*Myth insists that the seventeenth-century English colonists fled from religious persecution into a land of religious freedom. In addition to omitting economic considerations, the myth grossly simplifies the diverse religious motives for emigration. Not all colonists had felt persecuted at home, and few wanted to live in a society that tolerated a plurality of religions. Perfectly content with the official Anglican faith of the homeland, many colonists sought to replicate it in the colonies. And although some English dissenters, principally the Quakers, did seek in America a general religious freedom, many more emigrants wanted their own denomination to dominate, to the prejudice of all others. Indeed, at the end of the seventeenth century, most colonies offered less religious toleration than did the mother country.*⁷³

Virginia was an Anglican enclave, at least in theory. Colonists were required to support their Anglican parish, and they might be fined for failure to do so. They were also supposed to attend worship at least once a month, but with parish churches scattered widely, that requirement proved impractical. Not to mention the fact that there was a severe shortage of priests, and many of those that were sent to Virginia may have been exiled from England to get them out of the way. Taylor points out that in 1724, for a population of 120,000 inhabitants, Virginia had only 28 priests.

Essex County had a population of around 2,600 in 1699, and it had three parishes. The churches were usually kept supplied with pastors, probably because they had powerful vestrymen. The vestry consisted of ten to twelve men of the area who governed the business of the church in the parish. The founding vestrymen of a parish were elected by parishioners for life, and each of them usually selected his own successor.

*Like the county court, the vestry had the power to tax—and the church levies could run very high because of the vestry's responsibility for churches, the poor, and other public work. The vestry also supervised property lines by appointing men to walk them every few years, a job known as "processioning."*⁷⁴

Colonists in Virginia became used to providing their own religious services. For Anglicans it was easy. They simply relied on their *Book of Common Prayer*. But this independence created enclaves of like thinking religiously minded individuals who began to craft their own forms of religion. Out of the lack of religious authorities in the colonies grew new belief systems and practices like Methodism and the Baptist faith.

European Protestants viewed the American colonies as a refuge for their own religious practices. Virginia attracted a great influx of Huguenot refugees from Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, particularly in the late 16th through early 18th centuries. During this era Catholic toleration of Protestantism in France, Spain and The Netherlands had declined into bloody persecution. Laws were proclaimed that made holding Protestant beliefs inconvenient, expensive or dangerous.

Two great catalysts for Protestant emigration from the European mainland were the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. France was torn by the Wars of Religion between Protestants and Catholics between 1562 and 1598, an entire generation of conflict between people holding passionate religious and political opinions.

⁷³ *American Colonies: The Settling of North America*, by Alan Taylor. See the bibliography.

⁷⁴ *Settlers Southerners Americans: The History of Essex County, Virginia*, by James B. Slaughter. See the bibliography.

The immediate cause of the wars was the attempt by Huguenots to end persecutions suffered under the rule of King Francis II. They allied themselves with the Bourbons, a noble family that sought to wrest the government from the allied families of the Medicis and Guise. When a plan to kidnap the king failed, hundreds of Protestants were executed, their bodies hung on trees and castle walls to rot as a warning to future rebels. This, of course, inspired anger and fear in the survivors.

In 1560 Francis II died and his mother, Catherine de Medici, became regent for his young brother, Charles IX. War between the Catholics and the Huguenots raged across France, with the Protestants occupying and controlling sections of the north. After a defeat of the Catholic army by the Huguenot commander, Admiral Coligny, Catherine signed the Peace of St. Germain, which allowed toleration of Protestants in 1570. Over the next two years it appeared to Huguenots that they had finally achieved lasting peace. Catherine's daughter was even engaged to the Protestant Henry of Navarre.

The wedding was to be held in Paris in 1572, and it was the occasion Catherine and her Catholic allies had anticipated. Her attempt to assassinate Coligny on August 24th failed, but two days later, on St. Bartholomew's Day, the admiral was one of the first victims of bloody riots that consumed Protestant victims across the entire country. Violence persisted even after Catherine called for an end to the bloodshed so that, by the time order was restored, 3,000 Protestants had been slain in Paris and another 67,000 in the rest of France.

Conflict between the religions erupted time and again over the next thirty years or so, in France, the Netherlands, Germany and other European countries. In 1598 Henry of Navarre, now King Henry IV of France, decreed civil rights for Protestants in the Edict of Nantes. He declared freedom of conscience and tolerance of Protestant worship, the right of Protestants to hold public office, royal funding of Protestant schools, and formation of special courts that included Protestant judges to try cases involving Protestants. Protestants were also guaranteed civil control of around 200 French cities. Again it felt like peace had come.

It was all undone by Louis XIV when he declared that most of the Protestants had been converted to Catholicism and that the Edict of Nantes was no longer necessary. In 1685 he revoked the Edict. Protestants were allowed to leave the country, and those who remained were assured of their rights, but it soon became clear that persecution was in store. Unruly soldiers were billeted in Protestant homes and their abuses were ignored. Civil and religious rights eroded and Protestants fled the country to the Netherlands or England and her colonies.

The Offill and Rucker families were probably part of this migration. William Offill may have been an immigrant himself. In 1695, a Charles Wilkes received a land patent for importing seventeen persons, including "*Wm. Ofell, Jno. Ofell, Hannah Ofell.*"⁷⁵ This would seem to indicate that William and his family arrived under indenture, serving a term of seven or more years to pay for their passage. His birth date and the location of his birth are unknown, but some researchers believe that William wasn't born until approximately 1700. In this case the "*Wm. Ofell*" of the above patent would have been another relative of the boy.

⁷⁵ *Cavaliers and Pioneers, Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants, Volume 3, 1695-1732*, by Nell Marion Nugent. See the bibliography. This patent is abstracted from Virginia Patent Book 9.

Mary Rucker's family, too, were associated with the Germanna settlement. Her father probably arrived a bit later than William Offill, around the year 1700. Researchers disagree on the date of Mary's birth, some saying she was born around 1702, while others say she was born closer to 1720. Her parents were Peter Rucker and his wife Elizabeth.

The Rucker family that traces itself to her father, Peter Rucker, was prolific and talented, with many practical skills. Col. Ambrose Rucker, the son of Mary's brother John, used some of the nearly 6,000 acres his father owned to establish the first Anglican church in what is now Amherst County.⁷⁶ Two other boys in John's family tackled the problem of transporting huge tobacco hogsheads on narrow, swift waterways that planters were being forced to use more frequently as the Tidewater land was settled up. Benjamin and Anthony Rucker knew that Indian canoes, while maneuverable, were unable to carry enough weight. Flatboats were cumbersome and frequently lodged themselves on rocks and sandbars.

The Rucker brothers developed what later became known as the "James River bateau," a barge that was easily steered and carried adequate cargo, but still had a draft that was shallow enough to use in rapid, rocky or sandy waters. Since no examples of the boat survived, we weren't certain of what they looked like until emergency excavations in Richmond, Virginia, uncovered the remains of several of the boats in 1984 and 1985. They were flat-bottomed, had no keel, and were pointed at both ends, like a canoe. They were operated using poles on the sides and sweeps at the ends.

The first mention of their new design is in papers of Thomas Jefferson, who purchased one of their boats in 1771.⁷⁷ His account book says: "*Apr. 29. Rucker's battoe [sic] is 50. f. long. 4.f. wide in the bottom & 6.f. at top. she carries 11. hhds & draws 13 1/2 I. water.*" The design proved so popular that it was reproduced in other regions of the country, such as Indiana and Ohio.

When after the Revolution, the Rucker family attempted to patent their designs, they found that it had been copied so frequently that they needed proof that their family had developed the idea. A local newspaper editor scoffed at their claim to have designed such a popular craft. But Jefferson wrote a letter of confirmation for them that won them the patent, and the editor recanted, with effusive praise. A Virginia historical marker records the event: "*A dispute arose in 1821 when the Rucker brothers' heirs sought to patent the design. A letter from Thomas Jefferson testifying to his presence at the first batteau's launch resolved the matter in the Ruckers's favor.*"⁷⁸ Jefferson also supported Ambrose Rucker's disputed claim to some land nearby, carefully noting the history of claims in the area from 1752 on, and determining that Rucker's claim was strongest.⁷⁹

Anthony Rucker, one of the boat's designers, later became a captain during the Revolution. Descendants of John Rucker followed the same trail as the Vawters to Woodford County, Kentucky.

Mary Rucker may have been quite young when she married. She gave birth to her daughter Margaret around 1735. William appears to have been quite a bit older than his

⁷⁶ Information about Ambrose's church and the Rucker bateau historical marker are from the *Rucker Family Society* pages on internet, Jo Thiessen, editor. Another historical marker is placed at the site of the Rucker church.

⁷⁷ *The James River Batteau: Tobacco Transport in Virginia*, by Bruce G. Terrell. Published to internet. See the bibliography.

⁷⁸ Their use of the French word for boat lends credence to the Rucker family's francophone origins.

⁷⁹ Image 109 of the Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress *American Memory* collection.

wife, and may have married her after the death of a previous wife. On the other hand, William could have been a child of one of the other Offills whose arrival is indicated in the patent of 1695, above. Nobody really seems to know, nor do we have any information on the dates when these individuals died.

Generation Eight:

John Vawter & Margaret Noel

Virginia

THE PARENTS OF DAVID VAWTER both left wills that help to guide us through a study of their family. Nonetheless, there have been many different interpretations of the documentary evidence. Grace Vawter Bicknell suggested that there was an earlier John Vawter, a brother to Bartholomew, to whom our family line ought to be traced. She based this on Senator John Vawter's recollections, but they have proven faulty in other ways, and it is unlikely that there really was an earlier John Vawter. In fact, Senator Vawter's depiction of three brothers arriving in Virginia in 1685 has the flavor of folklore: a common theme in family histories, and often mistaken, is that of the three brothers who immigrated.

John Vawter, father of David, was born around 1691 in Essex County, Virginia. Most family scholars believe that he was the eldest son of Bartholomew Vawter. He is prominently mentioned in Bartholomew's will. Bartholomew owned land that bordered on those of Daniel Noel, John's eventual father-in-law, so it is likely that John knew Margaret Noel for years before they married.

The Virginia of John Vawter was a colony in the midst of change. Since slaves had first been imported in 1619, planters had increasingly come to depend upon them for labor. Bartholomew's will of 1717 makes no mention of slaves, unless they were the "chattel" he referred to.⁸⁰ From 1660 to 1680, English immigration to Virginia dropped by a third, to about 13,000. Landed families were finding it difficult to locate white servants to work their plantations. More and more frequently, they turned to slaves to do the job. Alan Taylor described the economics of this change:

*Faced with a declining supply of white laborers, the Chesapeake planters increasingly turned to African slaves for their plantation labor. At the end of the seventeenth century, slaves became a better investment, as servants became scarcer and more expensive: 25 pounds to 30 pounds for a lifelong slave compared well with 15 pounds to purchase just four years of a servant's time.*⁸¹

That John was a fairly successful planter is evident from his will, in which he designated legacies for each of his surviving family members, amounting to 1,238 acres of land in a number of districts from the Tidewater to the "Great Mountains."⁸² Such great amounts of property allowed John to rotate his fields every few years as tobacco

⁸⁰ Will of Bartholomew Vawter, August 16, 1717: Essex County, VA, Deeds & Wills No. 15, 1716-1718. Will proved September 17, 1717.

⁸¹ *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* by Alan Taylor. See the bibliography.

⁸² Will of John Vawter, May 23, 1748: Culpeper County, VA, Will Book A, 1749-1770. Will proved November 16, 1752.

wore the fields out. Even with this large amount of property, however, John Vawter was probably only of modest estate. The great Tidewater families owned thousands of acres of land at this time.

His holdings also demonstrate that John was making a break with the former system of plantation, which required water access for transportation. In 1734 John received a patent on 580 acres of land near the Forks of the Rappahannock River, in company with a man named Philip Stogdale.⁸³ By this time, roads were being constructed into the interior of the colony and vehicles were being used to transport products to wharves where they could be loaded aboard ships. Those who didn't own vehicles could roll their hogsheads to market. The variety of tobacco that could be grown there was of a higher quality, and thus more lucrative to grow, than the tobacco produced in Essex County.

It's likely that the availability of slave labor contributed to John's movement inland. John's will doesn't mention any slaves, but that doesn't mean he didn't own any. He instructed that his personal goods should be sold at auction, that his debts be paid from the proceeds, and that the remainder be equally distributed amongst his children after his widow had received her legal third. Any slaves he owned, considered as personal property, were probably sold in the auction after his death. John died sometime between 1748 and November of 1752.

John willed large pieces of land to his daughters, married or not. In the case of Winifred, that may have been by way of guaranteeing a dowry in case he was not around to see to it. The plan seems to have worked, for Winifred bears a different surname by the time her mother's will was composed in September of 1756.⁸⁴ Margaret, John's widow, specifically instructed her executors on the disposition of one slave, a girl named Cloe, and any child she might bear. But she, too, divided her estate between some of her children, and other slaves might have been included in that property.

Family documents of this era carry the names of several individuals who were connected to the Germanna community. John mentions the land he received from his father-in-law, Daniel Noel, and he mentions his daughter, Margaret Rucker. This daughter was married to Ephraim Rucker, who is designated executor of Margaret Noel Vawter's will. It is clear that the Vawters were closely inter-related with the Ruckers and the Noels.

It was a common practice to name children in honor of their ancestors, using an ancestral surname as the child's middle name. This practice contributes to the mystery surrounding a possible earlier John Vawter. A son of Margaret and John Vawter was named Richard Beverly Vawter. The Beverleys lived at the mouth of Occupacia Creek, a few miles away from the Vawters. They were one of the richest and most influential Tidewater families. In 1705, Robert Beverley wrote his *The History and Present State of Virginia*, a sourcebook for scholars of colonial Virginia. Some twenty years earlier, Robert Beverley had led a movement to limit the production of Virginia tobacco, thus driving up the price of the commodity. For his actions he was eventually imprisoned and he lost the benefit of royal favor.

⁸³ Georgene Jurgensen quotes *English Duplicates of Lost Virginia Land Records*, by Louis des Cognets, Jr. See the bibliography.

⁸⁴ Will of Margaret Vawter, September 18, 1756: Culpeper County, VA, Will Book A, 1749-1770. Will proved October 21, 1756.

Family historians sometimes suggest that the earlier John Vawter was married to a Beverley woman, thus introducing the name to the Vawter family tree. There have been Beverley or Beverly Vawters in nearly every generation since about 1700, always males, but the origin of the name remains a conundrum. It may only be that the name honors the respected family from Essex County. There may have been a political benefit to naming a son after them. They were a powerful and wealthy family, with a huge mansion, Blandfield, like some English manor, with a central building flanked by symmetrical wings. Blandfield remained in the Beverley family until the 1980s, when it was finally sold. By 1785 the Beverleys kept 300 slaves on their plantation. They owned 4,381 acres and their slaves performed all the crafts necessary to make the place self-sufficient. James Slaughter listed some of them:

*Slave artisans such as coopers, blacksmiths, tanners, carpenters, shoemakers, clothmakers and distillers manufactured goods for their plantations and neighborhoods. These cottage industries impeded the growth of Tappahannock and other Southern towns.*⁸⁵

John Vawter directed the building of a church in 1719, partly as a memorial to his recently deceased father, Bartholomew, who owned the land the church occupies. Known as Vauter's Episcopal Church, it still offers weekly Episcopalian services. It is located about sixteen miles north of Tappahannock, Essex County, Virginia. The church provides a good example of the floor plan and vaulted ceilings that were typical of churches in those days, and its brickwork is admired. There are only ten other churches still existing in Virginia that predate Vauter's Church. After the Revolution, Vauter's Church fell out of use, but the building was preserved. It reopened for services in 1822. Some of the original furnishings and the 1739 Bible have now been recovered and are displayed in the church. The historic pipe organ has also been restored.⁸⁶

Margaret Noel was born around 1695 to Daniel Noel and his wife Elizabeth. Daniel and his family owned a piece of land adjoining that of the Vawters. Margaret and John were probably married by 1720, and possibly even earlier. At some point, Daniel Noel gave property to John Vawter.⁸⁷ John refers to the property he received from Daniel in his own will. John served as executor to Edward Evans' estate in 1726.⁸⁸ This man was an uncle to the Noel children, having a sister who married James Noel, Daniel's brother.

In her will Margaret takes care to balance her bequests as equally as possible amongst her children, going so far as to determine the potential value of Cloe, the slave girl's, as yet unconceived child. Perhaps, as was happening with many smaller farmers at the time, the family's net worth was eroding. The rich families were flourishing, while the smaller farmers were facing ruin. Margaret Noel Vawter lived until October of 1756.

⁸⁵ *Settlers Southerners Americans: The History of Essex County, Virginia*, by James B. Slaughter. See the bibliography.

⁸⁶ Essex County, VA, has a homepage on internet that provides more information about the structure and its history. More information, including John Vawter's role in building the church was located in Slaughter's book.

⁸⁷ Although Daniel Noel's name appears on several Essex County property transactions, I have not seen a will for him.

⁸⁸ Essex County, VA, Wills, Bond & Inventory Book #4, June 21, 1726.

Daniel & Elizabeth Noel

Virginia

GEORGENE JURGENSEN IS an active contemporary researcher of the Vawter and Noel families. She has generously shared her work with other researchers, helping to clarify some complicated issues through the use of wills, land records, and other primary documents. To her I owe much of what I know about the Noel family.

Some family researchers say that Daniel Noel, the father of Margaret Noel Vawter, was born as early as 1665.⁸⁹ He didn't die until 1775, however, which would make him 110 years old at his death!⁹⁰ Even if we believe that the gift of land from Thomas R. Page in 1675 or 1676 signifies Daniel's actual birth date, Daniel Noel must have lived to an extremely old age for people of his generation.⁹¹ We know for a fact that by 1749 he was considered old enough to qualify for the tax exemption from "*Public, Parish and County levy.*"⁹²

Daniel was the eldest son of Cornelius Noel, a Huguenot immigrant who is apparently of French or Belgian stock. His mother's identity, beyond her given name, is unknown. An old family tradition in the Noel family claims that Daniel was married to Elizabeth Elliot. No documentation to support this claim has yet been found. An Elliot family did own land adjacent to the Noel holdings.

He was old enough to serve as a witness for a power of attorney document in 1694, so he was probably 18 to 20 years of age by that time. Daniel's future was already secure, for he had in his name 400 acres of land adjoining his father's property near Occupacia Creek on Popoman Swamp. Daniel was a planter, like his father before him, and he was successful enough to stand sponsor to indentured servants whose passage he paid from England. In 1708, John Staten petitioned for release from indenture to Daniel Noel, declaring that he had served his allotted time.⁹³ One benefit of bringing servants into early Colonial Virginia was that the government provided sponsors with land grants. The "headright" was instituted first in 1618, and allowed an individual the right to claim fifty acres of land for each "head" whose transportation costs he paid. The rise of tobacco as a cash crop and the headright that encouraged importation of indentured servants are sometimes credited with saving the Virginia colony.⁹⁴

Daniel's land served as a landmark in many Colonial Virginia deeds and wills. His plantations can be traced through these official entries in Essex County records. By 1741, when Daniel wrote his will, he had already given away three hundred acres of Thomas Page's gift to three of his sons. The remaining hundred were divided between two more sons. This included the plantation upon which Daniel lived, but an arrangement must have been made to allow him to continue living there.

⁸⁹ *Emigrant Cornelius Noel From Holland To Virginia And His Descendants, Volume 2.* by Mary Roberts Noel and Jennie Noel Weeks. See the bibliography.

⁹⁰ The date of his death is by family tradition: no documentary evidence has yet been produced for Daniel's date of birth or for the date of his death.

⁹¹ Essex County, VA, Deed Book 5 page 502, 28 January, 1675/6.

⁹² Essex County, VA, Order Book 15, page 307, 16 May, 1749.

⁹³ Essex County, VA, Order Book 5, page 3, 10 April, 1708.

⁹⁴ *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia 1650-1750.* See the bibliography.

His son John, who received part of the land, may have been married into the Rowzee family. When John died, that family would own the title to the property where Daniel was living. In January of 1752, John Rowzee filed an agreement to the effect that Daniel could continue to farm and live on the 36 acres he was using as long as he lived. Rowzee also agreed to allow Elizabeth Noel her right of dower (which I presume means that she would receive one third of Daniel's land and property at his death).⁹⁵ I expect that the Rowzee agreement was part of a marriage settlement. Daniel's son John died four years after the agreement was made so presumably Daniel and Elizabeth Noel continued to live on the farm even though ownership of the property passed into the Rowzee family.

Around the time of the Revolution, John Rowzee and then the "Widow Rowzee," were providing local Baptists with a place to meet, in spite of harassment and persecution they endured on the part of local politicians and lawmen.⁹⁶

Daniel was of retirement age by 1749, when he was officially excused from paying taxes. His death didn't occur until 1755. Of his wife, we have no further information.

Generation Nine:

Peter & Elizabeth Rucker

Virginia, Europe

THERE IS LITTLE SOLID EVIDENCE to support the birth of Mary Rucker's father. He was a Huguenot immigrant, from France, Germany, Belgium or the disputed territories between those regions. Although we have no further information about his birth, I believe Peter spoke French, because later documents from the family sometimes employed French words.

He arrived in Virginia in the late 1600s. Since he was naturalized on May 4, 1704, and Colonial laws of the period allowed for naturalization after four years of approved behavior, he might have arrived as late as 1700. There is no official record of him before this document.

Georgene Jurgensen reminds us that several Huguenot ships sailed for Jamestown in 1700, and that one of the ships sank.⁹⁷ That year, four Huguenot ships arrived in Virginia, bringing about 700 immigrants, led by the Marquis de la Muce. Records of three of these ships' arrivals are extant, but little is known of the fourth ship.⁹⁸

A family legend persists concerning Peter Rucker's arrival, in which his ship was said to have sunk. The story has Peter and three others stranded on the deck of the foundering ship with only one remaining rum cask to float one of them to shore. Huguenots or not, the four drew cards to see who got the barrel, and Peter won.

⁹⁵ Virginia Colonial Abstracts, King & Queen County Records, page 310. Entry dated 20 January, 1752.

⁹⁶ Slaughter, *Settlers Southerners Americans: The History of Essex County, Virginia*. See the bibliography.

⁹⁷ Jurgensen's analysis was included in one of her postings to the Rucker Family Board at Rootsweb.com.

⁹⁸ The Pierre Chastain Family Association maintains several internet pages of Huguenot history, including a timeline that records these ships as well as much of the Huguenot history provided under Cornelius Noel, below.

John Blankenbaker, pondering the Rucker family, has concluded that they were in the region of the Germanna Colony earlier than most of the other German Huguenots.⁹⁹ Peter first settled in Essex County, probably near Tappahannock, which is a small town of the south bank of the Rappahannock River. He married a woman named Elizabeth, whose maiden name is once again debatable.¹⁰⁰ There are no records decisive enough to say for sure.

The Ruckers moved to Spotsylvania County sometime before it became Orange County in 1734. In 1748, it became Culpeper County, and in 1793, Madison County. Some researchers claim that Peter's son John left his parents 420 acres of Spotsylvania County farmland when he died. I wasn't able to locate the bequest in John's will, but it does seem likely that Peter's family moved to that area before 1743.

Peter lived until 1743, when his will was probated in Orange County.¹⁰¹ In this document, Peter listed his heirs and specifically granted them land, property or slaves. He named three slaves by name, Yerkshire, Jenny and Phillis. These may have been valued house servants. Any other slaves were probably disposed of at an auction that Peter directed should be held after his death.

Peter and Elizabeth Rucker had ten children that we know of. They married into a number of Virginia families, including the Tinsleys, Cooks, Reynolds, Pierces, and, of course, the Vawters.

Generation Nine:

Bartholomew Vawter & Winifred Hodgson

Virginia

CURRENT RESEARCHERS DOUBT the verity of Senator John Vawter's 1850 recollections about the family. His history, they claim, is loose, more based on legends and misunderstandings than on actual fact. He provided names that don't match records, and he seems to have confused people of different generations. Thus, we have him state that his grandmother Vawter was born a Rucker, when she actually appears to have been an Offill, daughter of a woman whose maiden name was Rucker. Nonetheless, I give you Grace Bicknell's passage about the first three Vawters, based on John Vawter's recollections:

This record begins with John, Bartholomew and Angus Vawter, who came to Virginia from England (probably from near Plymouth) about the year 1685. We are descended from John.

Nothing is known of the first John, except that he had children and one of them was named John. Of this second John, we find in an old Virginia record (a copy of which is in the William and Mary Quarterly, vol. 5, p. 90) that, in 1737, John Vawter was appointed administrator of the estate of James Jamieson of Essex county, Virginia. There was also an Edward in the second generation, but it is not certain whether he was the son of John, Bartholomew or Angus.

⁹⁹ Blankenbaker, as stated above, is the editor of a Germanna homepage on internet.

¹⁰⁰ Surnames suggested have included Elliot, Coghill and Fielding. The latter name was widely used in recent years, but turns out to have been spuriously given. The 1938 *History of Woodford County, Kentucky*, calls her *Elizabeth Terrill*, but this was probably the name of a later Peter Rucker's wife. No primary evidence of Elizabeth's surname has been located.

¹⁰¹ Will of Peter Rucker, January 18, 1743: Orange County, Virginia Will Book 1. Probated February 23, 1743.

The second John Vawter is presumed to have married a woman of the Beverly family, one of the influential Tidewater families of Virginia. The presumption is based upon the fact that one of John Vawter's children is named Beverly. See my discussion about this above, in the section on John Vawter and Margaret Noel. Bicknell attributed the children of John and Margaret to the mythical first John Vawter, Bartholomew's brother (except that she also lists a Richard, distinct from Beverly). Bicknell's statement that we are descended from that early John is now disputed. Currently we trace our family to Bartholomew. Georgene Jurgensen believes that there was no first John Vawter.

It is not clear that Angus and John Vawter, supposed brothers of Bartholomew, ever really existed. You can see that Vawter family history is now declining into supposition and theory. Senator Vawter may have remembered old family names and supposed that they were Bartholomew's brothers, when in fact they were the sons of a later generation. The names were used in the family, and Senator Vawter may have merely grafted those names onto the folkloric theme of the three brothers. Bartholomew Vawter clearly had a son named John who definitely fits the profile of the John Vawter who married Margaret Rucker. This John named children after his parents, Bartholomew and Winifred. He also had a son named Angus. Bartholomew's will names John and it names John's father-in-law, Daniel Noel. No other John existed in those two generations, as far as documentary evidence can show.

Winifred¹⁰² was the daughter of William and Onah Hodgson. Of her parents I know nothing more. Her mother's maiden name is not documented. Winifred was born around 1670 in Old Rappahannock County, the parent county of Essex County. She lived until 1756. In 1696, she and Bartholomew were wed in Old Rappahannock.¹⁰³

What is clear about the Vawters is that they arrived in Virginia in the late 1600s, from their ancestral home near Plymouth, England. In this area a family of Normans named Valletort settled after the Battle of Hastings. In the course of five centuries in England, the name was spelled in a number of different ways, and it has survived today as Vawter. Their holdings included Trematon Castle, which yet stands near Plymouth. It was to this castle that Sir Francis Drake had his plunder brought for safe keeping, upon his return from preying on the Spanish in the Caribbean.

Precisely when the Vawters left England is not known, nor what prompted their emigration. Late in the seventeenth century the West Country was in virtual rebellion from the newly installed James II, a Catholic who enacted harsh punishments on the followers of Cromwell. Most of the West Country had supported Cromwell and maintained staunch Protestant sentiments. News from France, where the Edict of Nantes had been revoked, was of violence and slaughter that Protestants there were facing, and English Protestants feared their Catholic rulers might follow the French example. They cast about for a powerful defender, and settled upon a bastard son of King Charles II, the Duke of Monmouth. Monmouth was persuaded to return from his Dutch exile to England with a few more than 80 followers, but upon landing his forces were swelled to thousands of men, most of whom were West Country peasants. The poorly armed force was derisively referred to as "The Pitchfork Rebellion." In July of 1685 they met royal forces at

¹⁰² The name is sometimes spelled "Winefred."

¹⁰³ *Index to Marriages of Old Rappahannock and Essex Counties, Virginia*. Book D-9. Winifred's father's name is given in this record.

Sedgemoor in Somerset, but having lost the element of surprise they were surrounded and slaughtered by the King's men.

The courts that tried surviving rebels became known as "The Bloody Assizes" because penalties were so harsh. Amongst those who were condemned to transportation for their participation in Monmouth's Rebellion was a nineteen-year-old plowman, John Gibbs.¹⁰⁴ He was sent to "*Barbadoes or other his Maties plantacoas* [Majesty's plantations] *in America*." It was tantamount to a life sentence, for servants in Barbados often failed to survive until the end of their terms. From their jail in Exeter the rebels were taken to Bristol and marched to confinement aboard the ship *Rebecca*.¹⁰⁵ Another of those so condemned was a man named Robert Vawter. This woolcomber, from Sidmouth in Devon, was wounded at the battle of Sedgemoor, imprisoned at Wells, tried at Dorchester and transported from Weymouth.¹⁰⁶ It is not clear what his relationship to the Vawter who first migrated to Virginia might have been, but he was undoubtedly a relative. Robert Vawter died on the twentieth day out of Bristol and his body was cast into the sea.¹⁰⁷

Recall that Senator John Vawter believed his ancestors had arrived in Virginia "about the year 1685," and it seems likely that Bartholomew, and, if they existed, John and Angus Vawter, either fled to or were condemned to servitude in Virginia as a result of their family's participation in the Protestant backlash against King James II. Three years later most of England joined in the call for a Protestant monarch, and William of Orange arrived to wrest the throne from James in a bloodless coup called the "Glorious Revolution." William sent pardons to the condemned survivors of Monmouth's Rebellion, but many of them chose to remain in the New World.

Our first documentary evidence of the Vawter family in America is dated 1687. In this document Bartholomew Vawter serves as a witness to a power of attorney document for Margaret Rutherford. During this period he also served as a witness to a land transfer for Mrs. Rutherford.¹⁰⁸ The following year, Bartholomew registered his gift of a cow to Margaret and Robert Rutherford's daughter, Margaret.¹⁰⁹ Just what the relationship between the Rutherfords and Bartholomew was hasn't been determined.

The fact that Bartholomew was selected by Essex County's court to appraise a horse and, in another case an estate, in 1688 might show that he was already known and trusted by local justices at that early date.¹¹⁰ Curiously, Bartholomew is mentioned in a claim for headright property three years later. John Salmon sought to register 61 acres for the importation of Bartholomew Vawter and Mary Burkett in 1691. It may be that

¹⁰⁴ This was probably not the John Gibbs of our direct family line, but his name is included here to suggest the difficulty we face in trying to positively identify individuals who share a name with others.

¹⁰⁵ Original musters of these prisoners disagree on the name of the ship they were transported on. Some of the documents called the ship *Betty*.

¹⁰⁶ *The Monmouth Rebels 1685*, compiled by W. Macdonald Wigfield, M. A. See the bibliography.

¹⁰⁷ *Original Lists of Persons of Quality*, by John Camden Hotten. See the bibliography. There is a problem with the dating of certain documents concerning the convicts sent to Barbados, including those that mention Robert Vawter. These have been transcribed as dating from January, 1685, although the rebellion and subsequent exiles didn't take place until later in that same year. I suspect the transcriber misread the year, and that they ought to read January, 1686.

¹⁰⁸ *Deeds, Wills, Settlements of Estates 1681-1688, (Old) Rappahannock County, VA., and (Old) Rappahannock County Deed Book 1686-1688*. Courtesy of Georgene Jurgensen.

¹⁰⁹ *Old Rappahannock County Deed Book 7 1682-1688*. Courtesy of Georgene Jurgensen.

¹¹⁰ *Old Rappahannock County Orders*. Courtesy of Georgene Jurgensen.

Salmon had postponed making his claim, for headrights were often requested several years after transportation was completed.¹¹¹

Early Essex County was very different from the landscape that exists there today, even in the wildest of areas. In the mid 1600s, it was designated as part of the Rappahannock Reserve, land set aside for exclusive use of Native Americans. Customarily, the Indians regularly burned the forests and brushlands, creating open meadowlands that attracted elk, buffalo, deer and turkeys. Surviving trees tended to be hardwoods, with little underbrush beneath them. James B. Slaughter, who wrote a local history for Essex County says, "*The English remarked that a carriage could travel through the woods and that one could see for a mile in the forest.*"¹¹² Tangled thickets and pine forests dominate the wilder uplands of today's Essex County.

The earliest English settlers took up land along the waterways. On the north the river provided a natural boundary, although it also provided a transportation route until roads were developed around the end of the seventeenth century. Until the formation of Essex County from Old Rappahannock County in 1692, residents frequently had to cross the river to do business in the county court. Old Rappahannock County straddled the course of the river, and every other court session was held on the north side.

Branching off the Rappahannock were smaller waterways that also drew settlers. The largest was the one farthest downstream in Essex County, Piscataway, which flowed into the river just downstream from Hoskins Creek. Mt. Landing Creek met the river just upstream from an abrupt peninsula that later formed an upstream barrier for a landing known as Hobb's His Hole.¹¹³ The next creek upstream was Occupacia.

On the south side of the county were the headwaters of the same swampland that formed Middlesex County's southern border, The Dragon Swamp, with the stream flowing into it known as Dragon Run.

When the Virginia Assembly, in 1680, decided that every county should be required to build a town, they were hoping to provide immigrant professionals with places in which to build their shops and to create central warehouses for small planters to sell their tobacco. Hobb's Hole, with a few cabins already in existence, was selected as the site for the local town in what became Essex County. Local politicians first tried to name their village New Plymouth, but the original name lingered on, persistently used by captains of the visiting ships that had it on their charts. In 1705, the Assembly tried a different name, this time choosing the name of the Indian village that had existed at the site when John Smith visited the location in 1607. The name Tappahannock is still in use today.

In the last two decades of the 17th century Bartholomew Vawter took up land near Tappahannock south of the Rappahannock River. His land appears to have been slightly upriver from the village, around Occupacia Creek. His first recorded purchase was in 1692 or 1693, when Jonathan Hutson sold him 150 acres next to Daniel Noel's property.

¹¹¹ *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants, Volume 3*, by Nell Marion Nugent. See the bibliography. Georgene Jurgensen supplied this particular abstract.

¹¹² *Settlers, Southerners, Americans: The History of Essex County, Virginia*, by James B. Slaughter. See the bibliography.

¹¹³ A hole was an anchorage for sailing vessels.

In December of 1693, Bartholomew purchased another 150 acres from the Parish of Sittenbourne, which would mean it was property that belonged to the King.¹¹⁴

Daniel Noel, Bartholomew's neighbor, lived on the south side of Occupacia Creek, probably about four miles from the Rappahannock River. Noel's land is described as being on a branch of Occupacia Creek.

In 1717, Bartholomew growing weak, he drew up his will. By September 17, he had passed on. His will appointed John Vawter his executor and provided him with his home plantation, Daniel and William Vawter were granted lands neighboring Daniel Noel's and James Boulware's properties. Noel posted a bond to assist John Vawter in a legal inventory of Bartholomew's belongings, further evidence that the two families were trusted neighbors. One son, Daniel, appears to have been encouraged to grow up. Of him Bartholomew, having given him the half of his forest land next to Daniel Noel's property, suggested that he be treated as if he were of age, and "*do for himself after my decease.*"¹¹⁵

The inventory that was eventually produced was extremely detailed and took up more than four pages in the county record. It had taken almost a year to complete, and was recorded in the county records in July of 1718. Much of it is difficult for the modern eye to read, but it appears to be a minute tally of each item Bartholomew owned when he died. Housewares were counted: pewter, wooden, iron and tin. Supplies in barrels, tuns and bags were counted. A parcel of old books suggests that Bartholomew was literate. "*Book ownership,*" says Slaughter, "*helped assert a claim to genteel status, since very few men could read well.*"¹¹⁶ In addition to livestock, seed and tools for farming, he possessed tools and supplies necessary for many different businesses: carpentry, cabinet making, tailor's goods, masonry, and so forth. I find no mention of slaves in the inventory or the will. Given the abundance of selection in threads and different qualities of cloth, I would venture a guess that Bartholomew ran a tailor's shop.

On the other hand, the inventory could simply reflect the need of any plantation to be self-sufficient. It's likely that Bartholomew's plantation employed indentured servants or slaves who were trained to function in many jobs, supplying the woodwork, masonry, farming tasks, tending the livestock and making clothing and other necessary goods. Bartholomew may even have run a small store for his neighbors.

In 1719, when St. Anne's Parish decided to build a new church, it was located on land that had belonged to Bartholomew Vawter. John Vawter, Bartholomew's eldest son, and our direct ancestor, was placed in charge of building the church. An active Episcopalian church, it is the venue of a convention of Vawter descendants that occurs every five years.

¹¹⁴ These purchases are from *Essex County Deeds & Wills, 1692-1693*, and early Essex County Records collected by William Snyder Vawter. They were delivered to me by Georgene Jurgensen. Jurgensen reminds us that Essex County was formed of parts of Old Rappahannock County in 1692. Sittenbourne Parish was the northwestern, or upper, portion of the new county.

¹¹⁵ Will of Bartholomew Vawter, August 16, 1717: Essex County, VA, Deeds & Wills No. 15, 1716-1718. Will proved September 17, 1717. The inventory is located in Wills, etc., No. 3, 1717-1721.

¹¹⁶ *Settlers Southerners Americans, The History of Essex County, Virginia*, by James B. Slaughter. See the bibliography.

The Early Virginians

Virginia

JUST AS THERE IS A SOCIETY that celebrates ancestral roots in the American Revolution or the descendants of the people of the *Mayflower*, there is also a society that acknowledges people whose ancestors were in Virginia before 1700. That society is the Jamestown Society.¹¹⁷ From several of our family's branches we appear to qualify. There are many alluring clues that appear to fit our family's ancestral puzzle, but I'm afraid I haven't seen enough documentary evidence to build a case for most of our family branches in early Virginia.

*In December 1606, three vessels left England for Virginia, taking the standard circle route southwest via the trade winds to the Canaries, westward to the West Indies, and then north with the Gulf Stream to Virginia. They reached Chesapeake Bay on April 26, 1607. Seeking some security from Spanish discovery and attack, the colonists ascended the broad James River about sixty miles, to establish their settlement, Jamestown, beside a marsh on the north bank...*¹¹⁸

This was a very difficult land in which to survive. The marshy land chosen for the establishment of Jamestown was unsatisfactory in many ways. The swamplands bred mosquitoes that carried malaria, a disease with which the English were unfamiliar. The wells of the settlement were brackish, tasting of seawater on the high tides. That seawater also contained refuse and detritus that the colonists dumped into the river to get rid of.

Indians were a threat, breaking out in two concerted attacks in the first forty years of the colony. After the first attack, which occurred in 1622, survivors were carefully listed in the first comprehensive census of the colony. Several of our family names are found on that list: Watts, Gibbs and Barnett. Another family, that of the Noels, will be dealt with separately. Between Indians and disease, an alarmingly high percentage of the early colonists died. A second muster of the colonists in 1625 provided their ages and, if available, their means of transportation to the colony.

Until tobacco cultivation was discovered the colony's chief export was lumber, a scarce commodity in England, and highly valued. It was said that the average colonist in Virginia burned more firewood than most lords in England could afford. Cultivation of tobacco led to changes in the way the settlement developed.

In 1616 a few hundred settlers on the James River dispatched just over two thousand pounds of tobacco to England. Inferior to the Spanish leaf, Chesapeake tobacco commanded a lesser price but in so doing augmented demand; those for whom twelve-shilling tobacco was too expensive inhaled at seven or five shillings. By 1620 the population of Virginia had risen to roughly two thousand and tobacco exports to over fifty thousand pounds a year...By the early 1630s, some three thousand Virginians were exporting upward of a quarter-million pounds of tobacco a year...By century's end a population of just under ninety thousand would export more than 36

¹¹⁷ A similar society celebrates the descendants of "Ancient Planters," those who arrived and remained in Virginia prior to 1618. Our family doesn't appear to qualify for this society.

¹¹⁸ *American Colonies: The Settling of North America*, by Alan Taylor. See the bibliography.

million pounds, roughly four hundred pounds of tobacco for every man, woman and child in the region.¹¹⁹

New land was needed, and it needed to be located next to convenient navigable waterways so the huge tuns of processed leaf could be easily shipped to England. Over the next century virtually all the waterfront property in Virginia was settled, forests cleared and plantations established. Villages and towns were rare in early Virginia, seldom being developed to a large extent until the 1700s. Most those that the Assembly required counties to create earlier faded away before that time. Tappahannock was an exception. Plantations had to be communities within themselves, and they really had better contact with England itself than with other settlements within Virginia. Late each year ships from England arrived along the waterways to deliver supplies and to load tobacco for export.

There are many candidates for our Watts family, but I am unable to say just how we are connected to any of them. As mentioned above, family historians claim that Thomas Watts was the son of Edward Watts and his wife, Anne, who later remarried to become Anne McPherson. Edward in his turn is linked to another Edward Watts who was born around 1620 in England, and died in Stafford County, Virginia, around 1690. He isn't supposed to have married until 1688, which would make him quite old at the time, so I have my doubts about that connection. Perhaps his estimated birth date is flawed.

A Thomas Watts lived in Virginia at the time of the 1623 census. He was located at an outlying settlement known as Flourdieu Hundred.¹²⁰ In the 1625 census we find that he arrived aboard the ship *Treasurer*, no date provided, and that he was one of Sir George Yeardley's men, living at Hog Island.¹²¹ Sir George and his family lived at Chaplain's Choice during that count. On August 4, 1658, note was taken of the indenture of a John Watts, yeoman, bound to Phillip Gibbes to serve six years in Virginia, but this John was probably not connected to our family. Both John and Thomas were then, as now, common names found repeatedly in the Watts family.

We know from the Christ Church Parish Register that John was the name of our earliest documented ancestor of the Barnett surname. This John, father of the John Barnett who married Marran Gibbs in 1728, may have been born in Virginia around 1680. He might have descended from any number of early Barnetts. There is discussion amongst genealogical researchers concerning the early Barnett family. Some assert that the name is an Anglicization of the French name *Bernard*.

A Thomas Barnett lived at Flourdieu Hundred alongside Thomas Watts in 1623, and the following year a John Barnett was enumerated at the Eastern Shore. The former may have been the same Thomas who arrived in James City aboard the *Elizabeth* in 1620 (the year the Pilgrims arrived in Massachusetts).¹²² He was but sixteen years old on his

¹¹⁹ *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia 1650-1750*. See the bibliography.

¹²⁰ Flourdieu, spelled variously, was located south of the James River. It was also known as Piersey's Hundred.

¹²¹ *The Complete Book of Emigrants 1607-1660*, by Peter William Coldham. See the bibliography. Many of the bits of information provided in this section were taken from this text.

¹²² *Elizabeth* was the smallest (only 40 tons, carrying 20 passengers; by contrast, *Mayflower*, 140 tons, carried 100 persons) of six vessels chartered by the same people who chartered the *Mayflower*. She left England at roughly the same time and arrived off New England (then known as Northern Virginia) where she "tarried for some time" in company with *Mayflower* and *Bona Nova*. The latter vessel left for

arrival. Twenty-six year old John Barnett arrived at James City in 1620, too, aboard the ship *Jonathan*. We are told that a William Barnett lived at Chaplain's Choice in the early 1620s. He had arrived aboard a ship that frequented Virginia, the *Truelove*. But by 1623, William was dead. Any of these, though probably not the last, might have been father to the earliest John Barnett of the Christ Church Register.

The Gibbs name, in various spellings, appears frequently in early Virginia. There is enthusiastic support of a certain line of descent concerning this family, but I have not seen primary documents to support all the connections, so I will present it only as a theory here. In this theory, the John Gibbs who fathered Marran Gibbs was himself the son of Gregory Gibbs, born around 1635 at a community near Jamestown that was called Jordan's Journey. John Gibbs was a subject of study by the Rutmans in their survey of Middlesex County, and they took particular note of his possession of slaves. At the time of his death, John owned six blacks, including one male adult, two females and three children under the age of ten. John's widow, Mary, died four years after John and the inventory that accompanied her estate showed that the adult male and one female black had perished in an epidemic. Another child had been born.

*The loss was not simply a matter of slave capital but of income as well. Before there had been three laboring adults and three children. Now there were four children and only one laborer. (John) Gibbs' blacks had produced roughly ten pounds profit in 1726; Gibbs' widow's blacks produced less than a ten-shilling profit in 1730. In this particular case, the disaster was followed by departure from the county, Gibbs' sole surviving son, Zacharias, and his wife and child and Zacharias' two married sisters and their husbands and children all leaving to settle in the far western reaches of Spotsylvania County.*¹²³

Gregory Gibbs had moved his family to Middlesex County, where Order Book 2 is supposed to provide a list of his children. I have not yet seen this document. There was also a Gregory Gibbs who lived as an indentured servant in Lancaster County (later to become Middlesex County) sometime between 1655 and 1666. His employer, James Bonner, regularly encouraged him to good behavior by promising to release him from his indenture a year early. When Bonner died, Gregory Gibbs sought to have the promise fulfilled, appealing to the county court and winning his freedom a year before the contracted time was up.¹²⁴

Gregory is given as the son of Lieutenant John Gibbs and his wife, whose maiden name was Grigory. This John Gibbs is given credit for many actions in the early years of the Jamestown Settlement. He is listed as arriving amongst the 56 passengers aboard the ship *Supply* out of Bristol in 1619.¹²⁵ In 1625 he was located at Jordan's Journey. It was noted that he was a partner to Christopher Saffard (possibly Stafford).

Jamestown, but the *Elizabeth* remained with *Mayflower* until the spring of 1621, when she, too, sailed for Jamestown. We tend only to remember *Mayflower*.

¹²³ *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia 1650-1750*. See the bibliography.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* The Rutmans quote Lancaster Orders, 1655-1666, 139, 149, and 242.

¹²⁵ *Supply of Bristol* was another of the six vessels mentioned above. At 80 tons, she carried only 45 passengers when she sailed from England in September, 1620, as part of that fleet. It was the voyage after she had carried John Gibbs to Virginia. Of the two other vessels in the convoy, the largest was *Abigail*, 350 tons, which sailed in February, 1620, with 230 passengers. The last ship was *Margaret and John*, 150 tons, with 85 passengers. This ship sailed for Guadaloupe in December, 1620, where she shipped more passengers. Sailing for Virginia, she paused at Nevis to take on fresh water. On March 30, 1621, she fell in with two larger ships she took to be Dutch. When they had gained the advantage, Spaniards struck their

It should be noted that there were at least three other men with similar names in Virginia about that time. In 1620, a John Gibbes was sent as a servant to a Mr. Oldisworth. A John Gibbes lived at Elizabeth City during the 1625 count. He had arrived at age twenty-four, aboard the *Abigail* in 1621. In 1622, a John Gybs was listed as a servant of the Virginia Company remaining in the colony. There was also the condemned plowman of that name who was exiled to one of the colonies, but that wasn't until 1685.

Beginning in 1627, I find the name of John Gibbs frequently mentioned as the master of several different ships, especially vessels that sailed for New England. Our John Gibbs was supposedly made a lieutenant for sailing to New England to obtain a load of fish to feed starving Virginians in the early 1620s. I find it more reasonable to assume that John Gibbs, the mariner, was responsible for that act.

A John Gibbs returned to England in 1632, spending four years there before returning to Virginia. He gave a deposition concerning a shipment of tobacco. This John Gibbs was born around 1600, and he is often supposed to be our ancestor. Curiously, a deposition was also filed in 1632 concerning the voyage of the ship *Lion's Whelp*, master, John Gibbs. The juxtaposition of the two voyages indicates that there were two separate individuals of that name, one of which was a mariner and the other a planter. Which of these was actually our ancestor, I cannot say.

Lieutenant John Gibbs is said to have been the son of a British general, Gregory Gybbes, of Dorset. A brother of this Gregory Gybbes was Giles Gibbs, who immigrated to Massachusetts Bay around 1630. He established the northern branch of the American Gibbs families.

Strong personalities were evidently a trait of these generations of the Gibbs family. General Gybbes disowned his eldest son, our supposed ancestor John, who became the first in the Gibbs family to view America. Gregory made the first son of his second marriage his heir, William, born in 1621. A partisan of the doomed King Charles I, Gregory was not well liked by the people of his village:

*On Monday, 14 October, 1644. The King Charles I, left Chard and kept to the road, dynded at the Lord Paulet's and went that night to South Perrott, the first parish in Dorsetshire, leaving Crewkerne 2 myles short of it, a little on the left hand. The King lay that night at Mr. Gibbs, his house, the manor of South Perrott. The troops that night 6 miles off at Oveshot there coates are old in the hall window, where the King lay at Mr. Gibbs.*¹²⁶

General Gybbes' mansion, Mohun Castle, was located in South Perrott. Villagers who disliked King Charles I later burned the mansion and defaced the funerary monument of Mary Newcourt, the mother of the general.¹²⁷

false Dutch colors and raised their battle flags. For five or six hours the ships battled each other. In the end, the *Margaret and John*, with only eight brass cannon and a small "faulcon," killed both Spanish captains and so many enemy seamen that the Spanish ships fled. The victorious English ship lost eight of her company. The Spaniards were a 300-ton ship with 22 guns and another ship of 200 tons with 16 guns. Ironically, many of this ship's passengers who remained in Virginia were slain by the Indian attacks of the following year.

¹²⁶ This unattributed quote was provided by Dorothy Gibbs, who says she received it from an English researcher of the Gibbs family. The Paulets were related to the Gibbs and to Sir Thomas More.

¹²⁷ This Gibbs family history is courtesy of Dorothy Gibbs, Vassar, KS.

Dorothy Gibbs and her coworkers provide a family line that extends to Brittany around the 1200s. It appears to be a creditable and well-documented line. The only part I find confusing is the early years in Virginia.

Generation Ten:

Cornelius & Elizabeth Noel

Virginia, The Netherlands

OUR FINAL FAMILY TO STUDY in Colonial Virginia is another Huguenot family, that of Cornelius Noel.¹²⁸ This family line has been scrutinized in depth by researchers over the past couple of decades. A book published in 1997 contained the work of two of these researchers, Jennie Noel Weeks and Mary Roberts Noel.¹²⁹ Later research has disputed some of the findings published in the Weeks and Noel book. Georgene Jurgensen has again provided many of the facts contained in this section.

Cornelius Noel was born in Leiden, Holland, on October 3, 1623. Another boy named Cornelius had been born to the family in 1622, but had lived only two months. Our Cornelius was the eldest surviving child of Jacob Noweelsz and Katrien (also known as Trientje) Cornelisdr.

Researchers working on the family line believe that Jacob was one of three children of Passchier Nowe and Stijntje Jaspers. This couple had married in Leiden on March 29, 1582 or 1583, but both had fled their native homes in Flanders. Passcheir was born in Halewijn, and Stijntje was from Menen. Both of these cities are located in Belgium.

Over the previous twenty years, French Catholics had sometimes tolerated and sometimes violently opposed Protestantism. A civil war had raged in France since 1572, the same year in which thousands of Huguenots, lulled into a sense of security by a mild acceptance of their faith, were suddenly slaughtered in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. It is likely that Passchier and Stijntje came from Protestant families who escaped the French wars by fleeing to Holland.

Researchers indicate that the family might be traced back even farther, into France itself. French Protestants might have fled rigid punishments imposed in 1560 and 1561, requiring the confiscation of property and imprisonment of all who attended "heretical" worship in public or in private. Bearing in mind that Martin Luther posted his theses only forty years earlier, and that John Calvin began his reforms in 1525, our family seems to have included some of the earliest adherents to Protestantism.

The Holland of Cornelius' youth was a remarkable place, the haven of persecuted Protestants from much of Europe. Some fled Catholic armies, some were tired of the dominance of Anglicans or Catholics. Many of the refugees were highly skilled or educated people. They brought with them their tools, books and knowledge. Sharing their ideas and industry, the refugees strengthened Holland immensely. News of the world was

¹²⁸ The Noel surname was spelled variously in colonial documents. A few variations include Knowell, Nowell, Noel, Noelle, Noell, etc.

¹²⁹ *Emigrant Cornelius Noel And His Descendants in America From Holland to Virginia*, Noel & Weeks.

gathered to and disseminated from the people of Holland as refugees arrived or departed for other lands.

In 1606 a group of English refugees arrived at Leiden, fleeing religious persecution in England. They believed that the Anglicans had failed to completely purify religious practices in England. Refusing to tithe or attend their parish churches as they were required to do by law, they became targets of civil actions: fines, imprisonment, even torture. These English refugees spent more than ten years in Leiden before voting to sail for America where they could build their own community. This group later became known as the Pilgrims.

Some of the French Huguenots fled to England, where they established a new industry of cloth manufacturing in the north. The industry thrived and grew. Other French Huguenots joined colonists bound for Virginia. By 1619, Sir William Sandys was reporting on the progress of “*our Frenchmen*” in the Virginia colony. In 1623, some thirty Dutch Huguenot families established a colony at New Amsterdam, which later would become New York, under the British. Some of these families attempted to settle around the Falls of the Delaware, but were driven back by the Indians.

Around 1650, large scale Huguenot immigration to America began. In France the government began repealing Protestant rights and imposing Catholic laws upon the Huguenot population. By the mid-1660s Dutch Huguenots had established colonies in South Africa, having lost their New Amsterdam settlement to the British. In 1685, Louis XVI revoked the Edict of Nantes, depriving Protestants of all rights. Many fled the bloody purges, some to England where they helped to build the garment industry, others to overseas colonies. Huguenots in French-ruled Canada fled to British colonies further south, in what would become the United States, where they helped to establish overseas trade contacts.¹³⁰

In late September of 1665, the Virginia Company issued a land patent to four individuals, totaling 1,097 acres of land on Occupacia Creek, four miles from its intersection with the Rappahannock River.¹³¹ Among these four individuals was Cornelius Noel, who was said to have brought members of his family along with him from London. The fact that he was included in the land grant indicates that Cornelius was probably already a resident of Virginia. On September 26, 1668, Thomas Pannell received land for transporting thirteen new settlers, including ‘*Cornelius Nowell.*’ The description of Pannell’s property ‘*located on S. side of the Rappa. In the freshes about 4 miles from the water side*’ matches the location of Noel’s land.¹³² It would have taken Pannell some time to receive his headright for importing settlers, and it makes sense that his land and that of some of his settlers would be located beside each other.

A Virginia historical magazine ran a story on Cornelius’ eventual application for naturalization. In the documents they quoted, Cornelius is described as a mariner. Since his application was dated 1666, some researchers believe Cornelius must have actually

¹³⁰ These historical facts are provided in a timeline provided by the Pierre Chastain Family Association on internet.

¹³¹ Old Rappahannock County, VA, Record and Deed Book 3, 1663-1668.

¹³² The property descriptions and Pannell’s transport of Cornelius Noel are found in *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, by Nell Marion Nugent. See the bibliography. Thanks to Georgene Jurgensen for locating these records and sharing them with me.

been in Virginia by 1652. Laws at that time required a fourteen-year residency before allowing naturalization.¹³³

Cornelius established a plantation on his Occupacia Creek property, naming it New Holland.¹³⁴ Naturalization was granted to Cornelius on April 27, 1686, by Francis Lord Howard, Baron of Effingham, Governor General of Virginia, but for some reason the papers were not filed until after Cornelius' death. Perhaps he balked at paying the fee. In 1700 his widow asked for them to be recorded under the administration of Essex County, which had been formed of a part of Old Rappahannock County.¹³⁵

Cornelius seems to have played the part of a Virginia planter after establishing himself at New Holland. He imported laborers from England and he might have also relied on slave labor.¹³⁶ His son, James, who inherited New Holland from his father, mentions his "negroes" in his will.¹³⁷ Cornelius freely exercised his right to buy and sell land, or to acquire more property through transporting convicts or free individuals under indenture.

Cornelius was a tobacco farmer. In his will, dated January 10, 1698 or 1699, he provides a standard inheritance of six hundred pounds of tobacco to several of his children, including Daniel Noel.¹³⁸ He followed the laws of primogeniture, leaving his home plantation to his eldest son, although he also provided 100 acres to his daughter, Elizabeth. She, too, was to inherit the estate if James died without heirs. Each of the children received the six hundred pounds of tobacco, and one son, underage, was to receive a pair of pistols, a holster and a carbine along with the tobacco, should he live to his majority.

Cornelius died on June 6, 1699, in what had become Essex County, Virginia. It is possible that his widow, Elizabeth, remarried, to Thomas Pannell, although documentation of that is lacking. The year following his death, Elizabeth asked county officers to record Cornelius' citizenship in their official record. I have no indication of when Elizabeth died.

¹³³ *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. XVII,

¹³⁴ Will of Cornelius Noel, January 10, 1698/9: Old Rappahannock County, VA, Record Will and Deed Book 9, 1696-1699. The will was proved on June 20, 1699.

¹³⁵ Essex County, VA, Deed and Will Book 10, 1699-1702.

¹³⁶ In 1692, he received fifty acres of land for each of five people he transported into Essex County. One of these people was David Jamison, who may have been the father of the Jamison line that remained allied to the Noel and Vawter family over the next several generations.

¹³⁷ Will of Jas. Noel, October 15, 1733: Essex County, VA, Will Book 6. Will proved on April 21, 1741.

¹³⁸ Will of Cornelius Noel, January 10, 1698/9: Essex County, VA, Order Book 1. Will probated on January 20, 1699.

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