

Tom Robertson
612 Briarwood Drive
New Albany, MS
38652

The Robertsons of Tennessee: Myth and Reality



*A Special Edition from The Robertson
Genealogy Exchange*

The ancestry of Colonel Charles Robertson, one of the founders of the Watauga Settlements in Tennessee, and his degree of relatedness, if any, to General James Robertson, the founder of Nashville, has long been a source of controversy among Robertson family historians. Faced with a total absence of any real documentary evidence, Felix Robertson and Lavinia Craighead, two of General Robertson's children, established an oral tradition in the Draper Manuscripts in which they identified the men as cousins while Burke's Peerage, Ltd. and the Institute of American Genealogy published variants of an unproven lineage that said the men were brothers.

In time, elements of the Draper material would be merged with elements from an article that appeared in an 1898 edition of *The American Historical Magazine* and suppositional material supplied by descendants of both men to create a myth of origin that persists to this day even though there are new primary and secondary documents in the case that supplant the earlier hearsay evidence and cast grave doubt upon several of the traditional assumptions about the line.

THE MYTH OF ORIGIN

In response to several queries from Dr. Lyman Draper about his father's ancestry,¹ Dr. Felix Robertson, the sixth child of General James Robertson,² wrote that General Robertson's father, John, was a native of Ireland,³ and that John and his brother Charles "emigrated at an early age from the northeast of Ireland near Belfast"⁴ where their father, an emigrant from Scotland, had settled. John went to Virginia and settled in Brunswick County where "he married Miss Mary Gower, the daughter of Abel Gower from England,"⁵ and his brother Charles "...remained in or near Philadelphia."⁶ Robertson continued:

...My grandfather died in Wake County N. Carolina but the date of his death I cannot ascertain, leaving a widdow with seven or eight children. My grandmother died several years after her husband, but when I am not able to say. When they first moved from Virginia they settled low down in N. Carolina, & in a few years moved up to Wake County. My grandmother was Mary Gower, of an English family. My father was born in Brunswick County, Virginia on the 28th June 1742, died 1st Sept. 1844....⁷

...I am unable to state the time of my grandfather's removal to N. Ca. & of course my father's age at the time, but he was quite young....⁸

James, at the age of twenty-six years, married Charlotte Reves, daughter of Mary Jordan & George Reves, who had been born and raised in Brunswick County, Virginia. In October '70 he removed to Watauga in east Tennessee, just then settling. Here he lived until '77 when he removed further down Holston to the mouth of Big Creek, then a frontier.⁹

¹ Draper Manuscript No. 6XX48.

² Family Bible Record of the James Robertson Family as quoted by Col. William Curry Harlee in *Kinfolks: A Genealogical and Biographical Record*. New Orleans, La.: Searcy & Pfaff, 1936. Vol. III, pp. 2539-2541.

³ Draper Manuscript No. 6XX49.

⁴ Draper Manuscript No. 6XX96.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Draper Manuscript No. 6XX50.

⁷ According to the Family Bible Record, the actual date was September 1, 1814.

⁸ Draper Manuscript No. 6XX49.

⁹ Draper Manuscript No. 6XX96.

...Black Charles Robertson was my father's cousin.¹⁰ He died in East Tennessee at a good old age, but where I am unable to say. ...I am nearly certain that Black Charles was not a son of my grand-uncle Charles.¹¹

As a supplement to his own material, Robertson included a statement from his sister, Lavinia Craighead, in which she wrote:

John and [his brother] Charles Robertson landed in Philadelphia from Ireland. John went from there to Virginia and married in a family lately from England, a Miss Mary Gower. His first son James was born in June 1742. He then moved to North Carolina near Raliegh; not long afterward moved higher up on the Neuse River. There he died and left a large family, a wife & seven or eight children.

After some years his son James married a Miss Charlotte Reaves and the next year he and his wife, with a good many others, moved to East Tennessee and settled on the Wataga River.¹²

The immediate problem with these statements is that the evidence they present is hearsay, or evidence "which does not derive its value solely from the credit to be given to the witness himself...but [which] rests also, in part, on the veracity and competency of some other person."¹³ In Draper 6XX49 and 6XX50, Robertson clearly identified his mother as the source for all of his and his sister's historical and genealogical material on his father's family, and, as it is impossible that Charlotte Reeves Robertson was witness to each event that she had recounted, this identification adds several layers of uncertainty to those events to which she was not witness, and the problems inherent in this type of testimony can only be resolved through a proper cross-examination by the primary and secondary documents in the case.

The identification of Wake County, North Carolina as the place General Robertson lived prior to his removal to the Watauga Settlements in October 1770 also casts doubt on the accuracy of these statements. Wake County was not formed until 1771,¹⁴ and if Robertson left eastern North Carolina before 1771, he could not possibly have lived in Wake County. If he left after 1771, the date of his removal is inaccurate.

Lavinia Craighead's statement clearly places the death of General Robertson's father as having occurred prior to his son's marriage to Charlotte Reeves, and if James Robertson was married at the age of twenty-six, in 1768, as Felix Robertson has indicated, neither of these events could have taken place in Wake County, North Carolina.

There are procedures by which hearsay material may be integrated into a genealogy, but, when new and better evidence comes to light, hearsay takes a tertiary place in the evidentiary hierarchy and is considered subject to cross-examination by the primary and secondary documentation in the case. If the hearsay survives this process, its credibility is established through a preponderance, or greater weight, of the evidence, but if this process does not occur, the lineage becomes a traditional or legendary pedigree composed of "printed sources of dubious value and oral statements presumably passed from one generation to another" that is useful only as a collection of family stories and not as a proper genealogy.¹⁵

¹⁰ The name Draper and Robertson used for Colonel Charles Robertson.

¹¹ Draper Manuscript No. 6XX49.

¹² Draper Manuscript No. 6XX50.

¹³ Greenleaf, Simon, LL.D. *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*. Boston, Mass.: n.d., 1866. Vol. 1, pp. 165 et seq. as quoted in Noel D. Stevenson, J.D., F.A.S.G. *Genealogical Evidence*. Laguna Hills, Ca.: Aegean Park Press, 1979. p. 190.

¹⁴ Everton, George B., Sr and Gunnar Rasmuson. *The Handy Book for Genealogists*. Logan, Utah: Everton Publishers, 1962. p. 130.

¹⁵ Stevenson. p. 190.

The process never occurred in the James and Charles Robertson lines because it was impossible to locate any other documentation using the Draper material as a roadmap. Some early researchers took the Robertson-Craighead assertion that General Robertson's father lived and died in Wake County as literal truth and were disappointed to find that the only available will for a John Robertson who died in Wake County did not pertain to General Robertson's family,¹⁶ and others, who were more cognizant of the area's history, assumed that John Robertson lived and died in Orange County, one of Wake's parent counties, but once again the only available will for a John Robertson was not that of General Robertson's father.¹⁷

A 1789 courthouse fire in Orange County¹⁸ compounded the problems with which these early historians were presented, and by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries most had decided that the information contained in the Draper Manuscripts was the best available evidence for Robertson's ancestry. This choice of material opened the door to speculation, and, in January 1898, Mrs. Charles Fairfax Henley published a highly speculative article entitled "Maj. Charles Robertson and Some of His Descendants" in which she avowed that General Robertson and Major Charles Robertson were brothers who were descended from "...the Barons of Strowan...and...the first chief of the clan, Duncan Robertson, who saved the life of James I of Scotland and whose descendants intermarried with the Lords Crichton and Stuart and much later...intermarried with the 'great' Houses of McKenzie and Randolph." In Mrs. Henley's account, John Robertson acquired the middle name "Randolph" and an inferential birthdate of 1712 while Mary Gower, who he purportedly married in 1739, became the daughter of "Captain Gower (who was killed by Indians)." According to Mrs. Henley, "The Gowers were adventurous sea captains of noble descent...and civil officers in Colonial Virginia. Abel was one of their family names...."¹⁹

There was and is no proof that any of Mrs. Henley's contentions were based upon the slightest thread of evidence, and the years between 1898 and 1986 brought the further development of the myth of origin through a flood of family histories each of which purported to be a true account of General Robertson's ancestry. Although these family histories contained considerable differences and varying conclusions, if their authors referred to any source material at all, they either referred to the Draper manuscripts alone or to the manuscripts in combination with historical texts, Mrs. Henley's article, or further hearsay evidence developed by Charles or James Robertson's descendants.

There remained, however, two of Wake's parent counties in which family historians could conduct their research, and in 1986 Mrs. Lolita Bissell published her findings that the names of the orphans of John Robertson of Johnston County, North Carolina, one of the two remaining parent counties, roughly correspond to the names of General James Robertson and his siblings. In 1996, John Anderson Brayton expanded the scope of Mrs. Bissell's original research and presented a corrected version of the ancestry for General Robertson that included the ancestry of Colonel Charles Robertson, his uncle. While there is little evidence that the Robertsons of Tennessee are descendants of Christopher Robinson of Henrico and Charles City Counties, Virginia, there is overwhelming direct and indirect evidence that they are the descendants of Israel and Nicholas Robertson.

During the course of my own twenty-one years of research on the line, I had collected much historical and biographical material on Colonel Charles Robertson and his descendants, and when John Robertson of Shelby, North Carolina, the webmaster of *Robertson Families of the World*,²⁰ first approached me about Mr. Brayton's conclusions, I noticed certain

¹⁶ Will for John Robertson. Wake County, North Carolina Record Book 6. p. 117.

¹⁷ Will for John Robertson. Orange County, North Carolina Will Book D. p. 46.

¹⁸ Everton and Rasmuson. p. 129.

¹⁹ Henley, Mrs. Charles Fairfax. "Maj. Charles Robertson and Some of His Descendants" in *American Historical Magazine*. Vol. III, No. 1, [Jan. 1898]. pp. 28-29.

²⁰ <<http://jrshelby.com/rfotw/>>

correspondences to some of the material I had collected and decided to check the Bissell-Brayton assertions against their primary documentation to determine the validity of their conclusions. The process led to the discovery of other material that proves conclusively that Colonel Charles Robertson and John Robertson, General Robertson's father, are sons of Israel Roberson of Granville County, North Carolina and provided indirect evidence that Israel Robertson is the son of Nicholas Robertson of Charles City (Prince George) County, Virginia.

ISRAEL ROBerson

Israel "Robyson" first appears in Virginia records on August 15, 1719 in the will of Matthew Marks in which he and Edward "Robyson," his inferential brother, were jointly bequeathed a tract of land "on the other side of the Spring Branch, and so to Bleighton's Line, and down to the Meadow Branch" in Martin Brandon Parish, Prince George County, Virginia and in which John "Robyson," their inferential elder brother, was bequeathed "a parcell of Land at the Ponds, beginning at the Hedgerow and down along the meadow branch by a few Markt trees, and so down the Ponds run and up the Ponds run to the Hedgerow again."²¹ This land is a portion of the 556 acres granted Marks on April 21, 1690 for the importation of twelve people into the Colony of Virginia.²²

On March 14, 1722/23, Israel and Edward Roberson and Israel's wife Sarah deeded away the land Marks had bequeathed them, proving indirectly that the young men were then of age and that Sarah was Israel Roberson's wife,²³ and, on October 31, 1726, Israel "Robertson" was granted 160 acres of land on the north side of Beechsire Creek in present-day Halifax County, Virginia.²⁴ Two years later, on September 28, 1728, he purchased a Virginia patent for 670 acres of land on the south side of the Roanoke River and the east side of Smith's Creek in present-day Mecklenburg County, Virginia.²⁵ Part of the land he was granted in this patent actually lay in North Carolina, making him eligible for grants in both states, and his first North Carolina patents, in which he received a total of 1,920 acres of land on the back side of Little Creek and Reedy Branch in present-day Warren County, were purchased on March 25, 1749.²⁶ On December 15, he was granted a final Virginia patent for two hundred acres of land in what was then Lunenburg County but is now Mecklenburg County, Virginia.²⁷

Although the family was Baptist, the births of six of their sons are listed in the records of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church in Bristol Parish, Prince George County, Virginia: Matthew, born November 22, 1720 and christened on August 30, 1721; John, born May 8, 1723 and christened August 21; Israel, born November 14, 1725; David, born August 19, 1728; Nicholas, born September 21, 1731 and christened November 7; and Charles, born July 24, 1733 and christened September 28.²⁸ Although the family name given in these records is "Robinson," these six brothers and two additional children -- Susanna, born in Bristol Parish about 1735, and George, also born in Bristol Parish about 1736, -- are mentioned in birth order in the will of Israel Roberson of Granville County, North Carolina dated December 4, 1758 and probated August 12, 1760.²⁹

²¹ Will for Matthew Marks. Prince George County, Virginia Wills and Deeds, 1713-1728. p. 358.

²² Virginia Land Patent Book 8, 1689-1695. p. 77.

²³ Prince George County, Virginia Wills and Deeds, 1713-1728. p. 967.

²⁴ Virginia Land Patent Book 13, 1725-1730. p. 41. My research has since proved that this land lies in present-day Dinwiddie County, Virginia, not Halifax County.

²⁵ Virginia Land Patent Book 14, 1728-1732. p. 83. My research has since proved that Israel Roberson was unable to take possession of this land and that he remained in present-day Dinwiddie County at least until 1739.

²⁶ North Carolina Land Patent Book 14. p. 50.

²⁷ Virginia Land Patent Book 14, 1728-1732. p. 309.

²⁸ Chamberlayne, Churchill Gibson. *Vestry Book and Register of Bristol Parish, Virginia*. Greenville, S. C.: Southern Historical Press, 1994. pp. 356-360.

²⁹ Will for Israel Roberson. Granville County, North Carolina Unrecorded Wills. No. 53.

During his life, Roberson deeded land to several of his sons in Granville (Warren) County, and the following deed citations are representative of those gifts: on December 6, 1749 Israel Roberson of Granville County deeded to John Roberson "for a certain sum paid" three hundred acres of land "whereon John Roberson now lives on the west side of Little Creek";³⁰ on March 3, 1755 he deeded to his son Nicholas Roberson three hundred and twenty acres on the southeast side of Smiths Creek...on the county line at Henry Kings corner";³¹ on December 1, 1759 [1758] he deeded three hundred and twenty acres of land on the "southeast side of Smiths Creek and the south side of Rede [sic] Branch" to his son Israel Roberson,³² and also on December 1, 1758 he deeded to his son Mathew [sic] Roberson three hundred and twenty acres in his own line "on the Little Creek...including Mathew Roberson's plantation whereon he now lives."³³

His son David had been granted three hundred and ninety-two acres of land "in the County of Lunenburg on the north Side Smiths Creek [sic]" on December 15, 1749.³⁴

In his will of December 4, 1758, Israel "Roberson" of Granville County, North Carolina bequeathed to his sons Matthew, John, Israel, David, Nicholas, and Charles "five Shillings Starling" and to his daughter "Susannar Kendrick a Neagro Boy Named Gimme" thus indicating that he had given his older children their share of his estate prior to his death. To his youngest son, George, he left "a negro womman named Doll a Neagro Named Tonla a Negro gall Named Frank Sixteen head of Cattel three feather Beds all tother...goods that Belongs to the house my plantashon I now live on and mill and all the Land Belong[ing] to me and Sarah Roberson my beloved wife The mother of George to have a Living In the Estate...." He also made bequests to four of his grandchildren: to Mary Roberson, daughter of his son Matthew Roberson, "Twenty Shillings"; to Israel Roberson, son of David Roberson, "Twenty Shillings"; to Abee Roberson, daughter of Nicholas Roberson "Twenty Shillings"; and to "Jules" Roberson, son of Charles Roberson, "Twenty Shilling".³⁵

The youngest son, George, who received the bulk of the estate, died without issue about a year later, and in his will, which was written on August 22, 1761 and probated in November 1761, he gave his mother, Sarah Roberson, "During hir life my Neagro woman named Doll and after hir Decease to my brother Charless son Julus Roberson." To his sister, Susannah Kendrick's son, John, he bequeathed "My Neagro gall named Frank." To his brother Charles' son, "Julus Roberson," he left "all the Lande that I hold in the fork of the Creek from midway between my Corn field and John Popes." To his brother David's son, Matthew, he bequeathed "my old plantation and all the Land I hold on the Loar side of the mill Creek." To his brother Matthew's son, George, he gave "my mill and plantation and land where I am now living on in Granvell County." To his brother Nicholas' son, Charles, he bequeathed "half the Cattel I have and my Brother Charless son Julus Roberson the other half." Finally, to his sister Susannah Kendrick he gave "my gray horse," and to his brother Israel's son, Joel, he bequeathed "one feather bed & to my brother Israels Daughter Sarah Roberson one feather bed."³⁶

COLONEL CHARLES ROBERTSON

Charles Roberson, Israel and Sarah Roberson's sixth son, was born in Bristol Parish, Prince George County, Virginia on July 24, 1733,³⁷ and he next appears in colonial records at the age of fourteen, on April 28, 1748, working as a Deputy Surveyor for Lord Granville's land office,³⁸

³⁰ Granville County, North Carolina Deed Book A. p. 221.

³¹ Granville County, North Carolina Deed Book B. p. 427.

³² Granville County, North Carolina Deed Book C. p. 634.

³³ Granville County, North Carolina Deed Book C. p. 635.

³⁴ Virginia Land Patent Book 29, 1749-1751. pp. 21-23.

³⁵ Will for Israel Roberson. Granville County, North Carolina Unrecorded Wills. No. 53.

³⁶ Will for George Roberson. Granville County, North Carolina Unrecorded Wills. No. 52.

³⁷ Chamberlayne. p. 360.

³⁸ Granville District Land Patent Book 14. p. 437.

but his career as a surveyor was short-lived as his last official act in this capacity occurred on June 13, 1751 when he surveyed a tract of land for Ludwig Klapp in Granville County.³⁹ There is evidence that during his tenure in the land office he had become acquainted with Herman Husband,⁴⁰ an adherent of Benjamin Franklin and the foremost leader of the Regulator Movement in North Carolina,⁴¹ and, considering Robertson's later history as one of the founders of the Watauga Settlements and the State of Franklin, this acquaintance may have represented something of an epiphany for young Charles. On August 1, 1755, his father "for divers causes and the love I have for my son" gave him two hundred acres of land in Lunenburg County, Virginia,⁴² and the giving of this gift probably coincided with the approximate date of his marriage to Susanna [Nichols?]. His father's will was written on December 4, 1758, and it mentions Charles and his son, "Jules," who was probably Charles' eldest child. On August 21, 1761, George Roberson bequeathed "Julus Roberson all the Lande that I hold in the fork of the Creek from midway between my Corn field and John Popes,"⁴³ and a week later, on August 29, 1761, "Charles Roberson and his wife, Susana, of Granville County, North Carolina" sold the Lunenburg County land to George King⁴⁴ and moved lower into Granville County.

Charles Robertson appears in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina records on February 20, 1767 carrying the surveyor's chain for Joab Mitchell near the Pacolet River.⁴⁵ On July 4, 1767, he carried the surveyor's chain for James Bridges, on both sides of Thicketty Creek,⁴⁶ and on August 12, 1767 he and his brother David carried the surveyor's chain for James Hanna on the south fork of Fishing Creek near the wagon road that connected North and South Carolina.⁴⁷ The locations cited in the deeds for all these men affirm that they lived in the contested area of North Carolina which, when the boundary line was extended in 1782, became a part of South Carolina.

Charles and his brother David apparently recognized North Carolina's jurisdiction over the area, and on May 3, 1769, almost a month after the formation of Tryon County from Mecklenburg County, Charles sold John Parks twelve head of cattle "two cows mark'd crop in right ear and slit in left and one do. crop in the right ear and swallow fork in the left..."⁴⁸ A month later, David sold his Turkey Creek land to William Glover Bishop⁴⁹ and purchased a tract of land "on both sides [of] Mill Creek of Packlet River" from Joab Mitchell,⁵⁰ and on October 25, 1770 Jacob Weidner sold him an additional 400 acres of land on both sides of Thicketty Creek.⁵¹ The land Joab Mitchell sold him contained a grist mill which he operated until three days before he made his will.⁵²

The Minutes of the Tryon County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions reveal that the Tories of the region were attempting to dampen Robertson's Regulator leanings: In January 1771, Robert Lusk brought suit against Charles Roberson and was awarded £16/7s damages with an additional 6d for court costs. A year later Francis Carlisle also brought suit against Roberson

39 Granville District Land Patent Book 14. p. 366. The evidence for this claim remains uncertain, and it may be that this was the Charles Robinson who died in Anson County, North Carolina, in 1754. However, as Trustee for the Watauga Settlements, Colonel Robertson was in charge of the Watauga Land Office. The facts relating to his Reguator beliefs are well-founded, and I will write more about this subject at a future date.

40 Granville District Land Patent Book 12. p. 58.

41 Lefler, Hugh T. "Orange County and the War of the Regulation" in *Orange County -- 1752-1952*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: N.D., 1953. pp. 24-35.

42 Lunenburg County, Virginia Deed Book 7. p. 128.

43 Will for George Roberson. Granville County, North Carolina Unrecorded Wills. No. 52.

44 Lunenburg County, Virginia Deed Book 7. p. 130.

45 North Carolina Land Grant File Number 2045. Grant Number 474. Book 23. p. 42.

46 North Carolina Land Grant File Number 2252. Grant Number 411. Book 23. p. 157.

47 North Carolina Land Grant File Number 2169. Grant Number 228. Book 23. p. 122.

48 Tryon County, North Carolina Deed Book 1. p. 44.

49 Tryon County, North Carolina Deed Book 1. pp. 178-179.

50 Tryon County, North Carolina Deed Book 1. pp. 52-53.

51 Tryon County, North Carolina Deed Book 1. pp. 306-307.

52 Tryon County, North Carolina Deed Book 1. pp. 518-519.

and was awarded £12/19s/3d and 6d for court costs. John Lusk, Robert Lusk's brother, sat on this second jury. In April 1772, Roberson brought suit against Nathaniel Clark and, as the defendant did not come when solemnly called, he suffered a nonsuit. Nevertheless, the Court was prepared: John Lusk sat on this jury as well.⁵³

In his will dated July 8, 1771 and probated in October of the same year, David Robertson of Tryon County left his worldly goods to his "beloved Wife Frances Robertson" to be equally divided among his "beloved Children Matthew Robertson, Molly Robertson, Israel Robertson, Isaac Robertson, Isham Robertson, James Robertson, David Robertson, Abner Robertson, Sally Robertson, John Robertson, and Betty Robertson." Then, in a rather remarkable clause designed to protect his brother's financial interests, he wrote:

...As touching the Estate of my Brother Charles Robertson that I have obtained by Execution, I give to George Robertson the Youngest of my Brother Charles that is to say after the said Estate pays to my wife Seventy pounds Virginia Money and discharges the Execution and Attachment that I stand Bound for my Brother Charles Robertson, then the remainder to return into the hands of the said George Robertson the youngest son of my Brother Charles Robertson and if he should Die I give the same to the next Youngest Brother of his to him and his heirs And my Will and Desire is that such Estate remain in the hands of my Brother Charles Robeson [sic] till such Son comes of Age.⁵⁴

The clause is clear evidence of an intelligent mind at work. In a day when debts throughout the Colonies were paid with proclamation money like tobacco, corn, or cotton, David Robertson stipulates that his wife is to be repaid in "Virginia money," or coin of the realm, a condition, given the scarcity of money in the Carolinas, that was almost impossible to meet. Also, if Charles was such a profligate that he could not be trusted with his own finances, why would David stipulate that he retain control of the estate? The answer lies in the Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. The Tories were attempting to bankrupt his brother through a series of lawsuits that continued until April 1775, long after David Robertson's death.⁵⁵ It is apparent that the Colony of South Carolina did not appreciate the terms of his will and that the estate, rather than being divided equally among his children as he had stipulated, was divided according to the rules of primogeniture with two-thirds given to his eldest son, Matthew, and one-third going to his widow, Frances, as her dower right.⁵⁶ Through his will, David appears to be saying to the Magistrates that he was fully aware of their graft and the manner in which they brought pressure upon those they wished to silence, but that Charles Robertson's property, in any circumstance, belonged to him and his children and that they and their cronies would never have any part of it. The Court Minutes contain evidence of his success at this game of cat and mouse:

William Twitty garnishee on an Attachment returnable to this Court wherein Ino Elliott appears to be plaintiff vs Charles Robinson. Deft came into Court on a Citation & Declares on Oath that he has none of the Effects of the said Cha's Robinson in his hands and thereupon discharged by the Court.⁵⁷

That this Charles Robertson is synonymous with Colonel Charles Robertson of Washington County, Tennessee is proven through the names and relationships cited in the source documents. The deed for the sale of Charles Roberson's portion of his father's estate mentions

⁵³ Holcomb, Brent H. *Tryon County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1769-1779*. Columbia, S.C.: SCMAR, 1994. pp. 58, 89, & 95.

⁵⁴ Will for David Robertson. North Carolina State Archives Will Number 094.901.1.

⁵⁵ Holcomb. pp. 58, 78, 89, 95, & 152.

⁵⁶ Union County, South Carolina Deed Book A. pp. 241-246.

⁵⁷ Holcomb. p. 95.

that his wife was named "Susana," and the will of Colonel Charles Robertson clearly states "I do bequeath unto my wife Susannah Robertson negroe Peter & Poll her bed & furniture sufficient for the same until the said Susannah [sic] death...."⁵⁸ From Israel Roberson's will, one learns that his grandson, Charles' son, was named "Jules," and this name is confirmed by the will of Charles Roberson's brother George. In his will David Robertson, Charles' brother and Israel's son, names Charles' youngest son as George. Although Colonel Charles Robertson's will does not name all his male heirs, their names, George, Julius, William and Charles, are revealed through a land sale in Maury County, Tennessee⁵⁹ by the heirs of Charles Robertson, deceased, and that George Robertson is Colonel Robertson's youngest son is proven through an autobiographical sketch by Brigadier-General Julius Caesar Nichols Robertson who names his father, George, as "the youngest son of Col. Charles Robertson, of whom favorable mention is made in the history of the Revolution."⁶⁰

Although Colonel Robertson's military rank and service record have recently been questioned in some quarters,⁶¹ his commissions are well-documented and his service to the American Cause is a matter of public record. On December 23, 1776, at the same time James Robertson was commissioned Captain of the Militia, Charles Robertson was commissioned as First Major of Washington District, North Carolina.⁶² On January 21, 1779, immediately before he was sent on commission of the North Carolina Legislature to lead a campaign against the Chickamauga Indians, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-colonel,⁶³ and on October 25, 1788 he was made First Colonel of Washington County.⁶⁴

Colonel Robertson's will proves indirectly that he had daughters Rosamond, who married a "Beane," Keseah, who married a Sevier, and Sarah, who married a Cox. He appointed Charles Robertson, Jr. as one of his executors and made the following stipulation: "I do bequeath unto my wife Susannah Robertson negroe Peter & Poll her bed & furniture sufficient for the same until the said Susannah death then they to be divided equally divided [sic] amongst my sons and all my personal exceptions that is that William Robertson to have negroe Kate deducted or the price there of out of his part."⁶⁵ From this stipulation, one may infer that Colonel Robertson's wife, Susanna, had died by August 28, 1806 when his heirs, George, Julius, William and Charles Robertson, conveyed their moiety in ten thousand acres of land to Frederick Hargett and Scott Gray in Maury County, Tennessee.⁶⁶

In "Memoirs of a Southern Gentleman," the Honorable Felix Walker adds the name of a fourth daughter named Susan:

*I was married to Susan Robinson, a beautiful girl of fifteen, on the 8th of January, 1778, daughter of Col. Chas. Robinson -- where I had resided for 3 years past. In March ensuing my wife and self paid a visit to my father in Rutherford, designed to spend the summer. On the 28th of June, my dear girl had a miscarriage which terminated her existence. She died on the 9th day of July, 1778, six months after our marriage.*⁶⁷

⁵⁸ Will for Charles Robertson, Sen. Washington County, Tennessee Will Book 1. p 44.

⁵⁹ Maury County, Tennessee Deed Book A. pp. 195-197.

⁶⁰ Robertson, Brigadier-General Julius Caesar Nichols. "A Biographical Sketch of the Life of Gen. J. C. N. Robertson" in *The Masonic Jewel*. Memphis, Tenn.: January 15, 1875. Vol. III, No. 1, p. 4.

⁶¹ Letter of Sarah Foster Kelley to Tom Robertson. April 28, 1998. pp. 1-2.

⁶² Saunders, William L., ed. *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*. Raleigh, N.C.: Josephus Daniels, 1890. Vol. X, p. 998.

⁶³ Clark, Walter, ed. *The State Records of North Carolina*. Winston, N.C.: M.I. & J.C. Stewart, 1895. Vol. XIII, p. 539.

⁶⁴ Clark. Vol. XXII, pp. 702-703.

⁶⁵ Will for Charles Robertson, Sen. Washington County, Tennessee Will Book 1. p. 44.

⁶⁶ Maury County, Tennessee Deed Book A. pp. 195-197.

⁶⁷ Walker, The Honorable Felix. "Memoirs of a Southern Gentleman" in *Journal of American History*, Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 49-60 as quoted in Harlee. Vol. II, p. 1600.

John Anderson Brayton attempted to show that Susannah Cunningham was Colonel Robertson's wife,⁶⁸ but there is indirect evidence in the naming patterns of four generations of Colonel Robertson's descendants that his wife was Susanna Nichols, the inferential daughter of Julius Nichols of Bute County, North Carolina.⁶⁹ The couple named their eldest son Julius, and their youngest son, George, named one of his sons Nichols Robertson and another Julius Caesar Robertson. After Nichols Robertson's untimely death, Julius Caesar Robertson began to sign his name Julius Caesar Nichols, or General J. C. N., Robertson at his mother's request, and his brother Charles, George's eldest son,⁷⁰ named his youngest son Julius Caesar Nichols Robertson.⁷¹ George's daughter, Susan Robertson, named one of her sons Julius Caesar Moreland,⁷² and Patrick Robertson, one of George Robertson's grandsons, named one of his sons Julius Jefferson Robertson.⁷³

Christopher Cunningham's will does mention his daughter, Susanna Robertson,⁷⁴ but most researchers believe she married General Robertson's brother Charles as evidenced by the fact that he named his eldest son Christopher after the child's maternal grandfather,⁷⁵ and Sarah Foster Kelley, the author of *Children of Nashville: Lineages from James Robertson*, recently wrote that a descendant of General Robertson's brother made the statement in A. T. Andreas' *History of Kansas* that his ancestor was "Susannah Cunnyham."⁷⁶

Charles and Susanna [Nichols?] Robertson had eight children:⁷⁷ Julius, born before December 4, 1758,⁷⁸ Lunenburg County, Virginia and died after November 28, 1805 probably in Buncombe County, North Carolina;⁷⁹ Keziah, born about 1759, Lunenburg County, Virginia, married [1] Robert Sevier⁸⁰ [2] Major Jonathan Tipton;⁸¹ William, born March 22, 1761, Lunenburg County, Virginia and died January 26, 1843, Tippah County, Mississippi;⁸² Charles, born about 1762,⁸³ Granville County, North Carolina and died after August 8, 1814;⁸⁴ Susan, born 1763, Granville County, North Carolina, married The Honorable Felix Walker January 8, 1778 in Washington County, North Carolina, and died July 9, 1778 in Rutherford County, North Carolina;⁸⁵ Sarah, married [William?] Cox;⁸⁶ George, born about 1767, in the contested area of South Carolina, married Susan Nelson, and died January 27, 1827 in Hardeman County,

⁶⁸ Brayton, John Anderson. *The Ancestry of Gen. James Robertson, "Father of Tennessee"* addendum to *The Complete Ancestry of Tennessee Williams*. Winston-Salem, N. C.: J. A. Brayton, 1995. pp. 28-38.

⁶⁹ That Susanna Nichols was Julius Nichols' daughter was disproved by my subsequent research on this line. She is the daughter of William Nichols of Bute County, North Carolina and Julius Nichols' sister. See will for William Nichols. Bute (Warren) County, North Carolina Record Book 2. p. 8. Colonel Robertson and Susanna Nichols named their children, with the exception of Charles, who was named for his father, and Rosamond for Susannah Nichols and her siblings.

⁷⁰ Moreland, J. C. "Major Charles Robertson and His Descendants" in *American Historical Magazine*. March 1898. Vol. III, No. 2, p. 191.

⁷¹ Estate Settlement for Charles Robertson. Hardeman County, Tennessee Record Book 8. p. 475.

⁷² Moreland. p. 192.

⁷³ Entry for Patrick Robertson. 1870 Census of Hardeman County, Tennessee. Page 202b, lines 25-34.

⁷⁴ Will for Christopher Cunningham. Washington County, Tennessee Will Book 1. p. 14

⁷⁵ Will for Charles Robertson. Davidson County, Tennessee Will Book 3. p. 67.

⁷⁶ Andreas, A.T. *History of Kansas*. Chicago, Ill.: N.D., 1885. p. 360. Mentioned in letter of Sarah Foster Kelley to Tom Robertson. April 25, 1998. p. 2.

⁷⁷ The places of birth for these children are taken from the land provenance for Colonel Charles Robertson.

⁷⁸ Will for Israel Roberson. Granville County, North Carolina Unrecorded Wills. No. 53.

⁷⁹ Buncombe County, North Carolina Deed Book A. p. 482.

⁸⁰ Sevier, Cora Bales and Nancy S. Madden. *Sevier Family History*. Washington, D.C.: Kaufman Printing Co., 1961. pp. 416-418.

⁸¹ Elliott, Dollye McAlister. "The Tiptons of Tennessee: An Effort to Straighten Out the Line" in *The Colonial Genealogist*. Vol. IX, No. 3. p. 8.

⁸² Revolutionary Pension File for William Robertson. Number S4790. Although Robertson gives his place of birth as "Peedee river," the land provenance for his father indicates that he was probably born in Lunenburg County.

⁸³ Sistler, Byron and Brabara. *Early Tennessee Tax Lists*. Evanston, Ill.: Byron Sistler & Associates, 1977. p. 171. The date is inferential from his first appearance on the Greene County, Tennessee Tax List of 1783.

⁸⁴ Washington County, Tennessee Deed Book 14. pp. 30-33.

⁸⁵ Walker, Felix as quoted in Harlee. Vol. II, p. 1600.

⁸⁶ Will for Charles Robertson, Sen. Washington County, Tennessee Deed Book 1. p. 44.

Tennessee;⁸⁷ and Rosamond, born about 1770, in the contested area of South Carolina, married Russell Bean on October 8, 1789 in Washington County, North Carolina.⁸⁸

GENERAL ROBERTSON'S FATHER

John "Robinson," the second son of Israel and Sarah "Robinson," was born May 8, 1723 and christened August 21 in Bristol Parish, Prince George County, Virginia. Colonel William Curry Harlee, the author of *Kinfolks: A Genealogical and Biographical Record*, believed that the John "Roberson" who married Mary Gower first purchased 351 acres of land on "Kittle Stick" in Brunswick County from Richard Huckiby on June 6, 1745⁸⁹ one hundred acres of which was granted to William Gower by patent on February 18, 1722⁹⁰ and the remainder of which came from a patent for 316 acres of land granted to Thomas Huckiby on September 28, 1728.⁹¹

The records indicate that Roberson had only a portion of the £50 purchase price and that he sought a loan of £18 from William Broadnax of Prince George County on June 29, 1745. Broadnax stipulated that he was to be repaid £36, due and payable on June 29, 1746,⁹² but the deeds clearly show that Roberson could only pay half the sum on that date and did not take possession of the land until March 25, 1751 when he paid Broadnax the remaining sum of £18.⁹³

However, it is doubtful that John Roberson ever lived on this tract of land or if he did, it was only for a brief period. The deed for the sale of the land, on January 22, 1754, states that "John Roberson...and Mary, his wife" resided in Lunenburg County,⁹⁴ and Roberson appears on Field Jefferson's 1752 List of Tithables for Lunenburg County with his uncle John Roberson and cousins John, Edward, Robert, Nicholas, Abraham, Nathaniel, and Mark.⁹⁵

On December 6, 1749 Israel Roberson deeded his son 300 acres of land "whereon John Roberson now lives on the west side of Little Creek,"⁹⁶ and on September 3, 1754, the same Richard Huckiby who sold John Roberson the Brunswick County tract sold him an additional 300 acres of land on the head of Little Branch and the west side of Six Pound Creek in Granville County, North Carolina,⁹⁷ and Israel and John "Robinson" and Richard "Huckaby" are listed as members of Captain Richard Coleman's Company, Colonel William Eaton's Regiment, of Granville County Militia in the Grand Muster of October 8, 1754.⁹⁸ On April 28, 1760, John

⁸⁷ Owens, Mrs. Robert S., Mrs. Ed Knox Boyd, and Mrs. Howell Lee Davidson. *Cemetery [sic] Records of Hardeman County, Tennessee*. Huntsville, Ark.: Century Enterprises, 1971. Vol. 2, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Grady, Janie Ault. *William Bean: Pioneer of Tennessee*. Knoxville, Tenn.: Janie Ault Grady, 1974. p. 94.

⁸⁹ Brunswick County Virginia Deed Book 3. p. 30.

⁹⁰ Virginia Land Patent Book 11, 1719-1724. p. 190.

⁹¹ Virginia Land Patent Book 13, 1725-1730. p. 457.

⁹² Brunswick County, Virginia Deed Book 3. p. 54. Bill Timmons has claimed that the characterization of the nature of this loan is incorrect and that John Robertson lived on the Kettlestick Branch land. At no time do the documents explicitly say that he actually lived there. At any rate, this is a subsidiary argument, and it most certainly does not disprove in any way that John Robertson was Israel Roberson's son. Even if Mr. Timmons establishes that one of the John Robinsons on the June 1748 Brunswick County Poll List was General Robertson's father, it does not mean that he was in Brunswick County on December 6, 1749, the date Israel Roberson gave or sold him land. The other documents -- his birth record, the mention in his father's will, etc., the militia list -- as well as his continuous proximity to the family adequately proves the connection.

⁹³ Brunswick County, Virginia Deed Book 5. p. 11.

⁹⁴ Brunswick County, Virginia Deed Book 3. p. 54.

⁹⁵ Bell, Landon C. *Sunlight on the Southside: Lists of Tithes, Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1748-1783*. Philadelphia, Pa.: George S. Ferguson Co., 1931. pp. 192 and 194-195.

⁹⁶ Granville County, North Carolina Deed Book A. p. 221. Bill Timmons believes that he has proved that this record does not pertain to John Robertson, the father of General James Robertson and that the original deeds indicate that this land was sold to John "Robinson," Israel Roberson's brother, "for a certain sum paid," but the land provenance for Israel Roberson's brother establishes that he remained in Lunenburg County, Virginia, at least until June 1758.

⁹⁷ Granville County, North Carolina Deed Book B. p. 352.

⁹⁸ Clark. Vol. XXII, pp. 372-373.

Roberson of Granville County purchased 320 acres of land on the south side of the Neuse River in Johnston County,⁹⁹ and less than a year later, in April 1761, his will went to probate.¹⁰⁰

John Roberson's will mentions only "Mary my well beloved wife" and "my childrin" as legatees,¹⁰¹ but the names of all eight of his children are proven through the sale of his land on Six Pound Creek, through the Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions of Johnston County, and through the records for the sale of his land on the south side of the Neuse River. In April 1761, the Court "Ordered that Mary Robinson's [cattle] Mark be recorded which is Two Smooth Crops one on each Ear & an under Cutt under each ear,"¹⁰² and on May 8, 1764, "James Roberson of Granville Co. and mother Mary Roberson of Johnston Co.," sold to Christopher Mothershead, for £100, 400 of John Roberson's 600 acres of land in Granville County proving indirectly that James Roberson had reached his majority before May 8, 1764 and was heir to John Roberson's estate.¹⁰³ In July 1766, Elijah and Eliza Robertson, orphans of John Robertson, "came into Court and made choice of James Robertson to be [their] guardian."¹⁰⁴ On February 23, 1768, the Court ordered that the account of the sale of the estate of John Robertson be filed "upon oath by Russell Blakely & Wife Ads of John Robertson desd."¹⁰⁵ On November 28, 1769, the Court ordered "that Phillip Jones be appointed Guardian to Chs. Robertson, orphan of John Robertson,"¹⁰⁶ and on August 28, 1770, the Court ordered "that Russel Blakley be Summons to next court to Exhibit his acct & Settle the monies of Mark Robertson & Sterling Robertson the Orphans that is now under his care."¹⁰⁷

The Magistrates were not satisfied with the manner in which Russell and Mary Blakely were administering the estate, and on November 7, 1770, they ordered "that Michl. Rogers be appointed Guardian of the Orphans of Jno. Robertson Des'd to wit Elijah Robertson, Mark & Sterling Robertson."¹⁰⁸

In August 1772, David Johnston, on behalf of his wife, initiated a suit against Blakely to recover her portion of her father's estate, and the Court awarded Johnston £20 in proclamation money and appointed Needham Bryan, Sr. and William Bryan, Esquires, "to award the sum due from Russel Blakley [sic] Guardian to Ann Johnston, wife of David Johnston, as her filial portion of the Estate of John Roberson Deceased." At the same time, on August 25, 1772, the Magistrate "Ordered that Russel Blackley [sic] former Guardian to orphans of John Robeson decd (to wit) Elijah, Mark, and Starling Roberson to pay to Michael Rogers pr. Guardian to the aforesaid Orphan's the sum of fourteen Pounds & Six pence procl. Money being the Payable part of their Fathers Estate, the court...having made a deduction of Sixteen pounds proc. money, which Sum the Said Blackley has never before had Credit for."¹⁰⁹

In March 1773, "Elijah Roberson and Elizabeth Roberson being children of John Roberson Dec'd. having an equal share of a tract of land on the S. side of Neuse River now in possession of Dempsey Powell...each one [having an] equal part of money from sale of the land...sold their rights to James Alford" for £50 in proclamation money,¹¹⁰ and on December 6, 1779 James

⁹⁹ Johnston County, North Carolina Deed Book A. p. 180.

¹⁰⁰ Will for John Roberson. Johnston County, North Carolina Deed Book D. p. 198.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Johnston County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1759-1766. p. 30.

¹⁰³ Granville County, North Carolina Deed Book G. p. 210.

¹⁰⁴ Johnston County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1759-1766. p. 123. All page numbers for the Court Minutes refer to the numbers stamped on the pages of North Carolina State Archives microfilm number C.056.30001 and not the arbitrary page numbers assigned by Weynette Parks Haun in her abstracts of the records.

¹⁰⁵ Johnston County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1767-1777. p. 42. The entry proves that Mary Roberson, widow of John Roberson and administrator of his estate, had married Russell Blakely by the cited date.

¹⁰⁶ Johnston County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1767-1777. p. 76.

¹⁰⁷ Johnston County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1767-1777. p. 89.

¹⁰⁸ Johnston County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1767-1777. p. 95.

¹⁰⁹ Johnston County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1767-1777. p. 177.

¹¹⁰ Wake County, North Carolina Deed Book A. p. 34.

Robertson, John Robertson, Charles Robertson, and David Johnston with Michael Rogers acting as witness entered into a £1000 bond with Dempsey Powell concerning any residual rights to this tract of land.¹¹¹

Consistency with Other Records

When viewed in juxtaposition to other records relative to General Robertson's family, the foregoing land provenance and court records prove beyond a doubt that they too pertain to General Robertson's family. Felix Robertson and Lavinia Craighead wrote that John Robertson married Mary Gower, and it is apparent that this John Robertson's wife was named Mary. An inferential marriage date, based upon the date of birth for their eldest child, of "about 1741" may be assigned to John Robertson and Mary Gower, and, as there is no land record in Brunswick County for John Robertson and Mary Gower before 1745, they either lived in another county or, if they lived in Brunswick County, they lived with someone else. At the time of John Robertson's marriage, Israel Roberson's land lay in what was then Brunswick County. In 1749, he gave his son land on the west side of Sixpound Creek, and this deed of gift clearly ties the people of the Johnston County records to the Israel Roberson family as John Roberson's eldest son, James of Granville County, and his mother, Mary of Johnston County, sold a portion of the land on May 8, 1764 by which date he had reached his majority. Lavinia Craighead wrote that John Robertson died "on the Neuse River," and the John Roberson of the records died on the south side of the Neuse River. It is evident from her statement that he died some years before James Robertson married Charlotte Reeves, and the year of this marriage has been given elsewhere as 1768/69. The John Roberson of the Johnston County records died in 1761, a full seven years before James Robertson's marriage to Charlotte Reeves.

General Robertson had a brother named Elijah as proven by numerous sources including an April 15, 1797 letter to Governor John Sevier in which Robertson wrote, "My Brother Elijah Robertson departed this life yesterday, he had a sever [sic] attack of the Jandies."¹¹² That General Robertson had a brother named Mark, a brother named Charles, a sister named Ann who married a Johnston and a Cockrill, and a sister known simply as "Sister Cash" is proven by Mark Robertson's will of August 12, 1784 in which he names all of these people and their relationships to him.¹¹³ The names of all these people, with the exception of "Sister Cash," are mentioned as General Robertson's siblings in Draper Manuscripts 6XX49, 6XX50, and 6XX96. In Draper Manuscript 6XX49 Felix Robertson names another of General Robertson's brothers, John, who was killed by Indians in 1780.

The records associated with John Roberson of Johnston County mention the names James, John, Charles, Elijah, Eliza, Mark, Ann, and Sterling, and these names are entirely consistent with those of General Robertson's siblings and relatives. He was not known to have had a brother named Sterling prior to the discovery of these records, but he did have nephews named Sterling Clack Robertson, the son of his brother Elijah,¹¹⁴ and Sterling Robertson Cockrill, the son of his sister Ann Robertson Johnston Cockrill.¹¹⁵

The birthdates for General Robertson's siblings have always been inferential with the exception of Ann Robertson Johnston Cockrill whose birthdate was given by her grandson as February 10, 1757.¹¹⁶ Draper Manuscript Number 31S204, which consists of Dr. Draper's notes taken during a conversation with "Mrs. Col. Elijah R. & son," informs us that Elijah Robertson "died near Nashville, 14 April 1797 about 45," and this date of death is consistent with that

¹¹¹ Wake County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. Book I, pp. 122-123.

¹¹² Letter of James Robertson to Gov. John Sevier, Nashville, April 15, 1797 as quoted in Harlee. Vol. III, p. 2569.

¹¹³ Will for Mark Robertson. Davidson County, Tennessee Deed Book 1. p. 53.

¹¹⁴ Will for Elijah Robertson. Davidson County, Tennessee Will Book 2. p. 77.

¹¹⁵ Goodloe, Granville. "Cockrill Genealogy" in *The American Historical Magazine*. October 1898. As quoted in Harlee. Vol. III, pp. 2561-2569.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

mentioned in James Robertson's letter of April 15, 1797. If Elijah Robertson was 45 years old at the time of his death, as these notes indicate, it would mean that he was born about 1752, and this information is consistent with both the May 1773 land sale in Wake County and the information found in the the Johnston County Court records. The Elijah Robertson mentioned within the court records was not yet of age on August 15, 1772 when the court ordered Russell Blakely to relinquish the three youngest boys' share of their father's estate to Michael Rogers, their current guardian, but it is clear that both he and his sister Elizabeth were of age by the time they sold their interests in their father's land in May 1773.

It is interesting to note the similarity of the names Elijah and Eliza Roberson and the fact that they are always mentioned in conjunction with each other in these records. Both chose James Robertson as their guardian in July 1766, and both are mentioned in the May 1773 sale of land in Wake County indicating that came of age about the same time. For this reason, I have assigned Eliza, or Elizabeth, the same birth year as that of her brother Elijah with the idea that there is a strong possibility that they were twins. It is also probable that she is the mysterious "Sister Cash" of Mark Robertson's will. Further evidence of her existence is given in a March 27, 1860 letter from Mr. Abram Mason in which he relates several incidents that occurred during a 1793 Indian attack on Nashville. Mr. Mason writes, "I had to go to Wm. Cash's Fort and set at the back of the field and watch while the others worked. My orders were, if I saw any Indians, to fire at them and run for the fort; but none came while I was there. This Wm. Cash was a brother-in-law to Gen'l Robertson."¹¹⁷

In his *Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee*, first published in 1823, Judge John Haywood wrote of General Robertson's return to the Watauga Settlements, in the spring of 1777, from Wake County, North Carolina "whither he had gone in the Winter of 1776-1777...to receive from Col. Michael Rogers as guardian of his brother Mark the legacies and personal estates to which he was entitled under the will of their father."¹¹⁸ Haywood's information is thus consistent with the court records, and both Haywood and the primary documentation imply that Mark Robertson was born about 1755.

Sterling Robertson is mentioned in the court records of August 28, 1770, November 28, 1770, and August 25, 1772, and like his brothers Elijah and Mark, who are mentioned in conjunction with him, he could have been born no earlier than 1752, the inferential birth year of Elijah and Eliza Robertson. There is no further information at this time to help fix his birth year, and it is possible that he was born as late as 1761, the year of his father's death. Therefore, I have assigned him the birthdate of 1753/61.

General Robertson's brother Charles has often been confused with Colonel Charles Robertson of the Watauga Settlements, and his birthdate is sometimes given as 1740, the former inferential birthdate for Colonel Robertson,¹¹⁹ to the dismay of both men's descendants. Both married women named Susanna, and the records for their children have become so intertwined¹²⁰ that the centennial edition of the *DAR Patriot Index* lists Colonel Robertson, who is mentioned as a major in DAR records, as having married both Susan Nichols and Susanna Cunningham.¹²¹ The primary documents prove that the General's brother Charles died in Davidson County, Tennessee before January 1806, when his will was probated. His sons are named as James, Christopher, Elijah, and Mark Claiborne and his daughters are Polly, Rhoda, Susanna, and Elizabeth.¹²² It is probable that his son Christopher was named for his maternal

¹¹⁷ Mason, Abram in *The American Historical Magazine*. January 1898. Vol. I, No. 1. p. 90.

¹¹⁸ Haywood, John. *Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee*. Knoxville, Tenn.: Tenase Company, 1969. p. 68.

¹¹⁹ Whitley, Edythe Rucker, comp. *Membership Roster and Soldiers of the Tennessee Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1894-1960*. N.D.: The Tennessee Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1961. p. 1360.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution Centennial Administration. *DAR Patriot Index: Centennial Edition*. Washington, D.C.: National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1994. Part III, p. 2486.

¹²² Will for Charles Robertson. Davidson County, Tennessee Will Book 3. p. 67.

grandfather as the will of Christopher Cunningham of Washington County, Tennessee names Susanna Robertson as a daughter.¹²³ Colonel Harlee believed that Christopher Robertson was ninety years old at the time of his death in 1857, with an inferential birth year of about 1767,¹²⁴ but the Johnston County records indicate that Christopher's father, Charles, was appointed a guardian on November 28, 1769. The fact that Charles is not mentioned in any of the 1770 records indicates that he came of age shortly after his guardian was appointed and thus was thus born about 1749.

That John Robertson, the second son of John Roberson, is mentioned only in the relinquishment of residual rights is an indication that he was of age before July 1766, the date of the first entry in which children were mentioned. As James Robertson, who was born in 1742, was the first child of John Robertson and Mary Gower, their son John could not have been born prior to 1743, and the fact that he is not mentioned in the Johnston County record of July 1766 means that he could have been born no later than 1745. Therefore, his birthdate is established as 1743/45.

The establishment of fact in a genealogy does not occur in a vacuum, and one may not ignore new evidence pertaining to the family simply because one has grown comfortable with previously accepted conclusions about the line. This replacement of general information with specific information is a natural process that cannot and should not be avoided if the family historian wishes to preserve the integrity of the information he conveys to others. It in no way calls into question the motives and intended honesty of individuals who have passed their cherished memories to their loved ones in the hope that they will remember and learn from shared family experience. The oral tradition often forms the heart and soul of a good family history, and the stories that have been passed from generation to generation should be remembered and treasured for this reason, but in an age when rigid proofs are often the only standard by which genealogical competency is measured these stories are no substitute for sound genealogical scholarship.

After almost 150 years of research by various individuals, there is still no primary or secondary proof that John Robertson, General Robertson's father, and his brother Charles emigrated from Ireland to America through Philadelphia other than the Robertson-Craighead statements. There is, however, direct and indirect evidence that John and his brother Charles were sons of Israel Roberson of Charles City (Prince George) County, Virginia and Granville County, North Carolina. The evidence proves that they were native-born Americans, but it neither proves nor disproves a country of origin for their ancestors. The evidence supports Lavinia Craighead's assertion that John Robertson died on the Neuse River, but the land provenance disproves Felix Robertson's claim that Robertson first moved "low down" in North Carolina and then "moved up" to Wake County. The question of the date of removal to North Carolina and James Robertson's approximate age at the time is not appropriate to this family as John Roberson lived near state and county lines from before 1749 to about 1759 when he removed to the Neuse River.

Although Felix Robertson has indicated that Colonel Robertson was his father's "cousin," and not second cousins as some historians have stated, there is direct and indirect evidence to indicate that he was General Robertson's uncle and thus was the Charles Robertson of the Draper Manuscripts who was mistakenly said to have remained "in or near Philadelphia."

Israel Roberson's Antecedents

Professor Benjamin C. Holtzclaw, the author of "Kendrick of Gloucester County, Virginia and North Carolina," and John Anderson Brayton presented indirect evidence that Nicholas Robertson was the father of the Matthew Marks legatees and that Marks himself was their

¹²³ Will for Christopher Cunningham. Washington County, Tennessee. p. 14.

¹²⁴ Harlee. Vol. III, p. 2556.

grandfather. They also believed that the three young men were descended from Christopher Robinson of Charles City and Henrico Counties, Virginia. While this indirect evidence is the weakest portion of the Holtzclaw-Bissell-Brayton presentation, it has little or no bearing on the descent from Israel Roberson, and whether one chooses to accept or reject the descents from Matthew Marks, Nicholas Robertson, and Christopher Robinson is a matter of personal choice based upon the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the circumstantial evidence.

There appears to be enough circumstantial evidence of the descents from Matthew Marks and Nicholas Robertson to at least include them tentatively in the line with the caveat that they are not yet proven conclusively. However, the descent from Christopher Robinson is too speculative to include even tentatively at this point as it is based solely upon proximity which, when considered alone, is never genealogical proof.

Matthew Marks first appears in Charles City County records in "June 1691 when he was summoned to court for not going to church, thus indicating that he was probably already a Baptist and opposed to worshipping in the Established Church (Charles City Orders, 1687-95, p. 348)."¹²⁵ About 1714, he requested that the General Assembly of General Baptists in London, England send a minister to the Virginia Colony, and an entry in the Prince George County, Virginia Order Books on June 14, 1715 indicates that the minister, Robert Norden, arrived safely in the colony and took the oath of allegiance and that Matthew Marks' home was to be the meeting place for this group of Baptists.¹²⁶

On August 15, 1719, Marks made his will, leaving "...Edward Marks, the son of Edward Marks to [sic] hundred acres of Land, more or Less, Joyning the Wards Creek, ...to be by him enjoyed at the age of one and twenty years, he not prohibiting the Meetings there settled." To "John Marks, the son of Israel Marks," he gave "fifty acres of land, more or less, Lying against the southern Runn, goes to Harrisons Line, and the Marks [sic] trees, and up Harrison's Line, and goes away to the old feild [sic] again" and "...the Feather bed in the chamber." To his daughter, Mary Davenport, he gave "...a parcel of Land at the Ponds, lying against Bleightons Line, at the Meadow branch, so along Blightons [sic] Line to Southern runn so down the southern runn to the ponds runn, so along the runn to the mark trees, and so to the Meadow branch, and so to Bleightons Line again..." and also "...to [sic] beds in the fire room, one for her forthwith, and the other to remain for the use of Robert Norden the time of his tarrying in Virginia." At the same time he gave "...to John Robyson a parcell of Land at the Ponds, beginning at the Hedge row, and down along the spring, and so down the Ponds runn, and up the Ponds runn, to the Hedgerow again..." The land he gave "...to Israel and Edward Robyson Lyes on the other side of the Spring branch, and so to Bleightons Line, and down to the Meadow Branch..." It was also his will that "...Robert Norden have the plantation I Live in, till Edwards [sic] Marks comes of age, with the land belonging to it."¹²⁷

Holtzclaw extrapolated from these bequests and from the fact that the Robyson legatees received a share of land equal to that of Marks' daughter, Mary Davenport, that John, Israel, and Edward Robyson were Marks' grandchildren, the children of a then unknown daughter.¹²⁸ In "Kendrick of Gloucester County, Virginia and North Carolina," he writes of the people mentioned in the will:

An account of the estate in 1720 shows that the daughter was the wife of George Davenport, and mentions a parcel of books "belonging to the Baptist minister, not belonging to Marks" [Prince George D. & W., 1713-28, p. 470]. It is unfortunate that the will mentions no relationships except the daughter, Mary Davenport. However, it seems

¹²⁵ Holtzclaw, Benjamin C. "Kendrick of Gloucester County, Virginia and North Carolina" in John Bennett Boddie's *Historical Southern Families*. Redwood City, Calif.: Pacific Coast Pub., 1957. Vol. I, p. 36.

¹²⁶ Prince George County, Virginia Order Book, 1714-1720. p. 20.

¹²⁷ Will for Matthew Marks. Prince George County, Virginia Wills and Deeds, 1713-1728. p. 358.

¹²⁸ Holzclaw. Vol. 1, p. 36.

practically certain that the Marks and Roberson legatees were grandsons. The legatee, Edward Marks, was the son of an Edward Marks who died prior to 1714, his widow Martha in that year being the wife of James Bell (O.B. 1714-20, p. 6). She was a sister of William Santain, whose will, dated Dec. 31, 1716 and probated May 14, 1717, mentions his wife; James Bell and Martha his wife ("my sister"); and her children, Edward Marks and James Bell (D. & W. 1713-28, p. 162). John Marks, the other Marks legatee, was the son of Israel Marks who died in 1718, and his wife Elizabeth, who was a daughter of Richard Pigeon, who also died in 1718 (D. & W. 1713-28, pp. 250 and 288). Edward Marks, Sr., and Israel Marks were almost certainly sons of Matthew Marks. The names Israel and Edward Roberson among the legatees, the fact that Israel Roberson's eldest son was named Matthew and the fact that the three Roberson brothers were left together 200 acres of land (the same as Edward Marks and the daughter Mary Davenport), indicate very strongly that their mother was a daughter of Matthew Marks, who had predeceased her father.¹²⁹

I have recently located letters patent dated December 23, 1714 and granted to John Eaton of York County, Virginia¹³⁰ for the importation of seven individuals into the colony, including the entire "Markes" family, -- Matthew, Mary, "Edw.", John, Israel, and Sarah -- which were apparently unavailable to Holtzclaw and which indicate that Matthew Marks' previously unknown daughter was named Sarah. The Charles City County Order Books show that Marks was in Virginia as early as June 1691,¹³¹ and John Eaton did not apply for his land grant until many years after the Marks family had arrived in the colony. The fact that "Edw. Markes" is mentioned in the patent and his wife Martha is not means that he was not married prior to his arrival in the colony, and by the time the patent was granted, Edward Marks' widow had married James Bell, so the year of the family's arrival must have been prior to 1714. His brother, Israel "Markes," had apparently died before his father made his will as Israel's son, John, is given a bequest of land in the document. John "Markes," who is mentioned in the patent, is not mentioned in the will nor is there any mention of his children. A reasonable explanation for this circumstance is that he died without issue. Mary "Markes" is clearly the Mary Davenport mentioned in the will and identified by Holtzclaw as the wife of George Davenport. The Sarah "Markes" who is mentioned in the patent is not mentioned in the will, and if one accepts Holtzclaw's hypothesis that the Robyson legatees were Marks' grandchildren, there is a strong probability that this Sarah "Markes" was their mother and that the three boys were named for their uncles, John, Israel, and Edward Marks.

On July 12, 1715, the Prince George County Magistrates designated the home of a certain Nicholas Robertson as "a publick meeting house for the Sext of Anabaptists."¹³² This is positive proof that Robertson, too, was an early member of the Baptist Church in Virginia, and Holtzclaw believed that he was the father of John, Israel, and Edward Robyson. He gave as evidence for this conclusion that "...both John and Israel Roberson had sons named Nicholas, John Roberson witnessed a deed made by Nicholas Roberson in 1718, all four men lived in Bristol Parish, Prince George Co., and Nicholas Roberson is the only Roberson shown in the records who was of an age to have been their father."¹³³

Robertson is first mentioned in Virginia records in February 1687/88 when he recorded his mark for cattle,¹³⁴ and he and Nicholas Darrell were jointly granted two hundred eighty-nine acres of land in Prince George County on April 21, 1690.¹³⁵ His second wife, according to

¹²⁹ Holtzclaw. Vol. I, pp. 37-38.

¹³⁰ Virginia Land Patent Book 10, 1710-1719. p. 222.

¹³¹ Charles City County, Virginia Order Book, 1687-1695. p. 348.

¹³² Prince George County, Virginia Order Book, 1714-1720. p. 25.

¹³³ Holtzclaw. Vol. I, p. 38.

¹³⁴ Charles City County, Virginia Order Book, 1687-1695. p. 109.

¹³⁵ Virginia Land Patent Book 8, 1689-1695. p. 55.

Holtzclaw, was Jane Tillman, the daughter of Roger and Susannah Tillman of Prince George County.¹³⁶ Susannah Tillman's will, dated November 19, 1716 and probated in Prince George County on March 12, 1716/17, mentions that she was sixty-nine years old and names sons Thomas Parham, George Tillman, and John Tillman; daughters Jane Robinson and Christian Abernathy; granddaughter Mary Bethell; and grandson Robert Abernathy.¹³⁷ In his own will dated February 15, 1716/17 and probated May 14, 1717, Jane's half-brother, Thomas Parham, left Nicholas "Robyson" a hundred acres of land¹³⁸ which Robyson deeded to Jane's brother, George, on May 12, 1718.¹³⁹ On November 14, 1721, Jane Robyson, wife of Nicholas, relinquished her dower rights. The deed was witnessed by John Robyson and George Davenport,¹⁴⁰ Mary Marks' husband.

Holtzclaw continues, "Nicholas Roberson was probably the son of Edward Robinson and wife Ann of Charles City Co.," and John Anderson Brayton adds, "Nicholas Robinson owned land on the Hogg Pen Branch, as well as on the Ashen Branch, connecting him with both Edward and Christopher Robinson, his putative father and grandfather."¹⁴¹ A key piece of Holtzclaw's and Brayton's evidence for this descent is that Nicholas Robertson's youngest son was named Edward, linking him in their minds to Edward Robinson of Hogpen Branch, but it is more plausible to me that Edward "Robyson" was named for his uncle Edward Marks as his brothers John and Israel appear to have been named for their Marks uncles.

There are letters patent granted Anthony Dowden and dated April 23, 1688, for the transportaion of fourteen persons into Virginia including one "Nicho. Roberts"¹⁴² who may be synonymous with Nicholas Robertson. A search of Virginia Land Patents and the Northern Neck of Virginia Land Grants revealed that no one named Nicholas Roberts received a patent or grant during the period when "Nicho. Roberts" would have applied for his own land grant and, thus, the possibility remains that "Nicho. Roberts" is synonymous with Nicholas Robertson and thus not a son of Edward Robinson. However, this hypothesis is proven no better than the Holtzclaw-Brayton hypothesis, and, at this point, any reasonable hypothesis is worthy of consideration.

IN CONCLUSION

The Hotzclaw-Bissell-Brayton material taken in conjunction with the material I have presented here proves the correct parentage for Colonel Charles Robertson and adds futher details to the Robertson-Craighead assertion that John Robertson and Mary Gower were General James Robertson's parents. It does not substantiate their belief that John Robertson was an immigrant, but it does confirm that he had a brother named Charles. That this Charles, who is synonymous with Colonel Charles Robertson, was General Robertson's uncle validates the tradition in my line that Colonel and General Robertson were related although it does not prove that they were brothers as many of us had previously believed.

Despite the problems with the Robertson-Craighead statements in the Draper Manuscripts, they remain a valuable resource for family historians and can add much interesting historical detail to Robertson family histories.

Genealogy is and has always been a group effort. Each succeeding generation builds upon the store of knowledge left by previous generations, and the responsible family historian attempts to place his or her contribution into a form and context that may be used and understood by generations that follow. It falls to us, as descendants of our respective ancestors,

¹³⁶ Holtzclaw. Vol. I, p. 38.

¹³⁷ Will for Susanna Tillman. Prince George County, Virginia Wills and Deeds, 1713-1728. p. 144.

¹³⁸ Will for Thomas Parham. Prince George County, Virginia Wills and Deeds, 1713-1728. p. 168.

¹³⁹ Prince George County, Virginia Wills and Deeds, 1713-1728. p. 228.

¹⁴⁰ Prince George County, Virginia Wills and Deeds, 1713-1728. p. 501.

¹⁴¹ Brayton. p. 13.

¹⁴² Virginia Land Patent Book 7, 1679-1689. p. 652.

to reexamine family legends in the light of new primary and secondary proofs and to identify as untrue that which is proven false so we may provide new insights into our ancestors' lives and accomplishments to further their cause and the cause of history.

© COPYRIGHT, 1998 by Tom Robertson, 612 Briarwood Drive, New Albany, MS 38652. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. First published in *Tennessee Ancestors* of the East Tennessee Historical Society, v. 14, no. 3, December 1998. Slight revisions made to the footnotes January 16, 2001.