

## OUR BOBBITT FAMILY

### The Family Name and Origin

The Bobbitt surname is of Dutch origin. Among the Dutch who came into England during the early days of immigration from the continent were those who used the name "Bobbert". This Germanic name was eventually anglicized into Bobbit (1), or Bobbitt as we know it today.

There is another version of the origin of this surname. According to this version the Old Germanic name Rodbert was introduced into England by early settlers. That name, as the story is told, was later shortened to Robert and then to Bob. With the addition of the French diminutive ending "et" the name became Bobet or Bobbet, meaning little Bob or son of Bob.

The author's research points with greater emphasis toward the first account given above; but be that as it may, the name is definitely of Germanic origin and came into use in England after the conquest of William the Conqueror. Through the years the name has assumed numerous variations in spelling, for example, the name is recorded as Bobbet, Bobet, Bobit, Bobbit, Babbitt and in other ways in addition to the more familiar Bobbitt spelling. These variations are, however, all branches from the common stem and are the result, in many cases, of recording the phonetic spelling of the spoken name.

Perhaps the earliest mention of the Bobbitt name in existing English records is that of one Robert Bobbitt in the year 1327. In that year Robert Bobbitt is recorded in Somersetshire, a county in southern England that lies across the Severn river from Wales. Since the Bobbitts have always been a family of much movement it is not surprising to find members of the family crossing the wide expanse of the Severn and entering Wales itself. Indeed, the Bobbitts are recorded as having fought on the side of the Welsh in their early struggles against the British crown.

There is evidence to indicate that it was from Glamorganshire, a section of Wales that lies along the Severn river, that the first Bobbitts emigrated for America. There can be no doubt concerning the country from which our immigrant ancestor departed for the New World. It is a matter of record that one William Bobbitt, Esq. who was born near Columbia, South Carolina, in the 1790s, and who was a fifth generation removed from the immigrant ancestor, had family documents by which "he was able to trace his forefathers to Wales"(2). Altho our Bobbitt family came to America from Wales, it must be said that many characteristics of their English heritage were never lost.

The first members of the family to reach America during the early colonial days settled in the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts and are the ancestors of a large segment of the family, particularly those now living in the northern sections of the United States. A few years later, about the year 1670, our immigrant ancestor, William Bobbitt, sailed from Wales to America; but unlike his predecessors William came farther south and settled in the Virginia Colony.

There has been some speculation that these early arrivals in Virginia and Massachusetts were brothers, but this writer has found no evidence to support that view; to the contrary, a careful review of all available facts indicates that such close relationship was not the case.

We know, however, that William Bobbitt of Virginia is the ancestor of many of those now living in the South who carry the Bobbitt name.

It will be the purpose of this account to trace the genealogical and historical record of one of those Southern Bobbitt families.

## SECTION I

William Bobbitt, the forefather of many of the Bobbitt families in the South, and the first of his line in America, was born in Wales about the year 1645. Looking back some three hundred years it is not for us to know the specific reasons that prompted William, as a young man, to leave his native Wales and throw his lot with the Colonies in America. One can relate that fact only to the general conditions that prevailed at the time. There was growing political unrest at home, an adventurous spirit and a fascination for far away places among the young gentry of the day and an active campaign by the colonies themselves to promote immigration to their shores.

Sir William Berkeley, the Governor of the Virginia Colony, published a discourse in 1663 that was widely read in the mother country in which he extolled the virtues of the Virginia Colony and in which he recommended the colonial life to the young men of the day. This discourse is quoted, in part, as follows:

"For who....in England are more prodigal and riotous than the younger brothers of it? But this is not so in our plantations; for we find there that if we will be provident and industrious for a year or two, we may provide for our posterity for many ages; the manifest knowledge of this makes men industrious and vigilant with us....a small summe of money will enable a younger brother to erect a flourishing family in the New World; and add....strength, wealth, and honor to his native country."

The evidence indicates that William Bobbitt, our eponymous ancestor, was about twenty five years of age when he booked passage to America. After an ocean voyage of perhaps thirteen weeks William Bobbitt entered the waters of Chesapeake Bay and then up the broad channel of the James river and finally to the plantation area of Charles City in the Virginia Colony. It was about the year 1670 when William Bobbitt first set foot on Virginia soil.

In 1671 Governor Berkeley estimated the population of the Colony as 48,000 souls, of which 2,000 were negro slaves and 6,000 were indentured servants (3). The population was thinly dispersed among the settlements and plantations below the fall-line of tidewater Virginia.

Indian raids were of ever present concern, particularly for those living in the hinterland; but the establishment of Fort Henry near the falls of the Appomattox river, with a garrison of 45 men, reduced the Indian menace within its sphere of influence. It was within that area that William Bobbitt staked his claim and built his cabin.

On October 27, 1673, William Bobbitt was granted a patent by the Regal Government for his tract of land that consisted of about 96 acres on the south side of the Appomattox river near the Cattail branch. The official government record of William's land patent is recorded in Book 6, page 481, in Charles City County, Virginia, in these words:

"William Bobbitt, October 27, 1673, 96 acres, 3r., 24po. On the South side of Appomattox river, adjoining the land of Mr. Wittington, thence &c the Cattail branch."

The original document covering William Bobbitt's land grant is now preserved in the Virginia State Archives in Richmond, Virginia. Mr. John W. Bobbitt of Washington, D.C., has kindly furnished the author a reproduction of that original instrument. In that document the following statement is found: "The said land being due by transportation of two persons to the colony." From that wording one may infer that William was entitled to a grant of public lands as an immigrant freeman and that the second person mentioned was, indeed, his wife who accompanied William to the Virginia Colony.

William's land was originally located within the political bounds of Charles City County, Virginia. However, in 1702 Prince George County was organized out of a part of Charles City County and thereafter William's land was included within the bounds of the new Prince George county.

When one relates the landmarks of William Bobbitt's land as given in the patent with the present day topography of the area it appears that the location of the Bobbitt farm is now to be found near the present city of Hopewell, Virginia.

Evidence indicates that William Bobbitt died in 1702. We know with certainty, however, that he had passed away before May 12, 1703 (4).

William Bobbitt, our immigrant ancestor, was a member of the Anglican Church, Bristol Parish, Virginia. The author has found no record that would identify the name of William's wife but the research identifies the following children of that union:

1. William Bobbitt (Jr.)      See SECTION II
2. John Bobbitt

From a review of available secondary evidence it appears that John Bobbitt, as named above, was also a son of William Bobbitt, the immigrant ancestor, and that he was born in Bristol Parish ca. 1676. In 1719 John Bobbitt moved from Virginia into what is now North Carolina and settled near the bend in the Roanoke river in the area known as Occoneeche Neck. This location is not far from the wilderness trail that was to be followed some years later by his cousins in their move into North Carolina.

In 1723 John Bobbitt was listed as a Juryman (freeman) in Bertie Precinct (5, 6), and as of that point in time he was the only one of the Bobbitt name in the State Records of North Carolina. In 1727 John was a witness to the signing of the will of one John Pace, Sr. (7). John Bobbitt signed his own last will and testament on May 7, 1736, and it was not long after that that he passed away. His will was probated in Bertie Precinct on November 6, 1736 (8). In his will John Bobbitt names two sons, William and Thomas, and three daughters, Frances, Mary and Amey. To each of his sons he left 100 acres of land "in Orraneechey Neck."

John Bobbitt was a true pioneer in every sense of the word. North Carolina west of the 78th meridian was largely unsettled and was even largely unexplored up to about 1729.

#### NOTE TO READER

The reader is urged to review the explanation of the generation numbering system that is given in the Preface of this book.

## SECTION II

William Bobbitt (I - 1), the son of William Bobbitt, the immigrant ancestor (4), was born in Bristol Parish, Charles City County, Virginia, ca. 1675. In the early years of colonial America it was very difficult for children of frontier farm families to secure much formal education. We can easily imagine that as William grew older his rudimentary schooling was secured at his mother's knee, and that the Bible and the Parish Church were the corner-stones of his cultural environment.

William followed in the footsteps of his father and became a planter. The flintlock musket, the ax and the plow were the principal tools of his trade. Tobacco was the principal money crop of the colonist, but in addition they raised most of the garden vegetables that we are familiar with today and also many herbs and flowers, "all of our English seede [sic] both for pleasure and for the kitchen" (9). Most of the trade with the mother country came out of the port of Bristol, England, and the sailing ships returning from Virginia carried large quantities of tobacco in their holds for the Old World market.

When William Bobbitt was in his twenties he left his father's roof and moved into neighboring Surry County where on June 10, 1702, he was included in the list of tithables in Southwark Parish (10). Shortly after that date, however, William returned to Prince George County, probably at the time of his father's last illness.

When his father died William Bobbitt inherited "as heir at law" the land that his father had patented in 1673 (4). For a short time he continued to live on the property but on May 12, 1703, he sold the land of the old homestead to one John Peterson of Prince George County, Virginia. John Peterson, using terms that were then common in land transactions, made a record of the purchase in these words:

"95 acres purchased by John Peterson, the feffor, of William Bobbitt, by deed May 12, 1703, being land on which said Bobbitt then lived and was granted to William Bobbitt, father of said William Bobbitt, by patent October 27, 1673, and descended to said William Bobbitt, as heir at law to his said father." (4)

After the old homestead was sold William Bobbitt eventually moved a few miles to the southwest to the south side of Jones' Hole Swamp where the land rises, here and there, to over a hundred feet above sea level. On June 18, 1712, Robert Bolling, the official surveyor, was engaged to survey the Bobbitt land. The survey is recorded in Record of Land Surveys, Prince George County, on page 751, as follows:

"June 18, 1712. To a survey for Wm. Bobbitt on y<sup>e</sup> South Side of Jones' Hole Swamp - 90 acres."

Altho William occupied this land the author has found no record that he ever applied for a patent to the 90 acres. Land was plentiful and it was quite common for parcels to be occupied without the benefit of a formal grant. It is a matter of record that William was maintaining his claim and occupying this tract of land as late as January 22, 1717 (11).

William Bobbitt now expanded his operation and acquired a 254 acre plantation on the west side of Rocky Run. On December 6, 1718, William had the new location surveyed; the survey is recorded on page 754 of the record of land surveys in Prince George County, Virginia, in these words:

"December 6, 1718. To a survey for William Bobbitt on the West side of Rocky Run - 254 acres."

In 1725 the Colonial Government of Virginia issued a formal patent to William Bobbitt for those 254 acres as recorded in Patent Book 12, page 278, in Prince George County, Virginia (24).

The county surveyors were appointed by the Surveyor-General of the colony and were paid a fee, fixed by law, by the person for whom the survey was made. The fee was payable in tobacco. At the time that William had his survey made in 1718 the fee was 40 pounds of tobacco for each 100 acres surveyed. The surveyor took five percent for his personal fee, fifteen percent went to the support of William and Mary College and for the colony the Surveyor-General took what was left. On that basis it cost William 102 pounds of his best tobacco to have his 254 acres surveyed.

William Bobbitt and family were members of the Anglican Church and at one time were closely associated with the place of worship known as Ferry Chapel. On one occasion the Vestry of Ferry Chapel asked William to act for the Parish in burying one of their deceased members, a John Delahny, Esq., and then on November 16, 1736, the Vestry voted to pay William 100 pounds of tobacco to cover any expenses that he had incurred (12).

Ferry Chapel was one of the very earliest places of worship in Bristol Parish. It was constructed about the year 1692 on the south bank of the Appomattox river near the ferry that crossed from the present site of Pocahontas to Bolling's Point. The chapel was a simple wooden structure with heavy solid wood windows that had to be lifted out of their frames for each service during warm weather. No metal hinges or glass panes were used in the building's construction, but it served its purpose long and well, not only as a place for the worship of GOD, but also as a gathering place for settlers from miles around. The old chapel building where William Bobbitt once worshiped has long since disappeared; but the site where Ferry Chapel once stood can be found in the city of Petersburg, Virginia, about where the Norfolk and Western R.R. station now stands. (13)

William Bobbitt died after November 1736 (14), having spent his last years on his Rocky Run plantation. The maiden name of William's wife does not appear in existing records; but one may infer that he married a Miss Green - a conclusion that may be deduced from the will of William's nephew, Robert Green (15).

By an analysis of all secondary evidence the children of William Bobbitt were determined, as follows:

1. William Bobbitt
2. James Bobbitt            See SECTION III
3. Thomas Bobbitt        See SECTION III
4. Lewis Bobbitt         See SECTION IV



### SECTION III

James Bobbitt (II - 2), the son of William Bobbitt and the grandson of William, the immigrant ancestor, married Elizabeth -----, and moved into the western part of what was then Lunenburg County, Virginia. On April 4, 1752, he purchased 285 acres of land on both sides of Pigg river and on the east side of Frying Pan creek (16). In 1752 James was included in the list of tithables in Lunenburg County. Later in 1752 Lunenburg County was divided and the area where James lived was given the name Halifax County. Then in 1766/67 Halifax County was itself divided and the area where James had settled was thereafter called Pittsylvania County, Virginia.

James Bobbitt died in 1761, and his will was probated in Halifax County on August 20, 1761. In his will James lists his heirs as follows: his wife Elizabeth, sons John, James, William and Randall, and daughters Mary and Livisa and married daughters Diana Jennings and Ann Hansen.

Elizabeth and family continued to live in Pittsylvania County after the death of James, at least for some years; Elizabeth and sons John, James and William are shown on the list of tithables taken in 1767 in Pittsylvania County by John Donelson (17).

John, the above named son of James and Elizabeth Bobbitt, acquired considerable land in Pittsylvania County as shown by the deed records of that county. For example, on September 16, 1783, he purchased from George Peak a tract of 100 acres on the south side of Pigg river, beginning at the mouth of Hungry Camp Branch. On May 5, 1785, John sold that tract to his son James. John continued to live in that locality and is named in 1785 census of Pittsylvania County altho his son, James, moved into Grayson County, Virginia. On January 30, 1794, John Bobbitt and his son James of Grayson County conveyed 100 acres where John lived on the south side of Pigg river to one John Smith by an indenture recorded in Deed Book 9, pages 508 - 508 of Pittsylvania County.

William Bobbitt, the son of James and Elizabeth Bobbitt, as previously named, was recorded in the list of tithables in 1767 in Pittsylvania County (17).

In November 1768 the Vestry appointed William Bobbitt as one of the Processioners to confirm the boundary marks of all patented land from the mouth of Pigg river on both sides to the mouth of Snow Creek and on to the ridges (18). This is an example of the fact that the Church exercised many civil functions during the Colonial period.

Before 1778 William Bobbitt moved some miles westward into Montgomery County, Virginia, where his talents and abilities soon earned him great respect. He was appointed overseer of the new road passing Craig's Ferry (19), and later was appointed one of the overseers of the road established from Ward's Gap to Poplar Camp Mountain near Herbert's Ferry (20).

On Wednesday, March 4, 1778, William Bobbitt was named a Captain in the Militia by the county court that convened at Fort Chiswell, with the intent that William assume command of a part of Capt. Twigg's company (21).

Thomas Bobbitt (II - 3), moved into neighboring Surry County, Virginia. Surry County was divided in 1753/54 and the area where Thomas lived was thereafter named Sussex County. Thomas died in Sussex County without leaving a will. However, in Book A, page 116, of Sussex County there is an inventory and appraisement of his estate dated January 19, 1759, and on page 226 there is recorded an account current or settlement of the estate dated September 10, 1762 (22).

The latter document names Lucy--- as the wife of Thomas and names Lucy and Robert Wynne as administrators of Thomas' estate. Some five years later Lucy Bobbitt and Robert Wynne were married on March 25, 1767, in neighboring Brunswick County, Virginia (139).

Thomas was a cousin of Robert Green of Surry County. Robert Green's will was signed on August 9, 1750, and was probated on September 18, 1750. The will of Robert Green is quoted, in part, as follows:

"To my Cozen [sic] Thomas Bobbitt, my plantation and land, 150 acres where I live and one negro. To my Cozen, Mary Sturdivant 5 lbs. To my Cozen Ann Thruwitts, 2 negroes, great chest, etc. To my Cozen John Mercer, one negro and rem. of my estate to John Mercer and Thomas Bobbitt. 9 Aug. 1750".

In the absence of a will of Thomas Bobbitt, or other primary evidence, the children of Thomas and Lucy Bobbitt are not positively identified, but it seems clear from secondary evidence that among the children was a son named John Bobbitt. John married Frances Mitchell on September 19, 1792, in Sussex County, Virginia. John Bobbitt signed his own will on August 14, 1821, and his will was probated in Sussex County on June 6, 1822, and is recorded in the Will Book of that county on page 213. In his will John Bobbitt names his wife, Frances, and eight children, as follows:

Peter Thruwits Bobbitt (The youngest child)  
Florina Everits (Bobbitt) Robertson  
Lucy Jones Bobbitt  
Frances Mitchell Bobbitt  
William Golf Bobbitt  
James Edward Bobbitt  
Green Branch Bobbitt  
Betsey (Bobbitt) Rainey

In addition to the above eight children the will of John Bobbitt mentions a grandson named John Bobbitt Echols. This is a child of a daughter, Polly, who is not mentioned in the will, but who married William Echols (or Eckles) on December 1, 1800 (43). Betsey who is mentioned in the will married William Rainey on December 5, 1799 (44). Betsey's full name was Betsey Elizabeth Bobbitt.

Peter Thruwith Bobbitt who is named in the will of his father, John Bobbitt, is also mentioned in the settlement of the estate of his grandfather, Thomas Bobbitt.