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“In Search of the Elusive Parentage of William Ellis”

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Project

My 3rd great grandfather was John Ellis who married Elizabeth Bean in 1807 in Carter County, Tennessee. I have well documented my ancestry to John Ellis, but there has been some question with other Ellis researchers as to who were the parents of John Ellis. Was it John Ellis or William Ellis? John and William both arrived in Washington County, Tennessee in 1779, according to land records. Rumor from early researchers was that they were brothers who had lived in North Carolina for a while, then moved to Virginia for a short time, and then headed on to Tennessee. Both John and William arrived into Washington County, Tennessee when there was a large migration of Regulators, those opposed to the British, following the Battle of Alamance in Orange County, North Carolina. The Battle of Alamance ended the so-called War of the Regulation, a rebellion in colonial North Carolina over issues of taxation and local control. The battle took place on May 16, 1771. In fact, almost the entire congregation of the Sandy Creek Church in Orange County, North Carolina relocated to the Buffalo Ridge Baptist Church in Washington County, Tennessee. John and William were among those that migrated. John and William Ellis were early members of the Buffalo Ridge Church. No early researchers know the parentage of either John or William Ellis that moved to Washington County, Tennessee.

Through looking at land records, and following the ownership of a particular piece of ground in current Carter County, Tennessee, I have determined that my Ellis family property goes directly to William Ellis, my 4th great grandfather, the possible brother of John mentioned above. Now the problem becomes more complicated by introducing DNA results.

I recently had my brother submit DNA to FamilyTreeDNA in the hopes of receiving some help to figure out the parentage of my 4th great grandfather, William Ellis of Washington County, Tennessee. However, there are several different Ellis lines in East Tennessee and North Carolina, and I could not determine which Ellis line to follow. It seems that every

generation of Ellis's has at least two sons, both of which have been named John or William. I received notification from FamilyTree DNA that I had perfect matches in a 12 marker test, -1 deviation in 25 marker testing, and -3 deviation in 37 marker testing with four different people that all descend from William Ellis of Rowan County, North Carolina born in about 1704 in Maryland and who married Mary Clarke. That would seem like a simple explanation, but neither Barnett Ellis nor Dr. Eugene Ellis that I corresponded with believed or could prove any conclusive evidence that my William Ellis born in 1745 came from the family of William Ellis and Mary Clarke. The reason they did not believe that I was connected was that I told them that my William had a brother named John who migrated with him to Washington County, Tennessee. William Ellis (1704) and Mary Clarke's children, for the most part, moved on to South Carolina after the death of William in 1761 in Rowan County, North Carolina. They explained that William Ellis (1704) already had a son named John who was well documented and that there was no indication or evidence that William Ellis (1704) had a son named William. They insisted that I must have come through a brother of William Ellis (1704) instead.

My project has been to prove the parentage of William Ellis (1745). Is he the son of William Ellis (1704), from one of William's brothers, or from someone else completely?

Clues from the Past

When I was 18 years old, I attempted to interview my aging grandfather, Edmond E. Ellis. "Pappy" would not tell me anything about himself, but he did give me a little hint about his Ellis ancestors. I asked him where the Ellis family came from before they came to Tennessee. He said they came from around Rowan County and Guilford County, North Carolina. This puts my William in the same neighborhood as William Ellis (1704) and Mary Clarke. I had also been told from other researchers that when William Ellis came to Tennessee that he may have come with his brother, John.

William Ellis (1704) Inherits All

Dr. Eugene Ellis and Barnett Ellis, two excellent researchers who both descend from William Ellis (1704) who married Mary Clarke, suggested that my William Ellis (1745) might have come from their William's brother, Thomas. William Ellis (1704) had two older brothers, Benjamin (1682) and Thomas (1684). They were the sons of John Ellis born in 1661 in Kent Isle, Maryland. It is assumed that family members began dying after a smallpox

epidemic ravaged Maryland. Thomas Ellis (1684) who was living with his young family in Kent County, Delaware died in February of 1719 leaving a wife and three children, James, William, and Jane. Within a month, Thomas's father, John (1661) died in neighboring county, Kent County, Maryland. Both Thomas and his father had written their will on the same day, 1 February 1719. Thomas was dead before 27 February of the same year. He left all his possessions to his wife, Rachel. John (1661) died before March 17, 1719. He left the majority of his vast land holdings in Maryland to his son, Benjamin. On October 26, 1721 Benjamin Ellis made his will in Kent County, Maryland. His will was probated August 14, 1722. According to the research of deceased J.D. Ellis, Benjamin may have succumbed to smallpox as well, along with his daughter, Anne. The only surviving male member of the family from the generation of Thomas is William Ellis (1704), the youngest brother who becomes the heir of Benjamin's property as well as everything that had been left to Benjamin from their father, John. William Ellis is found in records of Kent County, Maryland first as executor for his brother, Benjamin 6 October 1720, Kent County Probate Volume 17 page 301. Then he is mentioned in the will of John Clarke 6 January 1725 in Kent County, Maryland Probate Volume 18 page 484 as the husband of Mary Clarke.

William Ellis (1704) began to sell off his land holdings in Kent and Queen Anne County Maryland and Kent County, Delaware between 1747-1750. From J.D. Ellis's research, the land on which he grew tobacco was beginning to fail. With exhausted land, the choice was to move on to better land. William Ellis (1704) appeared in Orange County, North Carolina in 1751 with a land grant of 300 acres located on Sandy Creek of Deep River and a short time later purchased 190 acres on Cane Creek north of Haw River. William Ellis (1704) was a carpenter by trade while living in North Carolina. Researcher J. D. Ellis believed that William (1704) established the Haw River site as his home and may have been visiting or assisting in the building on property of his son John Ellis in Rowan County where he was at the time of the 1759 Rowan County Tax List and at his death in 1761.

What Happens to Thomas Ellis Descendants?

Little can be found on the descendants of Thomas Ellis, older brother to William Ellis (1704). I found in the Kent County, Delaware probate records for Rachell Ellis, widow of Thomas Ellis. Admin. To Richard Empson August 29, 1728 reg. of wills liber G, folio 15. Rachell died intestate. There is no mention in the court record of her three children, James, William and

Jane. I have searched through ancestry.com for anyone doing genealogical research for the children of Thomas and Rachell. I have also emailed several people associated with the Ellis DNA Project. No one has any information on the descendants of Thomas Ellis. At this point, I can find no descendants of Thomas's children. Thomas's son, William, was born in 1708. James Ellis was born in 1706. Either of these sons would be in the generation that could be the father of my William Ellis (1745) that migrated to Washington County, Tennessee from North Carolina.

Local History in North Carolina

I began by researching the local history of Orange County, North Carolina and Washington County, Tennessee. I studied the Regulator Movement and the Battle of Alamance. The Battle of Alamance took place on May 16, 1771 in Orange County, North Carolina. By looking at old maps I ascertained that William Ellis's (1704) widow, Mary Clarke Ellis, resided in the same area as other Regulators and the Sandy Creek Baptist Church that eventually relocated its congregation to Buffalo Ridge Baptist Church at Boone's Creek in Washington County, Tennessee.

North Carolina and the 1759 Rowan County Tax List

In 1759 in the Rowan County Tax list there is a William Ellis, James, John, James Jr. and Benjamin all living in the same residence. I can account that William Ellis is the head of the family and that John, James Jr. and Benjamin are his sons. That leaves James. Since tax lists were recorded in the order of head of family and then descending ages, James could very easily be the son of Thomas Ellis, deceased, which would make him nephew to William. We know that the oldest son of William is John. So who is James? If he is the son of Thomas, James is living in the same household as his only surviving uncle. Because of the age difference between deceased Thomas and his younger brother, William, nephew James and uncle William would only be two years apart. William was born in about 1704 and his nephew, James, was born in 1706. My William (1745) could be the son of James (1706) or William (1704). There is no mention of a younger William in the tax list. If my William Ellis were under sixteen years old, he would not have been enumerated. I think that is the key.

By about 1769, William Ellis's (born 1704) three sons, John James, and Benjamin had sold their property in Rowan County, North Carolina and were living within 20 miles of each other in an area then known as Tryon County, North Carolina. This county discontinued in 1779. According to

the Ellis Cousins Newsletter Winter 1992, their property was located where Cleveland and Rutherford Counties came together and joined York County, South Carolina south of the Broad River.

1761 Rowan County Tax Lists

John Ellis (1729), son of William Ellis (1704) is listed in the 1761 Rowan County Tax list in list #3 that included Southern Guilford and northern Randolph County area. He is listed as follows: John Ellis and James and William -3.

In 1761 the oldest child of John Ellis (1729) would have been approximately one year old. His next son would be born in 1763, two years after this tax list. The James and William that are listed in the 1761 tax list, I believe,* are John's brothers, the sons of William (1704). James would be approximately 26 years old. If the William in the tax list were 16 years old, he would be born about 1745. Because he did not appear in the 1759 tax list, does not mean he did not exist. It only means he was not old enough to appear in the tax list.

Some researchers believe that the William listed in the 1761 tax list is actually the father of John Ellis (1729) not his younger brother. I believe that it is the younger brother of John, and my ancestor. Benjamin Ellis (1741) another brother to John, is also listed in this tax list with no other male members of the family. According to placement on the tax list, I would assume that Benjamin and John were close neighbors. That means that four sons of William (1704) are all living in the same county, John, 32 years old, James 26 years old, and William 16 years old in one household and Benjamin 20 years old in another. Since the ailing father of these brothers died in 1761, it would make sense that they were living close to each other.

Land Records Washington County, Tennessee

My William Ellis (1745) who arrived in Washington County with other Regulators from North Carolina purchased property as early as 1779. In *Earliest Tennessee Land Records & Earliest Tennessee Land History* it lists William Ellis acquiring 100 acres in Washington County entry 543 on 29 October 1779 in book 88 page 508. The location by stream name is Redey Branch. Another entry date of 14 November 1780 entry 2665 book 88 page

507 lists William Ellis acquiring 100 acres on Boones' Creek. Both of those land transactions have a grant date of 27 Febr. 1796.

Another land transaction took place in 1784. Thomas Hardeman and wife Mary sold to William Ellis 325 acres at Boone's Creek for a consideration sum of 200 lbs NC money. The source came from Washington County, Tennessee Deeds, 1775-1800, Old Book C page 249-57, dated 7/29/1784. This is land bordering William Bean's property. William Ellis's son, John, married the girl next door, Elizabeth Bean. John Ellis and Elizabeth Bean are my third great grandparents.

Washington County, Tennessee Tax Lists 1787

In 1787 William Ellis is listed as owning 325 acres with one white pole (polls) and one black from 12-60 years old. This was taken from *Early East Tennessee Taxpayers* compiled by Pollyanna Creekmore.

Church Records

I have been unable to find any early records of the Buffalo Ridge Baptist Church in Washington County, Tennessee. I have also been unable to locate early records of the Sandy Creek Baptist Church that contain information on early members to determine if my William was a member. Circumstantial evidence would appear to prove that they did attend the Sandy Creek Baptist Church because one year after the Battle of Alamance the church membership dwindled from 606 members to 14. The majority of the members eventually end up in an area known as Gray in Washington County, Tennessee. Gray is the area where my William Ellis (1745) purchased property.

The preacher of the Sandy Creek Baptist Church was a man by the name of Shubael Stearns who converted a young man named Tidence Lane. Tidence becomes the pastor of the Buffalo Ridge Baptist Church in Washington County, Tennessee—the transported congregation from the Sandy Creek Baptist Church in North Carolina.

In regard to his (Tidence Lane's) call and ordination to the ministry I have no definite information. We find him, however, "among the first Baptists" to set foot on Tennessee soil. He has the distinction of being "the first pastor of the first permanent church organization" of any denomination in the state of Tennessee, Buffalo Ridge, in Washington County, constituted in 1779. Under this date Ramsay says.: "Tidence Lane, a Baptist preacher,

organized a congregation this year. A house for public worship was erected on Buffalo Ridge." (Annals of Tennessee, p. 180.) Under date as above (1780) Benedict mentions by came eight Baptist ministers, who moved thus early into "the Holston country," all of them Virginians, "except Mr. Lane, who was from North Carolina. They were accompanied by a considerable number of their brethren from the churches which they left. Among the other emigrants there was a small body, which went out in something like a church capacity. They removed from an old church at Sandy Creek in North Carolina, which was platted by Shubael Stearns, and as a branch of the mother church they emigrated to the wilderness and settled on Boone's Creek (then in North Carolina, now in Tennessee). The church is now called Buffalo Ridge." Tidence Lane, as above stated, was its first pastor. With respect to our tradition that Buffalo Ridge came out from Sandy Creek Church (North Carolina) in an organized capacity and established itself in its new home as an "arm" of the mother church, with Tidence Lane as pastor, it may be said that Benedict in 1810 visited both these churches, mother and daughter, and made the record above given.

Tidence Lane organized the Buffalo Ridge Baptist Church the same year that my William Ellis moved to Washington County. It's also interesting to note that William's son, John Ellis, married Elizabeth Bean. Elizabeth Bean's father was Robert Bean and her mother was Rhoda Lane. Rhoda Lane's father was Reverend Dutton Layne, the brother of Tidence Lane.

John Ellis (1742) who arrived in Washington County, Tennessee the same time as William Ellis married Jemima Lane, daughter of John Fuller Lane who was the brother of Tidence Lane. All the early Ellis family members have close connections with the Baptist church and its leaders.

Military Records

I searched the Revolutionary War records for Washington and Carter County, Tennessee. A large number of men from those two counties served together in the King's Mountain Battle. There are no Ellis's listed in that battle.

However, there is a William and John Ellis of Pittsylvania County, Virginia listed in Joseph Martin's Company in July 1776.

I received from the North Carolina State Archives of record a notification of John Ellis appearing in the Treasurer and Comptroller Papers of the Revolutionary War Army Account Books. He is in Vol. 1 page 19 folio 4 being paid for service on June 12, 1782. He is on the same page of Sullivan and Washington County, Tennessee soldiers including Robert Bean and Tidings Lane. I have a deposition from Tidings Lane explaining his involvement during the Revolution at that time as fighting the Cherokee Indians.

In Vol. XII page 24, folio 2 John Ellis is receiving a certificate from Bledsoe and Williams for Revolutionary War service on August 1782.

Perhaps John served with William Ellis in Virginia in the Revolution before moving to Washington County, Tennessee. This would seem to corroborate the story that after the death of John Ellis's (supposed brother to William Ellis 1745) wife, (who was killed along with several of their small children by the Indians) that he moved to Virginia where he married his second wife, Jemima Lane, before moving to East Tennessee.

Pittsylvania County, Virginia

Pittsylvania County, Virginia was the previous home to many of the early settlers of Washington County, Tennessee. On Boone's Creek, William Ellis lived next door to the Crouch family and Bean family. The Ellis family intermarried with the Lane family. The Russell family was also connected with the Bean family—all of which came from Pittsylvania County, Virginia before coming to East Tennessee. Since it is common for neighbors and family to travel together, it makes sense to me that since the majority of William Ellis's immediate neighbors were from Pittsylvania County, Virginia, then he must have known them and lived near them before he came to Washington County.

Census Records

There are no census records existing in 1790 or 1800 for Washington County, Tennessee. This could have given me the state of birth of William Ellis. William died in 1809 missing the 1810 census by a year.

In the 1850 Carter County census, John Ellis 70 years old and my 3rd great grandfather and son of William Ellis (1745) lists his birth place as North Carolina. Family tradition corroborates the census record that the Ellis family came from North Carolina.

Probate Records and the Name Game

I began by looking again at what I already had on William Ellis, which amounted to his will and a few land records. He lists in his will his wife, Martha, and daughters Margaret Beene and Edmund Beene, her husband. Three sons, James, William and John already were given their part. Jacob, Clark, Elijah and daughter Martha are also mentioned. Three children that have been said to be William's children were not listed in his probate record.

I find it interesting to study the similarity in names from William (1704) and William (1745). I've also included the names of William's son, John born in 1729.

Known children of each of the following, not necessarily in order of birth:

William (1704)	John (1729)	William (1745)
Wife: Mary Clarke	Wife: Mary Quinn	Wife: Martha
John	John	John
James	Caleb	James
Benjamin	Edmund	
	Francis	Jacob
	Abner	Clark
	Asa	Elijah
	William	William
		Margaret
		Elizabeth
	Mary	Mary
		Ally
	Martha	Martha

I found it interesting that one of the son's of William born in 1745 was named Clark. If my William Ellis was the son of William Ellis (1704), then the Clark name had come from his mother's maiden name, Mary Clarke.

I also find it interesting that John (1729) had a son named Edmund. William Ellis (1745) has several descendants named Edmund. My grandfather was named Edmond E. Ellis and my great great-grandfather was named Edmund William Ellis. I cannot determine for certain where the name Edmund originated from because as far as I can tell, John (1729) son, Edmund, was the first to use the name in the Ellis family. My great great-grandfather may have been named after his older sister's husband, Edmund Williams. They

married three years before his birth. Anna Ellis is the daughter of John Ellis (1780) and Elizabeth Bean.

Also of interest is that both John (1729) and William (1745) had children named William and Mary, which would be the names of their parents.

Marriage Records I searched *Marriages of Rowan County, North Carolina 1753-1868* compiled by Brent H. Holcomb. I found a William Ellis, Jr. married to an Ann Riddle on 27 March 1792. I also found a Willis Ellis marrying a Mary A. White on 2 May 1840. There were five entries for John Ellis's marrying a Rebecca Loftin on 14 June 1796, an Elizabeth Loftin on 16 January 1804, a Sarah James on 18 August 1807, and a Polly Bradshaw on 14 November 1809. I found no indication of a William Ellis marrying a Martha Shipley. I am inclined to believe that my William Ellis (1745) was married twice because of the gap of years between the births of his children:

Margaret 1766

James 1768

John 1780

Jacob 1784

Clark 1792

William 1798

There are several children that I do not have birthdates for, so they may fill the gap between 1768 and 1780, or they may come later. Since William Ellis (1745) moved to Washington County, Tennessee in 1779, all children listed born after 1779 and before 1790 would be born in Washington County, Tennessee, in what was then part of North Carolina.

My Hypothesis

I believe that William Ellis (1745) was the son of William Ellis (1704) and Mary Clarke. I am still trying to find definitive proof, for at this point it is pure conjecture. Here are the reasons I believe that William is the son of William and Mary Clarke:

1. I cannot find anything on the children of Rachell and Thomas Ellis. Why wouldn't there be a Thomas Ellis listed in succeeding generations in the descendants of William Ellis (1745).
2. Everyone I match DNA with is a descendant of William Ellis (1704) and Mary Clarke.
3. The name of Clark appears over and over in each succeeding generation from my William Ellis (1745).
4. Deceased researcher J.D. Ellis believed that William Ellis (1704) had at least two more sons besides John, James Jr. and Benjamin. He was unable to locate their names, but there is evidence that there were other male children in the family. I think one of those sons may have been my William.
5. The birth date of my William Ellis was listed by at least one deceased researcher as 1738 in Rowan County, North Carolina. This researcher, Melba Wood, and I corresponded many years ago. I cannot find where she attained that information. I would be more inclined to believe that my William was born closer to 1745. That would make him 21 at the birth of his first child, rather than 28 by Melba Wood's calculation. If 1745 were the correct date, William would be the youngest son of William Ellis (1704) and Mary Clarke. This would explain why he is not listed on the 1759 tax list but appears on the 1761 tax list.
6. It would also make sense, that when a William Ellis appears in the same household in a tax list with John Ellis son of deceased William Ellis (1704) that William is a younger brother not a son. All of John's children would have been too young to appear in the tax list. To appear in a tax list you had to be 16 years old.
7. When all of the property of William Ellis (1704) is given to his oldest son John Ellis, my William is left out. Older brothers John, James, and Benjamin move to Tryon County by 1769. We know this because John has a daughter named Martha listed as having been born in Tryon County, North Carolina in 1769. After all the sons leave, who stays to help the mother, Mary Clarke Ellis, and widow of William Ellis (1704)? Researcher J.D. Ellis states that Mary Clark Ellis returned to Orange County, North Carolina to live after the death of her husband. I think that the youngest son, William, stayed to help take care of his mother. That would mean he was still in the area when the Battle of Alamance took place. That would explain why he moved with the Lane family to Pittsylvania County. This would be where he made

connections with the Bean, Russell, and Crouch families who became his neighbors in Washington County, Tennessee. Many of the children of each family intermarried.

8. I think that William fought in the Revolutionary War in Pittsylvania County, Virginia with another relative named John Ellis. I do not believe that John Ellis who came to Washington County, Tennessee about the same time as my William Ellis was his brother after all. It may have been a cousin or close relative that migrated with him to Washington County, Tennessee.
9. In Ellis Cousins Newsletter, Winter 1992 it states on page 10 that William Ellis was a carpenter by trade. J.D. believed that he established the Haw River site as his home and may have been visiting or assisting in the building on property of his son John in Rowan County, where he was at the time of the 1759 Rowan Co. Tax list and at his death in 1761. John's property was located in an area that later became Guilford County. My grandfather told me that the Ellis family came from around Guilford and Rowan County, North Carolina before coming to Tennessee.

There is still much to do to solve the mystery. I need to look for tax lists of Orange County, North Carolina to see if William Ellis (1745) is listed there. He could have been helping his widowed mother run her farm. Is there a death record for Mary Clarke Ellis? Did she leave a will? Were there land record transactions in Orange County, North Carolina after the Battle of Alamance showing William Ellis or Mary Clarke Ellis selling land? Are there Revolutionary War records for the John and William Ellis listed in Martin's Company in Pittsylvania County, Virginia?

As you can see, research on my William Ellis is far from complete. I have much to do to be able to definitely prove my thesis. But I believe that I'm headed in the right direction. Hopefully someday soon, with help from other Ellis descendants, a lot of hard work, and a little luck I will know the parentage for certain of my William Ellis.