

John Ellis 1710 - August 13, 1766

John Ellis III is my 6th Great-Grandfather – David Arthur – His father and grandfather were also named John Ellis.

He married Lucy Mayes.

Their daughter Jean was born 1725

Jean Ellis, married Hampton Wade on September 19, 1750 in Amelia County, Virginia Colony

John was widowed when his wife, Lucy, died in 1759

John died August 13, 1766

Amelia County, Virginia, Deeds

Book 5, Page 57

To all who these present come, Greetings: Know ye that I John Ellis of the Parish of Nottoway in the County of Amelia, for divers good causes and considerations, me thereunto moving, but especially for and in consideration of the natural love and affection I have and bear unto Hampton Wade of the said Parish and County and Jane his wife, a daughter of me the said John Ellis, have given, granted and confirmed to Hampton Wade and Jane his wife three slaves. The said slaves and their increase, after the deaths of Hampton and Jane Wade, to be equally divided between William Wade, Robert Wade, Richard Wade, and Betsy Wade, sons and daughter of the said Hampton Wade and Jane Wade.

Witness: Isaac Ferguson, Thomas Jeffress. /S/ John Ellis

Dated 19 Sep 1753. Recorded 27 Sep 1753

John Ellis' Bear Story

While surveying the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina Well over thirty men were employed by the Colony of Virginia in the year 1728 to survey the final dividing line between the colonies of Virginia and North Carolina. It had been one hundred years since the first English settlers had appeared, and still there was no clear delineation between the two colonies. So, under the guidance of commissioners from both Virginia and North Carolina, the surveyors mapped out the dividing line from a point beginning at the coast to a point a few hundred miles inland.

At the time of the survey, the American continent was a forested jewel, teeming with wildlife, including buffalo, bears and wolves. There were no English settlers in these woods, only the original natives. No one had traversed the Dismal Swamp and no one had named the piedmont rivers. Yet the mark these men left behind on the continent now appears on every map of the nation. The names they gave to rivers and creeks have become a part of history.

Shortly after the dividing line was surveyed, the details of this historic moment were told in a book entitled, "The History of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina". It was written by famed Virginian William Byrd, who was one of the commissioners from Virginia that attended the surveying expedition. He wrote the book by relying upon his own personal diaries that he had kept during the adventure. Not until modern times were both the book and the diaries published together. The publication of the diaries is entitled "The Secret History of the Dividing Line..."). These publications allow us to make a comparison of William Byrd's public words and private thoughts. These documents show his actual concerns versus his expressed concerns for members of his family, the other commissioners, native American Indians, as well as Indian traders, backwoods settlers, servants, and the like, all found along the route of the dividing line.

Two of the individuals mentioned by Byrd in his writings were John Ellis and John Ellis, Jr. These two men who helped survey the line, later became the ancestors of the Wade family of Halifax County Virginia, and Fayette County, Tennessee when John Ellis Jr.'s daughter Jane married Hampton Wade. At the time of the expedition, however, John Ellis Jr. was only about eighteen and not yet married. In fact Halifax County did not even exist.

At the beginning of the surveying expedition in 1728, the Ellises resided in Prince George County, in the lower half of the Virginia Colony. At that time the county was extensive, running West from the James River to almost the mountains. On its other three sides it was bounded by the James River, the Nottoway River, and the Appomatax River. Between its eastern settlements and the far reaches of the western mountains there was little but forests and the last of the remaining Indian villages.

The Ellis Family in Colonial Virginia

Early knowledge of the Ellises in Prince George County is sketchy due the destruction of the records in later wars, but from remaining sources, it can be determined that the Ellises had been in the county before 1713 living in the eastern parish of Bristol. To avoid confusion, it is perhaps best to explain up front that there were three generations of John Ellises in Prince George County: John Ellis (the first) who was normally referred to in the records as Senior; John Ellis (the second) who was also called "the Indian Trader" as well as Junior until 1728; and then John Ellis (the third) who was referred to as John Ellis of Amelia County. Their use of Junior and Senior was typical for their day. It did not differentiate father and son as it does today, but instead differentiated the older from the younger within the county court records. If a "Senior" died or left the county, the "Junior" could either drop their own title or become "Senior" should another similarly named individual appear in the county who was not older. Should ages be close or additional John Ellises appear in the county, then occupation or location was used to differentiate them. For our purposes though we will refer to the different John Ellises when possible as "1st", "2nd", or "3rd".

John Ellis, Senior

John Ellis, Sr. (1st), owned land at Wolf Pitt Branch and Reedy Run in 1715. In 1726, he was an elderly man and thus exempt from paying the Bristol Parish tax. By 1730, Elizabeth Ellis who was probably his widow, asked for her Indian slave to be exempt from the same such tax. No records ever say that this John and Elizabeth Ellis were the father of John Ellis (2nd); but they are the only Ellises in Prince George County at this time, and in one land deed both John Ellis (1st) and John Ellis (2nd) sign together as witnesses.

John Ellis, the Indian Trader

John Ellis (2nd) owned land at White Oak Swamp. By occupation, he was an Indian trader who would go into the back country for long periods of time to trade with the Indians. Parish records in the 1720's mention him and his occupation. The records also mention his son. One time when John Ellis (2nd) had gone on his usual trading trip into the back country, back in the parish his young son John Ellis (3rd) broke his leg. The records report that a parish warden had found a doctor to set it. After returning from the trading expedition, the father refused to pay for the cost of a doctor to set the broken leg of his son, because the leg had healed improperly. The wardens must have agreed with the decision, for they, in turn, sought another doctor before requiring John Ellis, the Indian trader, to make a payment of 3000 pounds of tobacco in 240 casks. In the end, John Ellis (2nd) made the payment by turning it over to one of the parish wardens who would use it towards the completion of the new parish church. The warden's name was Captain Thomas Jefferson--grandfather of the later president.

In both the parish records and the "Secret History of the Dividing Line..." the father-and-son relationship between John Ellis (2nd) and John Ellis (3rd) is clearly shown. Also shown in the parish records, is another relationship. This was of John Ellis (2nd); to Martha Ellis, a child. Martha Ellis chose a Margery Gilliam as her guardian in 1738 stating that her previous "guardian" John Ellis (2nd) was then deceased.

Undoubtedly, John was her father, too. Only one other Ellis is also mentioned in the early court records of the period and that is a mention of Thomas Ellis, but it is not clear how he is related to John.

John Ellis of Amelia

John Ellis (3rd) was born about 1710 in Prince George County, in the colony of Virginia. In 1720 at age 10 he broke his leg and for four months lived with a neighbor John West while his leg healed. Undoubtedly, even before he was eighteen, he had been out with his father helping in the Indian trading business, for in 1728, he was selected as one of the thirty men to go with his father and Commissioner William Byrd on the surveying expedition to lay out the dividing line. Afterwards, he married Lucy Mays the daughter of William Mays and Mary Mays nee Mattox. At one time, he was even arrested and held for contempt of court when he and his wife Lucy had refused to appear as witnesses in a court case that concerned his father John Ellis 2nd. At a later date, Lucy Ellis nee Mays did appear before the judge to show cause and her suit was dismissed, but her husband still refused to appear. When he also refused to pay the fine for his refusal he was arrested.

In 1753, John Ellis (3rd) deeded property to his son-law-law Hampton Wade and to his daughter "Jean" (most records called her Jane.) Hampton Wade and Jane Ellis later lived in Halifax County. In fact, the first county court session for Halifax was held in Hampton Wade's home in 1758. But at this time John Ellis (3rd) was living in Nottoway Parish, a part of Amelia County. Since Amelia had separated from Prince George County in 1735, John Ellis may not have had to move to be in the new county. The land was on the north side of the "Great Nottoway River" and would today be located in the county of Nottoway. For a while, John Ellis and his family may have lived in nearby Lunenburg County. His father-in-law William May had moved there before he died in 1748. Also, in Lunenburg at the place of where the county court was held, Hampton Wade had a license to operate an inn or "ordinary". John Ellis (3rd) left his own will in Amelia County, so may never have moved to Lunenburg County. The records are not clear at this time on anything about John Ellis (3rd), except that he died about 1762. He was 52 years old.

The Expedition's History

The life of John Ellis (3rd) is best seen in the time of the surveyors' expeditions in 1728. During the spring or first expedition, the Diary and the History as written by William Byrd mention both John Ellises and makes a point to differentiate between them. By the time of the fall expedition, the Diary only mentions one John Ellis (3rd). On this point the History and the Diary differ, the History credits both Ellises as going on the fall expedition, but since the Diary never differentiates which John Ellis it is referring to, it is assumed that it means the younger. The error may have been intentional or just a matter of form.

During the spring expedition, the Diary mentioned the Ellises twice. Once it makes reference to those who would have to go through the "Dismal Swamp". These men were going "were no white man had ever gone through before" and the Ellises are included on the list. The other time the Ellises are mentioned, the Diary relates the conditions of the men who successfully completed the trek through the swamp. The Diary describes the men as "being reduced to such straights that they had begun to look upon John Ellis' dog with a longing appetite."

That was about as far as the survey went in the Spring. On April 9, 1728, all of the woodsmen were discharged and sent to the Prince George Courthouse without completing the survey.

After the hot summer, and at the start of the autumn expedition, the Diary again mentions that John Ellis, Jr., (3rd). This time it mentioned John Ellis as one of those hired who were "attending" the commissioners. Their new expedition started on September 17, 1728. On the following Sunday, John Ellis must have been sick, for William Byrd had to give him medicine. In the diary Byrd described John's perscription as "a vomit for his Ague with good success." John Ellis must have gotten over the "ague", for on the return trip from the western most point of the survey he killed one of the few bears that fed the expedition. This was near the end of the expedition. For all of them, it ended on the 20th of November, taking about sixty days to finish out what is now about three-fourths of the state dividing line for Virginia and North Carolina. Only one other mention is made of John Ellis and the passage follows. Worth reading in the original, it is the one other time that John Ellis is talked about in both the Diary and the History. Though the flavor of the re-telling is William Byrd's, the following incident was told to Byrd by our own ancestor some two-hundred and fifty years ago. The expedition was deep in the virgin forest a long way from any settlements. On the Saturday afternoon of November 2, the surveying party arrived back at a creek they had recently named Matrimony Creek. They camped there along the creek because cold winter rains had come in so strong that they could not continue.

The Diary as written by William Byrd

[November 4th,] In the morning we measured the Marks we had set up at the River, and found the Water had not fallen above a foot, by this we were convinced that we shou'd be obliged to halt there a day longer. We sent some Men to endeavor to bring up 2 Horses, which tired on Saturday, but the Horses were too well pleas'd with their Liberty to come along with them. One of these Manumitted Horses belong'd to Abraham Jones, and being Prick't in the Mouth he bled himself quite off his legs.

There being great Plenty in our Camp the Men kept eating all day to keep them out of Idleness. In the Evening it Look't very dark and menaced us with more rain to our great Mortification, but after a few Drops, I thank God it blew over. Orion [i.e., Alexander Irvin, the surveyor for Virginia.] sigh'd heavily while it lasted, apprehending we shou'd take up our Winter Quarters in the Woods. John Ellis who was one of the Men we had sent to bring up the tired Horses told us a Romantick Adventure which he had with a Bear on Saturday last.

He had straggled from his Company, and tree'd a Young Cubb. While he was new priming his Gun to shoot at it, the Old Gentlewoman appeared, who seeing her Heir Apparent in Distress, came up to his relief. The Bear advanced very near to her Enemy, rear'd up on her Posteriors, and put herself in Guard.

The Man presented his Piece at her, but unfortunately it only snapp't, the Powder being moist. Missing his Fire in this manner he offer'd to punch he with the muzzle of his Gun. Which Mother Bruin being aware of, seized the weapon with her Paws. and by main strength wrench'd it our of his Hand. Being thus fairly disarm'd, and not knowing in the Fright, but the Bear might turn his own Cannon upon him, he thought it prudent to retire as fast as his Legs cou'd carry him. The Brute being grown more bold by the flight of her Adversary, immediately pursued, and for sometime it was doubtful, whether Fear made one Run faster, or Fury the other. But after a fair Course of 40 Yards, the poor man had the mishap to stumble over a Stump, and fell down at his full length.

He now wou'd have sold his life a Pennyworth: But the Bear apprehending there might be some trick in this Fall, instantly halted, and look't very earnestly to observe what the Man cou'd mean. In the Meantime he had with much presence of Mind, resolved to make the Bear believe he was dead, by lying breathless on the Ground, Upon the hopes the Bear wou'd be too generous to kill him over again.

He acted a Corps in this Manner for sometime, till he was rais'd from the Dead by the barking of a Dog, belonging to one of his Companions.

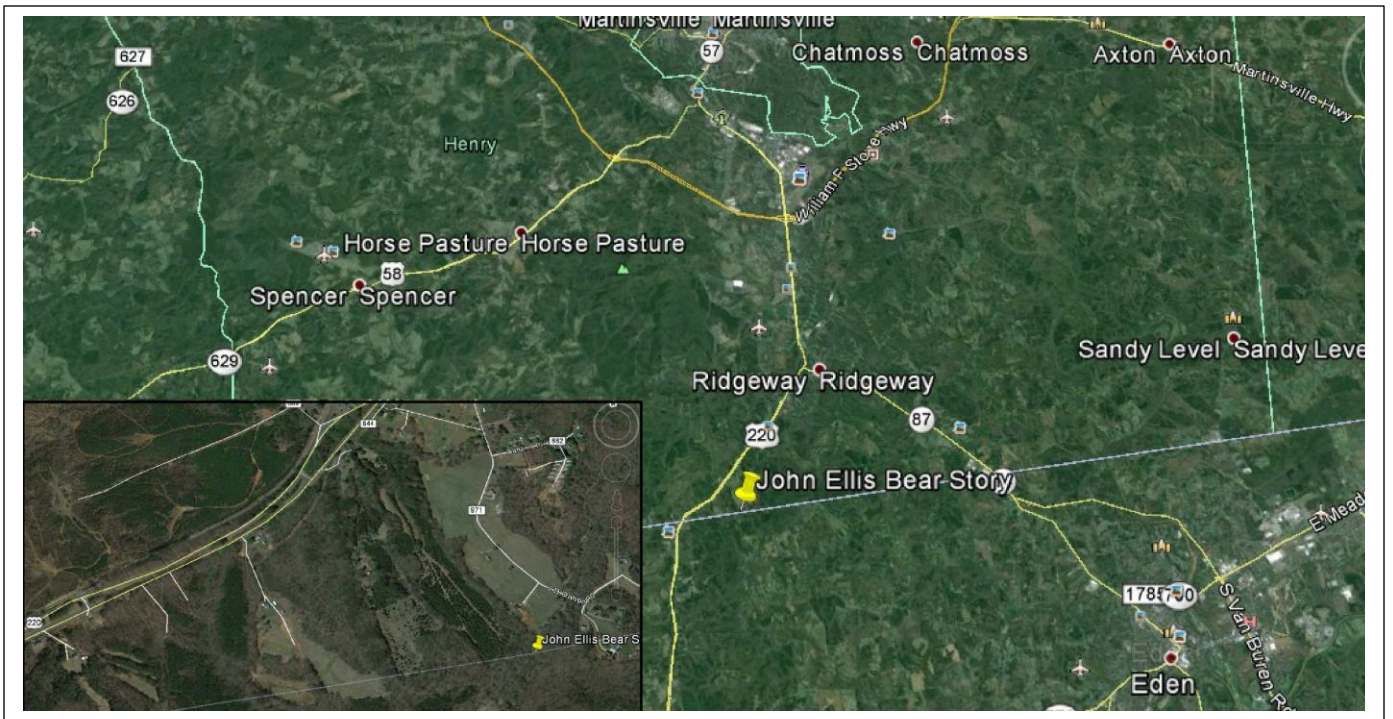
Cur came up seasonably to his Rescue and drove the Bear from her Pursuit of the Man, to go and take care of her innocent Cubb, which she now apprehended might fall into a Second Distress.

Citations

<http://kueber.us/p661.htm#i13206>

- 1.[S4146] , GEDCOM file George Perrin Descendents, March 20, 2008.
- 2.[S3304] Family Tree Maker File on Edward Wade, Charley Wade (file received from Georgia Hornbuckle) , received April 27, 2006, This source contained hardly any source citations.
- 3.[S2334] Charlie Ellis Wright, e-mail to Garril L Kueber November 28, 2001.

Matrimony Creek at the VA – NC Line, the location that William Byrd recorded the Bear Story in his diary. The incident had taken place a few days earlier probably west of here as it seems they were on the return journey.



David Arthur - <https://edavidarthur.tripod.com>