

FROM VIRGINIA: THE PETTIT FAMILY OF SPARTANBURG COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

AN EXAMINATION OF THE EVIDENCE THAT POINTS TOWARDS A
VIRGINIA CONNECTION FOR THE PETTIT FAMILY THAT SETTLED IN
WHAT WOULD BECOME KNOWN AS SPARTANBURG COUNTY, SC

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From Virginia

The Pettit Family of Spartanburg Co, SC

On September 10, 1936, in a farm house in Harrison, AR, William Henry Pettit penned what would be one of his last letters to his cousin Stephen Fletcher Pettit in Georgia. William Henry had just celebrated his 80th birthday and described himself as “the oldest Pettit living of our Pettit family”.¹ One of his purposes for writing was to make a final conveyance of his knowledge of the Pettit family history to his cousin.

Nearly forty-four years earlier William Henry Pettit had been visited by his uncle Elijah Poole Pettit (1817-1892)², a 75-year-old man who grew up in Rutherford County, North Carolina. Elijah had lived close by the plantation of his grandfather Henry Pettit Sr. (1763-1838), a Revolutionary War veteran, before pulling up stakes for Georgia. A lifelong farmer, Elijah no doubt spent many a day in the field talking with his grandpa Henry about his tumultuous days in Patriot militia in the Carolina back country. The years came and went, Henry Sr. passed on, a bloodier war soaked the south, and Elijah was now the old man with stories to tell.

On the long trek to Arkansas to visit William Henry, Elijah brought with him his second wife, Julia, and the old Pettit Bible which he had inherited from Henry Sr.³ Sadly, the winter trip from Georgia to Arkansas in 1892 proved to be too bitter for the tough old pioneer. He and his bride took pneumonia and both of them died. They were buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in Harrison. If he had any time at all to share his knowledge of the early Pettit family, Elijah would have been handing off the stories of his grandfather Henry Sr., to his younger nephew William Henry. The legends, if any, that were passed between the two, we may never completely know.

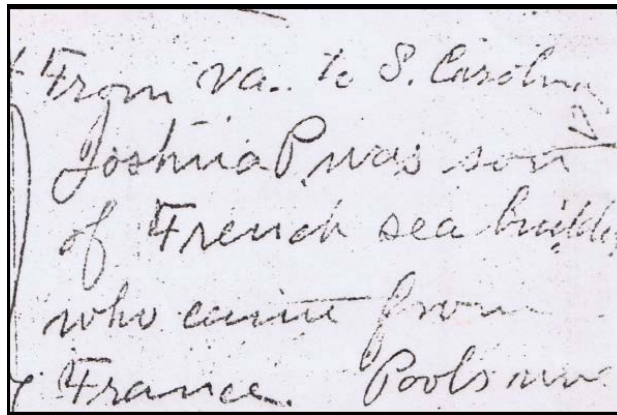
We do know, however, that William Henry took great care to document the early generations and to disseminate that information to some degree. Included in

¹ William Henry Pettit letter to Stephen Fletcher Pettit, Sept. 10, 1936.

² William James letter to Opal Parker, Interview of Carrie May Holden James in May 1967, March 7, 1984.

³ Ibid.

his notes furnished to Stephen Fletcher Pettit in 1936 was a genealogy going back to Joshua and Rachel Pettit who he said were born between 1735-1740. On his family tree, he also made a very peculiar comment in the column to the right of Joshua and Rachel's names seen below:



"From VA to S. Carolina, Joshua P. was son of French sea builder [sic] who came from France."⁴

Through interviews with Pettit cousins around the United State, it has been noted that the tradition of Joshua Pettit's French origin has been passed down through various branches of the family for the many decades that followed this letter. This tradition is especially highlighted among the descendants of Henry Pettit Sr. The above noted tradition of a connection to the colony of Virginia however, seemed to be much more obscure. Though the Pettit's sojourn in the Old Dominion may have been all but forgotten, their movements in areas further north have not. New Jersey has been the focus of much research. New Jersey is where we will begin.

From New Jersey to South Carolina

Conclusive evidence of a New Jersey connection which predated the Pettits' move to 96 District, South Carolina, exists in only two forms known to this researcher but they are nonetheless significant. Henry Pettit Sr., son of Joshua Pettit, would be questioned by the Court in Rutherford County, NC, in 1832, in regards to his request for a pension for his military service in the Revolutionary

⁴ Ibid.

War. His direct answer to their direct question is simultaneously revealing and also puzzling. In response to the question, “Where and in what year were you born?”, Henry gives the following reply,

“From the Records of my father I was born in the state of New Jersey on the Schoolkill in the year 1763.”⁵

Researchers have long pondered the apparent contradiction that is presented by this statement. Though the word “river” is not used, it is often assumed. If the reference to the “Schoolkill” is a reference to the Schuylkill River though, it is problematic. That river flows through Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and empties into the Delaware River but never touches New Jersey and never has. One plausible theory suggests what he may have said, but what may have been incorrectly recorded by the court, was “School Hill” or “Schooley’s Hill”, one of many names for a large hilly area just west of the Scotch Plains in eastern New Jersey near Elizabeth. Indeed, evidence of a Joshua Pettit can be found in the 1750’s in this area.^{6,7} Setting aside the specifics of this issue though for another time, we can still be relatively sure that “New Jersey” was clearly stated and the time of baby Henry’s arrival onto God’s green earth was January 22, 1763.

The second source placing the South Carolina Pettits in New Jersey comes from Henry Sr.’s youngest son John. It would appear that John’s parents must have taken care to communicate with him their family history. He stated to the court in Gilmer County, GA, in 1846 that he “often heard his father in his lifetime say that he served his country...”⁸ He also looked after his mother, Ann Pettit, from widowhood until the time of her death in September of 1845. Fortunately, John lived to the age of 83 and was enumerated on the 1880 census in Pickens Co, GA. The significance of this is that this census is the first US census to list not only the birthplace of the individual but also the birth places of the individual’s parents. The census taker recorded that John’s father, Henry Sr., was born in New

⁵ Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files, Henry Pettit #W5528, National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington D.C., p14

⁶ William Nelson, *New Jersey Archives: Newspaper Abstracts: Vol. 6 1768-1769*, (New Jersey: Digital Antiquaria, 2007), p287.

⁷ Elmer T. Hutchinson, *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Calendar of New Jersey Wills, Volume VI: 1781-1785*, (Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 2008), 351-352.

⁸ NARA, p8.

Jersey.⁹ ¹⁰ This reinforces his father Henry's statement and places Joshua (or at least his pregnant wife) in New Jersey in 1763.

From the birth of his son in 1763 in New Jersey, over a decade would pass before Joshua Pettit would make what is thought to be his first appearance on the record in South Carolina. On December 21, 1773, Joshua Pettit witnessed a 12 square mile land transaction deep in the Cherokee Nation in an area that encompassed present day Greenville.¹¹ At the center of this massive land transfer were Richard Pearis, a bold and controversial Indian trader, and Jacob Hite, son of wealthy Virginia entrepreneur Joist Hite. The transaction would eventually be ruled illegal by the colonial court but not before Pearis, Hite, and many of the witnesses to the deed had taken ownership and began settling the area. Some of the witnesses, like George Salmon, whose house near Greenville is on the National Register of Historic places, would live a peaceable and productive life on their new land. Others, would not fare so well.

Regardless, this deed establishes a Joshua Pettit presence in South Carolina in 1773 and it provides us with the names of some possible Joshua Pettit associates that can be investigated. Though Joshua has proven to be a tough man to track, these other men leave a clearer trail. As was often the case in our country's history, families and friends from one area migrated in groups to the ever-expanding lands that lay before them. This party was no different. Before attempting to migrate to the Cherokee lands in South Carolina the largest part of those represented on the Cherokee deeds resided in a particular area in Virginia. As it turns out Virginia was also the haunt of one Joshua Pettit.

⁹ 1880 U.S. Census, Sharp Top, Pickens Co., GA, population schedule, p. 28, enumeration district (ED) 165, dwelling 240, family 243, John Pettit; NARA microfilm publication T744, NARA, Washington D.C.

¹⁰ This same 1880 census also indicated that Anna Poole Pettit was born in Virginia and not North Carolina as is commonly reported.

¹¹ Oconostotah, Willinawauh, and Ewe Three Head Men of the Cherokee to George Pearis of said Cherokee Nation, Dec. 21, 1773, South Carolina Public Register, Conveyance Books, Series ST158, Book 5E, p502-505, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

The Virginian

Our first sign of a Pettit presence in the part of Virginia that came to be West Virginia comes from an aging man with a sharp memory by the name of George Yocum. George Yocum was born December 3, 1763, and grew up on the Yocum place near Petersburg (West Virginia). Around 1843 he was interviewed by John D. Shane as part of a project of historian Lyman C. Draper. In the interview Yocum describes the area he grew up in and the area settled many years earlier by his grandfather Matthias Yocum as well as Michael Harness and George Stump. This area was Hampshire County, Virginia, at the time and is currently in the area between Petersburg and Moorefield in West Virginia. Specifically, it was on “the south fork of the south branch” of the Potomac River. (This area will be an important focus from here on.) In the interview, George reveals the following information which is recorded in the Draper Papers,

“Michael Harness moved down on to the main South Branch, 4 miles above the fork, or where now Moorefield is. Had a station there. **Jac. Pettit**, the Cunninghams, and the Sees were there. Michael Harness ((son?)) went down from his father’s [house] to Vanmetre’s fort, and was shot on the road as he was riding home. Cunninghams afterwards lived above the Harness’ on the South Branch.”¹²

According to Yocum, “Jac. Pettit” occupied this area along with Yocums, Harness’, Cunninghams and Sees. A careful analysis of the context gives us clues to what time period George Yocum is likely referring to, assuming his intent was to present this information in somewhat of a chronological order. The preceding context includes a discussion on his grandfather being part of a small party of the first white men to settle in the area before mentioning Jac. Pettit.

The comments about Jac. Pettit are then followed with the comment on the slaying of Michael Harness, thereby sandwiching the existence of Jac. Pettit on the South Branch between: 1) the time of Yocum’s grandfather settling in the area and 2) the killing of Harness. It is somewhat difficult to attach a concrete date to point number 1. However, we know from the diary of Moravian ministers Leonhard

¹² George Yocum Interview, Lyman C. Draper and Josephine L Harper, *The Draper Manuscript Collection*, “Kentucky Papers”, (Chicago: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, Photoduplication Dept., 1980) 12CC150.

Schnell and John Brandmueller¹³ who traveled through the area that Yocum, See and Stump, were already settled on the South Branch by November of 1749. Fortunately point number 2, Harness' slaying, is actually fixed to an exact date in history; August 20, 1763. The slaying of Michael Harness was captured in detail in a newspaper story printed by Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* on October 6, 1763.¹⁴ If Yocum's memory is correct, we can conclude that whoever this Pettit was, who was living on the South Branch near Moorefield, that he was possibly there before August 20, 1763 and possibly as early as 1749. So who was this Pettit?

"Jac." is most often an abbreviation for "Jacob" but could be shorthand for a variety of other names. It could be short for "Jacques", the French form of the name as well. It is also true that examining the handwritten abbreviation jotted down by an interviewer who documented the childhood recollection of an 80-year-old George Yocum leaves open the possibility that "Jac. Pettit" could be an error by either the interviewer or interviewee. As useful as this clue is, it is not conclusive. Thankfully we need not rely solely on the Draper Manuscripts. There is more.

The Romney Ordinary

By 1767 the town of Romney, Virginia was an important stop on the trail to Winchester and The Great Wagon Road. The wagon road south out of Romney was nestled between the South Branch of the Potomac and the Blue Ridge Mountains. It led to Moorefield and on down to Petersburg. Whether he was going south to Petersburg or whether he was traveling north we do not know but we do know a man named Joshua Pettit set down for a drink of bumbo¹⁵ at Peter Steenbergen's Ordinary in Romney on March 31, 1767.¹⁶ The records show that 16 other people passed through the inn that day and it is hard to determine who, if any of them, were in the same party. However, two of the men would find

¹³ William J. Hinke and Charles E. Kemper, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Virginia Historical Society: October 1903), p113-131.

¹⁴*Pennsylvania Gazette*, No. 1815, October 6, 1763, p. 2, cols. 1 & 2.

¹⁵Bumbo was a popular colonial drink made of rum, water, sugar and nutmeg. An "ordinary" was similar to a colonial Tavern or Inn and the ledger indicates it was a center for much trade as well as a popular meeting place.

¹⁶ Peter Steenbergen, Ledger for Inn at Romney, Virginia, A&M 2337, West Virginia and Regional History Center, West Virginia University, 1549 University Avenue, P.O. Box 6069, Morgantown, WV 26506-6069

themselves crossing paths with Joshua Pettit on other occasions as well. Those men were Peter Casey and Charles Linch.

The following day, April 1, 1767, the Ordinary also had another visitor with some significance to the Pettit family, a man named William Poole who was apparently a tailor by trade. He purchased buttons and thread from the store there and earned credit on his account with Steenburgen by mending clothes. Though the name is common, there are other factors that would indicate it is quite probable this William Poole is the same William Poole who moved to Lawson's Fork on the Pacolet River in South Carolina sometime before the Revolutionary War. The South Carolina William Poole, also identified as a tailor, purchased land from John Kirkconnell in 1773, -a transaction that was recorded by William Wofford. (Joshua Pettit witnessed a deed between William Wofford and John Nucklos in 1777.¹⁷) Spartanburg County, SC court records also identify the Poole of Lawson's Fork in South Carolina as a tailor¹⁸. Two of William Poole's daughters would marry sons of Joshua Pettit in South Carolina and his land bordered both of them on the Pacolet River. Daughter Anna Poole wed Henry Pettit Sr. and Judith Poole wed Joshua Pettit Jr. In the aforementioned 1880 census of Pickens County Georgia that captured Henry's son John, John listed his father's birthplace as NJ and his mother's, Anna Poole, as Virginia.

In Romney, VA, Joshua Pettit would make two more visits to the Steenbergen inn in 1767. On August 1st he set down for some rum and on December 9th he had some cider and breakfast oats. In the next year, 1768, Steenbergen records that Joshua Pettit stopped by for some bumbo on July 7th and Joseph Neville visited that day as well. Joseph Neville, a prominent man of the area, sheriff, and surveyor paid 19 pounds 2 pence to balance out Joshua Pettit's account with Steenbergen sometime in 1768. The busy day of September 14th that year saw at least 18 customers including Joshua Pettit, Thomas Brannon, Charles Linch, and Thomas Parsons, Sr.

On November 9, 1768, the Ordinary was bustling with activity and the stage was set for an encounter that may have changed the course of Joshua's life forever. Joshua and at least 24 other men were recorded in the ledger that day. Peter Casey

¹⁷ John Nuckols to William Wofford Deed, Charleston Deeds, 1719-1776, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, S372001, Vol B-5, p364-5.

¹⁸ Spartanburg Co, SC Journals, v. 1-2 1800-1811, LDS Film (1023441) #008191538, p84 "William Poole (taylor) [sic]"

was there again as was Thomas Parsons, Sr. Also present was a man from Winchester whose business in Romney that November 9th, 10th and 11th, is a bit of mystery. Richard Pearis' travel from Winchester to his Cherokee friends in South Carolina surely would not have been via the road through Romney. Nevertheless, Pearis, with slaves in tow, showed up at the Steenbergen Ordinary in time for breakfast on November 9th and departed sometime after breakfast on the 11th. His three day stay at the inn, including stables, racked up some serious charges but did not cost Pearis a dime. The entire tab was picked up by Simon Hedges. It is very likely Richard Pearis and Joshua Pettit met at the Steenbergen Ordinary on that November day in 1768. Joshua's only purchase was his typical bumbo while Pearis ate breakfast and dinner with a round of bumbo in between. Whether this was their first meeting or a planned rendezvous, cannot be deduced with the records available. One thing is certain though. It was not the last time they would meet.

Deep Spring Run

December 6th and 7th of 1768 are the last recorded visits of Joshua Pettit at the Steenbergen Ordinary in Romney until 1770. He may have already departed by December 8th which was the day Abraham Hite arrived. Though absent from the ledger for the entire year afterwards, Joshua Pettit was still an active man in 1769 in Virginia.

Joshua received a colonial warrant for land from the Virginia Proprietor's Office on the headwaters of the Deep Spring Run of the South Mill Creek in Hampshire County, VA, on October 19, 1769. The precise area would be again near modern day Petersburg, WV, and just south and east. Like the property described by Yocum, this too was on the South Branch of the Potomac and may have bordered the Fairfax Manor line.

At the time of this writing, the actual warrant appears to be missing from the historical record as well as the assignment sheet which contains the signatures.¹⁹

¹⁹ The warrant number is blank on the Eyman survey and is also missing from the original survey notebook of Joseph Neville. In Neville's survey notebook there are several other surveys missing the warrant numbers and it appears his book was used as the source for what was recorded with the state office. The reason Neville did not record them is not known but they do appear to be based on legitimate warrants.

Consequently, no reference to Joshua Pettit appears when searching Northern Neck land records in Virginia. The proof of this warrant instead comes to us first from a land survey recorded on April 30, 1791, for Christian Eyman.²⁰ The survey gives us a chain of title but the only link in the chain besides Eyman is Joshua Pettit, a man who by some accounts had moved to South Carolina and was presumed deceased by September 15, 1786.²¹

An excerpt from the Eyman Survey is seen below:

April 30 1790 Surveyed Christian Eyman
 Assignee of Joshua Pettit a tract of Land lying ^{within} that part of
 Hardy County belonging to the Northern Neck and on the head
 of Deep Spring Run a drain of South Mill Creek & agreeable
 to a warrant from the Proprietors Office bearing date Oct^r
 19th 1769 No. _____ and bounded as followeth. (Viz.)

"April 30 1790 Surveyed Christian Eyman assignee of Joshua Pettit a tract of land lying within that part of Hardy County belonging to the Northern Neck and on the head of Deep Spring Run a drain of South Mill Creek & agreeable to a warrant from the proprietors office bearing date Oct 19th 1769 No. _____ and bounded as followeth. (Viz.)"

The blank on the above survey where the warrant number *should* be is indicative of the elusiveness of South Carolina Joshua Pettit. Other than the missing warrant, there is no record known to this researcher of when Joshua Pettit came to possess this property. There is also no known record of exactly how or

²⁰ Surveys (land) Hardy Co. (W. Va.), 1786-1874, Survey for Christian Eyman Nov 11, 1791, (The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia) Northern Neck Surveys No. 2, 1788-1794, Reel 313, p203.

²¹ "Joshua Pettit", A.S. Salley, *Accounts Audited of Claims Growing out of the Revolution in South Carolina*, (Columbia, SC: Historical Commission of South Carolina by the State company, 1935-) AA 5901, Roll 117, p427-428.

when he or his heirs relinquished the property, though clues do exist which we'll cover shortly. In other areas of the colony if Joshua Pettit neglected to settle and subdue the land or moved away before improving it, he would have lost any legal claim he had. However, warrant holders in this area of Virginia, the Northern Neck outside of Fairfax Manor, were not required to settle on the land. They purchased the warrant outright and retained ownership regardless of a lack of improvements. Either way, this may be a moot point. It appears this land may have been improved and may have been somewhat valuable by the time Eyman arrived to purchase it.

A chancery suit in 1806 between Christian Eyman and Valentine Cooper sheds some dim light on the subject. The suit is complex and dramatic but essentially boils down to a dispute over title. Valentine Cooper sold the property which was actually owned by Joshua Pettit to Christian Eyman when he had no legal right to do so. Eyman was then forced to buy the same property from Pettit. Eyman's motive for purchasing this property is revealed in the suit. According to Eyman the land contained a "valuable saw mill" which Cooper claims was old and in disrepair by 1790.²²

The acquisition of this land by Eyman does not necessarily mean it was purchased directly from Joshua Pettit even though his name is listed as the warrant holder. It may have been sold to Eyman by one of Pettit's heirs. It is also interesting that the land was warranted in 1769 but no further steps were taken by Joshua Pettit to pursue a deed (survey, plat, or otherwise). If the assignment papers are ever unearthed, the mystery of how this land changed hands and exactly who was involved would likely be revealed. As it sets now, the available land documents and chancery cases provide more questions than they do answers.

Was Joshua Pettit operating a sawmill on Deep Spring Run before he traveled to South Carolina? Could he have been a sawyer? Did he know how to construct and operate mills? At the outset of the Revolutionary War, Joshua Pettit had some skillset which demanded his immediate aid with the construction of Wofford's Fort. His son Henry's service began as a volunteer in place of his father who was called on to build the fort.²³ Wofford's Fort was sturdy enough to withstand Cherokee and Tory attacks and provided protection for many of the

²² Augusta County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1746-1928. Christian Eyman vs. Valentine Cooper, 1807-067. Local Government Records Collection, Augusta Court Records, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

²³ NARA, p14.

families during this dangerous time. Later, in 1826, Joshua Pettit's son, Joshua Jr. would leave instructions in his will for the upkeep and continued service of his own fully operation mill on a branch of the Pacolet river complete with mill pond.²⁴ (Will proved in 1828.) Though the record does not state what type of mill this was, we do know that it was being managed successfully enough that the income from it was to be divided among his heirs. Could Joshua Jr.'s mill have been constructed and come into operation under his father's guidance?

One thing confirmed by these Virginia documents is that a Joshua Pettit had an interest in the South Branch area near Petersburg that began as early as October of 1769. If this was the Joshua Pettit of Spartanburg County, SC, this must have been a busy year for him. That winter he and his wife Rachel lost their 1-year-old daughter Mary on February 8, 1769.²⁵ A few months later, a son, Benjamin Pettit, was born on July 20, 1769.²⁶ On October 19, 1769, the above mentioned warrant was issued. Yet, another event in the Hampshire County area in June of that year captured Joshua Pettit's name on paper once again.

Dr. Henry Hindsman's Estate

On June 19, 1769, Elizabeth Hindsman, the widow of Dr. Henry Hindsman, turned in the account of goods sold from his estate to the Hampshire County Court.²⁷ The good doctor had passed away earlier in 1765. A list containing the items sold, as well as the purchasers of the items yields two mentions of Joshua "Pettett". Two items in the estate caught his eye. One was a tea kettle. The other was a Bible.

The list of other purchasers includes several well-known men from Virginia: Charles Linch, Joseph Neville, Thomas Parsons, Able Randal, Peter Casey, Simon Troy, Adam Hyder, Jacob Stalnecker, Robert Maxwell, George Hart, and Thomas Brannon. Of this group, Charles Linch, Joseph Neville, Peter Casey, Thomas

²⁴ Pettit, Joshua, Spartanburg District, SC., South Carolina Will Transcripts, Microcopy No. 9, Series S108093, Reel 0024, Frame 00287, (Will Book B, Page 136, February 15, 1828), S.C. Department of Archives and History.

²⁵ Records submitted by John Pettit to Gilmer Co., Ga., which include a Pettit family Bible and "leaf of a small book", #W5528, NARA.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "Re: Hindman, Henry Decd, Hampshire County 1765", June 13, 1769, Hampshire County, Va., Court Records, 1736-1785, Box 1, Envelope 6, LDS Film 007616761, p81.

Parsons, and Thomas Brannon, are all found at the Steenbergen Ordinary at the same time as Joshua Pettit. No family association with Joshua Pettit can be directly drawn from this list of people, but many of the names correspond to property owners which were near the Pettit land on the South Branch in Virginia. Lynch, Parsons, Hyder, and Maxwell all appear in the list of lot owners on Sara Stevens Pattons' "Men and Manors in the South Branch Valley."²⁸

Thomas Parsons (from the Hindsman estate list) in his own will in 1771 bequeaths "unto Elizabeth Hinsman Late widow of Doctor Hinsman the sum of One Hundred Pounds".²⁹ It is widely thought that Elizabeth Hindsman was Thomas' daughter.

Also of note, the records of Henry Hindsman's estate in Hampshire County Envelope 6 are followed two pages later by the estate papers of Michael Harness Jr. (also in Envelope 6). This is the same Michael Harness who was killed by Indians on August 20, 1763, and mentioned by George Yocum in the Draper Manuscripts. Here Thomas Parsons appears again, this time as one of the appraisers listed of the Michael Harness (shot by Indians) estate. The other appraiser was George See. Recall that Harness, See, Parsons, and Pettit, are all associates of the Yocum family living on the South Branch and mentioned by George Yocum in the Draper Manuscripts. Here we see independent sources that have them loosely connected again.

Thomas Parsons owned a substantial amount of land in the immediate area surrounding the Pettit land. His holdings sprawled out into both present day Grant and Hardy Counties of West Virginia.³⁰ Thus historical documents exist which add weight to the account of George Yocum and to the supposed existence of a Pettit amongst the Parsons, Harness, Cunninghams, Sees, and Yocums on the South Branch. All this suggests a possible coexistence between these interconnected families and some mysterious Pettit. Parsons, Casey, Linch and Pettit were possibly traveling companions based upon the frequency their names are found together in the Steenbergen ledger.

By the time March of 1770 rolled around, a year and four months had passed since Joshua Pettit and Pearis, the famous Indian trader, met in Romney. Pearis

²⁸ Pattons, Sarah Stevens, "Men and Manors in the South Branch Valley", Hardy County West Virginia Genealogy Page WVGenweb, <https://www.wvgenweb.org/hardy/sbmanor.htm> (accessed Nov 11, 2018).

²⁹ Virginia Parsons MacCabe, *Parsons' Family History and Record*, (Decatur, IL: Charles W. Nickey, 1913), p19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p18.

never stopped in again but one final entry regarding Joshua in the Steenbergen ledger records his overnight stay from March 13th to March 14th in 1770. Abraham Hite, Peter Casey, and Charles Linch were there again as well. For them it was a typical visit but for Joshua Pettit, Steenbergen records a charge for something besides the typical bumbo or breakfast seen on the accounts of other customers. A somewhat unique entry shows that Joshua paid 1.3 pounds to have a pistol mended which had been left by another person.³¹ The record does not say whether Pettit took the pistol with him or for what reason he paid to have it repaired. If he was traveling in and out of Indian country and in some sort of business with a character like Richard Pearis, Joshua must have known he would be wise to keep pistol on his side at all times.

After March 14, 1770, Joshua Pettit essentially vanishes from the records of Virginia. If the South Branch Virginian Joshua Pettit of Deep Spring Run was indeed the same man from the South Carolina 1773 Cherokee land deal, then his association with another tightly knit group from Winchester, Virginia, about 75 miles to the north and east up The Great Wagon Road, may have originated with his dealings with Richard Pearis. As covered, we have one record which places them together in Virginia in 1768, we'll now move south to South Carolina where the next document was penned placing Pearis and Pettit at the same table once again.

The Unusual Suspects

Nearly all of the people involved in Richard Pearis' settlement of Cherokee lands in South Carolina can trace their roots to the lands around Winchester, VA. Just a few of these people will be described here. The list of names under investigation is actually derived from several separate transactions and petitions all stemming from essentially the same business venture.

Richard Pearis is studied in a section of the book *Greenville: The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont*, which gives the following account,

³¹ The original record is illegible but appears to say "to mending a cock of ** pistol Wh*** [Keith?/Ruth?] left"

"Born in Ireland in 1725, he was the son of George and Sarah Pearis who immigrated to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia with three sons and a daughter. George Pearis was a devout Presbyterian and a man of considerable property. By 1750 Richard owned 1,200 acres of land near Winchester. He and his wife Rhoda had three children—Richard, Elizabeth and Sarah. Three years later Pearis was trading with the Cherokee Nation and served as an Indian agent for Governor Robert Dinwiddie... As early as 1754 Pearis was traveling in South Carolina among the Cherokee of the Lower Towns. Like other traders, Pearis fathered a child by a Cherokee woman; Pearis named this child George."³²

In Virginia in 1763 Richard Pearis acquired 536 acres which adjoined a 1,650-acre tract that was originally granted to George Robinson and a John Peteat in 1735.³³ This land was just north and west of Martinsburg, WV, on the Tuscarora Creek and included part of the North Indian Road. (There is no known connection between these Peteats and Joshua Pettit.)

Though very well established in Virginia, Pearis sought greener pastures in South Carolina. Pearis was the schemer behind the Cherokee land deal and it would seem Jacob Hite's role was that of a financial backer. The first large scale purchase of Cherokee land by Virginians in South Carolina was on July 29, 1769. This was a grant from the Headmen of the Cherokee to Richard and George Pearis. A third of this land was given to Jacob Hite in exchange for his financing. We know of this deal because of a 1784 petition by George Hite (the son of Jacob Hite) to the South Carolina General Assembly in which George describes the transaction.³⁴ This record also mentions that Colonel John Neville had also secured ownership from Richard Pearis of a tract containing 11,000 acres of Cherokee land before later selling it off. Colonel John Neville was a sheriff of Frederick County, VA. This John Neville was either the son or brother of Joseph

³² Archie Vernon Huff, Jr., *Greenville: The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), p13.

³³ Cecil O'Dell, *Pioneers of Old Frederick County, Virginia*, (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Publishing Company, First Addition 1995), p21.

³⁴ Pettition of George Hite, 1784, South Carolina General Assembly Petitions, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, S165015, 1784, No. 2, frame 691-698.

Neville, one of the men listed with Joshua Pettit on the Hindsman estate and the man who paid Joshua's tab in Steenbergen Ordinary.

The Richard Pearis and Jacob Hite families were linked in business and were also linked in a closer way. One of Pearis' two daughters was engaged to John Obanion Hite who was the son of Jacob and Frances Hite.³⁵ Frances *Hite* was originally Frances *Madison*, a sister to James Madison, the father of the President of that name.³⁶ Frances first married Tavenor Beale, was widowed and then married Jacob Hite.³⁷ These marriages served to strengthen the Pearis, Hite, and Beale families who were all already wealthy residents of Frederick Co., VA. These surnames are all well represented on the South Carolina land transactions with the Cherokee.

When half-Cherokee George Pearis granted the property obtained from the Cherokee to his father Richard after becoming a naturalized citizen, the subsequent document produced in April 27, 1774, yielded witnesses from the Prince family and the Hampton family. These families had already settled on this Carolina land along with Pearis, Hite, and others.

Sometime in the next year, 1775, a 500-acre tract of land within the South Carolina Cherokee grant would be sold to John Armstrong by none other than Joshua Pettit.³⁸ It is not known how Joshua came to acquire this property though it could have been in exchange for some service rendered to Pearis, Hite, or another property owner.

By 1776 war clouds loomed heavy over the backcountry. On June 30th, the storm would be unleashed on the quiet settlement by Cherokee warriors which struck like a crack of lightening in the dead of night. The Hite family had been living in their new Carolina house for about six months when Jacob Hite, his wife, and a number of his children were savagely killed. Two of his daughters and his slaves were carted off as captives. Killed in another surprise attack at the Hampton house were Anthony Hampton, his wife, and an infant grandson. Others who were slain in the attacks on either June 30th or July 1st were the Harris and Prince

³⁵ Philip Alexander Bruce, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Volume 4, "Richard Pearis" submitted by A. G. Grinnan, (Richmond, Va.: William Ellis Jones, 1897), p464.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p463.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Petition of Ann Armstrong, 1784, South Carolina General Assembly Committee Reports, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, S165005, 1784, No. 6.

families. According to the petition of Ann Armstrong, her husband John Armstrong was also among those slain. Whether through intuition or by fortune Joshua Pettit may have traded fates with John Armstrong when he sold his rights to the land and headed further east, moving his family away from the Cherokee border.

The same month of the massacre, July of '76, Joshua had already settled on Lawson's Fork of the Pacolet River in what would later become Spartanburg County, SC.³⁹ No doubt fear gripped the neighboring community when news of the murders came galloping in. These frontiersmen did not delay action. Henry Sr. reported that his father was called upon to help build Wofford's Fort that July under the command of William Wofford. In defense of his family and his home, Henry Pettit volunteered for militia duty at 13 years old in the place of his father who was busy constructing the fort.

A year later, on July 7, 1777, Joshua Pettit witnessed a deed of 300 acres from John Nuckols of "Thickety" to William Wofford "of Lawson's Fork".⁴⁰ The land was on the north side of the Pacolet river and "bordered on all sides by vacant land."⁴¹ Joshua found time in between farming and fighting to carry the deed to the Justice of the Peace where it was recorded on October 12, 1779. Joshua Pettit's signature is clearly seen in this document.

He and his teenage son Henry would serve throughout the Revolutionary War in Roebuck's Battalion of the Spartan Regiment. Revolutionary War records indicate that he was presumed dead prior to September 15, 1786 but hints of his existence beyond this date can be found in scattered records.⁴² Nevertheless, of Joshua Pettit's ultimate fate, nothing is really known.

³⁹ NARA, p8.

⁴⁰ John Nuckols to William Wofford Deed, Charleston Deeds, 1719-1776, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, S372001, Vol B-5, p364-5.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Plat for John Gray "originally surveyed for John Hembree and Joshua Pettit on November 11, 1788", South Carolina State Plats, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Vol 27, p47.

Conclusion

In the 1700's Joshua Pettit took care to record the births and deaths of some of his children on the pages of a small book. His son Henry transcribed these records into his family Bible. Elijah Poole Pettit carried this Bible with him to Arkansas. From Arkansas, William Henry Pettit shared his notes on the family in a letter to his cousin in 1936. From this letter we have a clue of the Pettits' journey "from Virginia to South Carolina" but what do we really know?

The evidence shows that a party of Virginians from the western area of the colony were involved in a series of land deals with the Cherokee in South Carolina. Due to timing, politics, and other rascality, many things went wrong. Most lost their investment and some lost their lives. These families had interwoven histories and marriages. A Joshua Pettit was a member of this party in some form or fashion but whether his relation was that of family or business has yet to be determined.

The facts we know can be summarized in just a few words. A Jac. Pettit is described as being an early settler on the South Branch of Virginia probably before 1763. A Joshua Pettit purchased a warrant for land on the South Branch in Virginia in 1769. Joshua Pettit purchased items from the estate of Henry Hindsman in Hampshire County, VA, that year as well. Several of the men who purchased property in this estate were also at Steenbergen's Ordinary on the same day as Joshua. A Joshua Pettit traveled the South Branch area and stopped in at the Steenbergen Ordinary at various times in 1767, 1768 and 1770. This Joshua Pettit was there in 1768 at the same time as Richard Pearis. Also at Romney was William Poole, a tailor, who is quite likely the same William Poole, a tailor, whose daughter Anna Poole married Joshua's son Henry Sr. in South Carolina. (William's daughter was said to have been born in Virginia and he moved from Virginia to Lawson's Fork of the Pacolet River just before the Revolution.) A Joshua Pettit witnessed the Richard Pearis/Cherokee land deal in South Carolina in December of 1773. He sold 500 acres of this land to John Armstrong in 1775. In 1776, Joshua Pettit was living on the Pacolet River in 96 District of SC when he was called on to build Wofford's Fort. He then served in the Revolution in the Spartan Regiment and was presumed dead in September of 1786. Yet he had property surveyed with John Hembree in 1788 on the Pacolet River in South Carolina. In 1790 Joshua Pettit or possibly an heir, sold his Virginia land on the South Branch to Christian Eyman.

Clearly the story we have must contain some errors or we are dealing with two distinct individuals. Both possibilities will need to be considered until more evidence is unearthed. As tempting as it may be, drawing a conclusion would be premature at this point.

Fortunately, at the time of this writing, there remain ample records that are untouched in the search for Joshua Pettit of the South Branch in Virginia. Of extreme value would be the original Hampshire County, VA, warrant paper from 1769 with the assignment sheet which would yield the signatures of Joshua Pettit and any witnesses. His signature is unique and easily identifiable in other available records and a positive match would go a long way to establish a connection. Numerous other records do exist but can be accessed only on location in Virginia/West Virginia courthouses.

Taking all this into consideration, the only conclusion this researcher is willing to draw is the familiar conclusion that taunts all who dare to devote their time to studying this Pettit family: There is simply a need for more research.

- October 18, 2018

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