

Family Portraits: George Draper, Eleanor Hardin and Their Offspring

When I began tracing my Harvey and Ingles ancestors, I soon discovered it was possible to trace some branches of my family tree as far back as the thirteenth century. I am really not sure what to do with all that information, so I admit to feeling somewhat relieved that at least one important branch (that of George Draper and Eleanor Hardin) is much shorter, and thus more manageable. All that we know about George and Eleanor (prior to their arrival in Virginia, around 1742) can be summed up in one brief statement: that they were both born in Ireland, married there, and decided to come to the New World (Pennsylvania) shortly before becoming parents (of John and Mary). No one seems to know anything about the Hardin and Draper families prior to 1700.

Family traditions have passed down tantalizingly few details about this couple, leaving more unanswered questions than questions answered. They probably made the journey across the ocean with other relatives or neighbors, and established a home among other immigrant families. No one can say for certain if either family was wealthy or prominent back in Ulster, but by the time of George's death (or disappearance) in 1748, he had acquired a substantial amount of personal property including plows, harnesses, cattle and horses. That he was able to lay claim to a sizable and highly desirable piece of land on the Virginia frontier suggests that he had done pretty well for himself since arriving in the colonies, perhaps twenty years before.

In an era when families were often large, with some women bearing twelve or more children, it seems surprising that the Drapers had only two children. It is possible they had other children who died young, or married and left home. I wonder if George often left home for extended trips (hunting, exploring, selling merchandise?), causing Eleanor to develop the sort of pioneering and survival skills for which her daughter Mary later became famous.

I have found one Draper record (a possible match) showing a marriage ceremony in Ireland shortly before 1730, when George and Eleanor would have both been about 28 years old. However, I also found a record of a woman named Martha Draper (possible daughter), born in 1718, in Orange County, Virginia. I can find no joint mention of George and Eleanor Draper on passenger lists (on boats arriving at Philadelphia), but there are records showing entries for the arrival of a George Draper at various dates, and in various ports.

It is frustrating to be left in the dark about the origins of this couple, but there are several possible explanations for this lack of information. For one thing, much of the genealogical information from Ireland has not yet been made available to researchers online. Based on my research so far, I would say that these families probably were middle class rather than gentry. Younger sons had little to inherit in those days, and it was not unusual for them to leave home and never be heard from again. Mail service was terrible, at best, and families often lost contact after their relatives "disappeared" into the New World.

We can make an educated guess about their reasons for leaving Ireland, assuming they would have had the same motivation as so many others: they were Protestant (Presbyterian – non Anglican) and wanted to practice their religion more freely; they were hoping to find land and opportunity; and they were unhappy about political and economic troubles. This couple moved frequently and lived dangerously, risking their lives by moving to the unsettled frontier, and both died as a consequence. George disappeared on a hunting trip in 1748 and was presumed dead, but questions have always lingered about what happened. Eleanor died during the Shawnee attack at Drapers Meadows in 1755, at the age of 53.

By the 1730's, Philadelphia was becoming the largest city in America. Immigrants by the thousands arrived each year, with the majority coming from Ireland (Ulster) and many others coming from German speaking countries in Continental Europe. Further research may reveal clues about the young Draper family, from online sources such as the Pennsylvania Gazette (fully digitized and indexed from about 1730-1800), or from digital collections in some of the many museums, libraries, and historical societies in Pennsylvania or Ireland.

Two of the best sources for information about George Draper and Eleanor Hardin are accounts written by members of the family (a grandson and a great, great-grandson.) *Escape from Indian Captivity* was written by John Ingles in the 1830s and *Trans Alleghany Pioneers* by John Hale in the 1880s. John Ingles (1766-1836) was the youngest son of William and Mary Draper Ingles, and his account, prompted by requests from grandchildren and other members of the family, relates the stories told by his father (up until his death in 1782, at the age of 53) and by his mother (who lived to be 83). John could have listened in on numerous occasions as Mary spoke of her long walk through the wilderness from Kentucky back to Virginia, thrilling her audience of eager grandchildren, grand-nieces and -nephews.

By the 1880's, John P. Hale, a great-grandson of William and Mary Ingles, was a prominent civic leader in Charleston, West Virginia. He set out to write a history of the exploits of his ancestors and other pioneers, and his book typifies the romantic style of writing popular in that day. He did thorough research for this book, however, citing quite a few first-hand accounts (including those of men who fought in the Battle of Point Pleasant) and numerous nineteenth century historians (including Collins, Doddridge, and Peyton). His style of writing history is very imprecise by modern standards (no footnotes, no bibliography) and he makes no attempt to identify the sources for some of the family stories. We may never know for certain why Hale's book contains vivid descriptions of certain events (such as the birth of Mary's baby) that John Ingles omitted altogether.

Now, more than a century later, we can compare Hale's narrative with that of many others. Another interesting and valuable source of information about the Draper Meadows attack comes from descendants of Adam Harmon and other German families who lived through the same violent episodes of frontier history. The historical novels written by James Alexander Thom in the late twentieth century (particularly *Follow the River*) have added wonderful detail and offer helpful insights to allow us to better understand the conflicts between these early settlers, the Native American tribes, and the European nations (France and Great Britain) fighting for control of the continent.

Mary Draper Ingles' dramatic story has caught the imagination and the attention of historians for many generations, leaving the stories of other participants largely overshadowed. I am curious to know more about Mary's parents. I wonder when they arrived at the New River settlement, and how George Draper managed to stake a claim to a prize parcel of land, to be known for generations as Drapers Meadows. The Rev. Ulysses S. Heavener, a descendant of some of the early German settlers, affirmed that George Draper was one of the first Scots/Irish settlers to arrive in the New River settlement:

The Burkes, Leonards, Ingles, [and] Drapers who lived in the Draper's Meadows Settlement were Scotch and Irish. It may be of interest to state that simultaneously with our German Immigration, there was carried on extensive Irish Immigration. James Patton was a great promoter and is said to have crossed the Atlantic Ocean twenty-five times, bringing the Irish

Immigrants. Many of them were not able to pay their passage, even, but were brought by Patton and settled on his patented lands as “redemptionists.” These were required to make stipulated payments, with interest, until the entire amount was discharged.

In 1989, Paul Thomas Smith, a graduate history student at Virginia Tech, investigated the complicated and confusing circumstances surrounding the acquisition of land on the Virginia frontier in his thesis entitled “The Virginia Land Bills of 1779.” He examines the factors that made it difficult for the early settlers to secure claims to land, including distance from Williamsburg, inaccurate surveying techniques, competing claims between land companies, threat of Indian attack, the King’s Proclamation of 1763, and turmoil associated with the Revolutionary War. Smith writes:

When the first white settlers arrived in southwestern Virginia during the early 1740s, they simply squatted on the land. These settlers could have implemented the treasury right to purchase their claims legally, but their isolation on the frontier made this impractical. Because the frontier was so far removed from the rest of Virginia society, no institutions existed that allowed squatters to gain title to their claims. Surveyors had not laid off tracts of land allowing the settler to purchase a pre-surveyed chunk of real estate. These pioneers simply marched into the wilderness and chose the land that they desired. Gaining title to it was not an immediate concern.

When the opportunity of gaining title to their land became available, however, these squatters took advantage of it. Prior to 1745, men like Adam Harman, Jacob Harman, and George Draper arrived in southwestern Virginia and simply squatted on their claims. This situation changed in 1745. In that year the Wood’s River Company received a grant encompassing the land claimed by the squatters. The Loyal Land Company received a similar grant four years later. The companies’ grants enabled the squatters to purchase their claims from the companies. These land agents operating in the region reduced squatting in southwest Virginia to a minimum. Most squatters happily made arrangements to purchase their claims from one of the land companies. These early land purchases, nonetheless, did not mark the end of squatting on the Virginia frontier. The real era of squatting on the frontier came after British authorities closed the west to settlement.

Although George Draper was recruited on or about 1745 by James Patton to move to the New River, he did not immediately move his wife and two children onto the parcel that came to be known as Drapers Meadows. Several documents indicate that by 1748 the Drapers were living along the North River (North Fork of the Roanoke), near where the Ingles were operating a mill, several miles from the other parcel that came to be known as Drapers Meadows. I wonder how George became so conspicuous in his activities there, perhaps by his hunting, farming, or other activity, so that other settlers (as well as the Indians) came to associate the place with his name.

Place names offer helpful clues in the effort to sort out which settlers came first to the New River. One early name for the river we now call the “New” was Woods River, named after Colonel Abraham Wood who organized an exploring party of the wilderness to the west of Petersburg, in 1671. Patricia Givens Johnston (*Kentland at Whitethorne*, 1995) believed that several of those explorers were traders, and their names became associated with their trading posts.

Names of geographical features are always indicators of the people who discovered or explored them. In 1745 when the first white land surveying party led by John Buchanan came

to Kentland acres, he records finding the creek entering New River already named, recording it either as Jones Creek or Toms Creek. A ferry later established there was called Jones Ferry. (p.7)

Johnston also makes a connection between the Robinson family (Betty Robinson married John Draper) and about the name Tom's Creek (Johnston, p. 8)

When the first land speculators James Patton and John Buchanan began selling land there, no Jones family was a buyer, so the Jones name must predate 1745. Apparently the Jones family, in-laws and grandsons of Abraham Wood, had made contact with the Indians here at present Kentland.

It is reasonable to assume that once the Batts and Jones families knew about Woods River in the 1670s many hunting parties followed their trail to the river and came to the Kentland locale. Captain George Robinson, a partner and surveyor of Patton's Roanoke and Woods Rivers land companies preceded John Buchanan as first surveyor that Patton sent into the New River Valley. It is said that he ran survey lines for Patton at the New River Horseshoe in 1739 and later at the Robinson Tract in Present Pulaski County. Robinson was from New Castle, Delaware, a member and partner of Patton's Roanoke River settlement on the present Botetourt-Roanoke County line, where his home still stands.

According to Johnston, although traces of these place names used by the first settlers still can be found on old maps and letters, most of the names were changed as others obtained control. In her book, *Kentland at Whitethorne*, she traces the early ownership of land that now belongs to Virginia Tech, from Adam Harman to John Buchanan, and in so doing describes what happened to many of the early "squatters."

Because the settlers had deserted the land in the French War fleeing in '55 and again in '63 and because Adam Harman's taxes were in arrears he lost his land. John Buchanan, Patton's executor, claimed the land was escheated and came back into Patton's estate and laid claim to land the mouth of Tom's Creek. Buchanan in his will says he "bought" Adam Harman's land. For about eight years he possessed "the place where Adam Harman formerly lived." Land claimed by the Prices and Harlasses on the Big Horseshoe and at Tom's Creek fell into his grasp. All the land around Toms Creek mouth and down the river became known as Buchanan's Bottoms. James Patton's nephew William Preston got possession of the Big Horseshoe and his son, General John Preston later built a plantation there. Cloyds, Flannagans, Barnetts, and Kents would later own the Horseshoe.

"The old Indian Road" had terminated at Adam Harmon's Ford now called Buchanan's Bottom. Before the time of the first white settlement this trail was the main path or road west heavily used by migrants. Buchanan felt he would benefit greatly if the new improved wagon road continued to cross at his ford. However, William Ingles had other ideas. After returning from Indian captivity his wife Mary Draper Ingles refused to live at Draper's Meadows, so they had settled further up the New at present West Radford. William proposed to the House of Burgesses that the "Great Road" should cross the river at his property. He and John Buchanan had a legal battle over this and Buchanan lost. The new road would cross at Ingles' place where he established Ingles Ferry and Tavern and now a park in Radford.

To summarize, George Draper was a squatter working closely with Col. Patton. He died (1748) before he could get title to his land, and, after the devastating attack in 1755, his children decided to live

elsewhere. The Indian Wars disrupted everyone's claims to land & prevented surveys, but the land known as Drapers Meadows continued to bear that name up until the 1770s, when William Preston bought it, developing a large plantation there that came to be known as Smithfield.

Draper may have been killed by Indians who were encouraged to run off hunters and settlers by the French. Adam Harman and other neighbors suffered from Indian attacks as early as 1749. Adam's wife may have been killed by Indians. I think that the Shawnee may have made a more systematic effort to discourage the early New River settlements than has been previously suggested, and this is an interesting topic for further research and discussion.

I plan to continue writing this paper, however, to trace the descendants of George Draper and Eleanor Hardin, including stories about other settlers whose children and grandchildren married into the Draper family, including William Ingles, Elizabeth Robinson, David Love, Abram Trigg, Bird Smith, Eleanor Grills, John Grills, Margaret Crockett, and many others. (To be continued) Ellen Apperson Brown July 20, 2009

John Draper

Although George and Eleanor died young, their two children somehow managed to endure all the violence and turmoil on the frontier and live well into the nineteenth century. John Draper, born in 1730, and Mary his younger sister, born in 1732, were born in Pennsylvania and moved southward with their parents, hop-scotching from one settlement to another. By the early 1740s, the Drapers had journeyed into Augusta County, and was living in Pattonsburg. Historians offer different theories about where the family lived and for how long, but it seems likely that by 1747, when George Draper disappeared, they were living on the North Fork of the Roanoke, near the mill operated by Thomas Ingles and his son William. The Ingles and Draper families did not move into the Barrens, on Strouble's Creek, a.k.a. Drapers Meadows, until about 1753.

Court documents show that Mrs. Draper (Eleanor Hardin Draper) had to settle the estate and turned to trusted friends to be executors, based on the "non-age" of her son John. As soon as he turned twenty-one, however, he purchased land, married (Elizabeth Robinson), built a cabin, and soon celebrated the birth of their first child, a son. Fate handed him one of the most wrenching blows a man could endure, however, when one hazy summer morning, as he and his brother-in-law, William Ingles, were out harvesting crops, a Shawnee war party attacked, killing his infant son and carrying off his wife, Bettie, into captivity, along with Mary Ingles and her two sons, Thomas and George.

As far as we know, John Draper never wrote down his version of the story, and we have only scattered

According to family accounts, the two brothers-in-law did everything humanly possible to chase after their captured wives, but to no avail. They began to think about how they might bargain with the Indians, to pay a ransom to have their wives (and in William's case, two sons) released from captivity. This idea prompted them to harvest their crops and take their valuables down to the Cherokee Nation, and see if they could persuade the Cherokee to negotiate with their enemies, the Shawnee. The two men were just returning from this failed effort, in late November of 1755, just four months after the attack at Drapers Meadows, when they heard the astounding news... that Mary Ingles (John's sister) had managed to escape from her captors and walk back home! John and William must have had quite a tearful reunion with Mary.

While John undoubtedly rejoiced at his sister's safe return, he must have shuddered to hear Mary tell of her ordeal. His wife was still out there - frightened, vulnerable and unhappy. He could not stop thinking about the awful things that Bettie might be enduring.

Mary's story inspired William to leave her with neighbors to recuperate, and journey to Williamsburg to speak to the governor. He wanted the governor to authorize a counter offensive against the Shawnee. The records are silent about John's reaction, but we are fairly certain that he participated in the ill-fated Sandy Creek Expedition that winter, when about three hundred settlers (including roughly 70 Cherokee braves) tried to launch a surprise attack against the Shawnee villages. (To be continued)