Fulford Lineage in North Carolina

By Dave Lewis, October 2026

John Fulford Sr. was born about 1670, probably in England. He is the immigrant ancestor of the Fulford family of Brunswick County, North Carolina. DNA results shows there may be a connection between this John Fulford Sr. line and the Fulford's of Connecticut.

His arrival in the American colonies is documented on 29 April 1693, when he was listed as a headright named "Jno. Fulford" on a land patent granted to Mr. Thomas Parker in Nansemond County, Virginia. As a headright, his passage from England was paid for in exchange for land, and he likely served a period of indenture upon arrival.

After his time in Virginia, John migrated south across the border into the developing region of Core Sound in what is now Carteret County, North Carolina. There he established himself as a landowner and patriarch. During or just prior to 1708, John Fulford received land patent #733 of 520 acres joining the Pamlico River.

In his will of 21 January 1712, "John Ffulford of ye Cou(nty) of Bath and in ye: prect. (precinct) of Craven and Coresound" names his "youngest sonn" Joseph Fulford as his heir, bequeathing him the family lands in the Straits area of Core Sound. This document is the foundational record for this entire family line.

As the Carteret County Fulford family began acquiring land they played a prominent role in the early days around Carteret County, North Carolina. An entry dated February 1805 in the records at the Carteret County Courthouse shows the gift of land by Joseph Fulford, (born 1725) and Elijah Pigott for the erection of a lighthouse on Cape Lookout.. "We, Joseph Fulford and Elijah Pigott of the County of Carteret and the State of North Carolina, in consideration of the sum of $1 paid to us by the United States of America, the receipt whereof we do hereby acknowledge, do hereby, give, grant, bargain, sell…to the said United Stated of America four acres of land on Cape Lookout so-called in the State aforesaid for the accommodation of a lighthouse to be erected in pursuance of the Act of Congress passed on the 20th day of March 1804." Fulford also specified that he retain the fishing rights around Cape Lookout in perpetuity for his descendants. The lighthouse began service in 1812.

The first known keeper of the light was Joseph Fulford's son, James, (1755-1839), who was appointed by President James Madison on June 2, 1812, with a yearly salary of $300. James married Rebecca Harker and served as keeper for sixteen years. In 1828, James son, William (1796-1864) became the lighthouse keeper and served until 1854.

Carteret County records continue to show the Fulford's to be major land owners in the late 1700's and early 1800's. They held many local government offices and were officers and enlisted men of the North Carolina Militia, Carteret Regiment during the Revolutionary War.

By the early 1820's many Carteret County families were moving into different parts of the United States, leaving the area by boat, horseback or wagon train. The Fulford's were no exception and many left the area around 1823 with the intent to relocate to the Mobile, Alabama region. Many families decided while in route to settle along the way with many of them staying in the Plains, Georgia area.

A wagon train was organized in 1823 and left Carteret County for Alabama. Originally they settled in Marengo County, Alabama but eventually settling in Baldwin County, Alabama. Oxen pulled the wagons which carried all their belongings and each person walked as much as they were able, some making the sixty day journey on foot.

After a short stay in Alabama, some Fulford's decided to move to Cortez, Florida on the Gulf of Mexico. Taking advantage of the fishing around Cortez, the Fulford's helped to establish the little fishing village. Because they were unable to regain their market share for commercial fishing after the Civil War, more Fulford's from Carteret County migrated to Cortez during the mid to late 1800's.

Not all Fulford's that left Carteret County moved out of state. Two, Isaiah and his brother John moved to Brunswick County shortly before 1850. John married Annie L. Hewett about 1850 and Isaiah married Annie's sister, Anzie on December 16, 1858. Together they are the patriarchs of all the Fulford's in Brunswick County. Isaiah and John both served in the Galloway's Coast Guard Company during the Civil War.

Last name: Fulford

This unusual name is of Anglo-Saxon origin, and is a local surname deriving from any one of the various places in Devonshire, Somerset, Staffordshire and East Yorkshire called Fulford. The place in Devonshire is recorded as "Foleford" in the Domesday Book of 1086, that in Somerset in its Latin form of "sordidum vadum" in the Saxon Chronicles of 854, Fulford in Staffordshire as "Fuleford" in the Domesday Book, and Gate and Water Fulford in East Yorkshire as "Fuleford" in the Domesday Book. All of these places share the same meaning and derivation, which is "the dirty ford", from the Olde English pre 7th Century "ful", foul, dirty, with "ford", ford.

Local surnames were acquired especially by those former inhabitants of a place who had moved to another area, and were thereafter best identified by the name of their birthplace. A number of bearers of the name Fulford are descended from the William de Fulford cited below, who held the manor of Great Fulford near Exeter. Early recordings of the name include Robert de Fulfort (1219, Yorkshire), Richard de Fulford (1280, Worcestershire), and Thomas Fuleford (1327, Sussex).

Surnames became necessary when governments introduced personal taxation. In England this was known as Poll Tax. Throughout the centuries, surnames in every country have continued to develop, often leading to astonishing variants of the original spelling.