



NEWSLETTER

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Bell Family of Brunswick Co., N.C.

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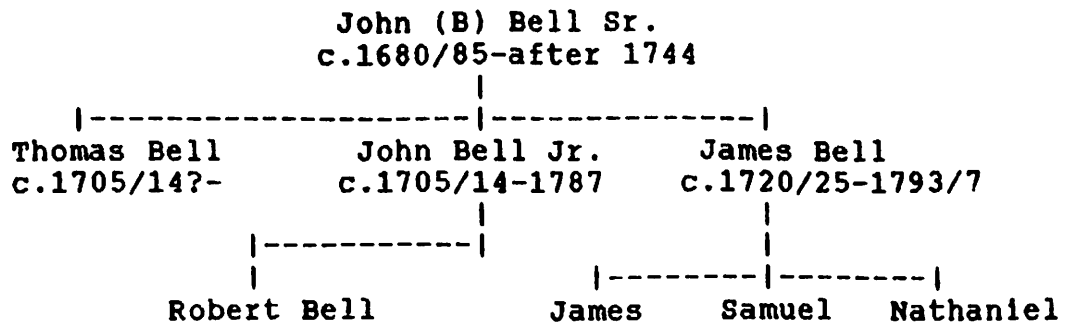
James Bell Sr. of Brunswick Co., N.C. left a will probated in 1797, at which time most of his children appear to have been grown and married. The relatively poor state of preservation of the early records of Brunswick Co. and those of New Hanover Co., from which Brunswick was formed in 1764, make study of the early history of this family somewhat, but I think I have determined their origin.

It has been proposed that James was connected to the family of a John Bell who left a will in Pasquotank Co., N.C. in 1720. Although the Pasquotank Co. Bells used many similar given names, I think we can show that these were not the origin of our Bells. Instead, we can first show that our James Bell had an older brother John Bell (who signed his name). Study of the New Hanover records shows that this man was John Bell Jr., and that there was also a John Bell Sr. in the same area, who signed by mark "B" (lying on its back). This John Sr. was in the Brunswick Co. area by 1728, soon after the first settlement, and would appear to have been the father of both James and John Jr., as well as a Thomas Bell also found nearby. John Sr. died without a will, and no record of his estate is preserved in New Hanover or Brunswick. However, it turns out that Thomas was his eldest son, and that the remaining lands of John Sr. descended entire to Thomas Bell under the law of primogeniture.

Part of the key to understanding the family is provided by a deed of 1 April 1793, made by Robert Bell, son and heir of John Bell (Jr.) to John Veyrier and John Baptist Gramache of the Town of Cape Francis, Island of Santo Domingo (Brunswick C:139, see photostats). In this deed Robert conveyed a large number of tracts, all in the Lockwoods Folly area. A number of these tracts had been purchased by Robert himself. However, other tracts included 100 acres near Lockwoods Folly Inlet sold by Christopher Cains on 27 Feb. 1773 "to the late John Bell father to the said Robert Bell". Another of the tracts conveyed was 640 acres on the west side of Lockwoods Folly, "being a tract of Land patented to John Bell the

elder...20 Feb. 1735...who died thereof seized and possessed and afterwards sold and conveyed by Thomas Bell son and heir at Law to the said John Bell unto the late William Dry..."

We thus appear to have the following relationships:



Now, we can prove that John Jr. and James were brothers. It would certainly appear that these two were the younger sons of John Bell Sr. However, as we will see below, it is at least possible that John Jr. and James Bell were step-brothers, both having different fathers named John Bell. This confusing issue will be discussed further when we get to consideration of the origin of the family.

JAMES BELL seems likely to have been born ca. 1720/25. We first find record of him in the context of what seems to have been a youthful indiscretion. At the New Hanover Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions for 15 June 1741 (f. 51v, see photostat) the grand jury indicted James Bell for taking a colt and mare of Edwd. Wingate's and swimming across Lockwoods Folly with the said horses "to his brother John Bell's plantation". This suit was dropped on 10 Sept. 1741 (f. 55v) when Wingate failed to prosecute.

The family does not seem to be listed on the 1755 tax list of New Hanover, which may omit much of Brunswick Co. However, James Bell was taxed in New Hanover in 1762-63 and in Brunswick Co. in 1769. I did not find him in the New Hanover deeds, or in the early land grants, although he probably did obtain land at this time. Later we find that on 9 April 1770 James Bell Sr. had a grant of 200 acres in Brunswick on both sides of Half Branch and on the main road (20:552). A James Bell on 25 Nov. 1771 had a grant of 100 acres on both sides of Poplar Branch, joining Thomas Russ (22:317).

In the earliest Brunswick deeds I found only that on 26 Oct. 1792 James sold a slave named Luke to Jeremiah Wescoat (C:123), and on 1 Dec. 1794 deeded a slave to James Bell Jr. (C:261).

As you know, James Bell Sr. made a will in Brunswick on 27 Jan. 1793, registered 20 April 1797, appointing his wife Sarah and sons James and Samuel executors. Witnesses were Will. Lord and Jacob Leonard. He left the following children:

- i. James Jr., probably born ca. 1752/56, as he was taxed in 1772, but not in 1769.
- ii. Samuel. Purchased 370 acres on the east side of Lockwoods Folly, known as Wingate's Old Field, from John Hickman Jr. on 20 Dec. 1774 (B:34, witnessed by Thomas Galloway, William Cains).
- iii. Nathaniel. Purchased a tract on the west side of White Marsh Swamp from John McClellan on 2 July 1778 (B:138).
- iv. daughter, who left a son "commonly known by the name of" James Anderson.
- v. Sarah, mar. John Galloway.
- vi. Rebecca, mar. Breward.
- vii. Mary, mar. Cains.

As noted above, James Bell had a brother John Bell, who wrote his name, rather than signing by mark. The early grants are difficult to separate between John Sr. and John Jr., but this may be the John Bell who on 20 Feb. 1735 had a grant of 640 acres on the east side of Lockwoods Folly (3:298). We do know from the court record that John Jr. had a plantation in 1741, and court minutes of 9 Sept. 1741 show John Bell Jr. as a juror (f 54v).

Only a few deeds for John Jr. appear to be preserved in Brunswick Co. We do find that on 10 Mar. 1761 William (M) Gaus Sr. of Craven Co. sold 5 slaves to John Bell of Brunswick (A:63). Then on 7 April 1787 John Bell Esquire, signing his name, sold 3 acres to the county for the purpose of establishing a courthouse (B:308).

John Bell, again signing his name, made a will in Brunswick on 6 Nov. 1787, proven Dec. 1787, witnessed by Dennis Hankins and William Gillis(?). John appointed his "children" Robert Bell and John Cain and brother James Bell as executors (see photostat). He left bequests to his wife Feabey and "dutiful children", suggesting the possibility that there might be other, unnamed and "undutiful" children. Those named were:

- i. Hannah, mar. Russ.

- ii. Jean, mar. Cain.
- iii. Robert, probably born in the 1740's and owner of large tracts of land on Lockwoods Folly.
- iv. Rebecca, mar. Gilbert.
- v. Unis.

We will now take up the apparent father of these men:

JOHN BELL Sr. was likely born around 1680/85, and signed by a distinctive mark that was a "B" tilted onto its back. He was among the very early settlers of the region. Settlement of the Cape Fear was organized in 1724 by Maurice Moore of South Carolina, in opposition to the stated policy of the North Carolina government of the time. Until 1729 when New Hanover Co. was created, this was considered a part of Craven Precinct, Bath Co., but the earliest Craven deeds are lost. We know however that John Bell was already settled on Lockwoods Folly by 1728. From the Patent Books we find that on 10 Nov. 1728 John Bell obtained a grant of 720 acres in Bath Co. on the southwest side of Lockwoods Folly and on the upper side of Mr. Lane's land (2:254). On the same date John obtained another grant of 640 acres on the south west side of Lockwoods Folly, on the upper side of his own land (2:257). John (B) Bell assigned the 720 acre grant for 100 pds. to Roger Moore Esqr. on 16 Mar. 1735/6 (New Hanover AB:173, witnessed by Jas. Hasell, Martin Holt). The 1738 Wimble Map (see photostat enclosed) shows Bell's plantation near the mouth of Lockwoods Folly.

From the New Hanover deeds we also find that on 13 Jan. 1730/1 Maurice Moore, Gent. sold for 8 pds. to John Bell town lot #2 (AB:39, witnessed by Wm. Norton, Ab. Spicer). This was in the now defunct town of Brunswick, and John (B) Bell sold this lot for 12 pds. to Comfort Davis on 14 May 1736 (AB:78, witnessed by John Martindale, Will Powers).

On 20 Feb. 1735 John Bell obtained another grant of 640 acres on the west side of Lockwoods Folly. The later deed of Robert Bell shows that this land descended from John to his son and heir, Thomas. We also find record on 25 Sept. 1741 of a grant to Joseph Bell for 620 acres on Pinch Gut Branch of Lockwoods Folly River (5:142). The name Joseph here might be a mistake for John. In any case, we find that on 14 Jan. 1744 John (B) Bell of Hanover Co.

sold for 400 pds. to Mrs. Grace Merrick of the same 640 acres on the run of Lockwoods Folly, as by patent of 25 Sept. 1741 (New Hanover C:85, also Brunswick C:102, witnessed by Roger Moore, Geo. Logan).

John Sr. died some time after 1744, although I have not found any reference to his estate in the New Hanover Court Minutes (which are abstracted, but not complete), or in the N.C. Secretary of State records, where we usually find some record of most estates prior to 1760.

The later deeds show that Thomas Bell was John's eldest son and heir. Thomas was active by 19 June 1736, when he received a grant of 550 acres on the southwest side of Lockwood Folly River and both sides of Batchelors Creek. In Brunswick on 17 Oct. 1765 Thomas purchased from George Moore, executor of Roger Moore 500 acres on the east side of Lockwoods Folly, formerly belonging to Cornelius Harnett (A:26, witnessed by Thomas Jones, Fredk. Jones). Thomas Bell and wife Jemima sold this land to John Gallaway on 12 Feb. 1770 (A:113, witnessed by John Screvener, John Bell, James Bell Junr.).

Early in New Hanover we also find a Josiah Bell, who may not have been related. This Josiah Bell on 13 June 1737 purchased from Jeremiah and Magdalen Bigford 140 acres at Mount Pleasant in the Fork of Old Town Creek (AB:77, witnessed by John Rice, Wm. (+) Walker). This is apparently the tract that Josiah assigned to John Rice on 23 Jan. 1737/8 (AB:178, witnessed by Wm. Lewis, S. Lewis). Josiah then purchased on 25 Jan. 1737/8 from John and Sarah Lewis 220 acres on a branch of Town Creek (AB:180, witnessed by ___ Rice, Sol. Lewis). N.C. Secretary of State records show that administration on the estate of Josiah Bell of New Hanover was granted to his widow Mary in 1743.

2. Origins

We will now consider the origin of the family. Unfortunately, the surname Bell was quite common, and there were many Bells in northeastern North Carolina and in Virginia, and we find many different John Bells. It was suggested that our Bells derived

from the John Bell family in Pasquotank Co., N.C., but I think I can show that this is not the case. I also checked grantors of Perquimans, Chowan, Tyrrell, Hyde, Onslow, Carteret and Beaufort Counties without finding our Bells.

Now, we know that John Bell Sr. was among the very earliest settlers of the Brunswick region. The initial settlement of the Cape Fear, in 1724, was organized by the Moores of South Carolina, and most of the original patentees were their friends, relatives and associates. The Moores have been noted in connection with the Bells' deeds several times above. By the late 1720's the Moores were actively encouraging settlement, and seem to have brought many persons to the region from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. However, a quick check of the will abstracts for the Philadelphia area and for New Jersey did not suggest any immediate connection to our Bells. By the 1730 period many other settlers were arriving from further up the coast in North Carolina.

Given the association with the Moores, it is tempting to suspect that our Bells might also have come from South Carolina. Examination of abstracts of the Colonial South Carolina deeds (Charleston series) do indeed show a John Bell Sr. on Santee River, signing by mark, who disappears after 1727. This is just the right time period for this man to be our John Bell. Unfortunately, the abstracts do not show just what mark this John Bell used. If the actual deed shows a mark "B" lying on its back, we could be fairly certain that this was indeed our John.

The relationship of the early John Bells on Santee is rather complex, as it turns out that there was a John Bell (carpenter) who married the widow of John Bell (bricklayer). The relationships shown in the deeds are as follows:

	c.1712		pr.1720			
John Bell	=	Ann	=	John Bell	=	Priscilla
(bricklayer)				(carpenter)		
-1705/12						
		John Bell Jr. (signs)				
		ca.1704-				

Later deeds show that the first John Bell on 14 March 1705 had grants of 500 acres on the north side of Santee River joining John Souso, and 400 acres on an island in Santee. He must have died soon after, perhaps leaving a will, although this is not indexed in

South Carolina. The deeds show that on 23 March 1712/3 John Bell, carpenter, signing by mark, who married Ann, sole executrix of another John Bell, bricklayer, conveyed to John Bell, son and heir of John Bell deceased and Ann his wife, all his rights to the real estate of the first John Bell (D:201, witnessed by Benjamin Rett, Richard Edgell, Thomas (X) Blanton). This deed was likely made at the time of John and Ann's marriage. We then find that on 25-26 June 1725 John Bell Jr. of Craven Co., S.C., signing his name, sold the two grants of 1705 on Santee to Samuel Blyth (D:288, witnessed by Joel Poinsett, Jona. Collings, Robert Hume). This deed was likely made by John Jr. soon after he had come of age. A later deed of 20/21 Apr. 1762 from Mark and Anna Huggins to William Litten Russ (B-3:372) gives a chain of title for this land, stating that it had been granted to John Bell the elder, and inherited by his younger son, John Bell, who sold to Samuel Blythe.

The second John Bell (carpenter) on 12 May 1714 obtained two grants, one for 500 acres in Craven joining Capt. Bartholomew Gaillard and said John Bell, by warrant dated 25 Dec. 1709 (D:232), and one for 500 acres on Santee River, by warrant dated Oct. 1711 (D:234). John then apparently remarried, and on 9/10 Dec. 1720 John Bell Sr. of Craven Co., signing by mark, and wife Priscilla sold these two tracts to Elias Horry (D:106, witnessed by Edward Weekley, Meredith Hughes, Andrew Collins).

John also apparently had one other tract, for we find that on 17 June 1727 John Bell Sr. of Craven, signing by mark, mortgaged 100 acres on the head of Sampit Creek to William Swinton, merchant, of Prince George Parish (F:368, witnessed by Priscilla Bell, Francis Britten; also recorded at La:366). No further deeds are found, and John may have lost the land to this mortgage.

The relationship of the two elder John Bells is not explained by the South Carolina record abstracts (perhaps they were cousins?). However, it seems a workable guess that John Bell, carpenter, who signed by mark, might be John Bell Sr. of Lockwoods Folly. Seeing just what mark the man in South Carolina used might resolve the question, and I can order copies of the deeds if you wish. We might then guess that John Bell Jr. of Brunswick Co. might be the son of John Bell (bricklayer), who we know signed his name. In this case, John Jr. might have been older than Thomas Bell, but Thomas might have been the eldest son of John Sr. of Lockwoods Folly. Perhaps we then have the following relationships:

	c.1712		pr.1720
John Bell	= Ann	= John Bell	= Priscilla
(bricklayer)		(carpenter)	
-1705/12			
John Bell Jr.	Thomas Bell	James Bell	
ca.1704-1789	c.1712/15-	c.1720/25-1793/97	

This is however just a theory at present, and some additional work in original South Carolina records would be required to test its validity.

Another possibility for the origin of John Bell Sr. is that he may have been in Craven Co. prior to the formation of New Hanover. Unfortunately, about the only Craven records surviving prior to 1729 are the Court Minutes of 1712-1716. These show, on a

very dim page (p.112) a power of attorney from John Bell of Bath Co. to Danll. Mackfarlan, dated 14 Oct. 1716(?), witnessed by Savage. Unfortunately, the man's signature is not shown. On the same page we also find a power of attorney from Anth:(?) Fowler to John Bell proven by the oath of Danll. Mcffarlan. I have not further identified this John Bell at present.

3. The Pasquotank Bells

I will now briefly summarize the early Bell family in Pasquotank. John Bell Sr. made a will there on 1 March 1720/1, probated 29 Mar. 1721, naming his wife Mary executrix and witnessed by William Willson, Samuel Cock and Darby (X) Swilevant. The will mentions land in Maryland, suggesting that John had recently come from that state. To his son James he left "all my lands at Allegator", as well as in Maryland, while the next sons, John, William, George and Matthew, were to divide the lands on the north side of Pasquotank River. John Jr. was to have the land "where he now lives", joining John Pirckins, which suggests he had already married by this time.

Now, the land on Allegator was in what is now Tyrrell Co., formed in 1729 from Bertie, Chowan, Currituck and Pasquotank. I was not able to locate a deed of sale for the land on Allegator, which probably suggests that it was sold by a Pasquotank deed of the 1720's, as these are not entirely complete.

John Bell left the following children:

- i. James, probably born around 1695/1700. On 17 April 1722 James Bell (signing) and wife Mary of Pasquotank sold to Col. Wm. Reed 110 acres formerly belonging to Robert Wallis (A:305, witnessed by Richd. Sandefur, Edmd. Gale, Jno. Sallis). We then find that on 13 Jan. 1734 James Bell and wife Mary of "Cartwright" Precinct, Bath Co. sold 100 acres on the southwest side of Pasquotank River to John Jones (C:364, witnessed by Will. Herritage, John Comyer, Danl. Chancey). James thus moved to Carteret Co., where there was already another Bell family resident, stemming from Ross Bell (will 1726). On 25 Sept. 1741 Arthur Mabson and James Bell jointly obtained a grant of 250 acres on the head of Harlows Creek of Newport River in Carteret (5:103). Secretary of State records show that the estate of James Bell was administered in Carteret in 1752 by his son Newel Bell. A younger son of James might be the John Bell (mark "I") of Carteret who sold 340 acres on Harlows Creek to Arthur Mabson on 22 April 1758 (G:3). Our James Bell is not found identifiable in Carteret deeds.
- ii. John, probably born around 1700. He inherited part of his father's land on the north side of Pasquotank River and, signing his name, sold this to George Bell on 10 Feb. 1732 (C:337, witnessed by Eleanor (s) Sibbon, Sarah (S) Lumble). Note that this was after our Bells were on Lockwoods Folly. I believe this John remained in Pasquotank and is the John Bell whose estate was administered by widow

Mary Bell on 10 April 1750, giving William Burges and William Willson securities. A division shows that he left four daughters as heirs:

- i. Elizabeth, mar. Eady.
 - ii. daughter, mar. John Burges.
 - iii. daughter, mar. John Faireless.
 - iv. daughter, mar. William Wilson.
- iii. William, probably the William who left a will in Pasquotank in 1770.
- iv. George, in 1732 purchased land from John Bell. He died soon after, and his estate was appraised in Jan. 1735. On 11 Oct. 1748 Joseph Bell petitioned the court stating that George had died leaving a will which could not now be found, and that William and John Bell had obtained letters of administration. Administration was granted to Joseph Bell on 12 Oct. 1750. George was probably childless. Note that this is not the George Bell who died in Edgecombe in 1751/2, despite the claim in Mrs. Yates DAR lineage.
- v. Henry, estate administered in 1742 by Benjamin Bell.
- vi. Matthew. No further records found, probably died young.
- vii. Mary.
- viii. Joseph.
- ix. Benjamin.