

WELCOME

Website <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~birdtracks/articles.html>

Welcome to the Birdtracks website. The information presented here is a composite of information gathered by dozens of Birdwell researchers across the United States. Obviously this is a work in progress and your help would be welcome. There are still many unanswered questions and some incorrect or conflicting data might be shown. So please contact us if you can add to our knowledge of the family, or if you see something which you can document as an error. In the United States there are a few thousand people with the Birdwell name. Surprisingly they might all trace back to the George Birdwell who lived in Augusta Co., Virginia (now Botetourt Co.) in 1751. At least a few other men named Birdwell lived in America during the Colonial era. However, to date none of their descendants have been identified. As a result, for now this site is detailing just the known, and suspected descendants of our patriarch, George Birdwell.

Articles of Interest To BIRDWELL Researchers

George Birdwell is commonly shown as being born about 1721 in Virginia. However it has never been documented when or where he was actually born. Nor has any information been discovered regarding his parent's names, nor where he lived before arriving in Augusta Co, Virginia. At this point there are only unproven theories regarding George's origins. His first appears in what was then Augusta (now Botetourt) Co, Virginia. It is quite likely that additional research could shed more light on this cloudy question. The following is a brief sketch of some of the documents which have been found naming George Birdwell. The earliest known document was a 1745 court record which listed George as a witness. Then with a deed dated November 28, 1751, George "Burdwell" (sic) acquired 140 acres of land. This land is inside an oxbow bend of the James River directly upstream from the modern town of Buchanan, Virginia. Most of George's fourteen children were born on this frontier homestead. George "Burdwell" (sic) sold this land on March 2, 1779. Shortly after this George moved his family to the Holston River valley in Sullivan Co., North Carolina (now Tennessee). This land is near the modern town of Kingsport, Tennessee. George died while away from his new Tennessee home. George "Birdwell" signed a will dated September 14, 1781 which was then filed in Bedford Co., Virginia on November 26, 1781. So George's death occurred between those two dates. The location of his grave is not known but presumably he died and was buried in Bedford County, Virginia. George Birdwell's children are known thanks to his will and a family Bible. In his 1781 will George named three children which he had by his "former wife", and eleven more with his wife "Mary". Thankfully the birth dates of these last eleven children were recorded in a family Bible. The name of George's "former wife" is completely unknown. His wife "Mary" is shown by some as Mary LOONEY. However, no evidence has been provided to support this assertion.

SEARCH FOR THE ORIGINS OF THE BIRDWELL FAMILY

The origins of the Birdwell family in America is shrouded in mystery. While some research has been done on this question, the majority of the early records have not yet been reviewed. So this would be a great question to pursue if you are looking for an interesting and very challenging project. In addition to George Birdwell of Virginia, another Birdwell family (or families) lived in Connecticut prior to the Revolutionary War. The earliest known mention of the family was the reported marriage of a Mary Birdwell to John DIX in 1671. Also reportedly, an Abigail Birdwell (daughter of a John & Sarah) was born in 1751. Then three Birdwell households were listed on the 1790 census in Connecticut. This may be the source of the Berdwell, Burdwell, and Birdwell families found throughout New England over the next few decades. Yet to date, none of their modern descendants have been identified, nor have these families been researched. As noted, it is not known where George Birdwell was prior to his appearance in Augusta Co., Virginia. His origins have been a matter of considerable debate and a number of theories have been proposed, including that he might be connected to the families in New England. Yet no solid evidence has been discovered to confirm any of these ideas. The following is a brief summary of the three most prevalent theories.

STAFFORD CO., VIRGINIA:

This is certainly the most widely held theory. In 1950 a researcher named Edyth R. Whitley proposed that: "George Birdwell was born about 1721, probably in Stafford Co., Virginia... there is some evidence that his father's name was Benjamin and he came from England." A family named BRIDWELL lived in Stafford County throughout the 1700's. Some believe that George Birdwell was a member of this Bridwell family and that the spelling of his name was altered. Presumably this Bridwell family is what prompted Mrs. Whitley to suggest that George was born in Stafford County, though it is not known why she stated his father was named Benjamin. Unfortunately no evidence is known which ties George Birdwell to this Bridwell family or to Stafford County, Virginia. Additional research in Virginia may help resolve this question.

ENGLAND:

No evidence is known to support Edyth Whitley's speculation that George's father came from England. Yet the name BIRDWELL has been found in English records as early as 1630, and the name BURDWELL appears as early as 1586. Also a prominent Norfolk family was named BERDWELL whose lineage traces back to the time of the Norman conquest. Further suggestion of an English connection is a hamlet in York which is named "Birdwell". However, there is no known evidence that George Birdwell had a connection to this English town, or that he was related to any of these families noted above.

IRELAND:

Statements by three descendants of George Birdwell (c1720-1781) indicate the family was in Ireland prior to reaching America. In apx. 1873, a descendant of George's son Joseph Birdwell (b: 1767) made a comment that her kin Russell Birdwell "was a full blooded Irishman". Then in apx. 1912, a descendant of George's son John Birdwell (b: 1770), wrote that John "came from Ireland". Finally, in a letter written before 1943, the widow of a presumed descendant of George's eldest son Robert (b: c.1775) wrote "years ago four brothers came over from Ireland. They called themselves Scotch-Irish". There are problems or errors within each statement and separately each is just suspect circumstantial evidence. However when considered together we have a compelling case the Birdwell family arrived from Ireland. It is highly unlikely these three knew one another, or was aware of the others' comments. Yet the belief the family had been in Ireland was noted in these three widely separated branches of the George Birdwell (c1720) family. The "Scotch-Irish" comment and guess work suggests Ulster in Northern Ireland as the place to look. Perhaps a Birdwell family can be found there in the early 1700's. Note a period in Ireland would still not exclude an ultimate English origin for the Birdwell family. In summary, there are several theories on the family's origins yet there is no documentation to support one over the other. Ultimately a thorough review of the early records will be needed to solve this mystery. If you hold additional information or clues on the origins of the Birdwell family please contact us. Perhaps one of you may already hold the answers to this question.

Written by Weldon J. Birdwell

www.ajlambert.com