

THE ORIGINS OF THE TATE FAMILY OF WISE COUNTY

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The surname 'Tate' is one of the oldest in Britain. It once was thought to have been of Scandinavian origin, and its usage is localized primarily in the Border Country between England and Scotland. Its original spelling is 'Tait'⁽¹⁾ Very early on this region was settled by Vikings from Denmark and Norway. However, the surname is most likely more ancient than that, as 'Taite' is Gaelic, and which translates as 'pleasing' from either Welsh or Scots Gaelic. The lower case 't' must be used in Google Translate to make it work.⁽²⁾ It is the Scottish Gaelic equivalent of the first name translated as 'Pleasant' into English, and which was so commonplace in Scots-Irish America a century or so ago (frequently given as 'Pleas'). Northumberland County of England touches the southeastern border of Scotland. It is the largest source of out migration in existence to the rest of the world.^(3,4) One of the earliest records of this surname is that of Nicholas Tate in 1273.⁽¹⁾

William Tate was born in Northumberland County in about 1585.⁽⁵⁾ Like many poor Border People, he moved to the dockside slums of London, where his son James Tate I was born August 1, 1615 in the endowed charity Royal Hospital and Collegiate Church of St. Katharine by the Tower. This migration out of the Border Country was caused by a series of rebellions by the Scots against the English, who were attempting to impose the Church of England on the Presbyterian Scots.⁽⁶⁾ William could not help his son having been born in a charity hospital affiliated with the Church of England, but he carried James I all the way back to a Presbyterian Church in Northumberland for baptism that same year.

Probably to escape the continuing turmoil in Britain, and which was soon to lead to the English Civil War⁽⁷⁾, James Tate I at age 17 immigrated to Virginia aboard the 'Ann and Elizabeth Joe' in 1635. He came as an indentured servant, his passage having been paid by Mrs. Jane Harmer, who paid for the emigration of thousands of people.⁽⁸⁾ He likely landed at Charles River Shire, which soon was renamed York County.⁽⁹⁾ By 1638 he is documented as having lived in York County, which is just to the north of Jamestown. His son, James Tate II, was born there that year.⁽¹⁰⁾ This 3 year period is within the usual time frame for him to have worked out his of indenture contract.⁽¹¹⁾

Many of the people that were transported via the services of Mrs. Jane Harmer wound up in the Hanover County area of Virginia, like James Tate. It seems to have been a destination for Scots and Border people who had had no experience with Northern Ireland. A neighbor of James Tate in Hanover County was Patrick Henry, whose grandfather had come from Scotland and settled in Hanover Co. at

about the same time period.⁽¹²⁾ It was a major migratory pattern that has been missed by the history books.

James Tate II lived his life out near where he was born. He married Elizabeth Dandridge, and there is an existing record of only one child. Nothing else is known about James II.⁽¹⁰⁾ Historically, this era was one of great turmoil in Virginia. Nathaniel Bacon led settlers from the Northern Neck in armed revolt against the colonial government, and burned the capital at Jamestown to the ground. James II could not have avoided being swept up in this event in one way or another.⁽¹³⁾

In 1654 New Kent County was split off of York County. James III was born there in 1662. He was a tailor, a planter, overseer of processing boundary lines, and a hatter. He married an Irish woman. Records indicate that he was referred to as a 'Scotsman'.⁽¹⁴⁾ In 1691 Robert Tate, Sr. was born. In 1720 where he lived was split off to form Hanover County. In 1742 Louisa County was split off from New Kent County. James III died in 1727, and Robert in 1759.⁽¹⁵⁾ However, in 1743 Robert was living transiently in Beverly Manor, then known commonly as the "Irish Tract", which is currently largely synonymous with Augusta County, of which Staunton is the county seat. This is documented by the birth of the future Col. John Tate there.^(16,17)

The Irish Tract is of monumental significance to Virginia history, and the Tate's association with it requires a detailed description of it.

In the late 1720's an Ulsterman (Northern Irish) named James Patton started a shipping business in Britain. Patton was from a low level of Irish gentry, and married well into the same class. In 1730 he began to import Irish indentures into land in the Valley of Virginia. These 'Irish' were really originally Scottish Border people, and today are called 'Scots-Irish'. Patton's method of operation was to bring his ships into the headwaters of navigation on the Rappahannock River at a place then known as 'Rob's Hole', now as Tappahannock. Indian trails from there passed through the Blue Ridge through several gaps into the Great Valley of Virginia. On his return trip to Ireland Patton took tobacco and furs, which he exchanged for more indentures. Patton made himself wealthy in this trade.

In 1736 William Beverly patented 118,941 acres in the Valley of Virginia, encompassing what today is most of Augusta County, which contains the City of Lexington. It included the land where Patton had been settling his Irish indentures. That same year William Penn kicked out of Pennsylvania several Irish because, being Irish, they had settled where they had been told not to do so, that is to say on land reserved by treaty to the Indians. This land in Virginia was officially named 'Beverly Manor', but on the practical level it was soon to be called 'the Irish Tract'. That year the Irish who had been run out of Pennsylvania came to Beverly Manor.

In 1737 Beverly made a deal with Patton and gave him 1/4th of Beverly Manor in exchange for bringing in more Irish settlers. Without benefit of divorce, Patton married Beverly's daughter, Mary.⁽¹⁸⁾ The Irish Tract became the common

point of origin for most of the Scots-Irish in America. Even though the Tate family had wandered around in the English part of Virginia for three generations, for them coming to the Irish Tract was like having come home.

In 1772 Col. Tate moved to the headwaters of Big Moccasin Creek to land formerly lived on by Francis Fugate⁽¹⁹⁾ in what is now Russell County. Fugate did not have legal title to this land, which Tate bought from the Loyal Company in 1774 (Land Office 20-217), but the turmoil of the Revolutionary War kept the legal process open until 1785, when he was able to complete the purchase. In order to locate the land on a modern map, follow US A 58 to Bolton about half way between Dickensonville and Hansonville. Take State 613 to the southwest down Big Moccasin Creek. Tate's land begins about 3/4ths of a mile past Willow Spring. The field to the south of the road is known to this day as "Tate's Bottom". To the north side of the highway above a heavy equipment building lies the cemetery where he is buried, along with other family members, probably including John's wife Mary Bracken, and possibly Francis Fugate. It is not marked on the map. Stuart's Chapel lies about 3/4ths of a mile further west, and marks the northwestern corner of Tate's grant.

One would assume that there was some sort of preexisting relationship between Francis Fugate and Col. John Tate because Tate settled on land that Fugate lived on, but did not own. Two of Tate's daughters married Fugates. Tate had the land in question surveyed in 1774, starting the process of purchasing it. The current owners of the land have an oral tradition that Francis was married to one of Tate's daughters, and lived in a fort house that stood on the hillside near the angle in the woods above the cemetery. The current owners tore this log fort house down about 1990. Their tradition goes that Indians attacked the fort house, and killed Tate's daughter, and that Francis and Tate took off after them. They chased them into what is now Wise County, where Fugate's horse slipped and killed him. Tate brought Fugate's body back and buried Francis and his wife in the cemetery where the Col. was later to be buried. Historic records partly substantiate this story. In Nov. 1781 Col. Tate, Robert Tate, William Houston, and John Wood were appointed to appraise the estate of Francis Fugate, who had been killed by a fall from a horse. The records, however, document that Fugate's wife was Nancy Mahan, and not a Tate. This blend of records and of oral tradition must contain elements of the truth. The next fort down Big Moccasin Creek, in current Scott County, was Houston's Fort. The families of William Houston and of John Woods were intermarried, and lived at that fort. During the Great Cherokee War of 1776 Col. (this rank had not yet been conferred on him, his rank having been Lt. at first) Tate joined the militia. The settlements of Lee County were largely evacuated, and Carter's Fort in Rye Cove was under siege. Massive numbers of refugees were sent into the interior of the frontier, to Houston's Fort. Among the garrison there was Col. John Tate. This fort came under siege. The crowding of refugees was intense. Tate suggested that some of the refugees go with him to his land further up to the east and build a fort there. About 16 families agreed to do so. The fort was built in a northerly pointing horseshoe bend of Big Moccasin Creek about half way between the cemetery and Stuart's

Chapel. The only spring on the Tate grant is located in the southern highwall of the creek, and is known today as “the spring where Col. Tate got his water.”

Col. Tate went on to become sheriff, designer of the road from Little Moccasin Gap to the mouth of Big Moccasin Creek, constable, Overseer of the Poor, Gentleman Justice, Collector of Revenue, and in 1802 was appointed Lt. Commander of the 72nd Regiment, 3rd Division of the Virginia Militia. He fought with the militia at the Battle of Kings’ Mountain.

Colbert Fugate was Francis’s brother, married Tate’s daughter Hannah, and settled on LO 40-381 about a half mile west of Stuart’s Chapel on the hill north of Tumbez. They bought the current Fugate Farm in Rye Cove for their son Zachariah, who was the first of eight generations of Fugates to live there. Touching the 1784 grant of Col. Tate on its west is LO L-178 to Robert Tate, and quarter of a mile further west, just to the west of Fugate Hill is located the 1804 grant to Robert Tate. Col. John Tate had a brother, a son, and a grandson named Robert.

South of Tumbez lie a Fugate Cemetery, a Tate Cemetery, and Fraley Hollow. This second Tate cemetery contains the graves of some of the next generations of Tates. The Tates and Fraleys continue to be intermarried to this day. These Fraleys are descended from Frederick Fraley of Moore’s Fort in Lower Castlewood. (20,21)

Col. Tate’s son Joseph had a son named John (1803-after 1873) who in 1843 moved to Powell Valley in Wise County (then Lee County). He was the pastor of the Three Forks Baptist Church. He was one of the organizers of the church in Big Glades, present Wise. He was appointed Constable of the Richmond District of Wise County. His family intermarried with the Gilleys, Stewarts, and Wells, all seminal families of Wise County.

The Three Forks community and post office were located north of the North Fork of the Powell River, and was separate from ‘Gilley’ which was a community and post office located on the South Fork of the Powell River generally near the June Toliver House on Jerome Street. The Baptist Church was likely in the Three Forks Community. All of this is now incorporated into the Town of Big Stone Gap. Any deed John Tate may have had would be recorded in Lee County. The Powell River watershed of current Wise County separated from Lee in 1856. There are no records of any land owned by John having been sold in the Wise Co. records. The earliest record in Wise County of a land transaction involving a Tate was in 12/15/1874 when Robert B. Tate bought 107 acres on the north side of Powell Mountain, which had been a fifth part of the Jessee Gilley estate. It was sold by Thomas B. Collier, the widower of Amanda, the daughter of Jessee Gilley.(22,23) The Jessee G. Gilley land lay on the eastern side of Maple Gap, and touched the J. M. Mullins land to its downhill (northern) side. Today this land remains in the Gilley family’s hands, a family that has lived there since the Revolution.(24,25)

The next record of a Tate related land transfer in Wise County is that of 12/14/1898 when a John Tate bought 60 acres on the north side of Powell's Mountain in Cracker's Neck "near the school" and touching Franklin land and the main cliff of Powell's Mountain, and which had once been part of the Patrick Hagan tract.⁽²⁵⁾ This would have been the length of Cedar Ridge, the Crackers' Neck School having been near the current Cedar Ridge Baptist Church, and the Franklin Farm off to the east of the last road to the left going up Chandler Mountain Road.⁽²⁶⁾

This would suggest that John Tate followed the classic route of immigration into Powell Valley by having travelled the 'Old Baptist Trail' that ran along the northern edge of Grindstone Ridge of Powell Mountain from High Knob into Cracker's Neck, the point of access having been the Big Stony Creek trail from Fort Blackmore.⁽²⁷⁾ However, their long close association with the Gilleys may mean that they had followed the Cove Creek to Maples Gap route from Hunter's Valley that the Gilleys traditionally believe that they followed.⁽²⁴⁾

Perhaps the best known of John Tate's descendants was his son Vernoy Tate, who was the 18th Commonwealth's Attorney for Wise County, was in the Argonne Forest Campaign during World War I, Deputy Treasurer of Wise County, an active Free Mason, and a member of the Odd Fellows.⁽¹⁾

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