

THE CHRISTIANS OF STOKES

According to oral tradition, the Christian family of Stokes is of Scotch-Irish origin. The name, however, is of Scandinavian origin, and recent genealogical studies indicate that the family originated on the Isle of Man, an island in the middle of the Irish Sea adjacent to England, Scotland, and Ireland. The family was founded in the Middle Ages by a Viking adventurer, who converted to Christianity and married into one of Man's Celtic landowning families. To denote his adherence to the Christian faith, this Viking adopted the name "Gillocrest," which literally translated means "follower of Christ." His children followed local tradition by adding a "Mc" to their father's name, a practice which simply indicated that a person was the son or daughter of a particular individual. For several generations the family was known as "McCrystyn" or "McKristunn." By the end of the 16th century, however, the "Mc" had been dropped and the present spelling of "Christian" adopted.

The Christians played a major role in the economic and political life of the Isle of Man. They were major landowners with estates like Milntown, and they held numerous political offices, particularly the position of Deemster or judge. Some family members left Man to seek their fortunes in England, Ireland, and Scotland. Edward Christian^{was} probably the most successful of this group. After serving as a sea captain in the service of the East India Company, as a courtier to the Duke of Buckingham, and commander of a naval frigate, he made a fortune and returned to Man where he engaged in mining ventures. In the 17th century, however, the Christians increasingly came into conflict with the Stanleys, the English noble family that ruled Man under their title of Earl of Derby, and family members began dispersing to other portions of the British isles. Matters came to a head in 1651 when William Christian, the receiver of revenues and major-general of the militia, led an uprising which overthrew Stanley family rule. Some ten years later, however, the Stanleys took control again, and Christian was shot

for treason. By this time, the progenitors of the Stokes Christians most likely had left Man, moving first to Scotland and then Ireland.

According to research conducted by a local historian, the first American ancestor of the Stokes County Christians was one Charles Christian, who immigrated to the Virginia colony in 1690 and settled in Charles City County. Little further is known about the family until their move to Stokes County in the 19th century, but it is very likely, they may be related to Colonel William Christian, the famous Virginia Indian fighter and Letitia Christian Tyler, first wife of President John Tyler. The Stokes County branch of the family was established by Charles B. Christian. Born near Richmond, Virginia in 1802, he married Matilda J. Page, also of that same area, in 1826, and most likely he and his bride moved to Stokes County shortly afterwards. They, as well as their two year old daughter Frances, were listed in the 1830 federal census as Stokes residents. Charles and Matilda Christian had eight children. They were Frances, who never married; Cephas, who died in the Civil War; William, about whom no information is available; Alex, about whom little is known except that he served in the Civil War and fought in the Battle of Bentonville; Mary, who married a S. Ray; Charles Thomas, about whom more will be said below; Virginia, who married Jim Smith; and Matilda, who married William Anderson Lawrence.

Most residents of Stokes County and northwest North Carolina associate the Christians with Westfield, the farming village that encompasses parts of Stokes and Surry counties. The family became established here after Charles Thomas Christian, moved to Westfield around the time of the Civil War to work as overseer on the farm of Ambrose Jessup, a prominent Quaker and community leader. Either shortly before or after his service in that conflict as a sergeant in the Confederate army, he married Semiria Jessup, the daughter of

his former employer. After the war, Charles Thomas Christian and his bride moved to Burks Garden, Virginia where they operated a general store for several years and where their first child, Sylvester, better known as Vester, was born. Eventually, they returned to Westfield, and after Ambrose Jessup's death in the early 1880's, they took up residence on the Jessup farm. In addition to Vester, who was to serve as Stokes County shefiff and coroner and play a major role in county Democratic politics, their children included John, a prominent politician in his own right, tobacco manufacturer, and highly successful farmer; Charles Reid, who eventually inherited the old Jessup farm and operated it very successfully; Numa, who after a stint at railroading settled down to a successful life as farmer and fertilizer dealer; Ellen, who was married to a Humphreys and a Tilley; and Emma, who married a Smith and after his early death, raised a large family and operated a very successful farm.

Although a substantial number of the Christians still live in Westfield and Stokes County, many have moved to other counties and states. Yet for most, Westfield and Stokes County have remained a focal point in their lives, particularly the old Jessup-Christian homestead in Westfield. Erected around 1850 by Ambrose Jessup, this simple two-story frame farmhouse has been occupied by successive generations of Jessups and Christians and is the object of many fond memories for most of them.

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Coat of Arms



Christian

Historiography

The Christian Coat of Arms illustrated left was drawn by an heraldic artist from information officially recorded in ancient heraldic archives. Documentation for the Christian Coat of Arms design can be found in Burke's General Armory. Heraldic artists of old developed their own unique language to describe an individual Coat of Arms. In their language, the Arms (shield) is as follows:

"Or, a cross crosslet sa."

Above the shield and helmet is the Crest which is described as:

"A lion guard sejant on its hind legs holding in its dexter paw a cross and resting its sinister on a pyramid sa."

When translated the blazon also describes the original colors of the Christian Arms and Crest as it appeared centuries ago.

Family mottoes are believed to have originated as battle cries in medieval times. A Motto was not recorded with this Christian Coat of Arms.

Individual surnames originated for the purpose of more specific identification. The four primary sources for second names were: occupation, location, father's name, or personal characteristics. The surname Christian appears to be both patronymical and characteristic in origin, and is believed to be associated with the English, meaning, "descendant of Christian's (followers of Christ)." The supplementary sheet included with this report is designed to give you more information to further your understanding of the origin of names. Different spellings of the same original surname are a common occurrence. Dictionaries of surnames indicate probable spelling variations of Christian to be Christiano, Christiani, Christiansen, Christianson, Christianus, Christman, and Christmann. Although bearer's of the old and distinguished Christian name comprise a small fraction of the population there are a number who have established for it a significant place in history. They include: CHRISTIAN III (1503-1559) King of Denmark and Norway (1534-1539). He was called the "Father of the People." Was the son of Frederick I, and became King at the time of the Civil War (1533-1536). As an ardent Lutheran, he introduced the Reformation in 1536. WILLIAM CHRISTIAN (1732-1782) Army officer who commanded Captain Colonel William Byrd's regiment in 1763. He represented Fincastle County in the Lower House of the Virginia Legislature from 1773 to 1775; was Senator (1776, 1780-1783); member of the Virginia Com. of Safety (1775); and, commanded the Virginia Militia in the Virginia Council of Defense (1776). FLETCHER CHRISTIAN (Fl. 1789) English naval mutineer. Master's Mate and leader of mutiny against Captain William Bligh aboard the exploring ship, "Bounty." CHRISTIAN X (1870-1947) Son of Frederick VIII, King of Denmark (1912-1947) and Ireland (1918-1944). Studied for a military career, and during World War, established closer relations with other Scandinavian countries. Introduced the Act of Union, in 1918, with Ireland, whereby Ireland became independent with only personal connection with Denmark. He was succeeded by his son, FREDERIK IX (1899), diplomat and Rear Admiral. No genealogical representation is intended or implied by this report and it does not represent individual lineage or family tree.

