

THE GILMERS OF SURRY COUNTY AND THEIR COUSINS

For most of my young life, the Gilmers and their cousins gathered for visits and special occasions at *Moore House* in Mount Airy. In those days it was Aunt Lettie's house. She was Mary Letitia Hollingsworth, the last owner of *Moore House* which was built in the mid 1800s by her grandfather, William Alfred Moore. Aunt Lettie was my grandmother's first cousin. In recent years, I have enjoyed nostalgic visits to this lovely old home place with new found Moore cousins who, in 1995, formed a national organization, the Association for Descendants of Rodeham Moore. This group meets in Mount Airy, Hawkins County TN, and Lawrence County MO near the home sites of the nine known children of Rodeham and Elizabeth (Gallahue) Moore.

My parents were Samuel Gilmer Sparger, born in Mount Airy on December 15, 1903, and Helen Taft Fulton of Walnut Cove in Stokes County, daughter of John G. and Emma (Webster) Fulton. My father was State Senator for the Surry-Stokes District in 1933. He was only thirty years old when he took his seat in the Senate, having won election on November 6, 1932, the day I was born. By that happenstance, my birth was announced on the front pages of local papers. I think it was the Mount Airy paper that queried: "What is Gilmer more proud of - his election or his new baby girl?" The Stokes County paper was less respectful in posing its query: "Who has the most hair - Gilmer or his new baby girl?" That would be my mother's brother-in-law speaking. He was owner/publisher of the Stokes County paper. By the way, all agreed that I had the most hair, or so they told me.

This present account began as a discussion about my Gilmer family; but evolved to devote more space to the history of their Moore cousins in the hope of dispelling lingering confusion between the descendants of Rodeham Moore of Surry County and Matthew Moore of Stokes County. Contemporary descendants of Rodeham and Elizabeth (Gallahue) Moore have devoted a great deal of attention to defining their history in Surry and Patrick Counties; and have restored the two hundred year old cemetery on Arrarat Creek in Patrick County.

Over the last thirty or more years, I have collected family memorabilia and expanded it using resources of the North Carolina and Virginia Archives, original county records, published abstracts, original census and tax records. To the best of my present knowledge (with as few inadvertent errors as I could manage), the story of my Surry County family, "The Gilmers and Their Cousins," comes together like this

Joyce Sparger Browning
October 2003

GILMER FAMILY
GUILFORD COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, AND SURRY COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

- William Gilmer, (ca 1735, Ireland - 1784, Guilford County)
married Susannah Shaw
- John Gilmer (1775, Guilford County - 1828, Guilford County)
married Jane "Jinny" Ross
- Samuel Gilmer (1800, Guilford County - 1828, Guilford County)
married Esther Gorrell
- Samuel Gilmer (1828, Guilford County - after 1900, Surry County)
married Matilda Caroline Moore

William Gilmer emigrated from Ireland, County of Down, Parish of Kalinsha, and settled in Guilford County, North Carolina on the head waters of the Alamance stream amongst the 1st settlers of the county. He was a Presbyterian and one of the contributors to the building up of Alamance Church. His wife's maiden name was Shaw. He was an active Whig in the Revolutionary War belonging to Captain Arthur Forbis's Company of Minute Men. He raised a family of three sons and four daughters.

.... Notes from *The Holy Bible*, published in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania by John B. Perry, 1852. [Records of Robert Shaw Gilmer of Mount Airy]

William Gilmer (ca 1735-1784)

William Gilmer was a land owner in Guilford County, North Carolina when the ancient process of "walking the bounds" took place in 1760. His home was near the headwaters of the Alamance River and it was there that he lived when he died, probably in 1784. His name may have been spelled Gilmore when he lived in the Parish Killenchy, County Down.

William Gilmer's wife was Susanna Shaw. One suspects that her father was Robert Shaw of Guilford County, the name given to the Gilmer's oldest son and passed down in subsequent generations. The sister of Susannah Shaw Gilmer probably married a Hamilton for Robert Shaw Hamilton was a Guilford County contemporary of the first Robert Shaw Gilmer. Early family surnames - Gilmer, Shaw, Hamilton, and Ross - are abundant even today in County Down, Ireland.

The three sons of William Gilmer and Susannah Shaw were Robert Shaw Gilmer, John Gilmer, and Joseph Gilmer. On November 17, 1784, after the death of William Gilmer, Ralph Gorrell, Guilford County Surveyor, divided the Gilmer home place for the widow's one third dower, then divided the remaining 330 acres among William Gilmer's three sons. Each received 110 acres on the Great Alamance "adjacent to William Wiley, John Tom (Thom), Michael Patterson and McCulloch."

John Gilmer (1775-1828)

William Gilmer's middle son, John, is the ancestor of my Surry County Gilmers. John Gilmer was born about 1775. On September 6, 1803 in Guilford County, he married Jane Ross, known as Jinney. John Gilmer increased the size of his home track in 1812 by purchasing 99 acres from his neighbor and brother-in-law, Michael Patterson, husband of the sister of Jinney Ross Gilmer. The deed was witnessed by Jeremy Forbis and Robert S. Gilmer. John Gilmer was living on his home tract when he died. His estate was divided among his widow and five children in November 1828.

Samuel Gilmer-I (1800-1828)

One of John Gilmer's sons, Samuel Gilmer, was recently deceased when his father's estate was divided. Samuel Gilmer's widow, Esther - the daughter of Ralph Gorrell of Guilford County - was Guardian of their son, also named Samuel Gilmer. When her father-in-law's estate was divided, Esther Gorrell was married to her second husband, Daniel Thom. From a newspaper article, we learn that Samuel Gilmer-I taught at Guilford College.

Two hundred years later (less two), Samuel Gilmer's great grandson, my father, Samuel Gilmer Sparger was presented the award for "Guilford College Oratory." Thirty years after that, his Mother gave me the handsome gold medal awarded to him. I wear it with great honor on a gold chain; and with pleasure tell those who inquire how I came to possess it. What a superb symbol of a long family tradition to possess and pass along to posterity.

Samuel Gilmer-II (1828-after 1900)

Samuel Gilmer-II, still a diapered infant when his father died, was born in 1828 in Guilford County. The snapshot of Guilford's census in 1850 tells us that he was a twenty-one year old single man and a "Teacher." His full name was probably Samuel Luther Gilmer.

Samuel Gilmer's relative, Robert Shaw Gilmer, was already living in Mount Airy when the 1850 census was taken. He was either the brother or cousin of Samuel Gilmer. The distinction between two contemporaries of the same name has not been made. Most likely, Robert Shaw Gilmer of Surry County was a cousin because he referred to "my friend Samuel Gilmer" in his will of 1903. In any event, it was undoubtedly the presence of Robert Shaw Gilmer in Mount Airy that accounts for Samuel Gilmer's move to the town.

And . . . it was his marriage that kept him there for on July 3, 1855, Samuel Gilmer married Matilda Caroline Moore at the Mount Airy home of her father, Samuel D. Moore, as recorded by W. W. McCabe in the Surry County Marriage Registry. Details concerning the family of Matilda Caroline Moore follow.

The census of 1870 records that Samuel Gilmer is a forty-two year old Merchant. His wife, Matilda Moore, is thirty-five, and seven of their ten children have been born. The 1900 census reports that Samuel Gilmer is seventy-one years old, his occupation is recorded as that of Magistrate. Matilda Moore is sixty-three years old. Only one of their children, twenty-three year old Mary Belle, still lived at home. Maybe she is the sister whom I knew as Aunt Nettie.

Jessie Slade Gilmer (1866-1963)

In 1870, my grandmother, Jessie Slade Gilmer, was four years old and living with her parents, Samuel and Matilda Gilmer along with six brothers and sisters and several servants. Some of my grandmother's brothers and sisters moved away before I was born. Those whom I knew, but only slightly, were Aunt Gertie, who married Jefferson Davis Smith and lived in Mount Airy. Aunt Nettie (who married Robert Nutt, a nationally known memory expert) and Uncle Bernie who lived in Greensboro, I think. I may not remember much else about my grandmother's siblings; but I fondly (and longingly) remember the creamy Christmas mints from Aunt Nettie's kitchen.

By 1900 my grandparents, George W. and Jessie Gilmer Sparger, lived in their own household in Mount Airy. Grandfather was a lawyer and founder of an insurance business which was carried on by their son, George W. Sparger, Jr. All of their children, except my father, were born by 1900 and listed in the census of that year with their ages: Helen Gilmer was ten years old; George W. Jr., six years old; Caroline, three years old; Elizabeth (not even named yet), two months old.

Grandfather and Grandmother were living in Baltimore, Maryland when he died in 1935, but they brought him home to Mount Airy for interment. After his death, Grandmother moved to a house on North Elm Street in Greensboro. Her daughters Caroline, who did not marry, and Elizabeth, a widow, lived with her. When Grandmother died in 1963, her children carried her home to Mount Airy where she rests next to Grandfather.

Grandmother was far and away the most unaffectedly, naturally articulate person I have ever known. She always chose the right word to express what she wanted to say whether orally or in script. A letter from her was almost a poem. When I went away to college in 1953, she wrote me a letter which was truly the most inspirational letter I ever received. She was likewise unfailingly kind, warm and compassionate. A policeman in Greensboro sent her a poinsettia every Christmas. Why, I never knew; but her warmth and grace easily invited this kind of enduring recognition.

By the time I married, Grandmother's vision had faded to dim images; but she managed to crochet eight lacy place mats as a wedding gift for me. I was skeptical and asked my Aunt Elizabeth if she had really done this herself; and was assured that she had. According to Aunt Elizabeth, her other granddaughters had place mats she had crafted and she was determined not to neglect her youngest one. Even in the last years of her life, Grandmother was quite alert though she had lost both sight and hearing, and was bedridden. She was ninety-six years old when I took one of our infant sons to visit her.

"Hold him close, Joyce, so I can see him," she said. With her hand she gently traced each little feature of his face. Her own face and smile were that of an angel as she perceived the face of her great grandson through the tips of her fingers. My father, always composed in his public and private life, was heartbroken when she died, maintaining his composure only with great effort and a very wet handkerchief.

Jessie Slade Gilmer was a remarkable person. With gratitude to her, I have a far richer life. As if by proclamation, she left me her bright blue eyes that have not faded with age, nor did her's.

FRANKLIN FAMILY
ORANGE COUNTY,VIRGINIA AND SURRY COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

Probably John Franklin (before 1670, lived in Richmond County VA - before 1717, Essex
County VA)
married Elizabeth Erwin

Lawrence Franklin (1696, Richmond County VA - after 1764, Anson County NC)
married second Mary Payne

Bernard Franklin (1731 Spotsylvania County VA- 1828, Wilkes County NC)
married Mary Cleveland

Jesse Franklin (1760, Orange County VA - 1823, Surry County NC)
married Maacha "Meckey" Perkins

Lawrence Franklin (before 1696-1764)

Lawrence Franklin, born about 1696, and his brother, Edward Franklin, lived on adjacent plantations in Spotsylvania County in 1722. Their land was on Gladly Creek, a tributary of the River Po, the middle branch of the Mattaponi River. Best evidence at present indicates that Lawrence Franklin's parents were John and Elizabeth (Erwin) Franklin of Richmond County, Virginia. Before John Franklin's death, the family moved across the Rappahannock River to Essex County.

Lawrence Franklin first appeared in the Essex County records in 1717. He is still a young man, and perhaps has recently come into possession of his inheritance at the age of eighteen or twenty-one. In 1728 when Caroline County was formed, Lawrence and Edward Franklin were already living on their own land in Spotsylvania County, whereas Elizabeth Franklin, presumably their widowed mother, was tithed for several slaves in Caroline County (formerly Essex).

In 1734/5, Lawrence Franklin and Edward Franklin, along with neighbors and relatives - the Clevelands, Madisons, Paynes, and Taylors - moved to St. Thomas Parish in Orange County. They settled along Blue Run near Piney Mountain. Lawrence Franklin's second wife, ancestor of the Surry Franklins, was Mary Payne, daughter of Bernard Payne and granddaughter of John Payne of Spotsylvania County. In 1764 Lawrence Franklin sold his Orange County, Virginia land and moved to Anson County, North Carolina with his son, also Lawrence. He was living in Anson County at the time of his death.

Bernard Franklin (1731-1828)

Bernard Franklin, son of Lawrence and Mary (Payne) Franklin, was born on May 26, 1731. He married his neighbor Mary Cleveland around 1752. The young couple was living in Orange County, Virginia when word was received that their leaders, meeting in Philadelphia, had adopted a Declaration of Independence in July 1776. A few years later, Bernard and Mary (Cleveland) Franklin took their family to Surry County to live, having been preceded by her brother, Benjamin Cleveland.

Jesse Franklin (1760-1823)

Bernard and Mary (Payne) Franklin's son, Jesse, was born in Orange County, Virginia on March 24, 1760. He bore the same name as a brother who was born on March 3, 1758, and died a year later on March 14, 1759. Jesse Franklin grew to young manhood on Blue Run in sight of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. He was about ten years younger than James Madison (who married Dolly Payne, a Franklin cousin). Being neighbors, Franklin and Madison were undoubtedly acquainted with one another. When both men became active in federal politics, their acquaintance grew to close friendship.

The Rev. Rene Chastain of Buckingham County, Virginia, recorded the marriage Jesse Franklin and Meckey Perkins on January 29, 1789. She was born about 1769 to Hardin and Sarah (Price) Perkins of Buckingham County, Virginia. Familiarly known as "Meckey," her name, Maacha, is Biblical in origin; or it may have been bestowed in commemoration of the Celtic Goddess who figures prominently in Ireland's ancient lore. It was quite a fashionable name about the time Maacha Perkins was born for she was not the only baby girl on the upper James River who was named Maacha during the latter part of the 1700s.

Jesse Franklin and Meckey Perkins probably met one another when she visited a relative - perhaps her brother - William Perkins. He, like the Franklins, lived on Fishers River, but about fifteen miles north in Patrick County.

Jesse Franklin died on September 24, 1823 and his widow Meckey (Perkins) Franklin died in February 1834. Both were buried near their Fishers River home. In 1835, they were joined in rest by their daughter Matilda Caroline (Franklin) Moore, the young wife of Samuel Dalton Moore and mother of three small children.

The remains of Jesse Franklin, a true patriot and hero, were re-interred in 1902 next to Richard Taliaferro and Joseph Winston at the base of the *Monument to Southern Heroes* in the park that commemorates the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. Jesse Franklin's public life as a hero and his service to North Carolina and the nation is well known in Surry County and will not be repeated here.

Matilda Caroline Franklin (1805-1835)

Matilda Caroline Franklin, the youngest child of Jesse and Meckey Franklin, was born in Surry County in 1805. At the time of her birth, her father was serving in the national Senate in Washington D.C. She narrowly missed being a White House daughter. In 1801 her father was President Pro-Tempore of the U. S. Senate during Jefferson's first term when a vacancy occurred in the office of Vice President as a result of the Aaron Burr controversy. As President Pro-Tem, Jesse Franklin was "a heartbeat from the Presidency." At the same time, North Carolinian James Macon was Speaker of the House of Representatives. It is believed that at no other time did North Carolinians simultaneously hold the two principle offices of the United States Congress with immediate succession to the Presidency.

Matilda Caroline Franklin married Samuel Dalton Moore on October 29, 1827.

The author's granddaughter, Caroline Browning, of Frederick, Maryland, born in 1991, is the seventh generation in our family to bear the name Caroline.

SPARGER FAMILY
SURRY COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

John W. Sparger (1754, Shenandoah County VA - 1840 Highland Co OH)
married Christina Frey

John W. Sparger, Jr. (1788, Friedburg, (then) Surry County NC - 1833, Surry County NC)
married Sarah Lyon

Murlin Sparger (1817, Surry County NC - 1876, Surry County NC)
married Bethania Cook

George W. Sparger (1859, Surry County NC - 1934, Baltimore, MD)
married Jessie Slade Gilmer

The Sparger immigrant, Johan Wolfesberger, arrived in Philadelphia on the ship *Thistle* in 1732. His family's migrations began in Germany in mid 1400 when they moved to Switzerland, then to Alsace, from whence he and a large group of Palatines made their way from Rotterdam to a British port, and to Philadelphia. Their fleet included about thirty vessels. He was naturalized a few years later. His surname is variously spelled, recorded often as Wolfesberger or Wolfensberger. Johannes Wolfesberger lived in Lititz, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania when he married. Around 1750 the family moved to the Shenandoah River near Woodstock, Virginia, (now Shenandoah County).

John W. Sparger (1754-1840)

The immigrant's grandson, the third Johan Wolfesberger, was born on August 17, 1754. As a twenty-some-year-old youth, he traveled to Friedburg, North Carolina. Soon after, he and a companion escaped through a window when the house they were in was raided and burned by Indians, so it was recorded in the diary of a Moravian neighbor. Johan Wolfesberger married Christina Frey, daughter of Valentine Frey of Friedburg. Around 1790, the young couple moved to a tract of land in north Surry County granted by patent to the elder Johan Wolfesberger for "my son." Their land was near Forkners Creek. Later, they acquired additional acres in the northeast part of the county. Some years after the Wolfesbergers moved to Surry County, it became more convenient for them to adopt the name as it appeared on an early jury list. Thus, Johan Wolfesberger became John W. Sparger, the "p" in Sparger reflecting the sound of the German "b." Father and children all used the middle initial "W." but it was eliminated in the third and subsequent generations.

John W. Sparger appears in local records as a wagon maker; and in estate accounts, he is sometimes paid for making a coffin. In 1800 he received a grant from the state for 1,000 acres for the purpose of operating an iron works. As their children grew to young adulthood, some began moving west. After the death of Christina Frey Sparger in 1834, John W. Sparger, now a widower in his late seventies, accompanied by one of his sons and perhaps others, rode on horseback to join his children in Highland County, Ohio. There he died on November 17, 1840.

John W. Sparger, Jr. (1788-1833)

John W. Sparger, Jr. was the only son of John W. and Christina (Frey) Sparger who remained in Surry County. In 1816 he married Sarah Lyon, daughter of William Lyon of Hillsville, now in Carroll County, Virginia.

Murlin Sparger (1817-1876)

Murlin Sparger, the oldest son of John W. Sparger, Jr. and Sarah Lyon, was my great grandfather. He was born in Surry County on May 13, 1817. On December 6, 1838, he married Bethania Cook, born January 13, 1817.

Like his father and grandfather before him, Murlin Sparger was a wagon maker. He also owned a tobacco factory which he left to two sons who carried on the business. Sparger Brothers Tobacco Manufacturing Company was still in operation after 1900. Murlin and Thany Sparger had nine children, some of whom left Surry County to raise their families in Knoxville, Tennessee.

In 1875, Murlin and Thany Sparger visited their children in Knoxville. While there, they wrote to their children back at the home place in Surry County. In his letter Murlin Sparger gives many instructions to his sons concerning the care of the farm, and passes along messages from "your mother" instructing their daughters about proper preservation of summer produce. He also speaks of the pain and sickness that troubles him. Indeed, a year after returning home to Surry County, he died of cancer.

George W. Sparger (1859-1934)

I only saw my grandfather once. At Thanksgiving when I was barely two years old, my parents undertook an automobile trip from Danbury to Baltimore. Although I did not know it then, I realize now that this was very much in the nature of a pre-death visit for my father and grandfather.

I have very clear memories of this visit, even to the appearance of the outside of the house which has changed, but remnants of the 1934 house remain, especially the use of some stone in the foundation of the brick house. My grandmother, as always, was warm and loving, happy to see her little granddaughter for the first time. As far as I could tell, Grandfather sat in the same chair in the living room from which he didn't move the entire time. I don't recall that he said anything though everyone made an obvious and extensive effort to include him in conversation which he acknowledged with a nod of his head or a motion of his hand. He was very near death; but as a two year old, I only grasped that something about the old man sitting in the chair wasn't right.

My most vivid memory of this 1934 visit was waking up on the back seat to an amazing array of sparkling lights in the sky flashing by the window over my head. My two year old brain told me that we had arrived in Fairy Land; but my parents informed me, "No, it's just Christmas lights in Washington. Now, go back to sleep. We're almost there."

It strikes me now that my two-year old vision of those sparkling lights in the sky over Washington was singularly prophetic. Many years later that little girl from the hills of North Carolina worked on or around the corner from the same street we drove down in 1934. Among other things, my NASA team was responsible for planning and directing repair of the Hubble Space Telescope that beams back to earth those incredible sparkling images from the sky.