

Chance Favors the Prepared Mind

One of “three youngest Sons”: Identifying a Missing
18th Century Pettypool Family Member

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Abstract

My favorite genealogical moments involve discovering the identity of extended family members who are known to exist but haven't been identifiable using easily accessed historical sources and “reasonably exhaustive research.”¹ Although one such individual has eluded my best efforts since I started to research the early branches of the Pettypool family over 35 years ago, a concentrated review of one Pettypool family branch along with a chance “hit” on an online database seems to have solved the mystery.

I finally published “The William Pettypool Family of Southside Virginia: Lineage Review Based on Current Review of Evidence” in 2003 knowing that some lines had not been fully extended and that one line, in particular, was missing an unnamed heir. The individual in question was a son of William(4) Pettypool (ca 1720 - ca 1774), fourth in a line of Pettypool men all named William, the first of whom was the mid-17th cen-

tury English immigrant to colonial Virginia.²

This William(4) married Mary Caldwell before 1741 and died before 10 November 1774 in Lunenburg County, Virginia leaving a nuncupative will in which he directed that:

All his estate both real and Personal to his wife so long as she continued his Widow. But in case she married again

it was his will that all the said Estate would be sold and the money arising therefrom should be put out at interest and be equally divided between his three youngest Sons.”³

Identification of four of the sons of William(4) and Mary (Caldwell) Pettypool proceeded relatively straightforwardly. In 1748 Edward Caldwell, Mary’s father, had designated his grandchildren, “Colwell Petepool and William Petepool,” as recipients of the land he had deeded to William(4) and Mary upon their deaths.⁴ Since these two male grandchildren were beyond the age of 21 at the death of their own father, William(4), it was presumed that they were not among the “three youngest Sons” referred to in William’s 1774 will.

Through use of Lunenburg County court records and tax records citing the widowed Mary Pettypool, two further sons, John(5) and Baxter(5), were identified.⁵ This left one unknown son among the three youngest male heirs of William(4). Between the time of original publication of the 2003 manuscript and the present, I had found no further easily rec-

ognized historical clues to the identity of the un-named son. To my knowledge, the mystery of his identity has persisted until now.

In recent weeks, however, I believe I have discovered the missing son’s identity. My cousin, James (Jim) Furman Poole and I have recently embarked on an attempt to clarify the relationships among descendants of the Pettypool family branches that migrated to western South Carolina in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. One of the by-products of this preparation was a concentrated immersion into and analysis of documents referring to the descendants of one of the South Carolina branches extending from William(4) of Lunenburg County, Virginia.

Sometime in the latter quarter of the 18th century William(5), the son of William(4) and Mary (Caldwell) moved his children and second wife, Frances (Brooks) Pettypool, to Newberry County, South Carolina. Subsequently, a Laban(6) P. Poole, named as a son of William(5) and Frances, appears in Newberry County probate documents from the early 19th century.⁶

I had already collected much Newberry County material before the advent of online

databases and had been aware of this Laban from earlier attempts to trace descendants of the William(3) branches. As Jim Poole had an early 2015 presentation deadline and needed the South Carolina material, I now proceeded with renewed energies to confirm and expand what I knew about this South Carolina Laban P. Poole and his siblings.

As I reviewed my genealogy program's descendant list through generation 6 for William(4), I noted, not for the first time I'm certain, but with greater recognition of its potential significance that Baxter(5), brother of William(5) of Newberry County, also had named a son Laban.⁷ Not without reason, as I reflect on the sequence of events, the presence of these two Labans of the same generation, struck me with greater force in such a comprehensive list than they ever had from my earlier narrative accounts or from "family group sheet" presentations. (Perhaps this is a lesson in the wisdom of approaching genealogical problem solving using a variety of formats.)

At approximately the same time, possibly the same day— I don't keep a research log as faithfully as I once did— I searched the databases of an-

cestry.com in order to ensure that I hadn't missed any relevant material for this South Carolina Laban. What should pop up but a hit for a "Laban (also Labon) Pool" in the Revolutionary War Rolls for Virginia. This was for an individual born way too early to be either of the Labans from the sixth generation that I had just seen in the descendant list. Just who was this Laban and where might he fit in?

This Laban Pool (called Laban Pettypool in one pay roll) had been indexed as part of the "Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783," a database containing a collection of records kept by the U.S. National Archives listing men who fought for the colonies during America's War of Independence. The images corresponding to the index entries indicated that Laban had been a member of Captain John Winston's company, a unit of the Virginia 14th Regiment that included men drawn in part from Lunenburg County, Virginia.⁸

The pay roll records from John Winston's company exist for December, 1777 through November of 1778, an interval in which the 14th Regiment was encamped at Valley Forge along with the rest of George Washington's Continental Army during the deadly winter of 1778.⁹

Laban is listed as a sergeant in Winston's company from December, 1777 until May, 1778, at which time there is a notation by his entry reading "Deceased 25 May 78."¹⁰ There is no evidence that Laban died from battle injuries, and analysis of army records has indicated that most of the encampment mortalities resulted from disease and that most of those came during the spring months of March through May.¹¹

Of even greater importance for the attribution of Laban's ancestry is the presence of Baxter(5) Poole in the same regiment as Laban during the entirety of Laban's service to the 14th Regiment. It seems quite natural to suppose that brothers, particularly if not already married and living independently, would join the same military unit. Moreover, it also seems fitting that Baxter and his older brother, William, would commemorate their dead brother, Laban, by each naming a son in his honor. I propose, therefore, that this Laban Poole (Pettypoole) is the unnamed third of the youngest sons in the will of William(4) Pettypool of Lunenburg County, Virginia.

Where might Laban belong in the family birth order? Minimum age of eligibility for service

during the Revolutionary War was age 16, or 15 with parent permission.¹² Thus, although it is not possible to use their military service to estimate either Baxter's or Laban's dates of birth with any certainty, we can assume that they were both beyond the age of 15, thereby suggesting birthdates of 1762 or earlier.

Such calculations accord well with what is known from other records associated with the family of William(4) of Lunenburg County. Laban, recorded as a sergeant from the beginning of Winston's pay rolls, consistently held a higher rank than Baxter, who was first a private and then promoted to corporal. Perhaps Laban's military seniority also suggests that he was the elder of the two brothers.

Laban's premature death also would explain why no tax, deed or court records have been found for him in Lunenburg County from the last quarter of the 18th century. He does not appear in lists of taxable tithes recorded in Lunenburg County starting in 1748, and his death predated the 1782 onset of the annual personal property tax collections in Virginia. He apparently held no property requiring his presence in county deed books, and he must have

been of upright character as he does not appear in any known county court records of the period. Gratefully, he did join in the struggle for colonial independence from Great Britain as we would otherwise have remained in the dark as to the identity of this missing early member of the Pettypool family.

Notes

¹ A “reasonably exhaustive search” is the first pillar of “The Genealogical Proof Standard,” one of the criteria proposed by the Board for Certification of Genealogists as a necessary qualification for a credible conclusion about an ancestral attribution. See <http://www.bcgcertification.org/resources/standard.html>, accessed 29 Jan 2015.

² For a biography of William(4) see p. 15 from “The William Pettypool Family of Southside Virginia: Lineage Reconstruction Based on a Contemporary Review of Evidence,” by Carolyn S. Hartsough, available from the Pettypool Family in America website, www.pettypool.com.

³ Ibid., 16.

⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁶ Glenda Burdick. Newberry County South Carolina Probate Estate Abstracts Volume 2: Probate Estate Boxes 11-25. (Self published, 1989), 504.

⁷ Carolyn Hartsough, “The William Pettypool Family of Southside Virginia,” 17.

⁸ “14th Virginia Regiment,” Valley Forge Legacy: The Muster Roll Project (<http://valleyforgemusterroll.org/regiments/va14.asp>: accessed 29 Jan 2015).

⁹ “The Encampment,” Valley Forge Legacy: The Muster Roll Project (<http://valleyforgemusterroll.org/encampment.asp>: accessed 29 Jan 2015).

¹⁰ Citing National Archives, Washington, D.C., "U.S. Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783," database, index and images, Ancestry.com (<http://search.ancestry.com/>: accessed 29 January 2015), Laban Poole entry for May, 1778 pay roll; citing National Archives Microfilm Publication M246, 138 rolls); War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Record Group 93; Roll Box: 113; Roll state: VA; Image 125 of 752; John Winston's Company, 14th Virginia Regiment.

¹¹ “The Encampment,” Valley Forge Legacy: The Muster Roll Project (<http://valleyforgemusterroll.org/encampment.asp>: accessed 29 Jan 2015).

¹² Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>), “Continental Army,” rev. 30 Jan 2015.