

THE NORTHERN NECK OF VIRGINIA — RESIDENCE OF OUR IMMIGRANT ANCESTOR.

By tradition, our earliest known Grigsby ancestor, John Grigsby (1623-1730), came to colonial Virginia "about the year 1660". To date no record has been found of the port from which he sailed or where on the American shore he disembarked, nor has his English or Welsh ancestry been established. His traditional wife has been given the names of Sarah or Jane Rosser or Prosser, but no record has been found as to whether the marriage was made before or after his arrival. These are questions which the Society poses to its members for continued research on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, and for which it is constantly on the alert for answers. There are several documented records on which the name John Grigsby appears from 1665 with a final entry of his will and death in 1730. A brief account of the area of his residence in Virginia may be helpful in finding the answers to questions posed.

Geographically, the Virginia land area known as the Northern Neck came into being in the final months of the reign of Charles I (1649), when his son (Charles II), then dethroned and in exile in Scotland, confirmed the proprietary land grants made to seven loyal followers of more than 5,000,000 acres from the Chesapeake Bay to the south and extending between the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers to the headwaters or summit of the Blue Ridge mountains. All the rights of an English barony went with the grant which (1688) came down to Thomas, Lord Culpepper.

It has been said that immigration to the settlements of the Northern Neck began in a period of European war and religious upheaval. In France, the Church and the Huguenots were opposing forces and the 50 Years War had left the countryside covered with thousands of graves. In England, the 1630's and 40's had been torn by political and religious conflict and civil war with the King (Charles I) and Parliament being on opposing sides. The Parliament, on which Oliver Cromwell sat as a member, held out for the rights of the people they represented to make laws and levy taxes. Religious practice was another issue with many of the King's opponents being Puritans—those who wanted to 'purify' the Church of England by simplifying its rituals and ceremony. The supporters of the Parliament and Puritan party became known as 'round heads' because of their bowl shaped, close-cropped hair cuts. The followers of Charles I, the Royalist Cavaliers, believed in the Church ritual and supported the King's claim to absolute political power.

A Royal army of supporting Cavaliers and a Parliamentary army of English yeoman under Cromwell took the field in the 1640's to settle the issues by force with the Parliamentary army emerging victorious. Charles I was beheaded (1649) and his son (Charles II) went into exile. The Cavalier supporters of the King found themselves without influence and in disarray and, hope and property confiscated, many Cavaliers escaped to America to find refuge in the colony of their late King. These 'gentlemen immigrants' came, first to Jamestown then pushed on to the largely uninhabited lands of the north and in the two or three decades to follow, a new kind of immigrant and civilization in Virginia was born—one that was to make a lasting impression on the history of the country and without whose influence the course of events to come would have been changed.

With the restoration of Charles II (1660) to the English throne, these Cavaliers who had made sacrifices for the King were not forgotten and their possessions restored, they received financial aid, land grants and colonial laws favorable to their interests. Among these early Cavalier aristocrats can be found the ancestors of George Washington, James Monroe, James Madison, George Mason, John Marshall, Gen. Robert E. Lee, the Fitzhugh, Carter, Williams, Dade and Ashton families of old Stafford County.

The tradition is that before his emigration, John Grigsby was a Puritan, an independent of the Yeoman class of small land owners and a possible follower of Cromwell who, upon the restoration of Charles II, found his way to America and the Northern Neck. There is no documentation that he came with a brother, James, The name, John Grigsby, first appeared in Essex Co. records, 1671, as a witness on a deed to John Prosser, however, by 1686, he had acquired land in Stafford Co. adjoining that of James Ashton to which he added 887 acres in 1699 thereby establishing a permanent residence. Puritan, Cavalier or Independent—Who was John Grigsby?

(Editor's note: Input from the membership regarding the earliest "documentation" of the year in which the name Grigsby or John Grigsby appears will be appreciated. Send along a copy of the instrument—if available.)

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