

## THE EAST TENNESSEE GRIGSBYS

A short narrative covering the origins of one of the larger branches of the Grigsby Family in America.

by John W. Grigsby

In England, in the year 1658, brothers John and James Grigsby, probably natives of Kent, had been faithful supporters of Oliver Cromwell all during the turbulent years following the beheading of Charles I. Cromwell died at this time, and his son was a weak and ineffectual man. All the while the sentiment in Parliament was leaning ever closer to the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II. John and James Grigsby probably felt their future no longer tenable in England, and decided to immigrate to the colonies.

At present, no record has been found for the date John and James embarked, nor upon which ship. (Many, including the author, believe this record will eventually be found.)

John and James Grigsby are next known to be in Tidewater, Virginia, where John Grigsby is recorded as owning land on the Rappahannock River as early as 1660, and later in the Battain Tract at the mouth of the Occoquan River, where he owned a large plantation of 887 acres. The Fry-Jefferson map of 1755 shows a port of "Grigsby" at this site.

John Grigsby had married Jane Prosser - possibly Rosser-earlier, and they raised a family of five sons and one daughter. They were John, Charles, Mary Ann, James, William, and Thomas. Charles, the ancestor of the East Tennessee Grigsbys, married Sarah Wilkerson, and they had five sons and five daughters. They were James, Charles, John, Margaret, Rose, Barbara, Priscella, Elisha, Rachel, and Wilkerson.

John Grigsby, third son of Charles Grigsby, returned home from the campaign of Admiral Vernon against Cartagena in early 1743 to discover his father had died in October 1740, shortly after John had left on the campaign. His father in his will bequeathed John - "should he survive" - a share of the plantation plus horses, cattle, and slaves.

John Grigsby, son of Charles, and grandson of the original immigrant John Grigsby, was now known as "Soldier John". In 1746, "Soldier John" married Rosanna Etchison, disposed of his holdings in Stafford County, and moved with

his young wife to Culpepper where he and Rosanna located near the Rapidan River. They had four sons and one daughter. They were James, John, Charles, Sarah, and William.

Rosanna died in 1762. In 1764, "Soldier John" married Elizabeth Porter. They had nine children. They were Ann, Joseph, Jane, Rachel, Martha, Elisha, Elizabeth, Frances, and Reuben. All of "Soldier John's" fourteen children except Reuben were born in Culpepper County. Reuben was born after his father bought "Fruit Hill" in Rockbridge County.

"Soldier John" lived in Culpepper for 37 years. He bought a plantation of 460 acres in Rockbridge County from his son, James, in 1779, and lived there at "Fruit Hill" until he died in 1794. He was the first person buried in the Falling Spring Presbyterian Church Cemetery.

John Grigsby, second son of "Soldier John", was born October 15, 1752. There is quite a mystery and some controversy about this John Grigsby. One John Grigsby, born October 15, 1752, married a Winifred (Winney) Breeding, and moved from Culpepper to Rockingham County prior to 1780.

In 1789 he came to Tennessee, where on May 5, 1789, he bought several hundred acres of land on Dodson Creek in Hawkins County (then North Carolina), paying for same with 230 pounds Virginia currency. John Grigsby's family at that time consisted of wife Winney, son William 9, Nancy 6, Winifred 5, Lucy 4, Elizabeth 3, Judith 6 months, and at least one manservant Will, and his wife Susan. The Grigsbys came in a caravan with families Lauderbeck, Breeding, and Roark. All settled near each other in Hawkins County. It is assumed that all came directly from Rockingham as all these families had connections with each other there, and that they banded together for protection from Indian attack.

After they settled in Hawkins County, John and Winifred Grigsby had seven additional children: James D., born 1790, Fanny (Susan) born 1791, Polly born 1795, John born 1798, Ashby born 1800, and Nathaniel born 1806, and Samuel born 1794.

Times were hard on the frontier, but John and Winifred worked hard and prospered. They contributed land and materials, as did their neighbors, for the erection of a church and school house with teacher. All thirteen of their children lived to adulthood, and all married and had families. In his will, John Grigsby freed his manservant, Will, upon his and Winifred's death, (1830). Will was duly made a free man 31 years before the start of the Civil War. A copy of his will as a free man is among the family archives.

William Grigsby, eldest son of John and Winney Grigsby, was born in Culpepper County in 1780. Sometime between 1780 and 1784, his parents presumably moved to Rockingham County since John Grigsby was listed on those tax rolls until 1788. William Grigsby's father, John, also served in the militia from Rockingham in the Revolutionary War, seeing service in Captain Michael Roark's company which was attached to Captain William Nalle's company of volunteers from Augusta County in the campaign to Point Pleasant.

After 1788, William Grigsby's parents bought their first plantation land in 1789 on Dodson's Creek, where the land is still in the hands of Grigsby descendants.

William Grigsby was known in the family as "Old Billy" at an early age. With his father's help, he bought a plantation several miles from his father's place. It was called "Whitehorn." William Grigsby had eleven children - 5 boys and 6 girls - all of whom lived to adulthood and married and had families of their own. They were: Dr. John Brown Grigsby, Winney Grigsby Smith, Emeline Grigsby Arnott, Polly Grigsby Mooney, Judy Grigsby Mooney, Althea Grigsby Petty, Lewis Grigsby, Arlena Grigsby Merriman, Andrew Jackson Grigsby, William Grigsby, and Wiley Grigsby.

William Grigsby's home plantation still stands, although ownership passed from Grigsby hands in 1954, when the last of the male members of the family became too old to operate the farm.

John Grigsby died on September 28th or 29th, 1826, shortly after making his last will on his death bed. His will was probated on October 2, 1826. His eldest son, William, was executor, and his plantation home place was left to his youngest sons: Ashby, who was 26 years old, and Nathaniel, who was 20 years old. Other lands were left to several other sons: William, Samuel, and James. John was left money to buy a plantation. Implication of the will was that the daughters had been previously provided for.

Nathaniel Grigsby married Elizabeth Lauderbeck in 1827. They lived the remainder of their lives on the Grigsby plantation, and raised a large family. They are buried in the family cemetery.

James David Grigsby, next owner of the family lands, married Frances Gulley, and they raised a large family. One of their daughters, Lucy Anne Grigsby, married Lewis Madison Arnott who owned lands adjacent to the Grigsby plantation. Their lands were consolidated by inheritance and purchase of other heirs' interest.

The next owner was Edgar Nicholas Arnott who married Jewel Odom. They had one child, Lucille, who married Frederick Ryan. The Ryans have five children - one son and four daughters. They are: Bridget Anne, Jewel Fredricka, Mary Beth, Mary Etta, and Timothy Arnott Ryan.

These children represent the seventh generation on the original Grigsby land which has remained in the family for 190 years since 1789. No land was ever sold outside of the family and much was added. Today this large holding is a "Heritage Farm" and the pride of many generations of Grigsbys and Arnotts. It is hoped in time that many generations of Grigsby descendants will have the privilege of standing on this beautiful land, which the first Tennessee John Grigsby chose as his home, and where he and his wife Winney sleep in eternal peace.