

ELIZABETH ABBOTT and MARTHA "PATSY" ABBOTT
Daughters of Joseph Abbott of Halifax County, Virginia

Research Report by Joan Horsley
Based on Research as of December 2013
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ELIZABETH ABBOTT

Daughter of Joseph Abbott and wife Frances
Born: Abt. 1768, Halifax County, VA
Died: Bet. 27 Feb 1837 - 26 Feb 1838, Halifax County, VA
Never married

MARTHA "PATSY" ABBOTT

Daughter of Joseph Abbott and wife Frances
Born: Abt. 1772, Halifax County, VA
Died: Bet. 28 Feb - 26 Aug 1844, Halifax County, VA
Never married

Joseph Abbott's will written 30 Mar 1787 bequeaths jointly to "my four youngest daughters namely Mary, Elizabeth, Frances and Paty [Patsy/Martha]." [HWB2:298] Using this information with the birth dates of their siblings and supported by later records, Elizabeth Abbott was born abt. 1768, and Martha Abbott was born abt. 1772, both born in Halifax County, Virginia. (The way Martha's name is spelled as "Paty" in the recorded copy of her father's will may be a clerk's copy error. "Patty" can be a nickname for Martha; but all other records except for the will name Joseph and Frances Abbott's daughter only as Martha or Patsy, the more widely-used nickname for Martha at this time.)

Elizabeth and Martha/Patsy are the two of Joseph and Frances Abbott's four daughters who never married, and they generally are mentioned -- we might even say overlooked or written off -- that way. Nevertheless, each was an individual in her own right. Each lived a long and prosperous life, and each would have contributed in her own particular way to their family and to the larger community. Their wills, their administration of estates, and the growth of their financial position show each one was competent and capable at handling affairs of the larger world.

Yet their lives as we know them from existing public records are so closely intertwined that discussing them together rather than separately gives a more complete picture of their relationships with each other and with their siblings among whom they lived all their lives. Hopefully discussing them jointly within this context will only add to our understanding of them as individuals rather than diminish their individual significance.

Elizabeth Abbott and Martha Abbott lived on the Abbott family land where they were born on the east side of today's Crystal Hill, VA in north-central Halifax County. Elizabeth was abt. 20 years old and Martha abt. age 16 when their father, Joseph Abbott, died in early 1788. Seven of their siblings who were younger than Elizabeth and apparently three much older half-sisters still lived at home, with the youngest being abt. age 11. Their older sister Mary

Abbott married in 1787 abt. six months before Joseph died, and their other full sister, Frances Abbott, married in 1795. Elizabeth and Martha and several brothers continued to live together with their widowed mother, Frances Abbott, until her death in 1822 or 1823, when Elizabeth was abt. 55 and Martha was abt. 51. Thereafter, the two unmarried sisters and their younger brother John Abbott (b. c1773), who likewise never married, continued to share a home together on Abbott family land.

In their earlier years, Elizabeth and Martha helped raise younger siblings while they also helped their widowed mother manage and provide for a large household on a sizeable farm. All their lives, the two sisters lived among the growing families of their brothers William, Richard, Leonard, and Moody, each of whom inherited adjacent tracts of the land their father settled in 1762. Their sister Mary Abbott Owen with husband Hatcher Owen and their family lived just a short distance south, near where their brother Joseph Abbott Jr. and his family also lived until abt. 1810, when they moved to southeastern Halifax. After Joseph Jr.'s death the following year, at least his oldest son kept in close touch with his Abbott relatives in northern Halifax and for several years around 1820 lived among them as well. Thus, Elizabeth and Martha were amply supplied with numerous nieces and nephews as well as siblings in their immediate area. Hardly the traditional image of "childless spinsters." In their later lives, the records leave the impression that Elizabeth and Martha were like surrogate mothers to one niece in particular whose mother died in the girl's infancy, as we shall see.

Of Elizabeth and Martha's 14 known siblings, only two are proved to have moved away from Halifax County. Richard Abbott (b. c1770) moved his family to adjacent Pittsylvania County in Dec 1843 when he was abt. 73 years old and Elizabeth was already deceased, but their next-to-youngest brother, Moses Abbott (b. c1776), left at abt. age 28. (Their youngest brother, Fleming, possibly joined Moses, but that is not proved.) Moses left Halifax abt. 1804 and went to Richmond, VA, where it seems he had a lucrative job and invested judiciously, accruing an impressive financial estate. However, Moses died suddenly at abt. 39 years old, apparently while en route to join his family in Halifax for Christmas.

On Christmas Eve 24 Dec 1815, Moses Abbott wrote his will and died shortly after. Like Elizabeth and Martha, Moses never married. He left a lifetime bequest to "my dear mother," Frances Abbott, and with one exception he left the whole of his estate to be divided equally among "my three brothers Moody, John and Richard and my two unmarried sisters Elizabeth and Patsy." The exception says, "I devise to my brother John and his heirs a lot of Ground which belongs to me in the City of Richmond upon condition that he pays annually to my two unmarried sisters the sum of one hundred dollars to be equally divided between them during their lives." *[Henrico WB5:71]*

Moses' death was the fifth untimely death in the immediate family circle in the previous five years--three siblings (Joseph Jr., Leonard, and Moses), a brother-in-law (John Robertson), and a sister-in-law (Magdaline Lacy Abbott). Two other of Elizabeth and Martha's siblings probably died between 1804-1810 (Mary Abbott Owen and Fleming), and in 1818, a 27-year-old nephew who lived next to them also died (William's son Carter A. Abbott). During this time of family loss and grief, the sisters, then in their 40s, likely were a comfort to their mother and perhaps lent strength and practical assistance to other family members as well.

Like several other Abbott families in Halifax, Frances Abbott's household, which included her daughters Elizabeth and Martha, is missing in the 1820 census. However, Frances is

included in the 1820 Halifax personal property tax lists. Also, beginning in 1820, Elizabeth Abbott is listed as the responsible taxpayer for one slave. (The only females included in these tax lists are widows or never-married adult women who were the responsible taxpayers and/or responsible for white males age 16+ in their households.) Elizabeth Abbott's 1820 tax list is dated the same day as her mother and brothers Moody, John, and Richard, and a few days after her brother William Abbott and his son Wesley M. Abbott, all living on adjacent properties. Her brother Leonard Abbott, who also had lived adjacent, died abt. 1815. His widow, Susanna Ferguson Abbott, is missing in the 1820 tax lists, but later list dates show she and their five children were still living on Leonard's land.

Elizabeth and Martha's mother, Frances Abbott, wrote her will on 18 Nov 1820. She died at around 80 or 81 years old between 25 Feb 1822, when she last appears on the yearly personal property taxes, and 22 Sep 1823, when her will was proved in Halifax Court. [HWB13:30] Frances left all her personal estate that was not on lifetime loan by her husband Joseph's will to her two unmarried daughters, Elizabeth and Martha. (It was the general practice to provide for unmarried daughters over unmarried sons, as males had more avenues open to them for self-support.) Frances' will states (in part):

"I give and bequeath all my Stock of Horses together with all my house hold and kitchen furniture of every kind and all my plantation utensils my Grind Stone Cast and Oxen to my two Daughters namely ELIZABETH ABBOTT and PATSEY ABBOTT I also give unto my afores'd two Daughters all my crop on hand after paying my Just debts to them their heirs forever." [Caps added]

Frances Abbott's will appointed her son John Abbott as an executor along with "friend" John R. Hall. Both stepped aside, and Frances' daughter Elizabeth Abbott, as the elder of the two legatees, applied for and was granted administration of Frances' estate. Elizabeth's brothers Moody Abbott and Richard Abbott secured her administrative bond of \$500.

Elizabeth's household with her younger siblings Martha and John continued to prosper. In 1824, Elizabeth Abbott was taxed for 3 slaves over age 12 and 2 horses, and by 1830, she had added 3 more taxable slaves. As Martha and John shared the household with Elizabeth, they shared the assets, but as the eldest, Elizabeth apparently held the assets in her name. The 1830 census names John Abbott as head of their household (as was typical, since he was the only male), and he is listed then with 14 slaves in all. Elizabeth was abt. age 62, Martha was abt. age 58, and John was abt. age 57.

On 12 Oct 1832, Elizabeth Abbott attested to her brother William Abbott's Revolutionary War service in Halifax Court when William applied for a pension at age 76. Elizabeth would have been around 13 years old when her brother left for war service, old enough to give the following testimony from her own knowledge and memory. (Elizabeth's will shows her signing by signature rather than mark as entered here. All the Abbott siblings were literate.)

"I, Elizabeth Abbott of the County of Halifax and State of Virginia do hereby certify that my brother an old Revolutionary soldier left home some time in the Spring of 1781 and was absent for several months, and when he left home he stated that he was going into the Army as a soldier, and when he returned he stated he had been in the Army, and it was my belief and the belief of the family at that

time that the cause of his absence was in consequence of him being a soldier in the Army and I remain of that belief. We then, and do at this time reside in the aforesaid County. Given under my hand this 12th day of October 1832"

/s/ Elizabeth (x) Abbott (her mark)

[Source: NARA File No. W5616. Transcribed by J. Horsley from images online at Fold3.com]

Seventeen years after their brother Moses Abbott died, and 10 years after the death of their mother who had lifetime interest in his estate, Moses' legatees, including Elizabeth and Martha, still had not realized their full inheritance because of unrecovered (and possibly unrecoverable) debts in Richmond owed to Moses' estate. Trying to collect on the debts, especially in a distant city, was costing even more. Thus, by a deed dated 12 Jan 1833, Elizabeth and Martha (named there Patsy as she was in Moses' will) joined their brothers John, Richard, and Moody in selling their interest in and rights to Moses' estate for \$250 to a Halifax County Justice of the Peace, Mel Spragins. [HDB40:493] As grateful as they surely would have been to get their full share of Moses' generous bequests, none of them was suffering without it, as each by their own assets was well-off, relative to their time and place.

Three years later, Elizabeth Abbott wrote her will dated 22 May 1836. [HWB18:334] Elizabeth died between 27 Feb 1837, when she last appears on the tax lists, and 26 Feb 1838, when her will was proved in Halifax Court. She was abt. 70 years old. Elizabeth named her brother Moody Abbott as executor, but he stepped aside for their sister Martha Abbott, Elizabeth's primary legatee, to obtain administration of the estate. Moody secured Martha's administrative bond along with their nephew Wesley M. Abbott, then age 39.

Will of Elizabeth Abbott - Abstract

Written 22 May 1836, Proved 26 Feb 1838

Halifax Will Book 18, p. 334

"I ELIZABETH ABBOTT of Halifax County being in perfect health, sense, and memory..."

Legatees:

To ELIZABETH M. ABBOTT: "two negro girls namely D Liley & Maria, to her and her heirs forever"

To "my sister" MARTHA ABBOTT: "all the rest and residue of my estate to dispose of as she shall see cause"

Executor appointed: "my brother" MOODY ABBOTT

Signed: Elizabeth Abbott [by signature]

Witnesses: W. D. Roberts, Drury J. Jeffress, Nelson K. Foster

26 Feb 1838 - Halifax Court - The will of Elizabeth Abbott was proved by the oaths of three witnesses and ordered to be recorded.

Moody Abbott declined as executor, and certificate of administration was granted to Martha Abbott, with Moody Abbott and Wesley M. Abbott her securities on the \$10,000 bond.

[Source: Halifax Will Book 18, p. 334. LVA Reel 43. Abstract by J. Horsley. Comments in brackets added]

Elizabeth Abbott's primary wealth and the only "property" in the appraisal of her estate were her slaves.

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Inventory and Appraisal of Estate of Elizabeth Abbott

Ordered Nov Court 1838

Dated 15 Mar 1839

Appraisers: James P. Roberts, Wesley M. Abbott, William D. Roberts

Ten slaves: Cindy, Granville, Mariah, Mildred, Charellon[?], Salley, Henry, Leathy, Jones, and Sanders.

Total appraised value: \$3,350.00

Recorded: 25 Nov 1839

[Source: Halifax Will Book 19, p. 175-176. LVA Reel 44. Abstract by J. Horsley. Comments in brackets added]

Note:

The appraisers were all close neighbors with Abbott relationships. Wesley M. Abbott was Elizabeth's nephew, son of her brother William Abbott. James P. Roberts and William D. Roberts were sons of Daniel Roberts, a brother of Sally Roberts Fulkerson, mother of Catharine Fulkerson who married Elizabeth's brother Richard Abbott. Daniel Robert's wife, Margaret Purcell, was related by marriages to William Abbott's wife Mary Parker, and Daniel Roberts' land was a bound on land purchased by Elizabeth's brother Moody Abbott in 1819. [HDB28:174]

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Elizabeth Abbott left the bulk of her estate to her sister Martha/Patsy, who continued living together with their brother John Abbott. However, Elizabeth also bequeathed two female slaves, probably valued at \$350-\$400 each. to their niece Elizabeth M. Abbott, the only child of their brother Moody Abbott. Various records indicate that the house where Elizabeth, Martha, and John lived together may have been on Moody's land, which Moody inherited from their father and later expanded.

Moody Abbott married for the first and only time at abt. age 51 on 31 May 1826 to Martha W. Lindsey (a sister of William Abbott's son-in-law Thomas G. Lindsey). Moody and wife Martha's only child, Elizabeth M. Abbott, was born abt. 1828, but her mother died either in childbirth or within the next year or two, and Moody never remarried. Surely he raised his daughter with the help and care of his unmarried sisters Elizabeth and Martha, as Elizabeth M. Abbott obviously was special to them. Out of all their nieces and nephews living around them, ultimately Elizabeth M. became the heir to their full estates.

Martha Abbott lived another six years after Elizabeth's death, but Martha wrote her own will 27 Jan 1838, around the same time Elizabeth died. [HWB20:519] Martha, then abt. 66 years old, apparently wanted to ensure that the home she had shared with John and Elizabeth was protected for John's use during the rest of his life and that her heir was of her own choosing rather than directed by intestate law in case she died or was incapacitated with no warning.

Martha bequeathed all her estate, which included her inheritance from Elizabeth, to their niece Elizabeth M. Abbott (Moody's daughter). However, that was to take effect only after the death of her brother John Abbott, who was to have full use of and responsibility for all the property for his lifetime. Martha "Patsy" Abbott died between 28 Feb 1844, when she

returned her yearly personal property tax list, and 26 Aug 1844, when her will was proved in Halifax Court. Martha was abt. 72 years old when she died.

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Will of Martha Abbott - Abstract

Written 27 Jan 1838, Proved 26 Aug 1844

Halifax Will Book 20, p. 519-520

"I MARTHA ABBOTT being in perfect sense and memory..."

Legatees: All estate real and personal "to be kept together during my brother JOHN ABBOTT's life time at my late dwelling place and I furthermore leave him to take charge of it all and to feed and cloath [clothe] my servants out of their labour during his life, and at his death I give and bequeath the whole of my Estate to ELIZABETH M. ABBOTT to her and her heirs forever"

Executor: my brother MOODY ABBOTT

Signed: Martha Abbott [by signature]

Witnesses: Giles M. Cardwell, Peter S. Cardwell

26 Aug 1844 - Will of Martha Abbott proved in Halifax Court by the oaths of the two subscribing witnesses. Moody Abbott declined as executor, and certificate of administration was granted to WESLEY M. ABBOTT, with MOODY ABBOTT and William Wauhop as his securities on bond of \$5,000.

[Source: Halifax Will Book 20, p. 519. LVA Reel 44. Abstract by J. Horsley. Comments in brackets added.]

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Inventory and Appraisal of Estate of Martha Abbott

Appraisers: James P. Roberts, Abel Chandler, Giles M. Cardwell

Inventory includes: Slaves Mary, Wilson, Jim, and William (valued together at \$1,250.00); also 2 folding tables, bed stead and cords, bed stead and bed, cubberd [cupboard] and contents, 4 chairs, 2 pine chests, parcel of books, loom, looking glass, grind stone, lot of plates &c, jug, butter hat, churn, cart, plow, parcel of hoes &c, 2 scythes & cradle, tops and shucks, 4 stacks fodder, 7 stacks oats, 20 barrels corn, crop of tobacco, 2 gray mares, 1 red cow, 1 red cow & bell, 1 black cow, 1 pided [pied] cow, bee hive. - Total appraisal: \$1,479.87

Recorded: 28 Oct 1844

[Source: Halifax Will Book 20, p. 552. LVA Reel 44. Abstract by J. Horsley. Comments in brackets added.]

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Moody Abbott declined as executor in favor of his and Martha's nephew Wesley M. Abbott, son of their brother William Abbott. Wesley's wife, Eliza Ann Robertson, was the sister of Jesse T. Robertson, who married Moody's daughter Elizabeth M. Abbott in 1843. Thus, the ultimate legatee of Elizabeth and Martha Abbott's estates, their niece Elizabeth M. Abbott, was both Wesley Abbott's cousin by birth and his sister-in-law by marriage.

Elizabeth and Martha's brother John Abbott lived another five years after Martha and died in 1849 at abt. age 76. The administrator of his estate also was Wesley M. Abbott. [HWB23:378]

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If you use any information from this report, please include the documentation as given here and cite this paper as:

Joan Horsley. *Elizabeth Abbott and Martha Abbott, Daughters of Joseph Abbott of Halifax County, Virginia*. (Raleigh, NC: J. Horsley, 2013) Available online at [www.joanhorsley.org](http://www.joanhorsley.org).

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