

FRANCES ABBOTT ROBERTSON and FAMILY
Daughter of Joseph Abbott of Halifax County, Virginia

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

Daughter of Joseph Abbott and wife Frances
Born: Abt. 1769, Halifax County, Virginia
Married: 15 Jan 1795, Halifax County, VA to John Robertson
Died: 1834, Halifax County, Virginia

JOHN ROBERTSON

Born: Unknown
Died: Bet. Mar 1813 - Mar 1814, Halifax County, Virginia

CHILDREN of FRANCES ABBOTT and JOHN ROBERTSON

John Robertson (m. Nancy Cabaniss), William Robertson (never married), George M. Robertson (m. Sarah/Sally Newbill), Fleming Robertson (never married), Joseph Robertson (m. Dolly C., no children), and two unknown daughters

FRANCES ABBOTT, daughter of Joseph Abbott and wife Frances, is named in her father's 1787 will among "my four youngest daughters namely Mary, Elizabeth, Frances and Paty." [HWB2:298] Based on this information, her marriage date when she signed her own consent, her census age categories, and the known and approximated ages of her siblings, the combined evidence shows Frances Abbott was born abt. 1769 in Halifax County, VA. She was born and raised on her family's land on Difficult Creek in north-central Halifax just east of today's Crystal Hill, VA.

Frances was the third of ten children born to Joseph Abbott and his third wife, Frances (maiden name unknown). Daughter Frances Abbott was abt. 19 years old when her father died in early 1788, and her youngest brother was under age 12 at the time. Not only would she have helped raise her younger siblings, but Frances learned the challenges facing a widowed mother with young children to raise and support on her own, as Frances herself later became.

Frances Abbott married John Robertson on 15 Jan 1795 in Halifax County, VA. Rev. Hawkins Landrum, a Methodist minister, officiated. (Rev. Landrum also performed the marriage for Frances' older sister Mary in 1787.) John Robertson's marriage bond was dated 14 Jan 1795 with bondsman Stith Harrison. Frances, then abt. 25 years old, signed her own consent, as parental consent was not required after age 21. [Halifax Marriage Bonds Register No. 1] Unfortunately, numerous online files mistakenly give Frances' marriage date as also her death date, so the rest of her life with her seven children and at least 16 grandchildren have been hidden from the Abbott family story.

The records reveal little about her husband, and even his age cannot be established. There were several John Robertsons in early Halifax, but they are difficult to differentiate in the yearly personal property tax lists, because the lists for them are inconsistent from year to year and include no identifiers that usually distinguish among those of the same name. Frances' husband John did not own land, so his residence cannot be established that way.

[Halifax Grantee/Grantor Indexes] However, it is apparent from the early tax lists, the marriage bondsman, and Frances Abbott's family home that her future husband John Robertson first lived in the North District of Halifax, as did Frances. John possibly was related to an older John Robertson who may have had a son John's age *[Halifax PP Taxes 1787]*, and/or a William Robertson, whose deeds show he had land among neighbors of Joseph Abbott. However, there were numerous Robertson families in early Halifax, many of whom are proved to be unrelated to each other, and almost none left wills. (Relatively few people did.) With so little direct information about Frances' husband John Robertson, even an educated guess as to his origins and relatives is not possible without more extensive research.

Around the time of their marriage, Frances' husband John Robertson may have been working for James Bruce, a merchant and large landowner who was one of the wealthiest men in America when he died in 1837. *[Halifax PP Taxes 1794]* At least by 1806 and perhaps before, John and Frances were living in the southwestern part of Halifax around Toby Creek between today's towns of Paces and Elmo. This area is just north of the Dan River, with the border of Pittsylvania County, VA around 5 miles west and the border of North Carolina less than 10 miles south. Frances was the only one of her 15 half- and full-siblings to live in this part of Halifax, which was abt. 25 miles southwest of where her mother and most siblings still lived. Apparently Frances and John moved to this area in south Halifax for John's work, which we discuss shortly, because he bought no land there and no known relatives or family friends from the northern part have been found around their new location.

John Robertson died intestate between March 1813, when he last appears on the yearly personal property tax lists, and March 1814, when his widow Frances (Abbott) Robertson is named for the first time in the tax lists. Administration for John's estate was granted in March Court 1814 to William Abbott. *[HPB31:67]*

William Abbott was Frances' half-brother abt. 13 years her senior. William had lived first with Frances and their shared family, then lived next to them after his marriage in Dec 1784. Even though William still lived next to the family in northern Halifax and had been apart from Frances some 10 years or so, William applied for and was granted administration of her deceased husband John Robertson's estate. Frances' older half-brother Joseph Abbott Jr. died in 1811 after moving within the previous year to southeastern Halifax, and Frances' younger brother John Abbott, still living with their mother and siblings in northern Halifax, applied for and was granted administration of Joseph Abbott Jr.'s estate. *[HPB29:223]* These are two of many examples how the Abbott siblings continued to be involved with each other throughout their adulthood, even those who no longer lived in close proximity.

John Robertson does not seem closely related, if related at all, to the other Robertson families still living in Halifax at the time of his death. However, an administrator or executor need not be, and frequently was not, a relative but a neighbor, friend, employer, or creditor instead. When no one came forward to fulfill the necessary probate duties, the county sheriff was appointed as administrator. These factors also support the impression that Frances' brother William Abbott volunteered to handle the affairs and accounts of John Robertson's

estate out of his interest in the welfare of Frances and her seven children, the youngest of whom was about 5 years old.

Estate of JOHN ROBERTSON, Dec'd - Administrative Bond and Court Order to Appraise

Halifax Court of 28 Mar 1814

"On the motion of WILLIAM ABBOTT who made oath according to law and for reasons appearing to the Court Certificate is granted him for obtaining letters of administration of the estate of JOHN ROBERTSON dec'd in due form he giving Security whereupon he together with William Purcell his Security entered into and acknowledged their bond under penalty of two hundred dollars [\$200] conditioned according to law"

"Ordered that George Marable, Samuel Carter, Beverly Barksdale, Matthew Cabiness or any three of them who being first sworn as the law directs for that purpose do appraise in current money the Slaves if any & other personal Estate which were of John Robertson dec'd at the time of his death and that they make return of such appraisement here to the Court."

[Source: Halifax Plea Book 31, p. 67. LVA Reel 66. Transcribed by J. Horsley. Caps and comments in brackets added]

Note:

William Abbott's security, William Purcell, was the husband of Nancy Parker, a sister of William Abbott's wife, Mary Parker Abbott.

Estate of JOHN ROBERTSON, Dec'd - Inventory and Appraisal

Taken 11 Jun 1814, "in obedience to an order of the Worshipful Court of Halifax"

Appraisers: Samuel Carter, Matthew Cabaniss, George Marable

Items listed were: One desk and book case; 1 cupboard, 1 pine table, 1 pine chest, 1 spinning wheel, 1 pot and hook, 1 barrel, 1 water vessel, 3 old hilling hoes. Total: £2 6s 6p

Recorded: 25 Jul 1814, Halifax Court.

[Source: Halifax Will Book 10, p. 4. LVA Reel 39. Abstract by J. Horsley]

Appraisers were generally nearby neighbors or close associates, and these are particularly interesting. Appraiser Matthew Cabaniss was the father of Nancy Cabaniss who two years later in 1816 married John and Frances' eldest son, John Robertson Jr. The appraiser Samuel Carter was a brother of Matthew's wife and Nancy's mother, Susannah Carter Cabaniss. Tax lists for 1813 show that Samuel Carter and George Marable, the third appraiser, jointly owned two stud horses they hired out for breeding and one or two studs each owned individually plus a larger than usual number of horses. Matthew Cabaniss, who consistently was taxed for well over the usual number of horses, owned 13 horses in 1813, and Beverly Barksdale owned 17 that year. Land tax records show all four men lived at Toby Creek in the area south of today's Elmo, VA, where later records show the Robertsons continued to live for a number of years after John died.

Each of these men was wealthy for their time and place, while according to Halifax deed indexes and tax records, John Robertson did not own any land or slaves and not even a horse. Yet John owned a desk and bookcase, not common items even for the average

resident (most of whom owned no horse) and rare for someone if they could not afford to purchase even a small parcel of land.

In fact, John's lack of land does not seem to be a result of his inability to purchase it. John Robertson left his widow, Frances Abbott Robertson, with seven children who survived to adulthood, all then still minors and four under age 10. Yet Frances still seems to be well-provided for despite John's small inventory, and she still owned the desk, cupboard, pine table, and pine chest when she died 20 years later. So how did John earn his living and have the resources for his family's welfare after his death?

John Robertson's inventory suggests a few intriguing clues to his occupation. John obviously was not a professional farmer, as he lacked the most basic equipment to farm for income and had only the three old hoes more useful for a kitchen garden. He could not earn a living as a weaver with just one household spinning wheel, and he had no specialized tools of a skilled craft. (One John Robertson is marked in pre-1800 tax lists as a blacksmith, but he does not seem to be this one.) John might be an overseer, but in other overseers' inventories I have seen, an overseer of John's age usually owned a rifle and most often had his own horse. John's inventory shows only minimal household items, whereas usually even forks, knives, and cups are included in an inventory, and he had no chair or stool for the table he possessed. And yet John owned a desk and bookcase.

Thus first, it seems obvious that John and his family either lived with his employer or lived at his place of employment or in a residence owned and supplied by his employer. Then, combining other clues with the fact that in the 1790s John may have worked for the merchant James Bruce (and was not labeled there as an overseer, as one commonly was), I speculate that John may have been a store manager or accountant for a merchant or other business owner (eg., Samuel Carter owned a tavern just west of Elmo, VA). John may even have kept the accounts for wealthy landowners or horse breeders who had their fingers in diverse financial pies. However, please note these are mere speculations.

As of the March 1814 tax lists, the widowed Frances Robertson had acquired a horse. Frances is missing the next year. Then in 1816, in addition to being taxed for her horse, Frances is listed with two males age 16 or over in the household. The younger is her son William Robertson (whom we discuss shortly). The elder is her son John Robertson (Jr.), born 2 Nov 1796 [*Grave marker, Trigg Co, KY*], who is first listed by name in the tax lists in 1817, the year after he married, when Frances loses one of the males age 16+ from her tax list.

Frances and John Robertson's son John Robertson Jr. married Nancy Cabaniss 8 Oct 1816 in adjacent Caswell County, NC. [*Caswell County Marriage Bonds. NC State Archives*] Nancy's name on the marriage bond is spelled "Nancy Cavanis." John Jr. signed his bond by mark, and his name in the bond is spelled both "John Robertson" and "John Robinson." (The names Robertson and Robinson often were interchanged in many county and census records, but all Halifax records for John and Frances Abbott Robertson's family are consistently Robertson or, twice, Roberson.) Nancy Cabaniss, like her husband John, was a Halifax County native. Nancy's parents, Matthew Cabaniss and Susannah Carter, lived at Toby Creek, and Matthew was one of the neighbors who appraised John's father's estate in 1814.

Caswell County, NC, where John and Nancy married, is adjacent to the southwest corner of Halifax County, VA, the area where their families lived. Apparently they married in nearby

Caswell due to a difference in state marriage age laws. John was age 19 at their marriage, but Nancy's birth date included in her brother's Bible record shows she was only 13 years old at the time. [Allen Cabaniss, p. 19] Virginia law required formal consent from a father or guardian for anyone, male and female, to marry under age 21. In contrast, North Carolina law allowed males from age 14 and females from age 12 to marry with no consent needed, and often even those ages were ignored. [NC Archives by email]

After their marriage, John and Nancy Cabaniss Robertson settled in southwestern Halifax close to his mother and siblings. Nancy's parents were both deceased, but a number of her Carter and Cabaniss relatives also lived near them. Her brother William M. Cabaniss was especially involved with Nancy and her welfare. [HDB34:400] John and Nancy Robertson raised their family in this immediate area for almost 30 years before joining several of his brothers in Kentucky.

Frances Robertson still has a male 16+ in her Feb 1818 tax lists. He is John and Frances' son William Robertson, who is listed on the tax lists by name for the first time at age 21 in 1819. This means that John and Frances' son William Robertson was born between Feb 1797 and Feb 1798. (In 1819, Frances is the only Robertson in both tax districts to lose a "white tithe," ie, white male age 16 and over, from their previous year's tax lists. That and William's dates on all subsequent tax lists plus censuses show there is no mistaking this William Robertson's correct parents.) In 1819, William Robertson is listed the same day as his brother John Robertson (Jr.), who lived near their mother, Frances. The next year, in 1820, William Robertson's tax list is dated the same day as his mother, Frances Robertson, and he is also enumerated in Frances' 1820 census household.

Contrary to pervasive undocumented online files, John and Frances' son William Robertson was not the William Robertson who married Martha Brooks in Halifax 4 Jan 1826. Furthermore, Martha's husband William Robertson almost certainly was not the William A. Robertson in Halifax through 1834, as most online files mistakenly say. The clear evidence for both these facts is explained below in an *Addendum* at the end of this report.

Frances Abbott Robertson had no other males age 16+ in her household after Feb 1818 through her Feb 1820 tax lists (the last year her district enumerated such "white tithes" until 1828). This generally would mean that John and Frances Robertson's next son was born 1804 or after, and, indeed, this fits with the age of their next son, George M. Robertson (especially since "white tithes" did not always appear at exactly age 16). Tax lists, censuses, and the ages of his siblings show George was born in later 1803 or early 1804, and he first appears by name at age 21 in the tax list of 15 Mar 1825. John and Frances' son Fleming Robertson was born 25 Nov 1805. [Grave marker, Trigg Co, KY] Their youngest son, Joseph Robertson, was born in late 1806 or early 1807 and is first named at age 21 in the tax lists in March 1828. Censuses show John and Frances also had two daughters born 1805-1810 and still unmarried in mid-1830 whose names are not yet known. Females are not enumerated in tax lists and are named only if they are unmarried adults responsible for taxable property and/or responsible for a white male age 16+ in their households. (Contrary to undocumented online files with numerous errors, I have found no evidence that Frances Abbott and John Robertson had a son named James Robertson or that they were related to or associated with either of the two James Robertsons in southern Halifax. Tax lists and censuses show Frances and John had no sons who survived to adulthood other than the ones named above.)

Frances Robertson is listed as head-of-house in the 1820 census living in southern Halifax County with most of her unmarried children. Her married son, John Robertson (Jr.), is listed as his own head-of-house.

1820 - Halifax Co, VA - Marseilles Dist.

Frances Robertson - Males: 2(10-15), 0(16-17), 1(16-25) [ie, 1(18-25)]; Females: 2(10-15), 1(45+)

This census raises an interesting question. From all combined tax lists and later records, there is no doubt that John and Frances had three sons born bet. 1800-1810--namely George (b. 1803-1804), Fleming (b.1805) and Joseph (b. 1806-1807)--as well as William (b. 1797-1798) and John Jr. (b. 1796, married 1816). However, the 1820 and 1830 censuses show only two younger sons, not three, in Frances' household, and the eldest unmarried son, William Robertson, born 1797-1798, is included in her household both census years.

The answer in 1820 is that the next younger son after William, George M. Robertson, was either apprenticed or employed in another household in 1820, when he was age 16. In fact, it is specifically the son George's age who is missing, because the 1820 census counted males who were 16 and 17 ("between 16 and 18") as a separate category, and Frances had none. Interestingly, in the 1780s and 1790s, there was a blacksmith in northern Halifax named John Robertson, and by his land and tax lists, he may be related to Frances' husband John. Perhaps their son George followed a family heritage in skilled crafts and became apprenticed at the usual age of 16. Otherwise, he simply may have found employment as a farm hand to help his widowed mother with six children to support, while his eldest unmarried brother, William, helped his mother manage the family farm.

Marseilles District, where Frances Robertson is listed in the 1820 census, seems to encompass, with one small exception, the southern half of Halifax County. (The northern half was called Meadsville District this census.) The town of Marseilles itself no longer exists, but the 1859 Bucholtz map places it on the Dan River just west of today's South Boston. Frances' son John Robertson (Jr.) is listed in the 1820 census in the two-page district for Mary Town, also now extinct. However, it, too, was in southern Halifax, because tax lists and close associates show John continued to live in the near vicinity of his mother and siblings.

In 1827, Frances Robertson purchased her own land. The later inventory of her estate indicates she supported her children as a farmer, and in 1827, at least five of her seven children were still living with her and could help work the farm. Frances was then abt. 58 years old, and the economic situation in Halifax had been deteriorating for some time. Perhaps Frances was hoping to have land to pass on to her children, particularly her two daughters in case they did not find suitable marriages.

By the deed below dated 1 May 1827, Frances Robertson bought 120 acres of land where she was already living, located close to where her family lived when her husband, John Robertson, died over a decade before. The land she purchased was at Birch Creek, which runs north of Elmo generally parallel to Toby Creek, which runs south of Elmo. Both creeks flow southeast from there to enter the Dan abt. 2 miles apart.

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Date: 1 May 1827

From: Samuel Price and wife Sarah H. of Halifax

To: FRANCES ROBERTSON of same

For: \$525

Description: 120 acres on Birch Creek

Bounds: Samuel Price, Mary Durham [nee Mary Dodson], Ephraim Ferrell, Thomas Dodson, Caleb Dodson's canal, Dodson Puckett, John Hodge [no metes included; Birch Creek not mentioned as a bound]

Signed: Sam'l Price, Sally H. Price

Witnesses: None

Release of Dower: 1 May 1827

Recorded: 24 Jul 1827

[Halifax Deed Book 34, p. 657-658. LVA Reel 16. Abstract by J. Horsley. Comments in brackets added.]

Note:

Records for Frances Robertson and her son John Robertson (Jr.) show they were closely involved with the Ferrell families at Birch Creek during this decade. The Ferrells and Dodsons in this deed were intermarried. The Dodsons had been in this area since the mid-1700s, and some branches of their family lived in the same vicinity at Toby Creek.

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On the same day as this purchase deed, Frances signed a deed of trust using the land and all her personal possessions to secure a debt of \$98.70 to local merchants Hagood & Luck. Many in Halifax of all financial classes were having to do the same in the county's worsening economic conditions where a relatively small group of interconnected merchants controlled most of the resources for vital supplies and services.

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Date: 1 May 1827 - Deed of Trust

From: FRANCES ROBERTSON

To: Bird L. Ferrell, Trustee, to secure debt owed to Hagood & Luck

For: \$1.00

Description: 120 acres adjoining the lands of Thomas Dodson Senr, Ephraim Ferrell & others, it being the same land where Frances Robertson now resides, also 1 gray mare, 5 head cattle, 3 feather beds & furniture, 7 [or 9] head hogs, 1 cupboard, 1 table, 5 chairs, together with the bal'ce [balance] of her household & kitchen furniture & plantation tools &c - Bird L. Ferrell to have and to hold the said land and personal property in trust

Purpose: To secure debt owed to Hagood & Luck for \$98.70 per bond of this date due 1 Jan 1828

Conditions. If at any time after 1 Jan 1828 the debt with interest is not paid, then at the request of either of the parties, trustee Bird L. Ferrell is required to sell all the above-listed items to the highest bidder at public auction. Any monies remaining after the sale plus interests and costs of proceedings to be returned to Frances Robertson.

Signed: Frances (x) Robertson (her mark), Bird L. Ferrell, Hagood & Luck

Witnesses: None

Recorded: 30 Jun 1827 - Acknowledged by Frances Robertson

[Source: Halifax Deed Book 34, p. 619-621. LVA Reel 16. Abstract by J. Horsley. Comments in brackets added.]

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The trustee Bird L. Ferrell had a long association with Frances' family and later was named as a bound on Frances' land. Ephraim Ferrell, a bound here, was Bird's uncle. Bird L. Ferrell again was trustee for Frances in 1833. He was also trustee for Frances' son John Robertson Jr. in 1824 [HDB32:117] and in 1827. [HDB35:471] (John's 1827 deed of trust, made the month before this one of Frances, was for John's debt to merchants Bruce & Hagood, another example of how the local merchants were interconnected.) In 1823, John Robertson Jr. granted power of attorney to Bird's cousin William C. Ferrell (a son of James Ferrell Jr.) to obtain a legacy due to his wife, Nancy Cabaniss. [HDB31:240] In 1850, Frances' son Joseph Robertson was living with and working for the family of one of Bird L. Ferrell's daughters, as we shall see.

Frances apparently was able to pay off this debt in a timely manner. Her next deed of trust was six years later for a debt to a different merchant.

In the 1830 census, Frances is listed next to her son John Robertson. This census is alphabetized by first letter of last name so does not necessarily show the proximity of their residences. However, the way the names are grouped is often indicative as exemplified by this case, because John's 1830 tax list is dated the day before his mother and brothers, confirming their proximity.

1830 - Halifax Co, VA:

Frances Robertson - Males: 2(20-29), 1(30-39); Females: 2(20-29), 1(60-69) [b. c1761-1770]

Again in 1830, Frances' son William (now age 32-33) is still in her household while one of Frances' three younger sons born bet. 1800-1810 is working outside of the family. Tax lists indicate this is Fleming, who at age 24 is well able to help bring income into the family.

John and Frances Robertson's son William Robertson apparently died soon after this census, as he is enumerated in Frances' 1830 household in her tax lists and census but does not appear on any later tax lists through 1844 (last year checked). No Halifax marriage record exists for him, and he has not been identified there or elsewhere in later censuses. (However, the "William A. Robertson" continues on the tax lists through 1834.)

John and Frances' son George M. Robertson married in Halifax by bond of 11 Dec 1830 to Sarah "Sally" Newbill. [Halifax Marriage Bond Register No. 1] She is recorded in the bond by her nickname as "Sally Newbill" and listed by her formal first name as "Sarah Robertson" in the 1850 census. George's bondsman is listed in the marriage bond register as John P. Newbill, whose relationship to Sally is not given. Of the seven Newbill families in Halifax in the 1830 census, only John Newbill and Elijah A. Newbill had a daughter Sally's age. Since John Newbill is listed there with no middle initial, the bondsman John P. Newbill may be a brother of Sally instead of her father, but John P.'s parents could not be identified either. Most, if not all, of the Newbill families in Halifax lived in northern Halifax, where Frances Abbott Robertson's siblings still lived. Interestingly, the road in northern Halifax that bounded the Abbott family land from the 1760s on is roughly today's Newbill School Road. (Many online files erroneously name George's wife as Nancy Newbill, despite her name "Sally" on the marriage bond and "Sarah" in the 1850 census. The claim in other online files that this George Robertson, father of Eliza Ann Robertson Haydon, was married to a Nancy Woods who, like her husband George Robertson, was born, married, died, and buried in New York State, is even more absurd, particularly since all censuses for Eliza Ann list her as born in

VA with both parents born in VA, and she is listed in the 1850 census in Caldwell County, KY with her widowed mother named Sarah Robertson, also listed as born in VA.)

The economy in Halifax County had been deteriorating for several decades at an accelerating pace, causing a wide-scale and on-going exodus from the county. Residents who stayed were forced by accumulated debts for even basic necessities to mortgage their properties to try to keep from losing them. In April 1833, Frances Abbott Robertson likewise signed another deed of trust (below) secured by her land, and again the trustee was Bird L. Ferrell. Frances was in a better financial position than many in Halifax at this time, since unlike them, she was able to secure these current debts with her land alone and did not need also to include all her personal property and household goods, as in her previous deed of trust.

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Date: 20 Jul 1833 - Deed of Trust

From: FRANCES ROBERTSON [spelled "Roberson" throughout this deed]

To: Bird L. Ferrell, Trustee, to secure debt to Bowling Eldridge [Bolling Eldridge]

For: \$1.00

Description: 120 acres of land "I now live on"

Bounds: Ephraim Ferrell, William Clardy, Bird L. Ferrell

Purpose: To secure debts Frances Roberson owes to Bowling Eldridge for \$89.01 by bond dated 20

Jul 1833 and another bond to Bowling Eldridge and John C. Eldridge for \$39.57 due 20 Jul 1833

Conditions: If debts are not paid in full by 1 Mar 1834, Trustee upon request is to sell property at public auction, the proceeds to pay debts plus charges of sale. Balance, if any, to go to Frances Roberson.

Signed: Frances (x) Roberson[sic] (her mark) [signature entered twice the same way]

Witnesses: William Davis, Martha (x) Dodson (her mark), Richard Eldridge, Dodson Puckett, Levi Hill, Caleb Dodson

Recorded: 5 Sep 1833

[Source: Halifax Deed Book 41, p. 189-191. LVA Reel 19. Abstract by J. Horsley. Comments in brackets added.]

Note:

Bolling Eldridge, to whom Frances owed these debts, was a wealthy merchant who lived at Birch Creek about a mile or so north of Elmo, the same area where Frances lived. There was also a family connection to Eldridge through Frances' daughter-in-law Nancy Cabaniss, wife of John Robertson Jr. Nancy's brother William M. Cabaniss married 8 May 1832 to Bolling's daughter Sarah Ann Eldridge. William Cabaniss was obviously close to his sister. By a purchase in 1827 with their brother-in-law Philip Howerton, William held land in trust for Nancy and John Robertson Jr. to live on after John's significant losses to debts. [HDB34:400] (See Notes for John Jr. for details.)

This deed of trust further shows the Ferrells' association with Frances Robertson and family. Bird L. Ferrell, once again her trustee, is now listed as an adjacent landowner along with Ephraim Ferrell and William Clardy, who married Ann Ferrell. Witness Caleb Dodson married Patsy Ferrell. Ephraim, Ann, and Patsy were children of James Ferrell Sr., who was Bird L. Ferrell's grandfather.

James Ferrell Sr. died in Halifax in 1808. Interestingly, accounts for James Ferrell's estate show that in Nov 1809, his executors (sons James Ferrell Jr. and William Ferrell, who was Bird L. Ferrell's father) paid Frances Abbott Robertson's brother William Abbott for a debt owed to William, and on 7 Feb 1814, they paid William Abbott for "crying" (auctioneering) Ferrell's land sold by his executors at

public auction. As mentioned above, throughout this time, Frances' brother William Abbott lived in northern Halifax quite some distance from the Ferrells in the south, so his early association with the Ferrells is especially intriguing. One wonders if he may have known them through his sister Frances.

[Estate accounts of James Ferrell Sr. transcribed on the Family Tree Maker Genealogy Site of Michael Shane Dienst, "The Dienst Family."]

Bird Ferrell's middle initial is often transcribed as "Bird S. Ferrell," because in old script the "L" and "S" could and frequently did look exactly alike. (In fact, even the Grantor Index lists him as Bird S. rather than Bird L. for the above 1833 deed.) Close examination, though, confirms that in each case he was "Bird L. Ferrell," and an undocumented online file gives his full formal name as Byrd Lanier Ferrell. ("Byrd" was the original Virginia spelling of the surname that passed down as a given name over time and was spelled phonetically as "Bird.")

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Frances Robertson last appears on the Halifax personal property tax lists in spring 1833 with two males over age 16 (Joseph and Fleming) in the household. She may have died before March 1834, because both Joseph and Fleming appear in their own names, and the taxes then charged to Fleming Robertson, who frequently was enumerated in Frances' household, include the two to three horses previously charged to Frances. However, two years before, in 1832, Fleming and his brother George shared the taxes on Frances' horses, even though she was still alive and was listed in her own name in 1833.

In any case, Frances Abbott Robertson was deceased by June 1834, when the Halifax Court ordered the inventory and appraisal of her estate, subsequently taken on 1 Aug 1834. Frances left no will, and this is the only probate recorded for her. Frances was about 65 years old at her death. Her youngest child was abt. 25, and Frances had raised and provided for her children as a widow for 20 years.

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1834 - Inventory and Appraisal of the Estate of FRANCES ROBERTSON, Dec'd

Inventory and appraisal ordered at Halifax Court of June 1834

Taken: 1 Aug 1834

Appraisers: Bird L. Ferrell, Burgess M. Ferrell, James G. Davis

Administrator of Estate: Bowling Eldridge [Bolling Eldridge]

Items listed: 1 gray mare, 3 head cattle, 1 pine table, 1 cupboard, 1 pine chest, 1 old pine desk, 1 bedstead & furniture, 4 sitting chairs, 1 loom, 2 spinning wheels, set knives and forks, parcel of earthen ware, 1 pot rack, 1 pot oven &c, 1 churn & tray, 1 sifter, 1 large boll, 1 stone butter pot, 2 meal bags, 1 powdering tub, 1 tub & piggin, 4 hoes, 2 ploughs, 1 set plough gear, 1 drawing knife auger &c, 1 coulter, 1 pole axe, 1 cutting box, 5 empty barrels, 1 iron wedge. Total: \$63. 34

Returned: 1 Jan 1835 - Recorded: 25 May 1835

[Source: Halifax Will Book 17, p. 301-302. LVA Reel 43. Abstract by J. Horsley. Comments in brackets added.]

Note:

The estate administrator, Bolling Eldridge, was the merchant to whom Frances was indebted by her 1833 deed of trust. *[HDB41:189]* Likely he was granted administration as the primary creditor of her estate, which was a common practice.

The three appraisers were Frances' nearby neighbors. As we have seen, Bird L. Ferrell was associated with Frances Robertson's family at least from the early 1820s. At this time, he held

Frances' land in trust and owned land adjacent to hers. Appraiser Burgess M. Ferrell was Bird's brother, both sons of William Ferrell. The third appraiser, James G. Davis, was married to Nancy Lovelace, whose brother Atkinson Lovelace married Charity Ferrell, a daughter of James Ferrell Jr. and a cousin of Bird and Burgess.

Soon after Frances died, her trustee, Bird L. Ferrell, had to sell her 120 acres of land that he held in trust in order to cover her debt to Bolling Eldridge. This means Frances was unable to pay off the full debt before her death and that the proceeds from the estate sale were insufficient to cover the current balance owed to Eldridge. The purchaser of Frances' land was William Davis (perhaps related to the appraiser James G. Davis), and the deed was recorded 28 Sep 1835. [*HDB42:430, per Grantor Index*]

About 1837, Frances and John's son George M. Robertson with his wife Sally Newbill and family left Halifax, as many were doing due to the deteriorating Halifax economy, and moved to Caldwell County, KY. George's brother Fleming Robertson, who never married, apparently moved with them then. Fleming leaves the Halifax personal property tax lists the same time as George, and at least by 1850, Fleming was living in Caldwell County with George's family and running the farm for George's widow. In the general exodus from Halifax during the 1820s and 1830s, a number of Halifax friends and neighbors and at least one Abbott relative (Frances' niece Elizabeth Owen Daniel, daughter of Hatcher Owen and Mary Abbott) moved to the same general area in southwestern Kentucky.

About 1845, John Robertson (Jr.) with wife Nancy Cabaniss and family also left Halifax. They moved to Trigg County, KY close to where John's brothers George and Fleming were living in adjacent Caldwell County.

George M. Robertson died in Caldwell County, KY bet. 1843-1850, and in the 1850 census, "Flemming Robertson," listed as a "farmer," was living with George's widow "Sarah Robertson" and her four children ages 7-18. (Sally's fifth child, a son age 16, apparently was employed elsewhere, and her only son at home was 9 years old.) In 1860, one of John and Nancy Robertson's sons, then age 39 and widowed, was living with two of George and Sarah Robertson's daughters in the married daughter's household.

This is one of many examples how the children of Frances and John's sons George M. Robertson and John Robertson Jr. continued to live near and interact with each other in Trigg and Caldwell County, KY. For at least two more generations, they intermarried or were otherwise involved with a shared group of associated and closely-related families, some of whom also were previously from Virginia. (See individual notes for more details.)

John Robertson Jr. died in Trigg County, KY on 30 Jul 1860 and was buried in the Robertson-Hite Cemetery at Cadiz, KY. His brother Fleming Robertson died 26 Apr 1866 and was buried in the same family cemetery. (Fleming's death date comes from an online transcription of the grave marker and could be 1856 instead, as Fleming was not found in the 1860 census, when his sister-in-law Sarah Robertson was deceased.)

John and Frances' youngest son, Joseph Robertson, remained in Halifax County, VA. In 1850, Joseph was an overseer living with the family of Christopher T. Sutherlin not far from where Joseph had lived all his life in southwestern Halifax. Christopher's wife, Eliza Ann

Ferrell Sutherlin, was a daughter of Bird L. Ferrell, the long-time family friend and the trustee for Frances Robertson's land, as discussed above. Also in the Sutherlin family that census were four Ferrell orphans. By 1860, Joseph Robertson, then 53 years old, was married to Dolly C., a year or two his junior. (No marriage record has been found, and Dolly's maiden name is not confirmed.)

In 1860, Joseph Robertson was farming his own land near Danville, VA in the southeastern part of Pittsylvania County just over the Halifax County line. Listed two households away from Joseph and Dolly is the family of Anthony E. Blanks, a prosperous farmer Joseph's age. By 1870, Joseph's land value had appreciated three-fold, yet he and "A. E. Blanks" with their respective wives and Anthony's children were living together and farming jointly. Perhaps this was a pragmatic response to the turmoil and general devastation caused by the Civil War or perhaps due to Joseph's deteriorating eyesight that left him blind by 1880. Anthony Blanks died in 1877, and by 1880, once again Joseph and Dolly were living alone. Joseph Robertson was then 77; Dolly is listed as age 74; and Joseph is marked "blind" in the census. Both died before the 1900 census.

However, there might be an earlier Robertson-Blanks connection. Anthony's father is said to be John Blanks, a brother of William Blanks who married 10 Jan 1782 in Halifax County, VA to Marian or Mariah Robertson. Given the close association between Joseph Robertson and Anthony E. Blanks, could Mariah/Marian Robertson be a sister or other relation of Joseph's father John Robertson? Perhaps merely coincidence but still interesting is the fact that by 1850 a Blanks family from Mecklenburg County, VA (adjacent to Halifax) was living among Robertson relations and friends in Trigg County, KY, and the father, James Blanks, is said to be buried in the Wall Cemetery. This is also the burial place of Eliza Ann Robertson Haydon and John A. Robertson, both children of Joseph's brother George M. Robertson and wife Sally Newbill. Whether there was any earlier association in Virginia between the Robertsons and the Blanks family is not known but worth investigating.

Another possible clue to follow regarding Robertson connections is the name of the younger son of George M. Robertson, named John Archer Robertson. The earliest Halifax personal property tax lists show an Archibald Robertson in the North District, where the Abbotts lived, and named later as Archer Robertson. The tax lists themselves do not reveal any particular relationship, and names can be misleading, but this, too, seems worth further investigation.

Research continues to try to learn about John Robertson's family of origin and to identify the two daughters of John and Frances Abbott Robertson.

ADDENDUM: William Robertson and wife Martha Brooks

Contrary to numerous undocumented online files, William Robertson who married Martha Brooks in Halifax County, VA by bond of 4 Jan 1826 was not William Robertson, the son of John Robertson and Frances Abbott.

The 1828 Halifax personal property tax lists prove there were two William Robertsons then in Halifax, both in the Southern District. They were John and Frances' son William Robertson and a William A. Robertson, formerly thought to be Martha Brooks' husband

William. The evidence is clear that John and Frances Robertson's son was not Martha Brooks' husband for these reasons:

- 1) Censuses for Martha's husband William all list him as born bet. 1800-1805, and his grave marker gives his birth as 1 Mar 1802 *[date in online photo confirmed by email from descendant Elizabeth Smith]*, while tax lists prove John and Frances' son William was born bet. Feb 1797-Feb 1798 and no later.
- 2) The 1820 and 1830 censuses show by age category that then-widowed Frances Robertson's son William was still in her household both years and that she did not lose her son William when the younger William Robertson married Martha Brooks in 1826 and established his own household. (The 1830 census also shows they and their children were not living in Frances' household.)
- 3) People named in the numerous deeds, wills, and probate found online for Martha Brooks' family and relations are not associated or involved with John Robertson or with his wife Frances Abbott Robertson, her parents, or her siblings' families, which would not be the case if Martha's husband William were a son of John and Frances Robertson.
- 4) Less significant but still important is the fact that none of the Robertson-Abbott relatives and their Halifax friends who went to Tennessee in the 1830s settled in or near Smith County, where William and Martha Brooks Robertson moved after leaving Halifax. (The only sons of John and Frances Robertson who left the Halifax area moved close to each other in Caldwell and adjacent Trigg County, KY. John and Frances' son William Robertson apparently died in Halifax abt. 1831.)

Thus, by proved ages and by facts from tax lists and censuses, reinforced by the lack of shared associations or connections between them, Martha's husband William Robertson was not John and Frances Robertson's son William Robertson.

Also contrary to previous assumptions, it appears Martha's husband William Robertson was not even the "William A. Robertson" in Halifax tax records bet. 1828-1834 and named the same way in the 1830 census, for these reasons:

- 1) Martha and William's children were born bet. 1826-1846, and all are listed in all their censuses as born in TN, indicating Martha and William moved to Tennessee immediately after marrying in Jan 1826, while William A. Robertson did not leave Halifax until later 1834 or early 1835, as proved by his annual personal property tax lists.
- 2) Martha and William's children do not fit the 1830 census for William A. Robertson in Halifax, and his age is listed as 30-39, too old to be Martha's husband William.
- 3) Martha's husband William Robertson's three confirmed Tennessee censuses and his grave marker include no middle initial for him, while the William A. Robertson in Halifax is consistently recorded with the middle initial "A" (never "H" as some online files imply).

By this evidence, Martha Brooks' husband William Robertson would not be the William A. Robertson in Halifax records. (William A. Robertson in Halifax did not live near John and Frances Robertson's family, and there is no evidence of relationship between them either.)

In researching to correctly identify the various William Robertsons, I found a number of circumstantial indications that Martha Brooks' husband William Robertson may somehow be related to the Henry Robertson whose will was proved in 1800 in Charlotte County, VA. Charlotte was/is just across the Staunton River from Halifax, where Henry also owned land that one or two sons lived on bet. 1800-1805. Working with several researchers of Martha Brooks and William Robertson's line, so far we could not find a direct link to Henry's family (the link could even be through a brother), but the possibilities have not been exhausted. My sense from the Halifax personal property taxes is that Martha Brooks' husband William may not have lived in Halifax prior to their marriage but that they knew each other through family connections and married in Halifax because that was her residence then. Thus, Robertson records in adjacent Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, VA and perhaps adjacent Person County, NC need to be searched for more information.

End of Addendum

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