

DeWITT FAMILY GENEALOGY

Ancestor Chart No.s 29, 58, 116, 232, 464, 928 (not enclosed)

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Lineage

Jacob(1) (?1616-1680s), born Holland?; died Henrico County, Virginia, wife Anna ---;
William(2)(c1670s-c1735+), born - died VA; wife Ann ---;
Charles(3)(1680s-1741) died Orange County, VA; wife Mercy ---;
Charles(4)(c1704-1770), Jr., born VA, died Orangeburg, South Carolina; wife Katherine ---;
Joseph(5) or James(5)(c1730s-c1800); born VA, died SC
Miss ---(6) DeWitt (c1760s-1795+); husband, William Nicks

Preface

Miss --- DeWitt was the daughter of either Joseph(5) DeWitt, Sr., of St. Bartholmews Parish, or his brother, James(5) DeWitt of St. Georges Parish, Charleston District, South Carolina. She is conjectured to have married William Nicks of nearby Christ Church Parish, Charleston District, about 1785-86, having two children (unknown) by 1790, and a son, Joseph DeWitt Nicks, born 1795, thought to be the namesake of Joseph(5) DeWitt, Sr. [See NICKS FAMILY GENEALOGY].

Although the time and place are correct, the DeWitt-Nicks relationship cannot be proved due to loss of records. However, the DeWitt lineage has been established and proven.

JACOB(1) DeWitt was one of fourteen persons 'imported' to Henrico County, Virginia by Widow Elizabeth Parker on 17 August 1637, 'East upon Four-Mile Creek, upon land of Seth Ward, deceased, in the right of her deceased husbands, Sgt. Wm. Sharp and Thomas Parker' [Nugent: Cavaliers and Pioneers, Bk 1, Pt. 1, pg. 65]. Four-Mile Creek was located on the north side of the James River.

DeWitt, the surname, is of Dutch-Flemish origin. Some DeWitt Protestants moved first to France, then to England before immigrating to the colonies in America.

When and where Jacob DeWitt died in Virginia is unknown. The earliest records of Henrico County were lost to time and war. A few fragile documents date from 1654, and the DeWitt (Duett-Divit) surname is not found among them through 1700.

Bold and fearless individuals sought land grants along the Pamunkey, Mattaponi and Rappahannock Rivers, a means to wealth despite the dangers. Isolated settlers were subject to Indian attack before and after Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. As a result of the colonists' uprising, forts were built on the James River near Petersburg, on the Rappahannock River near what is now Fredericksburg and, most northerly, on the west side of the Potomac River in Stafford County. Horse-soldiers patrolled those areas to provide additional security.

The second and third generations of the DeWitt family

also moved northward as they were granted land in the counties of King and Queen (1704), King William (1723), and Spotsylvania (1728). [Ref. Virginia Land Patents and Grants, 1623-1921.] [Note: Most records of King and Queen and King William Counties prior to the 1850s were destroyed.]

On the 24th day of September 1734, William(2) and Ann, his wife, leased a plantation: "William Beverly of Essex County ... lease to William DeWitt one plantation called the 'Coolspring' and one hundred acres of land...in the Parish of St. Mark, County of Spotsylvania...for the natural lives of WILLIAM DeWitt, ANN DeWitt his wife, and CHARLES DeWitt his son and the longest liver of them yielding and paying unto the said William Beverly his heirs and assigns yearly and every year on the twenty-sixth day of November the Royal Quitrents of the said land and also in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and thirty nine, the full and just quantity of seven hundred pounds of Lawfull Leaf tobacco at any convenient warehouse on the south side of the Rappahonock River on the said 26th day of November and then Yearly and every year afterwards the full and just sum of three hundred fifty pounds of lawful and convenient tobacco or else once in two years on the twenty-sixth day of November"... [Spotsylvania County (VA) Deed Bk 1, pg. 76.]

Third and Fourth Generations

Meantime, William's son, Charles(3), and his son, Charles(4), Jr., both tobacco planters, continued to acquire land and ever more land through grants and leases, amounting to several thousand acres by 1741. Tobacco was the most valuable cash crop in Virginia, the means to wealth. Charles, Sr. was also a cooper, producing wooden 'hogsheads' for storing and transporting tobacco.

In addition to Charles, Jr., John and Martin DeWitt, his brothers, acquired grants for 800 acres on the great fork of the Rappahonock River in 1728 and 1734. Spotsylvania County was divided in 1734, and the DeWitt lands fell into the new county of Orange.

In June 1735, Charles(4), Jr. and and Katherine ---, his wife, obtained a lease of 100 acres lying in Orange County on the south side of the Rappidan (Rapidan) River from Alexander Spotswood... a part of his 40,000 acre land patent called the 'Spotsylvania Tract'. The terms were "for the natural life of Charles, Katherine his wife, their heirs and assigns, the longest liver of them through 25 Dec 1775, yielding and paying yearly and every year of the first four years on the 25th day of December, One Ear of Indian Corn...and after the expiration of the first four years, six hundred pounds of good Sound Merchantable Top Tobacco yearly, clear of ground leaves and trash, according to law with delivery to a convenient Landing in the County of Spotsylvania". The lease concludes with a 'NOTANDUM',

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stating that "two years of the above mentioned four Rent-free years were past before the date of this indenture, the said Charles DeWitt having been so long settled on the domised premises" [Deed Bk 1, pg. 80-82].

Katherine DeWitt bore a daughter, Mary (married Charles Strother about 1755), and two sons, Joseph(5) and James(5). She probably died after her husband, Charles(4), Jr., entered into the lifetime lease with Alexander Spotswood during June 1735. Her name does not appear thereafter on land purchases or leases, nor does any renunciation of her dower accompany subsequent land sales by Charles.

Charles DeWitt, Sr. died before 29 May 1741. On that date his son, Martin DeWitt, gave bond as the administrator of his father's estate. An inventory of Charles' personal property was taken on 11 July 1741 and recorded on 23 July 1741 [Will Bk 1, pp. 153-154, 162]. Mercy, his wife, and six sons are said to have been mentioned: Charles(4), Jr., John, Martin, James, Thomas, and William DeWitt. Widow Mercy DeWitt married 2) Robert Coleman, Jr.

During 1743, Orange County was divided and some DeWitt brothers found themselves in the new county of Frederick.

In Orange County on 24 November 1748, Charles(4) DeWitt, Jr. received from the estate of his father, Charles, Sr., 880 acres lying in the County of Orange "above land bounded by a tract granted by Thomas, Lord Fairfax, Proprietor of Northern Neck of Virginia unto the said Charles DeWitt, Sr. records being had to the Patent of Deed shall more fully appear and the Reversions, Remainder, Rents and Profitts of the premises and every part and parcel thereof the said eight hundred and eighty acres...granted unto Charles DeWitt, Jr. to the only use of Charles DeWitt, Jr. and his Executors and assigns...during the Term of one whole year from thence next ensuing ...ending yearly on the Feast of St. Michael the Arch-Angel for one Ear of Indian Corn if the same be demanded ...that the said Charles DeWitt, Jr. be in actual possession of the Premises and enabled to accept a grant of the reversion and Inheritance thereof to him, his Heirs and Assigns forever in Testimony of the parties to their hands and Seals interchangibly sett..

(Signed) CHARLES DeWITT (seal)
in the Presence of Us - Sam Pound, Valentine Corley, and Wm. Bledsoe."

In 1749, Orange County was divided again. The 880 acres and other DeWitt grants at the fork of the Rappahonnock and the Rapidan Rivers fell into the new county of Culpepper. Thereafter, Charles and Joseph(5), his son, began selling off, leasing and releasing their lands prior to moving on to the Province of South Carolina with Charles Strother and others. A warmer climate, in addition to free land and greater religious choice, may have become more attractive to an aging man and his sons.

Joseph(5) DeWitt and wife, Mary ---, had son William(6), born 7 March 1757 and baptized 13 Feb 1758, by Rev. John Giessendanner at Orangeburg Church, Orangeburg township, St. Matthews Parish, South Carolina. Witness: Charles Strother, among others.

His father, Charles(4), obtained a royal land grant of 300 acres on the Edisto River, 22 January 1759. The size of the grant indicates there were six persons in his family (at 50 acres per head), possibly including his son's wives and one grandchild. The grant was located near Orangeburg township, some 60 miles northwest of Charleston. This area was set aside for the settlement of hundreds of Swiss and German Protestants who braved the long ocean voyage in crowded ships to find a better life and prosperity in South Carolina through the offer of free land.

In March 1765, Joseph obtained a grant of 200 acres in St. Helenas Parish, Granville District (later Beaufort County), South Carolina and his brother, James DeWitt, obtained on 3 June 1765, 300 acres in St. Peter's Parish, Granville County (later Beaufort County). He had married Sarah RUMPH, daughter of David Rumph, Sr., during the 1750s.

Charles(4) DeWitt, 'Planter, of Orangeburg Township, St. Mathews Parish, South Carolina', wrote his will on 20 August 1769, and died before it was recorded in Charleston on 26 March 1770: "Know all Men by these Presents that I Charles DeWitt of Orangeburgh Township in St. Matthews Parish in the Province of South Carolina, Planter, being at present Weak and Sickly in Body but in perfect Mind and Memory do make this my last Will and Testament hereby revoking all former Wills and Testaments whatever. First, I give and bequeath to my beloved Son Joseph DeWitt my Saddle and Bridle likewise all my Wearing apparel with which he is to be well Satisfied and contented. Secondly, I Give and bequeath to my beloved Grand Son Charles DeWitt, Son to James DeWitt, and to his heirs or assigns a Negroe boy Sam; I also give and bequeath to my beloved Grand daughter Katy DeWitt, daughter to the above named James DeWitt, one Feather Bed with the Furniture belonging to it. Thirdly, I give and bequeath to my beloved Son James Dewitt and to his Heirs or assigns a Negro Wench named Sarah with her increase together with every other Article belonging to me not bequeathed or disposed of in this my last Will. Lastly, I appoint James DeWitt my son to be the sole and only Executor of this my last Will and Testament." Dated and sealed by Charles DeWitt. Witnesses: Jo. Fisher, Henry Row, William Mitchell, Junr. [Note: Charles' 300-acre grant was not mentioned, indicating the land may have been sold prior to writing his will or deeded earlier to one of the sons.

At the time of the 1790 Census, the households of Joseph(5) and ?son, Joseph(6) DeWitt, Jr., were located in St. Bartholomews Parish, Charleston District, adjacent to Christ Church Parish, where William Nicks lived.

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The last will and testament of David Rumph, Sr. of St. George's Parish, dated 1782 and recorded in Charleston, names wife Mary (Pendarvis), five sons and four daughters... "Son-in-law James DeWitt and wife Sarah Dewitt" were legatees to her father's plantation on Catteels Creek. Witnesses: William Clayton, Catherine DeWitt (James' daughter), Brand Pendarivs.

At the time of the 1790 Census, the households of James and Sarah (Rumph) DeWitt and their son, Charles, were located in St. Georges Parish, Charleston District (later Colleton County). James probably died there before 1800. The household of S. (Sarah) DeWitt was enumerated in St. Georges Parish for the 1800 Census (over 46 years/born before 1754). If James or Sarah left wills, they probably were recorded in Colleton County and destroyed with other county records in 1864.

The additional loss of records for the counties of Orangeburg and Beaufort has created a genealogical void, precluding identification of Joseph DeWitt Nicks' mother and her parents.

[Note: Joseph DeWitt Nicks may have been named after Joseph DeWitt, Sr. However, James DeWitt may have been young Nicks' grandfather for other traditional reasons, i.e. that Joseph DeWitt Nicks named his first-born daughter Sarah Ann Nicks, ostensibly combining the given-names of her paternal and maternal grandmothers, SARAH (Rumph) DeWitt and ANN Harrison Galbraith. Also, Joseph's only son, James W. (William) Nicks, may have been endowed with the given-names of both grandfathers, JAMES DeWitt and WILLIAM Nicks.]

SOURCES

Virginia

Nugent: Cavaliers and Pioneers (Jacob DeWitt), Bk. 1, pg. 65.
King and Queen County Quit Rent Rolls, 1704
Land Patents and Grants, Virginia State Library
Deed and Probate Records, 1730-1750: Spotsylvania, Orange, and Culpepper Counties.

South Carolina

Index to Royal Land Grants, compiled by A. S. Salley, Jr.
Abstracts of Charleston Wills, 1732-1800:
Charles(4) DeWitt, recorded March 1770, Will Bk RR,
1767-1771, pg. 440.
David Rumph, Sr., recorded Feb 1783, Will Bk WW,
1780-1783, pg. 268.
The History of Orangeburg County, South Carolina, by A. S. Salley, Jr. Contains the register of vital events as recorded by two Orangeburg Church ministers, c1730-1763, both named John Giessendanner, being uncle and nephew.