

The James Blairs of Chester County, South Carolina in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

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In June 1998 we visited Chester County, South Carolina, in order to clarify information about four different James Blairs who have been attributed to this county in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

This report assesses and integrates information from a wide variety of sources and clearly determines the identities of the different James Blairs, most particularly differentiating between the Blairs of Fishing Creek and those of Rocky River.

Four James Blairs of Chester County

There have been four James Blair names attributed to Camden District, Chester County, South Carolina.

1. **James Blair, Sr.** (hereafter identified as James #1)

This James arrived 1772 on the *Lord Dunluce*, part of the Rev. William Martin's five shiploads of Covenanters who came to South Carolina (see Stephenson). James #1 was born in Ireland about 1735 and died in Chester County, South Carolina. His will was probated there.

He received a warrant for 250 acres when he arrived, as reported by the South Carolina Council Journal meeting of 6 January 1773, noting the arrival in December 1772. This 250 acres would indicate James as head of household. James, Sr. was accompanied by his wife Margaret (Junkin or Jenkins), his son William, reportedly 4 years of age when they arrived, and a daughter Jane (or Sarah Jane), born 16 October 1767.

The 250-acre warrant for James #1 "situate in Craven County on the Drafts of Fishing Creek" tracked the following path:

Warrant dated 6 January 1773 for 250 acres

Plat dated 16 February 1773 for 230 acres

Grant dated 26 July 1774 for 230 acres

Memorial dated 31 December 1774 for 230 acres

2. **James Blair** (hereafter James #2), the son of Thomas Blair who arrived in South Carolina in 1767. He arrived on the *Lord Donegal* in 1767, age 9, born about 1758, with his father, Thomas Blair (age 38, born about 1729), and mother, Margaret (age 33, born about 1734), and a sister, Jane, age 2. The South Carolina Council Journal of 22 December 1767 reported the arrival of this family (see Revill). Revill's work does not cite the acreage warranted to Thomas.

3. **James Blair** (hereafter James #3). He reportedly arrived 1772 on the *Pennsylvania Farmer*, another of the Rev. Martin's five ships. (Revill and Stephenson), and supposedly received a warrant for 350 acres, location not given. Revill's work has the listing for this James Blair under a subtitle: "The undermentioned are not able to pay."

Some Blair researchers have surmised that this person is the same as James #1, above, and that there may have been duplicate and erroneous recordings of his warrant. This James' 350 acres compares to the warrant for 250

acres for James #1. There is no further record of James #3, no plats, no grants, no memorials, nor could we find a will. Therefore, he will not be discussed further in this paper.

4. **James Blair** (hereafter James #4), son of James Blair #1, was born 25 October 1789 in South Carolina.

J. C. Blair's information is inconsistent with this report. J. C. Blair's work, page 4, paragraph 3, cites information concerning Blairs in three locations. He states that: James, Sr.[#1], had a 230-acre plat in 1773 on Fishing Creek: Thomas [father of James #2] had a 350-acre plat on Rocky Creek in 1768; a Thomas Blair received a plat for 100 acres in 1772 on both sides of the Branch of Pudding Swamp, which is a branch of the Black River. [Note: This is not in Chester County, but is between eighty and one hundred miles away. There does not seem to be any readily apparent connection with any of the Chester County Blairs, neither James, #1, nor James #2.]

Most particularly, J. C. Blair states, "James Blair, according to Plat Book, Vol. 13, p. 123, received a tract of land of 230 acres in Craven County on the drafts of Fishing Creek, which is adjacent to the grant of Thomas Blair on Rocky Creek made in 1767." This is incorrect since these two grants are some five miles apart and on branches of different rivers.

Further information about James Blair #1.

As indicated previously, James Blair #1 received a warrant for 250 acres and a plat, grant and memorial of 230 acres. The plat for the 230 acres revealed a very irregularly shaped property. His land was bounded SE and NE on Robert McFadden's land, SW on Thomas Martains [sic] land and SW on William McFadden's.

James #1's 230 acres had grown to 374 acres in 1816 when his sons sold the land provided to them by his will. The two deeds of sale of land by William and James, Jr. (James #4) indicated that each had sold 187 acres.

Besides William and James #4, James #1's will named his wife, Margaret, his daughter, Martha, his daughter, Sarah, and his son-in-law Richard Ryte [sic], believed to be Wyatt.

How did James #1's land increase from 230 to 374 acres? 104 acres came from James Burcham, which came from Robert McFadden's original grant of 350 acres, and 40 acres came from James Ferguson's land.

The 104 Acres. An "indenture" (contract) made 6 May 1780 identified James Burcham and James Blair Sr. #1. In the interior of this indenture was described the sale of 104 acres of land to James Blair #1 from 350 acres owned by James Burcham. The indenture described that Burcham had purchased these 350 acres from Isaac McFadden, heir of Robert McFadden who had received the 350 acres as a royal grant. (Robert McFadden received a plat for 350 acres on 25 November 1772, and a grant for 350 acres on 26 July 1774—the same date as the grant of James Blair #1). This plat was bounded by James and John Ferguson and vacant land.

Thus, James Blair #1 bought 104 acres of the original Robert McFadden land that bounded his own, probably to straighten out some of his irregular plat. With this acquisition, James #1 had 334 acres compared with the 384 that his two sons sold.

There is an additional reference to James Burcham and James Blair #1 which recorded an event of some kind 11 April 1789 (cited as "Order Book A, #331, Chester County Court Records." No one at the Chester County Court House could identify this reference. The citation abstracted is "Deed of Conveyance from James Burchen [sic] to James Blair, Sr. . . . is formerly [sic] proved . . . and committed to the record." Perhaps this is an affirmation of the 104 acres detailed above.

The Other 40 Acres. These acres came from James Ferguson's 300 acres which bounded James #1 on the North. The deeds of sale by his sons William and James #4 describe precisely that 40 acres came from a strip across the southern edge of Ferguson's land. No deed could be found for the previous transfer from Ferguson to James Blair #1.

The Entire 374 acres Sold by James #1's Two Sons.

Son William sold 187 acres to Thomas Collins. The deed of that sale indicated that the "187 acres...being a part of a grant to their father James Blair dec'd for 230 acres dated the 26 th day of March [sic] 1774,...and part of a grant the same date to Robert McFadden for 350 acres." This confirms that some of the McFadden land (by way of a James Burcham, see below) was a part of James #1's estate. The survey descriptions in the deed also showed that tract included most of the 40 acres that James #1 had obtained from James Ferguson.

His son James #4 sold 187 acres to William Ferguson. The deed for the sale of those 187 acres indicated that the "before mentioned said land...being a part of a grant to their father James Blair, Sr., dec.'s for 230 acres dated the 26 th day of March [sic] 1774." The survey descriptions in the deed also showed that the tract included a small piece of the 40 acres that James #1 had obtained from James Ferguson.

In summary, the two sons sold all of James #1's original 230 acres, 104 acres and 40 originally belonging to James Ferguson.

Summary of James Blair #1. James #1 and Margaret Blair, who arrived in Charleston on the *Lord Dunluce* in 1772 were the residents of Fishing Creek. James's grant of 230 acres with additions of 104 acres from Robert McFallen's land (via Robert Burcham) and 40 acres from James Ferguson's land equals the 374 acres then sold in two parcels by sons William and James #4 in 1816.

We saw these lands. The Fishing Creek properties are about one and one-half miles east of the village center of Richburg, South Carolina (which is ten miles east of Chester). The most important landmark location is where Tinkers Branch joins Fishing Creek (which is the location of John McFadden's land-grant for 331 acres in 1771). James Blair #1's land is west of that location. Today the Lewisville Elementary School sits on the original site of James's land. The drafts of Fishing Creek could not be seen at that location. They are "sunken" (we were told) under the school land.

Ferguson, McFadden, Blair and Peter Wylie are names that are repeatedly named on each others' grants' boundaries.

Further Discussion of James Blair #2. As previously shown, this James Blair was age 9 in 1767 when he arrived in South Carolina. His father Thomas Blair's warrant was for 250 acres. Based on South Carolina Council records for arrival in 1767, will and deed data, the family in time included the following:

- Thomas Blair, born 1739, Ireland
- Margaret Blair, born 1734, Ireland
- Children: James #2, born ca.1758
 - William
 - Mary
 - Jane, born ca.1765
 - Thomas
 - Elizabeth

The plat for the 250 acres to Thomas Blair, on Rocky Creek in Craven County, is dated 5 January 1768, bounded on all sides by vacant land.

We found the following actions for this family that tie these various family members together. They are all on Rocky Creek.

1792. James #2 sells to his son Thomas Blair the 162 acres of a 1787 grant that had been made to him. This sale refers to a “bargain” sale with certain other conditions for one year so it appears to be a sale within that family.

There are other citations (see below) of James #2’s 1787 grant for 162 (or 163) acres, but neither the original warrant nor plat has been found. It is curious that he apparently received this grant in 1787, age 29, some 20 years after the family’s arrival in South Carolina. Many persons lived on the land for considerable time before applying for warrants or plats. Perhaps James #2 was one of these, but that seems peculiar since his father went through the regular process in a timely manner. The lack of the original plat does not harm the logic of the land progression, however, since the other citations are very consistent.

1793. Thomas Blair, Sr. and Margaret (wife) have an indenture with son Thomas (Jr.) for 163 acres under a certain grant of 4 June 1787, which was granted to James Blair #2. Also, a tract was granted to Thomas Blair, Sr. (undated) probably of 145 acres.

1795. Thomas Blair, Sr.’s will indicating Wife Margaret to have lawful genteell [sic] maintenance during her whole life. Sons, William and Thomas who each have to provide half Margaret’s maintenance from their respective plantations. Sons James [#2] who gets “five shillings & no more” and “his son Thomas Blair one pound five shillings worth of hogs.” Son John Blair who gets “five shillings and no more.” We interpret the language to mean that “his son” and “John” were sons of James #2. Alexander Walker gets “five shillings and no more.” Son Thomas gets “five shillings and no more. Daughters Mary and Elizabeth, certain goods. Son William gets the plantation. James and William are the executors. (Why didn’t James, the elder son, get part of the plantation? He already had 162 (or 163 acres. Dividing the plantation between William and Thomas would give them 125 acres each. Perhaps father Thomas thought this was a fair overall division of land.)

1798. William Blair is selling, as heir of Thomas Blair 22 acres to William Paul.

1803. William Blair, selling 290 acres to William Paul, refers to boundary with Thomas Blair.

1809. James Blair, selling 188 acres to John McCreary, part of John Reynolds grant of 1769.

1811. James Blair, selling 200 acres to William Neel, “on Haug’s? branch waters of Rocky Creek.

The Thomas Blair family of Rocky Creek and the James Blair #1 of Fishing Creek are clearly not of the same family, at least not in these generations. The names, ages, and neighbors of the Thomas Blair family of Rocky Creek are not consistent with the names of James Blair #1 of Fishing Creek, his family and neighbors. The Fishing Creek Blairs and neighbors are about one and one-half miles east of Richburg. The Rocky Creek Blairs are about three and one-half miles southwest of Richburg. The direct distance between the two groups is (approximately) five miles, not the roughly ten miles as once estimated by J. C. Blair. Both creeks empty into the Catawba river on the eastern border of Chester County. Rocky Creek enters nearest the southern border of the county and runs generally northwest. Fishing Creek enters the Catawba about three miles north of where Rocky Creek connects. Fishing Creek runs generally north by northwest.

Descendants of James Blair #1. The plats, grants, memorials, deeds and indentures examined demonstrate that James #1 Blair is the one who arrived on the *Lord Dunluce*, and received the 250-acre warrant, platted as 230 acres on Fishing Creek. These data also demonstrate that James #1 of Fishing Creek is not the same person as the younger man, James #2 (son of Thomas, Sr.) who was on Rocky Creek.

William Blair, son of James #1 is well documented. In addition to his land sale in South Carolina we have been able to document him in Lincoln County, Tennessee. He married Margaret Phoebe Morton, and died in Tennessee in 1832, not in Randolph County, Illinois, which has often been reported and accepted. This conclusion is based on records of the Swan Creek Congregation of the Reformed (Covenanter) Church in Lincoln County, Tennessee, and the probate of his will there.

Alexander Blair, son of William, and grandson of James #1 was born in 1816. He married Ann McLaughlin, and died in 1865, a civil war casualty. The place of his death is not certain. Letters of Administration were filed in Randolph County, Illinois, and he is listed as buried in Old Bethel Cemetery, Eden, Illinois, but there is no marker. When we visited the cemetery we found markers for Alexander's wife and two daughters. There is an open space between Ann and the daughters. It is speculated that Alexander is buried in that space. Margaret Adeline Blair, daughter of Alexander, grand-daughter of William and great-granddaughter of James #1 married William Sloane Wisely. They are Janet Wisely Dickason's great grandparents. The rest of the line from Margaret Adeline Blair (Wisely) to Janet is well documented.

Chester County Background Land records played a dominant role in solving the Blairs in Chester County land puzzle. The history of the geographical definitions of what is now Chester County varied over time. Land records may have notations of one or more of the following.

Before 1771 - There was an area in northern South Carolina called Craven County, but there was no precise definition. Approximately 1771-1784, Camden District was defined. In 1785 the counties of York, Chester, Fairfield, Lancaster, Richland, Clarendon and Clarendon were defined. In 1786-1790, Chester County defined as of "Camden District." 1791-onward, Chester County defined as "of Pinckney District."

Obtaining and documenting land in South Carolina involved three or four steps:

- 1 - a "warrant" for land was issued by the South Carolina Council.**
- 2 - a "plat" (or survey) of the warranted land was conducted and legally defined and described the land.**
- 3 - a "grant" was title to the land, written in flowery language; it again described the land.**
- 4 - a "memorial" was a record of payment of "quit rent" taxes to the Crown in pre-Revolutionary time; the land was again described.**

Although "warrants" were issued by the South Carolina Council, the actual designation of land to be received was within the discretionary power of land surveyors out in the field. Their discretion in selecting land to plat was unlimited.

Bibliography:

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Parker, Elmer O., "Early Surveys of (areas in) Chester County, South Carolina," published irregularly in the *Journal of the Chester County Genealogical Society*.
Revill, Janie, "A Compilation of Original Lists of Protestant Immigrants to South Carolina, 1763-1772," Genealogical Pub. Co., Baltimore, Md., 1974.
Stephenson, Jean, "Scotch-Irish Migration to South Carolina, 1772 (Rev. William Martin and His Five Shiploads of Settlers," Shenandoah Pub. House, Inc. Strasburg, Virginia, 1971.)

The various plat maps referred to herein have been consolidated and compiled on two 11x17 inch summary maps. These include the lands of James Blair #1, his sons James #4 and William, Robert McFadden, James Ferguson, Thomas Blair, his son James #2, etc. Readers who are interested in these summary maps should send \$3.00 and a self-addressed #10 or 9x12 inch envelope to Donald G. Dickason, 64 Mason Drive, Princeton, NJ 08540.