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## **THE BOLLINGS OF WISE COUNTY**

By W. S. Rose

Of the sixty-nine pupils enrolled at Flat Gap public school, at the head of Pound Valley in Wise County, Virginia, all but one were Bollings or their mothers were Bollings. Neighboring schools have the name in lesser proportion.

They do not go to school for nothing either. Their settlement comprises about one-tenth of the Robertson Civil District, which contains fifteen schools, and eight of them were recently taught by Bollings.

The circumstances of the ancestry and early settlement favored a clean-blooded posterity, and it has been agreeably cooperated with by choice for nearly one hundred and twenty-five years. No insanity, epilepsy, idiocy, or hereditary tuberculosis. The result is a keen-witted, self-reliant people able to take care of themselves under any conditions they encounter. They are great people to mind their own business and would rather others do the same.

Environment and heredity, the two prime factors in character-molding, are in this case given the widest possible play, and yet, the age-old debate on which of the two has the greater influence is not settled. Heredity was strong, as will be seen later, and the community started from one family whose members went forth to various Lands of Nod to mate and bring back their mates in most cases, to settle near the parent roof.

The nest was at the head of the valley that somewhat resembles a scoop-shovel, except there is a dividing ridge in the middle throughout the entire distance of ten miles. All around the outer rim, excepting the northeastern end, are mountains. Until very recent times it was greatly isolated from the rest of the world.

Amid such natural surroundings heredity began to play its part. It had a free hand. The first family of children were large enough to remember when the mail came as close as sixty miles, and when it finally came within twenty miles they began to send and receive letters.

They escaped the conventionalities, shallow forms and hypocrisies prevailing in what passed for high society, and the blighting effects of a wasteful labor system then in vogue elsewhere.

They were taught by their parents to read and had no trashy literature to waste time on. Providing for their material wants kept them all busy.

Their history goes back to famous ancestry on both sides, and the temptation is strong to trace the mother's side, but that seems contrary to the accepted custom. Robert Bolling married Jane Rolfe, daughter of Thomas Rolfe, who was the son of John Rolfe and the beloved Pocahontas.

Who the Bollings were is not generally known, but all that is necessary here to record about them is that they descended from the Welsh Boleyns, who, in England became Bollings, the most noted of whom was Anne, whose beauty captivated the monster, King Henry VIII, who married her despite all opposition and thus gave to England Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen, from which the name Virginia was derived.

To this Robert Bolling and Jane Rolfe Bolling, granddaughter of Pocahontas, only one child was born, John. The mother died and Robert had other children by a later marriage, but the blood of Pocahontas did not course in their veins. It is interesting to note how long the Pocahontas blood was held by a single life because the same thing happened again when the first John had but one son, also called John, who, however, ended all anxiety by fathering nineteen sons, the eldest of whom was Thomas, who himself had a numerous family. He, it was, being prompted by the need for such instruction in his family, procured a teacher from England, which eventually led to the establishment of the first deaf and dumb institution in America.

Under the law of primogeniture then in force, Thomas inherited the entire forty-thousand acre estate, leaving the other eighteen sons of John to scatter or at least, to shift for themselves.

At least one of the brothers went to North Carolina. His name was Benjamin, and among his family of seven sons and three daughters was another Benjamin, who was born in 1734 and was, therefore, two years younger than Washington,

with whom he bore arms in the same great conflict, as did his sons by his first wife.

Having lost his first wife, Pattie Felts, he married Charity Larrimore, who bore him one son, Jeremiah, the father of the family on Pound River. And, it was a real family, too, as will be seen later. Other Jeremiahs drop in from time to time, but this Jeremiah was Jeremiah I. He already was married to Sallie Ward of Georgia when he started with his wife and father to the wilderness. Perhaps it would be better to say that Benjamin brought them into the wilderness to found a home.

The son, at least, and the father perhaps also, had scouted the area and knew beforehand in a general way about where they would settle. There were already settlers in the valleys of the Clinch and Powell Rivers. Hannah, a sister of Benjamin, had married Solomon Osborne and had come with him into the wilderness and located at a ford on the Clinch River a short distance upstream from where the town of Dungannon now stands. The name Osborne Ford clings to the place to the present.

Because of local interest, a digression is here made to record a statement made by well-informed members of the Bolling family of the upper Pound Valley that Benjamin had a younger brother Jesse, who was a primitive Baptist preacher and came over the mountains bringing with him two boys named Gilly. After living for a period of time at the forks of the Powell River, where Big Stone Gap now stands, he passed on into Kentucky, leaving his claim and improvements in the possession of these boys. Whether this be true or not, one thing is certain, and that is that the Gillys are very numerous in the locality mentioned, and that they started somewhere and somehow several generations ago.

There were several Johns, John the first, John the second, and John this and John that, but it is not recorded that there was a John the Baptist. But Benjamin evidently was of the same faith as Jesse and must have taught it to his son Jeremiah, for the one church of the locality is close by and the title page of the record book is inscribed "Primitive Baptist Church." The burying ground is near and Benjamin was the first tenant. On a rude stone at the head is inscribed "B. Bolling 1734-1832." He had several grandsons through the son Jeremiah who reached extreme old age, but none quite reached his ninety-eight years. By his side sleeps Charity who braved the wilderness with him. Marks to both graves are the work of Jeremiah.\*

It has not to this day been definitely settled just which of the Carolinas President Jackson was born in, and the descendants of Benjamin and Jeremiah are not sure about which their ancestors came from. They talked much of both states and were, perhaps, so near the line that they spent time in both, as was the case with Jackson. They brought with them across the mountains on their horses small appleseed sprouts set in gourds, and, after planting, they grew and lived long, which might indicate North Carolina was their native state because North Carolina is more adapted to that fruit.

History teaches that land-title troubles were responsible for much of the early migration from western North Carolina, while South Carolina was so organized as to make life difficult for self-reliant and industrious white people; and, from both states there was, in early days, an outwardflowing stream of their bravest and best. Be the cause what it may, one or the other or both states lost when Benjamin brought Jeremiah and Sallie out.\*\* In their new abode the population increases with wonderful regularity. Eleven of the thirteen children of Jeremiah and Sallie reach maturity, and of the two who failed to do so one was killed by a falling tree; and there was not a doctor within a hundred miles.

Of the eleven, eight were given Bible names. They follow the dates of birth and death as nearly correct as possible: Jonathan 1806-1866\*\*\*; Jeremiah II, 1809-1894; Ezekiel, 1815-1907; Hosea, 1817-1910; Amos 1819- 1894; James, 1821 with no date of death; Sarah, 1823-1862; Dulaney, 1824 with no date of death; Jesse, 1826- 1901\*\*\*; Polly\*\*\* who married, became the mother of four children, and passed away, but the date of birth and death was not learned. There has been from the beginning a small migration, mostly to Kentucky, and the missing dates are due to those cases. Most all of the departed sleep in the churchyard of which Benjamin was the first tenant. It is on a low ridge just above the ancestral homestead, an dis well fenced and cared for. It contains several times as much standing marble as the average rural burying ground, all of which was hauled over very rough mountain roads for distances ranging from eighty down to twenty miles, depending on the facilities of transportation at the time of purchase. Perhaps names chiseled on it would range in much the same ratio as the school pupils mentioned in the beginning of this story, for most of these people prefer to live out their lives int he place that Benjamin selected for their nest and where Jeremiah's fledglings peopled it.

To bring the genealogy down past Jeremiah's family would need so many "begats" as to resemble the second chapter of Genesis, and must not be attempted here. Their direct descent from Pocahontas and one other incident which will be related later are the only romantic elements discovered in their story. Only a few of the ninth in descent from the Indian maiden are now living. Taken from narrative form and given directly it is as follows: Pocahontas to Thomas Rolfe, 1st; Thomas Rolfe to Jane Rolfe Bolling, 2nd; Jane Rolfe Bolling to John Bolling I, 3rd; John Bolling I to John Bolling II, 4th; John Bolling II to Benjamin Bolling I, he of the large family, 5th; Benjamin Bolling I to Benjamin Bolling II, 6th; This is the Revolutionary soldier who brought into the wilderness his son Jeremiah, who is the 7th, and his children whose names and dates are given are 8th in line. The Thomas Bolling mentioned was a brother of the first Benjamin and was the sole heir. He was mentioned only because of his connection with the first institution for the deaf and dumb in America. He has no important connection with the Carolina Bollings, who have not, as far as learned, used Pocahontas and John Rolfe in giving names to their children. Mrs. Edith Galt Bolling Wilson and her brother Rolfe Bolling are 9th in descent also, but from another branch of the family, as were the Randolfs, Tuckers and others with whom here are not concerned.

This story, long though it has grown, cannot well be closed without relating an incident that for disappointment and sadness closely approaches the theme in Longfellow's immoral poem of Evangeline's never-faltering search for Gabriel, which has thrilled the hearts of countless millions in many languages and in different lands.

Late in life Sallie Ward, wife of Jeremiah, was seized with a passion to return to the home of her childhood to visit her kindred. Taking with her Hosea, her son, then a lad in his teens, she set out on horseback. This must have been in the eighteen thirties, for we have seen that Hosea was born in 1817. She riding and the lad afoot, over the rough trails they

went, fording rivers and streams, lodging when possible with the widely scattered settlers, and often taking the weather as it came. But, at last, the hardships and privations were left behind and with a joyful heart she approached the place she longed to see once more, where she could pour out to her kindred the great story of her life since their separation.

She found not one living kinsman and none who could give any information as to when and where they had gone. The land was still there, but for all practical purposes for her it was as though the earth had opened and swallowed them up. What her feelings were can only be imagined by those who have met with overwhelming and crushing disappointment.

It must have been that the one great sustaining comfort to her as she turned her face to the wilderness was that she at least had a place to return where a welcoming hand would greet her and a friendly roof would shelter her.

A brother of her husband's father had found them as he was outwardly bound from the old homeland to Missouri, but for her, her husband, sons and daughters were all that were left to her. With them she continued to live on until 1845 when her body was laid near the first tenant, to be later joined by her mate, and the twain sleep well in the soil where they labored in the land they loved.

#### NOTES

\* The following passage has been omitted from this story for reasons stated below:

"We have seen that Jeremiah's wife was Sallie Ward, born in 1773, two years before Andrew Jackson, with whom she played as a child, and whom she always disliked, not to use a harsher word. After he rose to fame and was idolized by the public she always spoke disparagingly of him."

The previous passage was omitted from the rest of the story because there are some very obvious errors in it. First, Jackson was born in 1767, not 1765. Second, if Sallie Ward Bolling was born in 1763 she was about 43 years old when her first child was born, i.e., Jonathan in 1806 or 1807, and she was about 68 years old in 1831 when her last child was born, I, e., Polly in 1831. This obviously, is impossible.

A more probable date was twenty years later, about 1783, which would have placed her about the same age as her husband (see\*). This, however, would have placed her much younger than Andrew Jackson, and it is doubtful that they were playmates in childhood.

Third, one historical source, the World Almanac, gives the location of Jackson's birth as New Lancaster County, South Carolina, but the text of this story states that Sallie was born in Georgia. Therefore, it is possible that Sallie Ward never heard of Jackson until he was well-known. One can only speculate, but the editor of this story, after much thought, had decided that the incidents related here about Andrew Jackson and Sallie Ward must be mere folk tales built up as years passed in the Bolling family, because upon talking with present living Bollings in the area, some have said that they can remember their grandfather or uncle, etc., having related the account to them as it was given here. But, as we have seen, it cannot be true.

\*\* The late Hugh L. Sulfridge in his Columbia University Master's thesis gives the date of about 1790 to the migration, and the area from which they came to be Wilkes County, North Carolina. The date 1790 can be questioned because, since this text states that Jeremiah was married at the time of the migration, it is doubtful that a period of sixteen years would have elapsed before his first child was born. Also, Mrs. Margie Bolling Riddle, great-granddaughter of Jeremiah and granddaughter of Jesse, gives the dates of Jeremiah's birth as February 7, 1782. Obviously, an eight-year-old boy would not be married. A more probable date would be 1800 to 1804, and then the other statements would be more logical.

\*\*\* Mrs. Margie Bolling Riddle, mentioned above, of RFD Pound, Virginia, gives these dates for the births of: Jonathan, 1806; Jeremiah II, 1810; and Polly, 1831. She also adds the eleventh child, Edmond, born in 1828.

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