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Southern and Colonial Genealogies

On the Identity of Dorcas Rountree

Many family researchers have accepted John S. Wurts' statement that William Rountree's wife was Dorcas Dudley, to whom Wurts gave a long and illustrious genealogy.¹ This genealogy purports to show the Dudley line from Charlemagne to Ambrose Dudley of New Kent County to his daughter Dorcus Dudley.

This contention is largely worthless for genealogical purposes since it is accompanied by absolutely no evidence. Mr. Wurts's books contain many genealogies but barely a footnote, end note, or tidbit of evidence for his assertions. And professional genealogical societies have long warned that his books are unreliable, to put it kindly. Any responsible genealogist will seek additional proof before accepting any of his statements.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence whatsoever that Ambrose Dudley had a daughter named Dorcas. Nor is there any evidence that William Rountree's wife was named Dudley. Wurts wrote that Dorcas Dudley was the daughter of Ambrose Dudley "of New Kent County" and the granddaughter of Colonel Ambrose Dudley of Gloucester County. The records of both Gloucester and New Kent are practically nonexistent, so one wonders exactly what led Mr. Wurts to draw this conclusion. Not only is there no evidence presented for the Virginia Dudley genealogy itself, there is not a shred of evidence that that any Dudley had a daughter named Dorcas, much less that Dorcas Rountree was related to either Ambrose Dudley Senior or Junior. Nor has there been found any record linking William Rountree with any member of the Dudley family.

Worse, there is no evidence that anyone named Dudley ever set foot in New Kent County until long after William Rountree was married to his wife Dorcas. The earliest record of a Dudley in New Kent is in 1733, when Ambrose Dudley III (whom Wurts guesses is Dorcas's brother) appears in the St. Peter's parish records in connection with the baptism of a son.² Ambrose Dudley III is mentioned frequently after 1733, and was elected a vestryman in 1736, but does not appear in any records until several years after William Rountree and Dorcas were married. There is no mention of his supposed father, Ambrose Dudley II, in any New Kent record and there are no patents to Dudleys in New Kent or the surrounding counties until 1760.³ Could it be that Wurts misunderstood the St. Peter's entry for the birth of Dudley Rountree – which does not mention his mother's maiden name?

If we ignore Mr. Wurts for the moment, are there any other plausible candidates to be Dorcas Rountree's father?

Actually, there are at least two candidates, both more plausible than Dudley. Dudley was a perfectly acceptable given name in this time period, and we cannot assume that it honored a surname. But three others of William Rountree's children had given names that might have memorialized the surname of a parent or

grandparent: Turner, Randall (or Randolph), and Richardson. Persons with all of those surnames appear in New Kent records in the right timeframe, and are therefore potential candidates to be Dorcas Rountree's father. Thus, we might plausibly argue that any of the four names might reflect the maiden name of his wife. Richardson and Turner, in particular, are names frequently recorded in the vestry books.

For example, at the time William Rountree was having children, John Richardson was a vestryman in Blisland parish, and Richard Richardson of Blisland was a Burgess from New Kent in 1729. Charles and Robert Richardson were baptizing children in St. Peter's parish in the 1708-1715 period. As for Turner, that was a very common surname in New Kent – no fewer than five persons named Turner recorded the births of their children between 1700 and 1710 in St. Peter's parish.

Although a minor point, the absence of the given name "Ambrose" among William Rountree's descendants, and the absence of "Dudley" among all but the descendants of Dudley Rountree, is bothersome. One would think that such an illustrious and wealthy line of three successive Ambrose Dudleys would have been memorialized. Both Richardson and Turner, in contrast, are names that do appear among descendants of the children other than Richardson and Turner Rountree themselves. In summary, it appears we will never be able to prove or disprove her maiden name, though Dudley seems the least likely.

Finally, I might also note that it is not clear that all of William Rountree's children were by a single wife. The sole mention of Dorcas is in the record of the birth of the son Dudley in early 1729. William Rountree's children appear to have been born over a span of roughly 25 years, a relatively long period of fertility for women in that time.

1. [Magna Charta](#), Vol. 8, John S. Wurts, (Reprinted by Brookfield Press, 1954). [[↔](#)]
2. Chamberlayne (St. Peter's), p511. [[↔](#)]
3. Virginia Patent Book 33, p828. [[↔](#)]

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