

Tom Chapmans Research Notes
John Chapman of Culpeper
born about 1750
married Jane Donaho about 1770
resided in Culpeper County

Most of what I know about John was derived from the research of Mildred Chapman Gibbs, who we descendants owe a great debt of gratitude. Long before the internet, she did a ton of tedious courthouse work in producing her book, "From Culpeper County to the Teays Valley."

This recap of my data might not be wholly accurate and does not contain many cited sources because I did not set out to be a genealogist and failed to always take source notes as I dove in. Friends along the way have contributed and helpfully taken me to task when I have erred. I'm creating this content largely to leave behind clues for future researchers.

There were three John Chapmans that I have studied in the Culpeper area around 1770. The first I call "Spotsylvania John." He was twice married, the second wife being Mary Allen. Mary is connected to an old Virginia area man named Erasmus Withers, and she and John had a son named Erasmus. This is interesting because it's not a common name, and we have two Erasmus's in early generations. Also, a number of their other children have given names similar to names in our family - such as John, William, James, Lewis, and Charles. I've spent a lot of effort trying to establish a connection, but to no avail. I even tracked down a descendant and persuaded him to take a DNA test. If he did, it was inconclusive. Anyhow, this man died about 1776.

A second John was married to Sally Abbot and left Culpeper for New River Valley about 1770. This man is often said to have been born to an Isaac Chapman that migrated south from Connecticut, but that story is bunk. He's also said to be related to the noted descendants of Thomas Chapman that arrived on the Ship Tryall about 1610, and eventually spawned the large group of Chapmans that inhabited Charles County, Maryland. That too is bunk. However, those folks in Charles County bear further research in regard to a possible connection to our John, because they are quite numerous and there was a migratory path out of that area that runs across the Potomac, through Stafford and Fredericksburg toward Shenandoah. Our John settled in a part of Culpeper that was right on that route.

By 1780 our John was the only John left in Culpeper to be captured in public records. We first find him in 1782 on both a tax list and a mention of attending an estate sale. Next there is a 1788 record of him doing some smithwork, which is a clue to his profession. Two years later, in 1790, only his widow remains on the tax lists. One other record that might be our John is in the 1781 lists of men that were in the local militia. There we find a John Chapman serving under the command of John Strother. I'm pretty sure this is our guy because Strother was one of the first to settle as a large landowner in the neighborhood of our Chapmans. Another man in that militia unit was Cadwalader Slaughter, which suggests a possible name origin of our Cad Chapman.

I searched a long time for evidence of this family living in the central part of Culpeper, but couldn't find any clues. More recently, I came across land records showing Joshua Morris

purchased property in 1797 that was near Pignut Mountain in the upper (North Fork) Thornton River valley. Further, the 1800 survey indicates Cadwalader Chapman served as a chain man in that survey. Cad was his son-in-law, having married Mary "Polly" Morris in 1798. Three other sons of John Chapman married Morris girls, and they were all wed by Reverend Charles Yates, who presided over the congregation of a nearby Baptist church. Although there is no record of any of our Chapmans owning land anywhere in Culpeper, it's fair to assume they lived in or near that neighborhood. Today the area is Rappahannock County, carved out of Culpeper in 1833.

Following are the known children of John and Jane:

1. John L., born about 1770, married Elizabeth "Molly" Menefee on Feb. 4, 1797. Molly was the daughter of a neighbor, Henry "Mountain" Menefee, named so I presume because he was a noted outdoorsman, or perhaps because he lived farther up the valley than most. They were wed by Charles Yates, who was associated with the Thornton's Gap Primitive Baptist Church in that valley located just north of Sperryville. As noted previously, three sons of John and Jane married daughters of Joshua Morris. After 1800, that whole clan moved together to the Teays Valley of Kanawha, where Joshua owned extensive land. Church records indicate the elder son, John L., remained in the North Fork Thornton River area until about 1817. In 1824, he settled on Mud River just below the mouth of Little Cabell Creek. I refer to this as the the Morris/Chapman clan. I've been to this site and found a Boy Scout camp and a trail head to the Kanawha Trace Trail there. Many people cite his middle name as "Linwood" or "Lewis," but there is no evidence to support that.

2. Nancy Chapman, born about 1770, married John Ball. Nancy is not included in the research of Mildred Gibbs, but there is a consensus among most other researchers that she belongs. I know little more about her except that she lived in the same area in Kanawha as the rest and appears in the 1830 census as a widow between the age of 60 and 70.

3. Cadwallader Chapman was born about 1772. He and John L. both appear on Culpeper tax lists in 1792, so we know both had to be at least 20 years old, by law. They are recorded in sequence, which indicates they lived next to each other. He married Mary "Polly Morris" on June 5, 1798.

4. Joseph Chapman was born April 17, 1774. He married Lucy Morris in 1802. Unlike the others, they were not married until living in Kanawha County. I've seen online trees that claim his middle name was "Erasmus" or "Donaho." Both are bunk as far as I know. (Why do people do that?)

5. Henry Chapman was born August 1, 1777. A lot of people have Henry's middle name as "Amanuel." I've never seen proof of that, but it is a name that appears in some records. However, there were many Henry's in Kanawha/Cabell.

Other possible children:

Mary "Polly" Chapman was born December 22, 1784. She married Andrew Jordan on April 20, 1802, and they too lived in the same area of Kanawha as the others. However, there is no record connecting her to John and Jane.

William Chapman appears in early records of Kanawha and Cabell and is thought by many to be in this family, or perhaps a cousin

James Chapman is just another name mingled among the Chapmans of early Kanawha. However, it appears frequently in later generations. I once had a DNA connection to a James, but the DNA subject died and fell out of the pool.

While I have closely followed the data of Mildred Chapman Gibbs in tracing subsequent generations, I'm not going to include any of that in these notes because knowledgeable people have pointed me to a number of errors and questionable assumptions she made. A lot more work has to be done to sort out the many Chapmans with similar names that lived in proximity of known family members.

Also, it's not helpful to have people simply copying trees without doing the work. There are many online trees connected to our John that are woefully in error. As of today, 5-5-2019, do not believe anybody that claims to know anything about John's ancestry, or that of his wife, Jane Donaho. If you have one of those online trees and are reading this, shame on you.