

Susannah Rucker

The Story of the Wife of John Rucker

Oldest son of Peter *Rucker, Immigrant* *by Jean W. Brydon*

Our speaker for the March, 2003 GRIVA¹ Meeting, Mary Beth McKimmy, spoke on finding women in Colonial Virginia. In those times, women had few rights and were usually not in records. Even her maiden name was generally not known. She told us to find women, one must pursue male records.

This is the story of Susannah, the wife of John Rucker of Orange County, Virginia (son of Peter the immigrant. We judge her to be born in the early 1700s because her children began coming about fifteen to twenty years later. The only records of her are when she signed a release to property her husband was selling (her 'dower rights'). Her husband died in 1742/3 and mentioned her in his Will²: *Item, I give to my well beloved wife Susanna Rucker, . . . one third part of my household Furniture & Stock . . . to remain my wife's no longer than her widowhood after to be sold and divided as the rest of my Estate hereafter mentioned.*

Ms. McKimmy at the March meeting told us that a woman could not own land unless she was single or a widow — called “femme sole.” (A ‘femme covert’ was a married woman and could not own land, everything was her husband’s.) Susannah could stay on the farm until she died or remarried. Usually this meant if she remarried, the land would become her new husband’s, but in this case it would become her children’s.

Susannah and John had twelve children and most of them moved to Amherst County, Virginia where John had patented 5850³ acres. The only one that stayed in Orange County, near her, was her oldest son, Peter. They lived adjoining Zachary Taylor and the property, located just south of the town of Orange, is currently owed by Taylor descendants.

Susannah sold her land, 27 May 1769: Indenture between Susannah Rucker, late of Orange County, and Peter Rucker of Orange County, Extrx. and Extr. to the Last Will and Testament of John Rucker, dec'd, and Andrew Shepherd of Orange County for £70, have . . . granted . . . 130 acres be the same more or less whereon Susannah formerly lived and joyning [sic] to Col^o John Baylor, Mrs. Thomas Bell, Mr. William Moore which he purchased of Mr. Richard Taylor and Mr. Hancock Taylor, Mr. Zachery Taylor and the s^d Shepherd . . . Signed Susannah Rucker and Peter Rucker. (D. B. 15, p.94-96, Orange County, VA.)

¹Genealogy Research Institute of Virginia. This article was printed in their June 2003 newsletter.

²Will of John Rucker, dated 11 Jan 1742/3, recorded 28 Jan 1742/3 (W. B. 1, p.248, Orange Co., VA):

³Virginia Land Grant, Vol. 22, p.596, applied for in 1739, awarded in 1751 to his son, Peter Rucker and divided among the children of John Rucker.

A clue: The deed said “Susannah Rucker, late of Orange County.” She had moved, but where? Originally I thought she had died in 1769 as she then disappeared (or so I thought). Her son, Peter continued to live in Orange until he died in 1794. Did Susannah move in with Peter or one of her other children in Amherst County? The clue above insinuates she had moved away, but I overlooked (or ignored) it at the time. As it turns out, she moved to Amherst County, and purchased her own home. There is no record of this purchase. Susannah was a widow who could own land, why wasn’t there a record of her land?

The way I found out that Susannah was living in Amherst was from these two deeds:

4 Nov 1776, Thomas Gillenwaters and wife Martha to Jno. McDaniel, 100 acres on Harris Creek. Lines: Edwd. Tinsley, Hugh Rose, Anthony Rucker, *Susannah Rucker*, Geo. McDaniel (D. B. D, p.380, Amherst County, VA).

7 Dec 1788, Jno. McDaniel to Isaac Rucker, 100 acres. Lines: Anthony Rucker, Hugh Rose, Joshua Tinsley, Edwd Tinsley, Ambrose & *Susannah Rucker*.

Another place Susannah was mentioned: In the “Lost Order Book” of Amherst County, 1773-1782: Dated 1 May 1780: “Ambrose Rucker, Gent., is appointed Surveyor of the Road from Rutledges to his own Meadow, and it is ordered that he do with his own Male Labouring Tithables, John Rucker, Benjamin Plunket and their Male Labouring Tithables, and the Male Labouring Tithables of Harvies Estate and *Susannah Rucker* at Pauls Mountain keep the said Road in repair according to Law.”

At first I didn’t connect this Susannah as being John’s widow. But then the light dawned — it was her! She was living in Amherst County! She had moved to be near most of her children.

I kept looking and found the following:

3 Jul 1769, Leonard Goff & wife Ann, Bedford County, Virginia to **Peter Rucker, Jno Rucker, Ambrose Rucker, Benj Rucker, Isaac Rucker, Anthony Rucker, Sarah Marr, Wineford Lee, Mella Ham, Phebe Rucker**, of Amherst County, for 50 pds, 100 acres. Lines: Jno. Burford, Rucker’s Run, Drinking corner in Jno. Burford’s line (D. B. B, p.437, Amherst County, VA).

Why was this property purchased by all of her children? Look at the date — 1769, a few months after she sold the Orange County land. It had to be Susannah’s land!

Here is the sale of this land:

22 Jan 1781⁴ [actually 1791], Peter Rucker, Jas Rucker as exor. of **Jno. Rucker dec’d, Alex Marr, Ambrose Rucker, Jno Lea, Benj Rucker, Isaac Rucker, Anthony Rucker, Stephen Ham, and Jas Morton** of Amherst to Anthony Rucker, of Amherst, for £65, 100 acres. Lines: Isaac Rucker, Drinking Corner. (D. B. G, p.7, Amherst Co., VA).

Her children owned Susannah’s land! They purchased it in 1769, shortly after she sold the land in Orange and it was probably sold after her death in 1791. Maybe she lived even longer, moving in with a child. Note the above deeds are a good clue to the daughters and their married names.

⁴The deed is dated 1781, but is filed in 1791 deeds, so I am assuming it is 1791, esp. as she is listed in a deed dated 1788 (see above).

What we can surmise about Susannah: She was born early in the 18th century and lived almost ninety years. She was probably born in the Eastern part of Virginia (her husband was raised in Essex County, Virginia and probably married there). They moved to the area that is now Orange County — the then frontier of Virginia. Anyone that wanted to settle there was given land (as a buffer to the Indians). John's father was an Immigrant to this country and they had little money and land so they took the opportunity to move west to "free" lands. From the deeds we know they only had 130 acres — too small to make a living for their twelve children by farming. John ran a tavern⁵ in his home and I'm sure Susannah, not only kept the home, a kitchen garden, raised the children, but helped with the tavern. Her husband died young, in early 1743, leaving her with small children (the youngest was a baby). When the children were grown, most of them moved to Amherst County, Virginia. She stayed behind in Orange County with her oldest son, who owned the adjoining property. Then twenty-five years later, in 1769, she sold her land and moved to Amherst where she lived the remainder of her life.

When looking for your female ancestors, remember to study all the county records for her, her husband and her children.

And, one final note, the most important thing our speaker said was the first law of genealogy is "Trust nothing until you prove it yourself!"

Part 2 — Susannah's Maiden Name

I know it's difficult for people to accept that we do not know the maiden name of a female ancestor. However, in this case we must accept that we do not know Susannah's parents' name. As soon as a woman married, she no longer used her maiden name and it was not important for anyone to know birth name. The only way a female's parentage can be proved is through a deed of land, Will, Bible, church records, etc. Nothing has appeared to shed light on Susannah's maiden name.

Sudie Rucker Wood in *The Rucker Family Genealogy*, p.4, suggested that Susannah may have been the daughter of Frederick and Sarah Coghill, because of their deeding a tract of land to Peter Rucker and his three eldest sons "for love and affection." The Coghills did have a daughter by the name of Susannah. I have researched her and she married someone else. You can see by the paper above that Susannah Rucker never remarried.

In 1707/1708 Peter Ruckers's three sons referred to the above mentioned deed were young boys and the "love and affection" could not possibly refer to an inter-family marriage with the Coghills. Wood, p.5, suggested that John Rucker came of age in 1725 [21] when he began buying land, making him about four years old at the time of the deed. He may have been a little older, but even if he was seven or eight in 1708, he would not have been old enough to marry.

⁵24 Sep 1742, Captⁿ John Rucker was granted a license for keeping an Ordinary at his own house (Order Book, 1741-1743, p.240, Orange Co., VA).

Susannah Coghill, oldest daughter of Frederick Coghill was an heiress. George Dusberry [half-brother of Frederick Coghill] left in his Will⁶, probated 26 Dec 1715: “To Susanna Coghill, eldest daughter of my brother Frederick Coghill, my plantation . . .”

Frederick Coghill’s Will was probated 19 Nov 1758⁷ mentions five children including “Suanner [sic] Miller,” wife of Capt. John Miller. When Susannah Rucker sold her home in Orange County, she signed the deed⁸ “Susannah Rucker.” Therefore I conclude that Susannah Coghill was not married to John Rucker, but instead to John Miller.

Edythe Whitley in the *History of the Rucker Family*, p.9, suggested that her name was Susannah Phillips, the daughter of William and Susannah Phillips. In a letter printed in Vol. 1, Issue 1 of *Rucker Ruckus*, she admitted she was wrong about Susannah being a Phillips or kin to the Lloyd family. In genealogy you can’t take someone’s word for something without proof, not even if it’s printed in a book.

Therefore, we must accept the fact that we may never know Susannah Rucker’s maiden name. Family members have been searching for her name for nearly 100 years and if nothing has come to light even in this modern day of computers, I doubt that it ever will.

Footnote: I am convinced that the Ruckers and Goffs were related by marriage. Either Peter’s wife Elizabeth or John’s wife Susannah was a Goff. The Ruckers were closely related for three generations—beginning in Essex, moving to Orange together and then to Amherst (and finally Bedford). I have never been able to prove this, so only being speculation, I have never printed anything about this, but would like to. Both John Rucker and John Goff had sons named Ambrose—such an unusual name. Also were John Rucker and John Goff named after the same person? John Goff’s father was Thomas which was also a big name with the Ruckers. Peter Rucker Sr.’s oldest sons were John, Peter, and Thomas. (It was tradition to name the oldest son after the father’s father, the second after the mother’s father and the third after the father.)

⁶Will Book 14, p.430, Essex Co., Virginia.

⁷Will Book 11, p.223, Essex Co., Virginia.

⁸ Deed Book 15, p.94-96, Orange County, Virginia.