

THE JACOB ELLER PLANTATION

**Botetourt County (later Roanoke County) Virginia
Located on the Sugarloaf Mountain Road, Rural Route No. -2, Salem,
Virginia 1802-1986**

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Growing up on what Jacob Eller called his Plantation was like living and walking through history. Here is where Jacob built his first cabin. This is where they got water out of the creek to wash their clothes. This is where they grew tobacco before grandpa quit. These are Albemarle Pippin apple trees that grandpa planted. This is why they are so big your arm can't reach around them. There is where great grandmother Polly's cabin was. She lived ninety four years. My father- Christian Emory Eller seemed to know the answer to all my questions.

Jacob Eller immigrated from Germany to what was then Botetourt County Virginia along with many of his fellow countryman in the later part of the 1700. The earliest known date of his presence was when he was given a Grant [1/](#) of 150 acres of land by Governor Beverley Randolph on Wolf Run of Back Creek, a branch of Roanoke River, July 19, 1790. He later sold this land to John Brubaker [2/](#).

On February 9, 1802 he bought 400 acres of land in what was then Botetourt County, Virginia from Jacob and Elizabeth Yest (Yeast) for \$1066.67 [3/](#).

This land was located in the beautiful Roanoke section of the Valley of Virginia in what was then Botetourt County in the Cave Spring District on Cravens Creek, five miles south of Salem Virginia. He chose land on the Blue Ridge Mountain side of the Valley.

Much of his farm was on the foot hills of Sugar Loaf and Long Ridge Mountains. There were two streams on the farm. One on the western section, Cravens Creek, and one on the eastern section, Seacat Branch at the foot of Sugar Loaf Mountain. He later- bought from Jacob Statler- 49 acres of land [4/](#). Much of the land was covered with timber-. Later a road was built and he was appointed "Overseer of the Roads" [5/](#).

A part of the original tract of land had been Granted by Governor Harry Lee of the Commonwealth of Virginia to Thomas Harrison [6/](#).

Her-e he and his wife Magdalene lived, raised a family of -'230- eight children, and where he died in 1830 leaving a Will/7/. It is presumed that both Jacob and Magdalene were buried on the farm,, however, no markers have been found.

In his Will he divided the farm in half. The west half, 243 acres valued at \$972.00, was willed to his son John (Johnny) Eller. This part of the farm is still intact and is owned by the Virgil Jaminson Family. It is famous for- its Grist and Saw Mills on Cravens Creek.

The eastern half of the farm was willed to his son Abraham (Abram), 237 acres valued at \$968.00. It was on this part of the farm where Jacob Eller built his home and where he lived/8/. This is the section of the farm where I was born and grew up. Abraham Eller was my great grandfather..

Many of the German settlers were interested in fruit growing. They planted fruit trees, especially apple and peaches, throughout the valley. The Eller family planted extensive orchards.

After a successful life of farming Abraham Eller died/9/ at the age of sixty-seven. He had married Mary "Polly" Wartz/10/ and raised eleven children. Mary continued to live in her own log house until near her death December 13, 1906/11/. My brother Henry C. Eller says he remembers a lady living there who smoked a clay pipe. One day while standing in the gat-den I asked my father-, "Tell me about the log house that stood here." His reply was, "That was not a happy house." I was so astonished I never asked him any more questions about Mary's log house.

Abraham's Will/12/ directed his Executor John B. Naff to sell the farm to the highest bidder. His will also dedicated a portion of the hillside of the northwest portion of the farm to a Grave Yard/13/. This is where he was buried. I remember- seeing his grave stone and wondering why it was taller than the others. This Grave Yard remained active until 1964 when it was discontinued.

My father told me the children had decided their brother John W. Eller, my grandfather, should buy the farm. He had sacrificed so much during the Civil War/14/. He was so opposed to slavery and to war as a way to settle disputes, he fled along with others to Clark County, Ohio and remained there until after the War/15/. He was then living with his second wife, Hannah C. Brubaker- on a farm located on Tinker Ct-EEK near- Hollins, Virginia/16/. My father Christian Emory Eller- was five years old when they moved to the Abraham Eller- farm/17/.

On the day of the sale the family gathered and stood back while John W. bid. However, they were prepared to bid in order to keep someone outside the family from buying the farm.

By this time much of the land had been cleared of timber. He planted extensive apple orchards including much of the land on Sugar Loaf Mountain. Other crops included wheat, corn, and tobacco. He later discontinued raising tobacco because he decided using it was a sin.

Although he remained a farmer through his life, John W. Eller had other interests. He was ordained by his church, the German Baptist Brethren, later changed to The Church of the Brethren, and was much in demand as a preacher and evangelist.

His concern for the black slaves which some of his neighbors had freed after the Civil War led him to sell lots to at least ten individuals and families on the northeast corner of his farm. The lot to Rhoads Banks was 1 1/2 acres. The price was \$20.00/18/. Land was also used to build a school for the black children.

The Census Records of 1830, 1840, 1850, and 1860 have no reference to slaves being owned by the Ellers of Roanoke County. Also, Jacob Eller's descendants were members of the German Baptist Brethren Church which forbid the owning of slaves/19/.

Education of the children of the Cave Spring District was one of his interests. He was a member of the School Board from 1890-1896/20/.

Apparently the heavy burden of farming and his church responsibilities encouraged him to invite his son Christian Emory, who was teaching school, to join him in the farm operations. He deeded him one-half interest in the farm in 1898/21/.

When Christian Emory Eller inherited the farm/22/ at the death of his father John W. Eller there were three dwellings, a barn and other farm buildings. Four generations were living there. There were great grandmother, Mary Wertz Eller, grandmother Hannah Brubaker Eller, with daughters, Sarah and Cora, and Christian Emory and his wife Rebecca Henry Eller and their four children, Orien, Henry, Sadie and Gertrude.

By 1906 he and his family were for the most part on their own. This was the year he bought the land on top of Sugar Loaf Mountain and a right-of-way south to the Sugar Loaf Mountain Road from the Leighton family/23/. Sometime later he cleared the land on the south side of the mountain and planted a peach orchard. One of my early memories was hiding when we heard one of our horses running away down the Sugar Loaf Mountain Road with a wagon load of peaches. All were lost.

This was also the year he gave the land to the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church/24/. The land was deeded to this congregation of black members as long as it was used for a church. My father told me the lumber to build the church was cut off of the farm, sawed at the Jamison Saw Mill and donated to the church. I attended services and funerals there a number of times. One of the ministers who preached in the church lived in a house on the land that had been deeded by John W. Eller to ex-slaves after the Civil War.

In 1914 he entered into an agreement with the Sugar Loaf Canning and Produce Co./25/. The raising and canning of tomatoes was a major farm activity until after the close of World War I, when the canning industry of the Roanoke Valley collapsed.

During the recession following the first World War cash flow was low. He secured a loan from the Federal Land Bank of Baltimore/26/. This kept the farm going during the down time for farming in the area.

In 1929 he planted his largest peach orchard on the northeast section of the farm. I was old enough by this time to help plant many of the trees. Brother Raymon tells of missing most of a

month of high school planting trees. This orchard came into full production the years of 1936, '37. and '38. In 1937 the peach crop was sold to the Kroger Grocery Company. They paid \$1.50 for every bushel basket we loaded on their trucks. We shipped 10,000 bushels. It was my opportunity, as a college student home for the summer, to supervise the harvesting of the fruit in the orchards. The farm had recovered from the recession of the twenties, the Great Depression and four years of drought.

My father was always interested in improvements on the farm and in the community. In 1912 he helped establish the Sugar Loaf Telephone Company and served as an officer^{[/27/](#)}. The subscribers for telephone service were responsible for maintaining the lines and equipment. After- storms we would go out and remove trees or limbs that were shorting out the lines. We had a rectangular wall telephone with a crank. Our number was 9-1-2-3. It was a party line. Everyone heard the rings and could listen to the call. Many did, especially at night. It was a sort of a neighborhood watch for sickness or disaster such as a fire.

January 23, 1918 he bought from the W. E. Wolfenden Electric Company a Delco House Lighting Plant for \$350.00^{[/28/](#)}.

In 1934 he was able to convince the telephone company in near-by Roanoke, Virginia to extend phone service to the Oak Grove Community. The company laid out the line route, furnished the telephone poles and digging equipment. We brothers: Orien, Raymon, Paul and I, dug the holes and planted the poles. After the telephone company finished the job and service was established they sent my father- a check for- our labor. When it arrived I heard my father tell my mother, "I think I will take the check and go to the court house and pay the taxes." The farm was saved.

He was one of the first in our community to buy a Fordson tractor- to use on the farm and in the orchards. I remembers listening to the Grand Old Opry from Nashville on our battery powered radio.

Christian Emory Eller continued as a Farmer Preacher until his death^{[/29/](#)}. He had been the leading spirit in establishing the Oak Grove Church of the Brethren. Lumber for- the church was cut from the farm and sawed at the Jamison Saw Mill and donated to the church.

He sold small parcels of the farm. Only one is mentioned. He sold the land and orchard on the southwest section to W.R. Wertz in 1940^{[/30/](#)}.

In his will^{[/31/](#)} he gave to his oldest son Orien Denton Eller the house and eight acres of land where he lived. The rest of the farm he left in equal shares to his nine living children: Orien Denton Eller, Henry Cline Eller, Sadie Eller Spangler, Ruby Eller Foster, Edna Eller Snavely, Raymon Earnest Eller, Paul Christian Eller, John Clinton Eller and Lowell Frederick Eller

Four of the children chose not to be a part of the continuing farm operation. Sadie, Edna, Paul and Lowell, sold their share to other family members.

The remaining five children continued to operate the farm until five years of frost , freezes and inflation drove them out of business. Two of those years most of the peaches and apples were

lost. The cost of producing fruit had risen steadily after World War II. In 1936 when our father harvested his largest crop of peaches he estimated his cost of producing a bushel of peaches was approximately \$0.45. He sold his crop of peaches at \$1.50 per bushel. In 1953 the total crop of peaches on Eller- orchard was 2456 bushels. Some of them sold to the Kroger Grocer Company for \$1.50 per bushel. It was estimated that the cost of producing one bushel of peaches was \$1.45.

It was soon realized we could not continue as we were. In 1956 the partners in Eller Orchards entered into an agreement with the Hidden Valley Corporation to sell the farm in sections [/32/](#)..

Brother- Orien later disposed of his part of the farm and abandoned the Family Cemetery. His son Neilford Harding Eller was the last member of the family to own a part of the Abraham Eller section of the original Jacob Eller Plantation. He sold his house and lot in 1986.

The last of the apples grown by an Eller- on the farm were used for table decorations and sold to the highest bidder at the Eller Reunion June 21, 1986 at Salem High School, Salem, Virginia.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 1. Richmond, VA, Virginia State Library, Deed Book-Land Office Grants, No. 22 Reel 88. p. 4-170-431.
2. 2. Fincastle, Botetourt Co., Va., Clerk of Court, Deed Book 8, Part 2, p. 421 – 422.
3. Ibid., Deed Book 7a, p. 655.
4. 4. Ibid., Index to Deeds 1770-1889, Book 13, p. 203.
5. 5. Summers, Lewis Preston, ANNALS OF SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA, p. 479.
6. 6. The Original Grant was written on sheep skin and is owned by my brother Lowell F. Eller- of Salem, VA.
7. 7. Fincastle, Botetourt Co., Va., Clerk of Court-, Will Book E, p. 124.
8. 8. Eller, John C., Conversations with Christian Emory Eller, May 1946 (Unpublished)
9. 9. Eller, Henry C., THE JACOB ELLER FAMILY TREE, Salem, Va., now of Bridgewater, Va.), mimeograph, p. 6, 1948.
10. 10. Fincastle, Botetourt Co., Va., Clerk of Court, Marriage Register 1770-185--7, Part I, p. 348.
11. 11. Eller, Henry C., op. cit., p. 6.
12. 12. Salem, Roanoke Co., Va., Clerk of Court, Index to Wills, book 1, p. 243.
13. 13. Original Deed had Survey Plat attached. Owned by John C. Eller.
14. 14. Washington, D.C., National Archives, Microcopy 324, roll 1060 contains the Muster-Roll for Company B 157, Reg't, Virginia Militia at Camp Buckner in Greenbrier County, Va., (now WVA) and includes John W. Eller.
15. 15. John W. Eller wrote a letter to John C. Beckner and family from Clark County, Ohio, February 19, 1865, NEWSLETTER. Fellowship of Brethren Genealogists, Vol. No. 1, Spring, 1990, p. 11.
16. 16. Salem, Roanoke Co., Va., Clerk of Court, Index to Marriages, Book No. 73, p. 92, WO Real 102.

17. 17. On November 7, 1946 Christian Emory Eller was asp: to answer a series of questions about his life and times. Among the questions was his age when the family moved to the Eller Farm. (Unpublished, owned by John C. Eller)
18. 18. Reference is made to one of these 1 and 1/2 acre Lots deeded to Rhoads Banks. See: Salem, Roanoke Co., Va., Clerk of Court, Index to deeds, from 1838 through 1923, Book L, p.566.
19. 19. The Brethren Encyclopedia, Vol. 3, Philadelphia and Oak Brook, II: The Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc., 1983-1984, Slavery, p. 1189.
20. 20. Kagey, Deedie, When Past is Prologue: A History of Roanoke County, Roanoke, Va., Roanoke Sesquicentennial Committee, 1988, P. 718
21. 21. Salem, Roanoke Co., Clerk of Court, Deed Book 18, p. 366.
22. 22. Ibid., Deed Book 32, p. 46.
23. 23. Ibid., Deed Book 35, p. 359.
24. 24. Ibid., Deed Book 38, p. 103.
25. 25. Ibid., Deed Book 75, P. 224.
26. 26. Ibid., Deed Book 119, p. 374.
27. 27. Eller, Henry, This I Remember, Bridgewater, Va., 1984, p. 6. The writer also has in his possession the Minute Book kept by my father as Secretary of the Sugar Loaf Telephone Co.
28. 28. Original Purchase Order in possession of the writer.
29. 29. Eller, Henry, The Jacob Eller Family Tree, Salem, Va. (now Bridgewater, Va.), Mimeograph, 1948, P. 18.
30. 30. Salem, Roanoke Co., Va., Clerk of Court, Deed Book No. 310, p. 217.
31. 31. Salem, Roanoke Co., Va., Clerk of Court, Index to Wills, Book 8, P. 228.
32. 32. Ibid., Deed Book 564, P. 50.

