

GENEALOGY PROBLEMS REGARDING
JACOB AND MAGDALENE ELLER
of Botetourt County, Virginia

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Because misinformation regarding Jacob Eller, who was the first Eller to settle in Botetourt County, Virginia, and his wife Magdalene, continue to be circulated among genealogists, I am writing this to tell how I have been involved and what I know about Jacob and Magdalene. Just recently I received undocumented material which illustrate the continuing problems. Also, The Eller Family Association recently reprinted the book George Michael Eller and His Descendants in America by James W. Hook, which, I believe, has given wider circulation to Mr. Hook's incorrect data.

Problem No.I

The descendants of Jacob Eller have and continue to relate the family tradition which I have heard repeated many times: "Jacob Eller was born in Germany and emigrated to America along with three of his brothers. They spent some time in Pennsylvania. Later Jacob settled in Botetourt County, Virginia and the other brothers settled in North Carolina."

The first documented evidence of Jacob Eller in Virginia was a Land Grant given by Governor Baverley Randolph July 19, 1790 (1). He later sold that land to a John Brubaker(2). On February 9, 1802 he bought 400 acres of land from Jacob and Elizabeth Yest(Yeast)(3).

In 1947 while working on a term paper for a class at Bethany Theological Seminary I found the name of James W. Hook at the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.. He had written a genealogy book about his family and included his address in Connecticut. Since Mr. Hook's mother was an Eller from North Carolina, I wrote to introduce myself and to enquire whether he knew of any connection between the Virginia Eller Family and his ancestors in North Carolina.

To my surprise he was not aware of Eller families in Virginia and urged me to send more information. Since my Brother Henry had produced in writing(4) the information we had on the family, I gave him Henry's name and address who mailed him the information he had. The two never met or discussed the information provided.

Mr. Hook and I continued to corresponded occasionally until 1957. My last letter was answered by his secretary. Mr. hook had died, however, he had published his latest book (5).

I immediately wrote for a copy and was not only surprised but a bit horrified to see on pages 53 through 63 our Jacob Eller and his descendents as prepared by brother Henry. Mr. Hook had decided that our Jacob Eller "may have been" (See P. 54) the son of George Michael Eller. On page 5, he used the expression, "The evidence is strong". No documentation was given.

By this time my father Christian E. Eller, who was the genealogist of the family, had died. He had a brother Danial M. Eller, born May 8, 1863(6), La Verne, California, and a sister Cora Eller Bream, born August 3, 1888(7), Whittier, California.

Both were born and grew up on the Eller Farm in Virginia. Living on the farm was their grandmother Mary "Polly" Wertz Eller. She was the wife of Abraham(Abram) Eller, their grandfather. He was the son of Jacob Eller. Abram and Mary were married March 26, 1831.(8) Mary would have known Jacob Eller. She died February 1908(9) well after uncle Dan and Aunt Cora had left home.

In 1958 I needed to go to California on business and decided to ask both separately about the Eller tradition regarding Jacob Eller. Uncle Dan was 95 and Aunt Cora was 70. Both were in good health, alert and did not know of my visit with the other.

My inquiry to both of them went something like this:

"Tell me about the Ellers in Maryland".

Both were astonished that I had ask. Both gave essentially the name answer.

"I never heard of them."

I persisted, "Did you ever hear great grandmother "Polly" speak of the Eller families in Maryland?"

Both replied, "No."

Aunt Cora became inquisitive. "Why do you ask?"

I told her about James Hook's genealogy book about George Michael Eller who lived near Frederick, Maryland and that he believed our Jacob Eller was one of his sons.

Her reply was, "That is wrong. Jacob Eller came to America from Germany. He couldn't have been the son of some Eller in Maryland."

Both she and Uncle Dan repeated the Virginia Eller tradition about where Jacob Eller came from.

To my knowledge no documentation has ever been found that proves Jacob Eller emigrated from Germany to America nor that he did not. However, there are two listing of Eller men on ships that landed in Pennsylvania in the late seventeen hundreds:

(a) Rupp, Prof. I. Danial, A Collection of Thirty Thousand Names of German, Swiss, Dutch, French and other Immigrants in Pennsylvania from 1727-1776. 1985, P. 402.

November 3, 1772. Ship Sally, John Osmond, Master, from Rotterdam, last frown Cowes.

Johann Jacob Eller

(b) Strassbutger, Ralph Beaven, Pennsylvania German Pioneers, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1966, Vol. I and Vol. II., Second Printing, P. 8

Sept. 5, 1785. Ship Favourite, Group # 12, German Passengers, List 328.

Jacob Eller

One of these could have been the Jacob Eller who settled in Botetourt County, Virginia prier to 1790.

Problem No. II

Magdalene Eller was the wife of Jacob. The earliest known reference to her is when she and her husband Jacob Eller sold land to a John Brubaker June 12, 1804(10). To my knowledge there is no documentation regarding her family or maiden name.

The late Chester Peter of Long Beach, Calif. did much research on the Peters family in the 1950-60 years. He did a great deal of research in Virginia, especially in Franklin County.

Since I knew the Peters and Eller families had intermarried a number of times, I talked with him several times at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. He told me of his belief that Magdalene, the wife of the first Jacob Eller in Virginia, may have

been a Peters. He showed me a reference to a marriage he found at the Courthouse at Rocky Mount, Va.

In his genealogical listings he listed her as Magdalene Peters with a "?" mark. Many genealogists have noted this reference. Some are now omitting the "?" mark.

On October 10, 1985 my wife and I visited the Courthouse at Rocky Mount, Va., the County seat of Franklin County, and found what, I believe, led Chester Peters astray.

There was a marriage between a Jacob Eller and Magdalene Peters(11). However, this Jacob Eller was a grandson of the original Jacob, Eller. His parents were John(Johnny) Eller and Catherine Brubaker Eller. Also, the wedding date of this Jacob Eller was twenty-one years after the death of his grandfather.

I am glad to see the recently published genealogy book on the Peters Family(12) by Ed. Peters, Rt.1, Box 432, Manson, Wa 98831 does not include a reference to my great grandmother Magdalene Eller.

End Notes

1. Richmond, Va., Virginia State Library, Deed Book-Land Office Grants, No. 22, Reel 88, P. 430-431.
2. Fincastle, Botetourt County, Va., Clerk of the Court, Deed Book 8, Part 2, P. 421-422.
3. Ibid., Deed Book 7, P. 655.
4. Eller, Henry C, The Jacob Eller Family Tree, Salem, Va.(Now Bridgewater., Va.), Mimeograph, 1948.
5. Hook, James W., George Michael Eller and His Descendents in America, New Haven, Connecticut, 1957.
6. Eller, Henry C., op. cit., P. 17.
7. Eller, Henry C., op. cit., P. 20.
8. Fincastle, Botetourt Co., Va., Clerk of the Court, Marriage Register 1770-1853 Part I, P. 348.
9. Eller, Henry C., op. cit. P. 6.

- 10.10. Fincastle, Botetourt County, Va. , Clerk of the Court, Deed Book 8, Part 2, P. 421-422.
11. Rocky Mount, Franklin County, Va., Clerk of the Court, Marriage Bond Book 1787-1853, P. 29.
12. Peters, Edward L., Some Descendants of Michael Peters, Manson, Wa.: Peters Publishing, 1993.