

Eller Pioneers and Frontiersmen

By J. Gerald Eller

Jacob, Christian, and Melchior Eller, all early German settlers in Rowan County, NC, arrived to find the most productive land occupied by the Scotch-Irish and English. George Michael Eller, may have reached Rowan County before the other three; according to one undocumented record he was in Rowan County as early as 1755, but no land record for him has been reported. Like other German settlers they found the most fertile land already occupied by the Scotch-Irish and were forced to settle east and southeast of Salisbury on a less fertile strip extending along the western bank of the Yadkin River. Their farms were located a few miles south of the famed Trading Ford and a few miles down stream from where Squire Boone and his son Daniel lived.

These early Ellers settled on Crane Creek, a tributary that flowed east into the Yadkin . Plat maps show Jacob's land was located at the mouth of Crane creek while Christian's and Melchior's land lay further upstream. While successful farming was conducted the soil conditions in the German settlement were less fertile than elsewhere in the county and may have been a determining factor in the decisions of some Eller families, especially those of the second generation, to remove elsewhere before 1780. First to depart Rowan County were the eldest sons of immigrants Jacob, Christian, and George Michael Eller. They moved westward while still young men.

Jacob Eller, Jr. (son of Jacob, Sr.) was apparently the first to leave, departing perhaps as early as 1769. He was soon followed by George (son of Christian), and Peter (son of George Michael). This decision to leave Rowan County unknowingly rendered a great service to future Eller genealogy in that their descendants escaped the entangled genealogy of the Ellers who remained in that county where intermarriage and the persistent use of the same given names led to enormous complications in sorting Ellers into their correct family groups.

It is not mere happenstance that the earliest and most extensive Eller genealogies were compiled by the descendants of those who departed first. Descendants of Peter Eller s/o George Michael are thought to be the first to compile their genealogy. The first was probably his daughter Catherine. J. W. Hook, a Peter Eller descendant published two books, one in 1925 and one in 1957. J. W. Eller of Indiana, a descendant of George Eller, son of Christian, published a small booklet in 1918. [[J.W. Eller Book](#) / [J.W. Hook Book](#)]

The descendants of immigrant Jacob Eller were slow to get started but are catching up fast. Three of his descendants founded The Eller Family Association and since 1993 his computer data-base contains more than 11,000 descendants. Other of his and Melchior Eller's descendants still living in Rowan County, such as Peggy Agner Troutman and Louise Barringer File, are making great strides in untangling the web of Eller relationships among those who remained in Rowan County, NC. These two ladies are among several with a very unique Eller ancestry - they descend from all four of the immigrant Eller families that first came to North Carolina - all due to intermarriages.

According to J. W. Hook (1957), Peter Eller was living in the Blue Ridge mountains of what is now Ashe County, NC, as early as 1773. Jacob Eller, Jr., settled on the western frontier beyond the Appalachian mountains of North Carolina in what is now the state of Tennessee as early as 1779. In that year he and his father-in-law, Adam Biffle, received land warrants for adjacent tracts on the Holston River. George Eller Sr. was living in what is now Grayson County, Virginia before 1790.

The history of the descendants of these and other early Eller immigrant families in America is part of the history of the western expansion of frontier America in that period when "manifest destiny" was a corner stone of the United States policies for the western territories. Descendants of these three second generation Ellers were soon joined by other Eller families who followed the frontier as it moved westward. Seeking out those early pioneer Eller families and their descendants who ventured westward is a major goal of the editors of the Eller Chronicles.

Jacob Eller, Jr., was reared only a few miles from home of Daniel Boone. He probably heard the tales and exploits of Daniel, possibly from Boone's own lips. When Jacob Jr. and Adam Biffle with their families followed the Boone trail across the Appalachians into the Tennessee Valley their land warrants were dated the same year that the second trans Appalachian North Carolina county was formed. The new county, named Sullivan, was formed from part of Washington County which was cut from Rowan County, NC. The two trans mountain counties adjoined the hostile Cherokee Indian Nation, and gained the reputation as being the most dangerous frontier in America for the next fifteen years. It was during this period that John Sevier, "Nolichucky Jack", gained his reputation as the most successful Indian fighter who ever lived. He led these rugged settlers to victory in over thirty battles with the Cherokees. When Jacob Eller, Jr. removed from Sullivan County, TN to Buncombe Co., NC about 1800 his land in Tennessee was purchased by John Sevier and his son John Sevier, Jr.

The Eller and Biffle families in Sullivan County, NC, reared their family under the harsh conditions that required constant vigilance against Indian attacks. No doubt members of both families participated in the numerous Indian battles led by John Sevier of Washington County, and Isaac Shelby of Sullivan County. Jacob Biffle, youngest son of Adam Biffle, fought at Kings Mountain during the Revolutionary War. Even after removal to Buncombe Co., NC, - the Biffles, ca. 1787, and the Ellers, ca. 1800 -they still lived under frontier conditions that were probably only slightly more civilized than those they left behind. Cherokee Indians, probably less hostile, still lived in the northern part of Buncombe County, NC, where they settled. Some researchers believe Jacob Eller, Jr., fought in the Revolutionary War but this has never been documented.

The frontier spirit of Jacob Eller, Jr., was passed to his eldest son, Jacob, III, who married Susannah McCarty (McCarthy) in Buncombe County on 29 Sep 1810. Before 1820 they were pioneer settlers in Cooper Co., Missouri. James Me. (McCarty or McCarthy) Eller, eldest son of Jacob III, pushed on into Texas, fighting Indians, and rearing another Eller family under frontier conditions. By the time the Eller Family Association was formed, the relatives of Jacob Eller, III, in North Carolina, had lost all knowledge of him. But thanks to his descendant, Edith D. Lyle of independence, MO, the very first issue of The Eller Chronicles carried his story with a list of his children. Edith Lyle and Gayle Berlin have since provided much additional information which appeared in the Chronicles.

Now hundreds of descendants of Jacob Eller, III, are known. One is Rev. David Bierschwale, a Presbyterian minister now serving the Reems Creek Presbyterian Church in the same Buncombe County valley from which Jacob Eller, III, departed. Rev. Bierschwale conducted the dedication service at the grave of Mary Biffle Eller, wife of Jacob Eller, Jr. at the Eller Family Association Conference at Asheville, NC, in 1995. After such a long separation, the participation of this seventh generation descendant of Mary Biffle Eller brought a special spirit to this historical event. His presence in the Reems Creek Valley was another of those unexpected connections which adds so much to genealogy. Reconnecting these long separated branches of the same lineage added much to the occasion.

Joseph Eller, middle son of Jacob Jr. and Mary Biffle Eller, born ca. 1792 in the Holston Valley remained in Buncombe County throughout the remainder of his life. His first wife was Sarah Stephens, (all or part Cherokee) who bore him at least nine children. The thousands of acres in Eller Cove in Reems Creek Valley, visited during the 1995 Conference, was once owned by Joseph Eller. His eldest son, John, left a family in Buncombe Co., NC, soon after 1840 that included my great grandfather, John Wesley Eller, and went to Missouri. There he was said to have fought for the confederacy. Court Records in Buncombe Co., NC, show he died before 1869. He was my 2nd gr grandfather and is thought to be the John Ellers of Sullivan County, MO (1860 census}, who was lynched in Putnam Co., MO before 1869 for complicity in a murder. This John Ellers was said to be a very mean man, not exactly the nature of most other Ellers of my acquaintance. Such are the shocks that anyone may expect when they begin to climb their family tree.

Other children from Joseph Eller's first marriage removed to Georgia, Tennessee, and Missouri in the early years of the 1800's. A middle son, Jaccb, removed to Macon, TN, where he reared a large family, some of whom later went to Kentucky and Texas. The youngest son, Joseph Michael Franklin, left home at an early age and lived in several states before finally settling in Cottonwood, Idaho, where he left many descendants.

Only two of Peter Eller's children are known to have left North Carolina. His oldest daughter Catherine married Michael Stoker; and the couple became pioneer settlers in Nuvo County, Illinois; his son George also moved to the same state. At least four other descendants of Peter Eller went to the western frontier. His grandson David left Wilkes Co., NC, in 1828 and settled first in Wayne Co., IN. By 1838-1839, he was living on a farm in Jefferson Co., IA. Later three of Peter's great grandsons (sons of Simeon, a brother of David), followed David to Iowa. The first to go was Harvey Eller who left Wilkes Co., NC, in 1852 with his wife, Caroline Vannoy, seven children, a covered wagon and two teams of horses. The story of their travel from Wilkes County, NC, to Farson, Wapello Co., Iowa, is one of high adventure and perseverance. Opposition to slavery and whiskey, according to family stories, were said to be the cause for his removal from Wilkes Co., NC. In 1853 two of Harvey's brothers, John Cleveland and William, joined him in Iowa.

These three families later moved to Nebraska and today are collectively referred to in the Chronicles as the Nebraska Ellers. J.W. Hook, the genealogist, was a son of Virginia Eller, a daughter of Harvey Eller. Descendants of the three Nebraska Eller families are among the most supportive members of the Eller Family Association, A. William Eller, a descendant of William Eller, son of Simeon, served as President

from 1987 to 1993. Lynn Eller, a descendant of Harvey Eller was EFA President 1993-1995/. Or. Byron H. Eller, a descendant of John Cleveland Eller, researched and published stories on Ellers in the Civil War in The Eller Chronicles. Bethel Eller Stolte of Ludell, Kansas, another descendant of Harvey Eller, serves on the Board of Trustees and as Historian of the Association. Now Van Eller joins the Board of Directors as a descendant of Leonard Eller who left North Carolina shortly after 1800 and pioneering in virgin territory in Ohio.

George Eller, Sr. eldest son of immigrant Christian Eller, left Rowan Co., NC, before 1790 to become an early settler in the New River Valley in what is now Grayson Co., VA. He and Peter Eller of Ashe County lived in adjacent counties and visitation between the two families is known to have occurred. This led to an erroneous tradition begun years later by David Eller in Iowa who passed on stories of his visits. His memory failed him on one point; he remembered George Eller as his direct grandparent and the son of Christian Eller. This was the genesis of the error made by J. W. Hook in his 1925 book. He based that genealogy on the story that Christian Eller was father of Peter Eller. Hook later discovered his error when he found the will of George Michael Eller in Frederick Co. Maryland which listed Peter Eller as his eldest son.

George Eller, Jr. and his brother John, sons of George Eller, Sr. (Christian) later pushed on from Grayson Co., VA, to settle in Wagner Co., KY. John, in 1833, removed to Indiana where he became the progenitor of a host of descendants, one being J. W. Eller who wrote a family genealogy in 1918 which still is the source of most of what is known about the Christian Eller line. Many descendants of this line now live in the western U.S., and Harvey Powers of Midlothian, VA has taken up the task of compiling and maintaining a computer data base. [\[Christian Database\]](#)

Descendants of immigrant Henry Eller of Frederick Co., Maryland, also moved westward. Maria Elizabeth Eller, his eldest daughter, married Christian Herter and removed about 1794 to Franklin Co., VA, and then again in c1805 to Montgomery Co., OH. A son, Henry, Jr., removed first to Pennsylvania and then to Montgomery Co., OH, where he died in 1832. Another son, Jacob Eller, Jr., removed to Calloway Co., MO, in 1837. Peter Eller, a descendant of this line who died in 1885 in Fayette Co., IA, had a son, Joshua Nubo Eller, who homesteaded in Miner Co., South Dakota, where he reared a large family whose many descendants still live in South Dakota and Montana. Note: This Jacob Eller, Jr. and this Peter Eller not to be confused with Jacob Eller, Jr., son of immigrant Jacob, and Peter Eller, son of immigrant George Michael Eller.

Question: Probably the Eller immigrants of the 17th , 18th, and part of the 19th centuries were pioneers. Which of their descendants, not mentioned above, were pioneers or frontiersmen? Do we have any modern day Ellers who have exhibited the risk-taking, adventurous spirit of our early pioneer ancestors. I know of at least one- EFA member, Clifton Eller of Wasilla, Alaska, another descendant of immigrant Jacob Eller. His wife Paula has promised to write his story for a future issue.

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