

Ralph & Mary Albritton

of

York County, Virginia

by Timothy Dean Hudson[†]

Ralph Albritton was born about 1656. The location of his birth is currently unknown, but by about 1681, he had settled in York County, Virginia [1]. Many researchers have speculated about Ralph Albritton's ancestry, but no one has thus far provided any evidence to document the identity of his parents. Several published works suggest that Ralph descends from the Albrighton family of Staffordshire, England, among whom the given name of "*Ralph*" is common. However, this remains merely a hypothesis [2]. Ralph was possibly connected to the family of Francis Albritton (also spelled Albrighton by county clerks) who died in York County in April 1667. Although Ralph was not Francis' son, he may have been a nephew or other close relative [3].

Sometime prior to 1681, Ralph Albritton married Mary, and between 1682 and 1700, the Charles Parish Register records the birth of seven of their sons in York County, Virginia [4]. Despite the lack of any known documentation to prove the identities of Mary's parents, one researcher stated definitively in his widely disseminated published work on the Albritton family that she was Mary Wooten. Others have accepted this without questioning the dearth of evidence, and now it has become common for Albritton researchers to insist that Ralph's wife was Mary Wooten [5]. In a March 1697 lawsuit against Thomas Wooten, the sheriff summoned Ralph Albritton to provide evidence before the York County Court, but this merely proves the men knew each other. Without a primary source document to prove Mary's parentage, or even strong circumstantial evidence to suggest it, claims that Ralph married Mary Wooten are pure conjecture [6].

In late 1689, two men who lived near Ralph Albritton in York County, Thomas Harwood and Thomas Charles, had a dispute over ownership of several barrow hogs that foraged on Harwood's property [7]. Harwood claimed the hogs as his own, and multiple witnesses testified that the animals bore Harwood's stock mark, while Charles claimed that they belonged to his father, Henry Charles. Harwood warned Thomas Charles against removing the hogs from his land to which Charles replied that "*hee would nott bee forewarned by any body*" [8].

On November 25th, without Harwood's "*Consent or Knowledge*," Charles went on Harwood's land, gathered several barrow hogs, and put them in a pen at Ralph Albritton's house. Harwood

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later testified that these events occurred on his land and within one-half mile of his dwelling house. The York Court accepted his claim, and if literally accurate, this indicates that Ralph Albritton and his family lived in a house that lay on Harwood's land near the Harwood house.

That same day, Thomas Rea searched in vain for some of his own hogs that had strayed in the woods. Towards nightfall, Rea saw Thomas and Henry Charles ride by after they had put the hogs in Albritton's pen. Rea said he overheard Thomas Charles say to his father, *"This was not the worst hogge voyage that ever wee made,"* or words to that effect. On his way home, Rea passed by Ralph Albritton's house and saw some hogs in a pen, an unusual occurrence, as lands in colonial Virginia remained open range, with hogs roaming the swamps to forage for food, identified by the brand of the owners.

In a legal deposition he made two months later, Rea recalls his saying to Albritton, *"Ralph, what makes you putt yo' hoggs in a pen to keepe them from their feed,"* to which Albritton replied, *"They are none of mine, they are Mr. Charles."* Rea responded, *"What does Mr. Charles hogges doe here."* Ralph Albritton answered, *"They have been gone away ever since August was twelve months."* Rea said that, wanting to have a look for himself, he examined the hogs to see their stock mark. Taking the ears of the hogs in his hand, he said to Albritton, *"This is Mr. Harwoods marke."*

A day or so afterwards, Thomas Charles and his sister, Elizabeth, went to Ralph Albritton's house, where they began killing and dressing the hogs in the pen. Harwood appears to have heard of their activities, and gathered two neighbors, Anthony Watts and Thomas Cheeseman, to accompany him to Albritton's house.

Thomas Charles had already killed three of the hogs and began dressing them by the time Harwood, Watts, and Cheeseman arrived at the pen. The men's approach prompted Charles to grab his gun in order to shoot the fourth barrow hog before Harwood and his group arrived at the pen. In a later legal deposition, Ralph Albritton said that he *"bid him have a care that hee did not kill the men that was a coming."* Ignoring him, Charles raised his gun and aimed it at the fourth hog. He pulled the trigger three times, but the gun failed to fire. Albritton said to Charles, *"You have forgot to take the Leather out of the pan in your gun."* Trembling, Thomas Charles replied, *"So I have."*

Harwood yelled at Charles, *"Do not kill that Barrow for he is my Hog and my Mark."* Charles answered that the hogs belonged to his father, and that he would kill them, after which he pulled his trigger and shot the fourth hog. Harwood warned Charles to not carry the hog meat away from the pen and then left. Shortly afterwards, Henry Charles rode up to the Albritton house in a horse-pulled cart and carried off the hog meat. Ralph Albritton later testified that the hogs killed by Thomas Charles carried Harwood's brand.

On 24 January 1690, Thomas Harwood filed suit against Thomas Charles in the York County Court, claiming that Charles had broken Virginia law by coming onto his land and hunting within a half mile of his dwelling house. Harwood also claimed that Charles killed four hogs belonging to him. Harwood's petition requested that for

...detering of other persons from the Like accompts [actions], the defend^t [defendant] might be Ordered to pay for the said trespass and Satisfaction for the said Hoggs &c.

Thomas Charles appeared in Court and pleaded not guilty of killing any of Harwood's hogs, claiming that they belonged to his father and carried the Charles brand. The Court impaneled a jury, and over the next several days, obtained depositions of several witnesses, including one by Ralph Albritton, "Aged 33 years or thereabouts."

The jury returned their verdict in the Harwood vs. Charles suit on 31 January 1690, reporting, "Wee finds for the plaintiffs." The jury awarded Harwood 600 pounds of "tobacco & Cask Damages with costs." Thomas Harwood petitioned the Court to allow the verdict, and the Court confirmed the judgement. They also ordered payments to Ralph Albritton and the other witnesses for two days' attendance before the Court to provide evidence [9].

Anthony Watts continued to live near the Albrittons during the 1690s. On 30 December 1695, Ralph and Mary Albritton witnessed the lease of land owned by Anthony and Rebecca Watts to Henry Hayward [10]. Five weeks later, on 8 February 1696, Ralph Albritton witnessed the will of James Forsyth by making his mark to the document. Forsyth died later that year, and on November 24th, Albritton appeared before the York County Court along with Forsyth's widow, Grace, to prove the will [11]. The Albritton and Forsyth families must have lived in close proximity in York County. Several years later, Ralph's eldest son, Thomas, married James and Grace Forsyth's daughter, Agnes [12].

On 24 March 1696/97, the York County sheriff summoned Ralph Albritton to Court to provide testimony on behalf of Thomas Wooten, the defendant in the suit of Josiah Ship vs. Thomas Wooten. The Court ordered that Albritton be paid for two days attendance [13].

The last known legal record of Ralph Albritton in York County occurred on 25 January 1700, when the Court heard the suit filed by Thomas Sessions against Ralph Albritton for payment of a debt. Sessions chose to not continue the prosecution before the Court, and so they dismissed the case [14].

Ralph Albritton died in Charles Parish, York County Virginia on 21 January 1702. The Parish Register had recorded the birth of Ralph and Mary Albritton's son, Ralph Jr., several years earlier, on 10 July 1696. This leaves some uncertainty as to whether the Ralph who died in 1702 was the

elder man or his son, as there are no known later records of either. However, the York County records consistently mentioned the elder Ralph every few years between 1689 and 1700, when he disappears from the records. Presumably, the man whose death was recorded in 1702 was Ralph Albritton Sr. If correct, Ralph died at the age of about forty-five years [15]. We have no record of what became of Mary Albritton.

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Children of Ralph and Mary Albritton

The Charles Parish Register records the births of seven sons of Ralph and Mary Albritton but no daughters [16]. As typical in that era, most of their known children died as infants or toddlers, undoubtedly succumbing to childhood diseases. It appears that only Thomas and Richard Albritton survived infancy. The Register records the death of Charles Albritton on 18 January 1692/93, and he is otherwise unidentified. Although other Albritton adult males lived in York County during this period, the Charles Parish Register otherwise only mentions only the family of Ralph and Mary. This suggests that Charles was another of their children [17].

Documented and supposed children of Ralph and Mary Albritton, all born in Charles Parish, York County, Virginia:

1. **Thomas Albritton** (1 Aug 1682–1731) married by about 1705, presumably in York County, Virginia, to Agnes Forsyth (6 Mar 1669–1727/1730), daughter of James Forsyth and his wife, Grace. Thomas settled in Princess Anne County, Virginia around 1714 or 1715. After Agnes' death around 1727–1730, Thomas remarried to Ann. He died between January 24th, when he wrote his will, and March 3rd, 1731, when it was filed in court.
2. **Edward Albritton** (17 Dec 1686–Sep 1688) was buried in Charles Parish on 6 September 1688.
3. **John Albritton** (2 Sep 1688–25 Aug 1689).
4. **William Albritton** (7 Jul 1691–6 Dec 1692).
5. **Charles Albritton** (?–18 Jan 1693) is not documented as a child of Ralph and Mary. His death is recorded in Charles Parish in 1693, the only Albritton entry in the Register who is not identified as a member of the Ralph Albritton family. He is perhaps another of their children.
6. **Ralph Albritton Jr.** (10 Jul 1696–?).
7. **Richard Albritton** (19 Apr 1698–aft. 1728) may be the man involved in a 1728 legal case in Warwick County, Virginia.
8. **Benjamin Albritton** (22 Jul 1700–29 Aug 1702).

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Notes

1. York County VA Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., Book 8 (1687–1691), p. 385 (Thomas Harwood vs. Thomas Charles suit, 24 January 1690; “*Deposition of Ralph Albritton Aged 33 years or thereabouts*”). Bell, Landon C. *Charles Parish, York County Virginia, History and Registers*. Richmond, VA: Virginia State Library Board, Division of Purchase and Printing, 1932, p. 42. In a deposition made before the York County Court on 24 January 1690, Ralph Albritton stated that he was aged thirty-three years. The Register of Births of Charles Parish records the births of several children of Ralph Albritton, with the earliest occurring on 1 August 1682.
2. McSwain, Eleanor Davis. *Some Descendants of Francis Albrighton (1609–1667), Mathew Jones of Mulberry Island, Virginia (1643–1712), and Ralph Albritton of York County, Virginia (1656–ca1701), and Connecting Families*. Macon, GA: Jones and Grissom, 1984, p. 58. Albritton, Bobby G. *Albrittons of the Second Millennium*. Revised ed. Alpharetta, GA: Balbritt, 2004, pp. 22–23.
3. York County VA Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., Book 4 (1665–1672), p. 130 (Probate of will of “Mr. Francis Albrighton,” 24 April 1667); p. 132 (Will of Francis Albritton, written 9 April 1667, recorded 24 April 1667).
4. Bell, pp. 42–43. The Register of Births of Charles Parish records the births of several children of Ralph and Mary Albritton, with the earliest on 1 August 1682.
5. Albritton, pp. 26–27. Carter, Jeff. *Ancestors of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter*. Jefferson, NC: MacFarland, 2012, p. 115. Mr. Albritton stated that Ralph “*married Mary Wooten Abt. 1681 in York County, Virginia, daughter of Thomas Wooten and Sara Wood. She was born Abt. 1660 in Isle of Wight County, Virginia and died Abt. 1710 in York County, Virginia.*” Albritton provides no documentation to support his claim that Ralph Albritton married Mary Wooten. Carter used Albritton’s work as his source for details on the Albrittons, repeating the definitive statement that Ralph married Mary Wooten.
6. York County VA Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., Book 10 (1694–1697), p. 367 (Court session dated 24 March 1696/97); p. 373 (Ralph Albritton appeared to provide evidence in a case of Josiah Ship vs. Thomas Wooten).
7. In the court depositions involving these events, the witnesses alternatively referred to the animals as “*hogs*” or “*barrows*.” A barrow or barrow hog is a male hog that was castrated before reaching sexual maturity. Adult barrows proved far less aggressive and easier to handle than uncastrated adult males, and the meat of barrows was much more flavorful and desirable.
8. The direct quotations given here retain the archaic seventeenth century spelling found in York County legal records cited below.
9. York County VA Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., Book 8 (1687–1691), pp. 368, 370, 385–387 (Thomas Harwood vs. Thomas Charles, 24 January 1690). Several witnesses appeared before the York County Court on this day to provide depositions in the case, including Ralph Albritton, Anthony Watts, Thomas Cheeseman, Thomas Rea, Elizabeth Charles, and John Murder.
10. York County VA Deeds and Bonds No. 1 (1694–1701), p. 43 (Anthony and Rebecca Watts to Henry Hayward, 30 December 1695; witnesses: Ralph Albritton, Mary Albritton). The deed states that Anthony and Rebecca Watts conveyed land that “*is granted & given to us by our fathers Will,*” suggesting they were siblings and not spouses. Anthony Watts remained an Albritton neighbor into the early 1700s. In 1702, Watts served as the road surveyor for that portion of Charles Parish, and the parish assigned Ralph’s son, Thomas Albritton, to perform road work under Watts (see York County VA Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc. Book 12 (1702–1706), p. 48).
11. York County VA Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., Book 10 (1694–1697), 337, 343 (Will of James Forsyth, written 8 February 1695/96, proved before the York County Court on 24 November 1696; witnesses: Ralph Albritton, Robert Toplady, Isabell Toplady).
12. Bell, p. 42 (Thomas Albritton, son of “*Ralph by Mary,*” born 1 August 1682); p. 90 (“*Agnes Foresith, dau. of James by Grace,*” born 6 March 1668/69). York County VA Deeds and Bonds No. 3 (1713–1729), pp. 432–433 (John James, Thomas and Agnes Albritton to Thomas Nelson, 14 November 1724). This document identified Agnes, wife of Thomas Albritton, as “*the only Surviving Daughter & heir at Law of the said James Foresyth.*”
13. York County VA Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., Book 10 (1694–1697), p. 367 (Court session dated 24 March 1696/97); p. 373 (Ralph Albritton appeared to provide evidence in a case of Josiah Ship vs. Thomas Wooten). A few researchers have misinterpreted this document to indicate that Ralph Albritton served as the York County Sheriff. This is a mistake, for the court minutes show that the sheriff summoned Albritton to appear in court, not that Albritton served as sheriff.
14. York County VA Deeds, Orders, Wills, Etc., Book 11 (1698–1697), p. 260 (Court session dated 25 January 1699/1700); 264 (Thomas Sessions suit against Ralph Albritton for debt dismissed); LDS Film #4027498 (original) and #7676322 (transcript).
15. Bell, p. 201. The Register records the death of Ralph Albritton on 21 January 1701. As this event occurred before 1752, it fell during the period when England and her colonies used the Julian Calendar, which designated New Year’s Day as March 25th. As a result, a date written as 21 January 1701 during this period translates to 21 January 1702 according to our modern calendar, adopted uniformly in England and the colonies in 1752.

16. Bell, pp. 42–43. The Register of Births of Charles Parish records the births of these Albritton children, describing them as children of Ralph and Mary Albritton: Thomas on 1 August 1682; Edward on 17 December 1686; John on 2 September 1688; William on 7 July 1691; Ralph on 10 July 1696; Richard on 19 April 1698, and Benjamin on 22 July 1700.
17. Bell, p. 201. The Register of Deaths of Charles Parish gives the deaths of these Albrittons: Benjamin (29 August 1702); Charles (18 January 1693); Edward (buried on 6 September 1688); John (25 August 1689); William (6 December 1692); and Ralph (21 January 1702).

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