

North American Drakefords - An early investigation

A lecture presented at the 2012 Drakeford gathering in the
Congleton museum on 7th June 2012

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There are two distinct Drakeford clans in America: the white Drakefords, who are presumably all ultimately descended from English ancestors, and the African American Drakefords, many of whom are likely to have descended from the former plantation workers of the white ones. The family history of the African American Drakefords has already been extensively researched – there's an excellent website ¹ and they have a family reunion every 2 years which last year was attended by 65 people. Today I'm looking mainly at the white Drakefords.

I became interested in the American Drakefords in a rather roundabout way. I was researching a branch of my family which had emigrated to Australia when I discovered an elderly cousin, Fred Drakeford of Melbourne. Fred had a lot of family history information which had been passed to him over the years by various relatives. One of the things he had, and shared with me, was a copy of a two-page 'tree' showing American Drakefords, and it was this 'tree' which sparked my interest. **Family Trees No. 1 and No. 2 are shown at the end of this paper.**

What I noticed about the 'tree' straight away was that it contained very few dates. Also a couple of people on it were marked 'name unknown'. I concluded that it was probably based on tradition and family memory rather than research. Fred didn't know where it originated but there were clues as to who compiled it and when – people are described as 'my grandfather' and 'my father' and one person is described as 'still' living in Alabama 'in the 1920s'.

I knew that Jeremy Drakeford had been in touch with two American genealogists, both Drakeford descendants. One, Merrill Hill Mosher, had researched the earliest American Drakefords and had written a magazine article about them ², and the other, Lavonne Sanders Walker, had traced all their descendants as far as she could and had written a book ³. Jeremy copied the magazine article for me and lent me the book.

There was a huge amount of information, particularly in the book. I spent some time transferring basic data on all the Drakefords in the 'tree', article and book into a 'Legacy' family file to make it easier to access, sort and select ('Legacy' is the family history software which we are using to record all our research).

Lavonne's book was researched over 15 years ago when the genealogy internet was in its infancy, with very few records indexed or digitised online, so she had to travel around the country visiting local record collections, churches and cemeteries. This limited the amount she could discover.

¹ <http://drakefordsim.tribalpages.com>

² The Virginia Genealogist article, by Merrill Hill Mosher- April-June 1995, Vol. 39, No.2 Richard Drakeford and his descendants.

³ Drakefords in America, By Lavonne Sanders Walker – 1997

If someone wasn't living in the area where Lavonne expected them to be, they were very hard to track down. Now I could take advantage of another 15 years of indexing and digitising to expand and extend her work without leaving my home.

I used a variety of online sources, but the most useful were 'Ancestry', 'FamilySearch', the free 'FindAGrave' website, which currently holds details of over 79 million graves, including over 200 US Drakeford ones, and the 'GenealogyBank' website giving access to the archives of lots of US regional newspapers. This last site has proved particularly useful for obituaries, which in America generally give far more family detail than ours do.

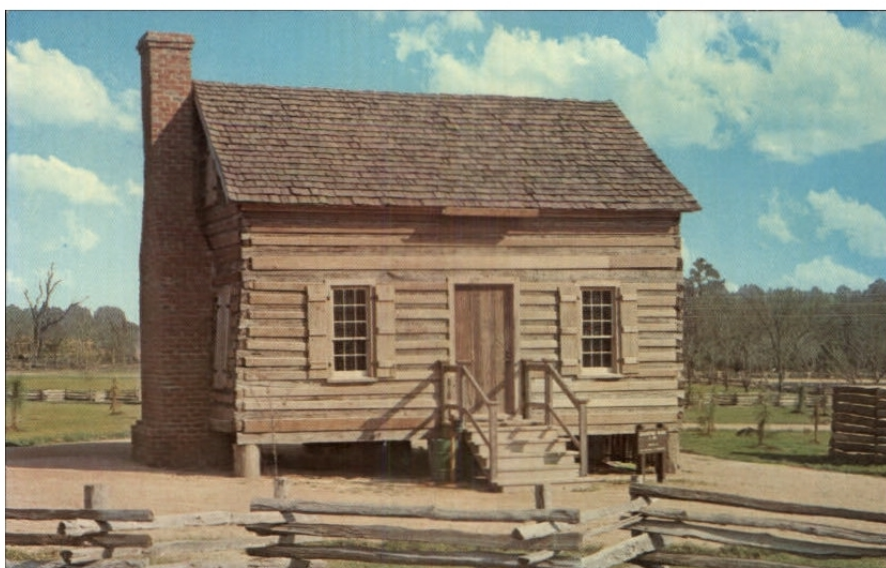
It's quite common for an American obituary to include the deceased's birthdate, birthplace, parents' names, names of siblings, including any who've already died, and details of children and their spouses and grandchildren – a whole mini family tree!

Another great help in my work has been the American naming convention for married women, who generally retained their maiden surname as a second forename, so for instance Lavonne Sanders Walker, the author of the book, was Lavonne Sanders before she married Mr Walker. Therefore a woman who was born a Drakeford would usually retain Drakeford as one of her names even if she married, making tracing her right through her life much easier.

My research is still very much a work in progress, but so far the family file contains over 500 names including 176 who were born Drakeford (the others are women who married Drakefords and first generation children of female Drakefords, who would bear their father's surname). All the male Drakefords are descended from one Richard Drakeford, who appears in Virginia around 1660. We don't know whether *he* came from England or whether one of his ancestors did – there had been English colonists in America since 1607. My 'tree' refers to two brothers, John and Richard Drakeford, emigrating from England to America in 1748, but this and some of the other early detail on the 'tree' is incorrect.

Richard of Virginia was a tobacco planter. He had a son John who moved to Camden, South Carolina and fought the British in the American War of Independence, as did *his* sons Richard and John. This Richard junior, a Justice of the Peace, is thought to have been the builder of the Drakeford House, a log cabin of around 1812 now at the Historic Camden Visitor Center.

The Drakeford House (c 1812) Camden, SC



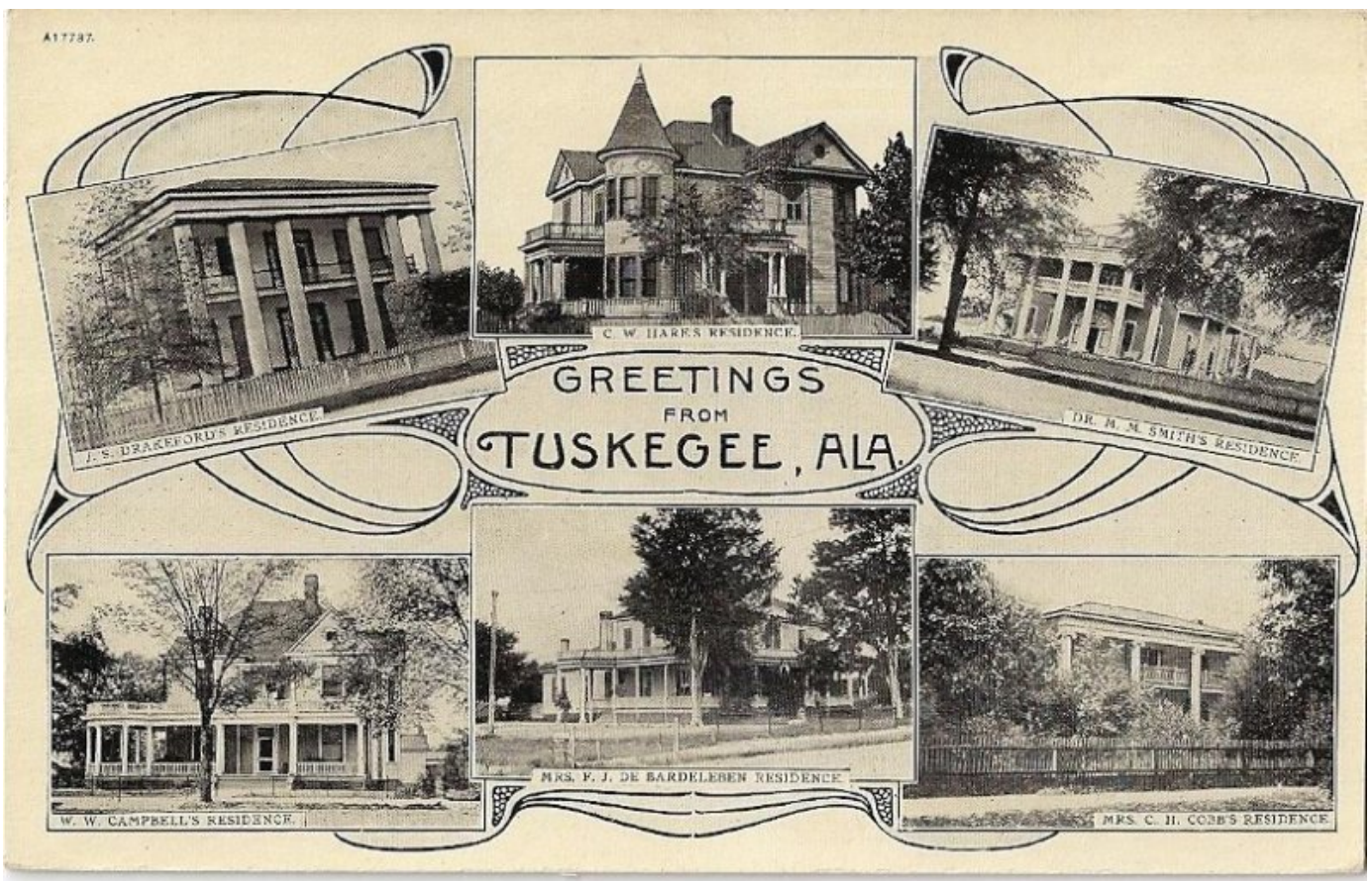
Richard Drakeford's will 1826 (extract)

State of South Carolina
Kershaw District } In the name of God Amen
I Richard Drakeford of the State and District
aforesaid, being weak and low in body but in perfect
mind and memory do make this my last will and
testament in the way and manner following—
First— I will and bequeath to my Son William
Drakeford and his heirs forever all my Lands lying
on the Flat Rock Creek and the waters of the
same whereon I now live it being in sundry
tracts also five negroes namely Isom Robin
Peter Maria and Chice— ~~together with~~
their increase forever. (second— I will and bequeath
to my Daughter Susanna Drakeford and her heirs forever
four negroes namely Lucy Child Nelson Dick and
John together with their increase forever. & Third
I will and bequeath to my daughter Deliah
Drakeford and the heirs of her body forever four
negroes namely Mully March Doris and Joe
together with their increase forever. & Fourth— I will
and bequeath to my Daughter Nancy Sanders and the
heirs of her body forever four negroes namely
Jude Jim Hannah and Child George together with
their increase forever—

One type of bequest in the will is shocking to us, but would have been quite normal in South Carolina then - for example 'I will and bequeath to my daughter Susanna Drakeford and her heirs forever four negroes namely Lucy and child Nelson, Dick and John, together with their increase forever'.

John and Richard junior's grandsons fought on the Confederate side in the American Civil War – one was killed at the Battle of Gettysburg ⁴. The Confederates lost, slavery was abolished ⁵ and an African American slave owned by a white Drakeford might assume his former master's surname when he became a free man.

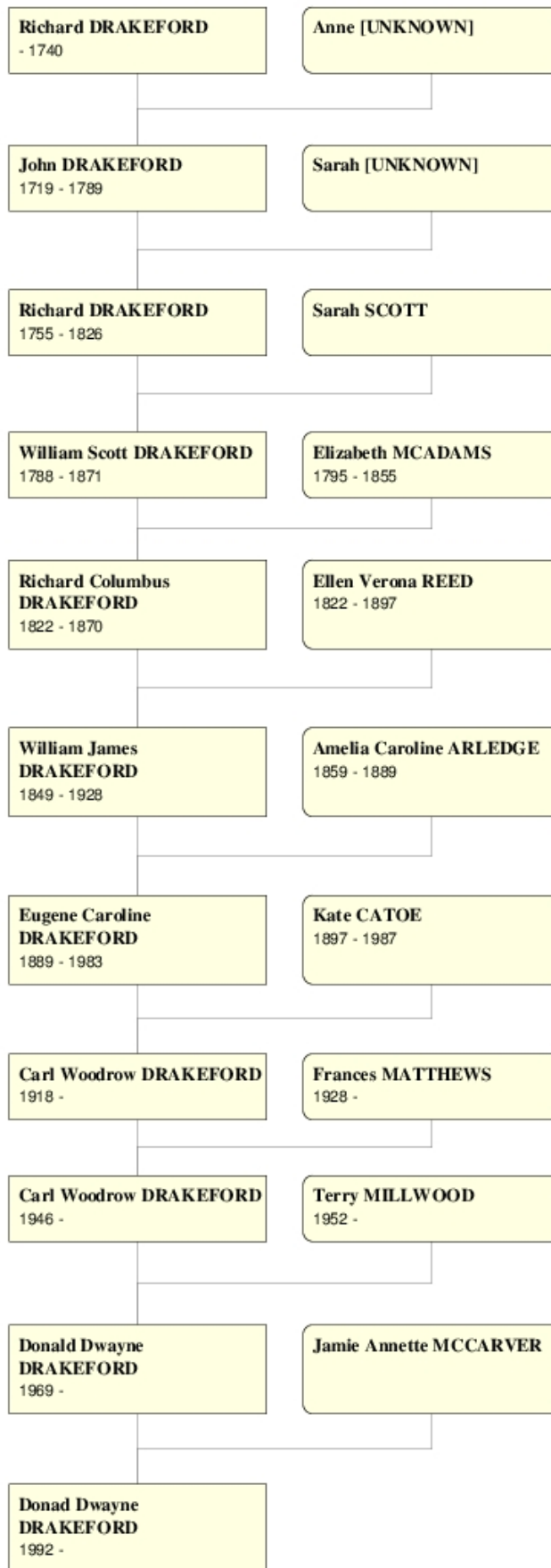
Many of the family are still in South Carolina but some have moved to Alabama, New Jersey, New York, Kentucky and Georgia and have left descendants there. Some of them did rather well. One became President of the Bank of Tuskegee, Alabama, and lived in a fine house rather different from the log cabin, which features on an old postcard I found on an EBay advert (top left hand corner).



One of the youngest in the file is Donald Dwayne Drakeford, born in South Carolina in 1992, 11 generations down from Richard of Virginia.
(Please see next page).

⁴ 1863

⁵ 1862-1865



Though we can't at present link this family back to their English roots using documentary research, it might be possible using DNA testing, but that's a different subject which I don't have time to go into now. (DNA testing has since been used by Drakefords in America and in England/Ireland with exciting revelations which are brought fully up to date in Study Paper No: 8 available on the family website).

Many other Drakefords have emigrated to America. There's a note about some of them on the first page of the 'tree' – [again see Family Tree No. 1 below](#), and I've managed to account for most of those. The family working in the silk industry in Paterson, New Jersey were a Coventry silk ribbon weaving family who disappear from the English censuses after 1871 and appear in the Paterson one in 1880. The Jack Drakeford of Alabama *was* a descendant of Richard of Virginia, and I've been able to add him and his descendants to the family file.

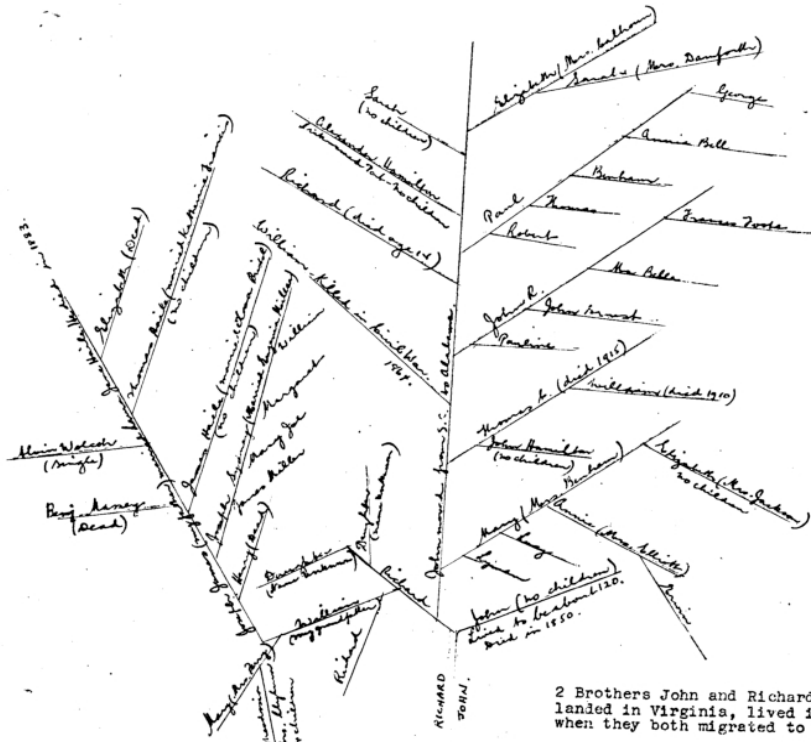
I discovered that one of the Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire, Drakefords, John, who was born in 1799, was buried in the city cemetery in Bountiful, Davis county, Utah, USA in 1870 - the records in the cemetery office there are online and give full details of his birthplace and date and his parents, agreeing exactly with the entry in the Sutton Coldfield parish register. Bountiful was a Mormon settlement, and a little further research revealed that John and wife Sarah travelled overland for 2 ½ months from Nebraska to Utah in 1860 in a wagon train of 394 persons, 55 wagons, 215 oxen and 77 cows.

A later Mormon convert was another John Drakeford who emigrated from England to Utah with his wife and children around 1885 and became for 29 years custodian of the Mormon Tabernacle, the huge conference centre and concert hall in Salt Lake City, home of the famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir. This John was born in Congleton in 1853, and I thought initially that he must be a relative, but he turned out to be the illegitimate son of a widow Drakeford – what I believe the geneticists would call a 'non-paternity event'.

And finally there's Alfred Drakeford, illegitimate son of my great great grandfather's elder sister Eliza. I've discovered that he built railway bridges in India, kept a pet tiger and married one Sophia Manook, reputedly a descendant of the Byzantine royal family. Alfred and Sophia emigrated to Connecticut, where their daughter Grace had married the Professor of English at Yale University!

Roger Hall
June 2012

Family Tree No. 1.

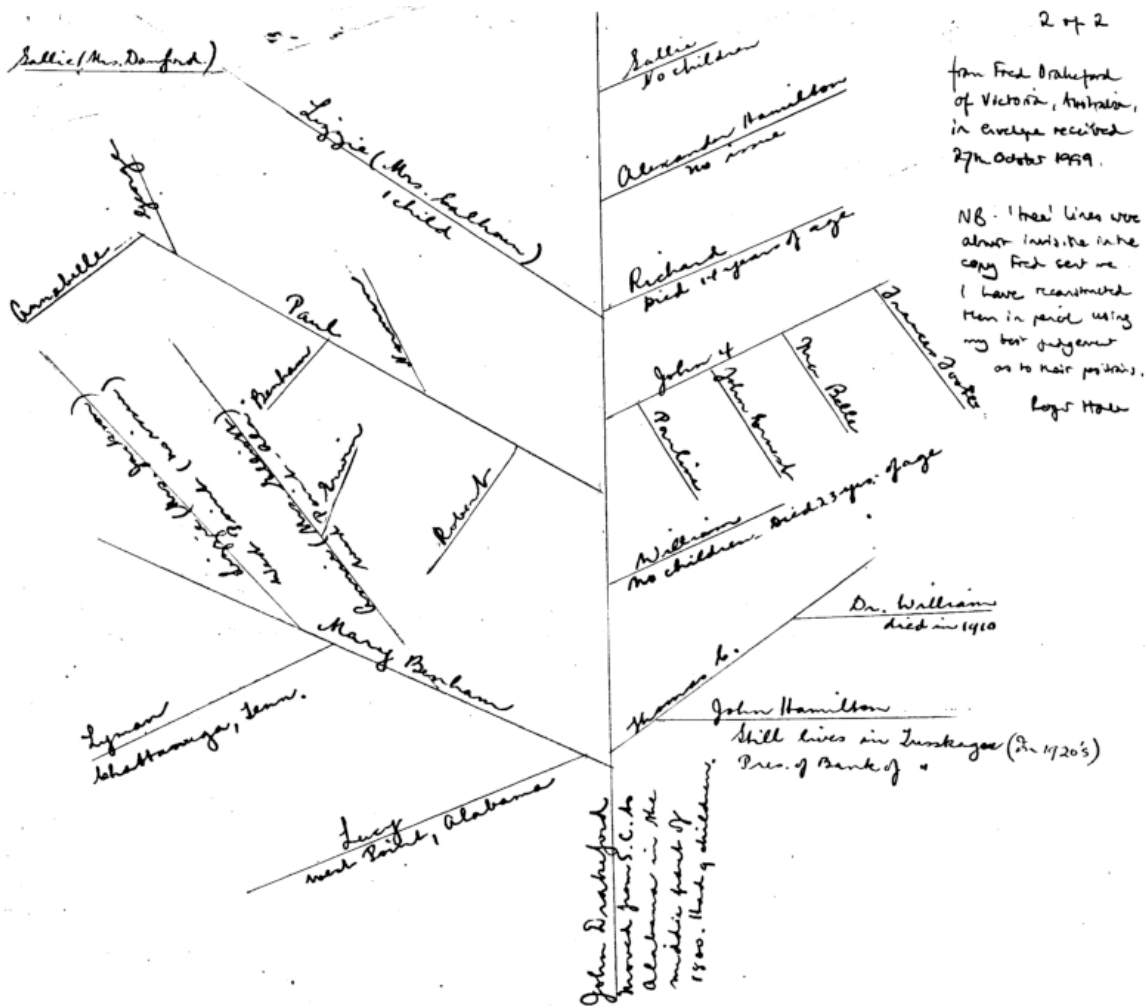


1 of 2
 from Fred Drakeford of Victoria Australia
 in envelope received 27th October 1999
 NB 'real' lines were almost invisible in the copy
 Fred sent me. I have reconstructed them in pencil
 using my best judgement as to their positions.
 Roger Mann

Drakeford family tree so far as I know it, bearing the names of those in the United States up to about 1890. There is a family in the Silk industry in Paterson, N.J. who came from England in 1883 consisting of father and four children. Father's name is Thomas. He has a son Joseph, George and Thomas and a daughter. I do not know their history yet. There is a Rev. Geo. Drakeford in Nova Scotia. He has several sons. There was a Jack Drakeford in Alabama who had 2 sons James and Hayden and one daughter Ludie who married a Dugger and had one child - Louise. I have not been able to connect this family. None of the above are in this tree.

2 Brothers John and Richard came from England in 1748 and landed in Virginia, lived in Fairfax County Va. until 1750 when they both migrated to Hershaw County S.C.

Family Tree No. 2.



Ext. from page 396, Historic Camden.

John Drakeford and his brother, Richard, came from Fairfax County, Virginia and settled on Flat Rock Creek, in the upper part of Kershaw County, about the middle of the 18th century. The old land titles show that John was here as early as 1754. The two brothers were gallant patriot soldiers in the Revolution. Richard was desperately wounded by a sword cut on the head, but he recovered and raised a large family. One of his sons was the COL. William Drakeford mentioned above. Richard died in 1825. John lived to a great age, dying about 1850. The first Drakefords came to this country from England. Many in this State and Alabama trace their lineage to the branch that settled here.