

The Woolfolk/Shakespeare Connection

February 26, 2007

Revised 03/07/2009

By Marion Woodfork Simmons

I am the great granddaughter of Overton and Katie Woodfork and the great great granddaughter of William and Louisa Woolfolk. I have been researching my Woodfork ancestors for over 25 years. My Aunt once told me, her father (my paternal grandfather) had stated his father's family was related to the Shakespeare family; however, she did not know how the two families were related. I searched for the Shakespeare's in the Caroline County and Spotsylvania County, VA census and noticed there were a few of them in Caroline County, VA. I could not find any information to connect the two families, so I put the information aside.

During the course of my research I located Cousin Ethel, who is the granddaughter of Susan Woolfolk Waugh and the great-granddaughter of William and Louisa Woolfolk. She has in her possession the family Bible that originally belonged to Louisa Woolfolk and was very willing to share the information recorded in the Bible. The Bible contained two entries for Shakespeare: Sancho Shakespeare (born 1799, died Aug 20, 1882) and Lucinda Shakespeare (died Jan 1887).

Shortly after the end of slavery, the Freedmen's Bureau in Caroline County, VA performed a survey of former slaves in the County and issued marriage licenses to couples who were cohabitating as husband and wife. The Freedmen's Bureau also surveyed children of couples who were no longer cohabitating as husband and wife. The information was recorded in two documents 1) Register of Colored Persons of Caroline County, State of Virginia, Cohabiting Together as Husband and Wife on 27th February 1866 and 2) Register of Children of Colored Persons in Caroline County, State of Virginia, whose Parents ceased to cohabit on 27th February 1866, which the Father Recognizes to be His. I had searched these documents in the past for my Woolfolk ancestors, with no success.

After obtaining the Shakespeare names from the family Bible, I searched both Freedmen's Bureau documents and found a Shakespeare entry in each document. The Husband and Wife document contained an entry for Sancho Shakespeare (age 60) and his wife, Lucinda Jackson (age 63) who had began cohabitating as husband and wife circa 1831. Their children were: Eliza (age 34), Richmond (age 32), Louisa (age 32), Nancy (age 30), Matilda (age 28), Beverly (age 26), John (age 24) and Martha (age 19). The last slave owner for both Sancho and Lucinda was Mary Wigglesworth of Spotsylvania County, VA.

The second document contained an entry for Jno (John) Lewis (age 8). His mother was Matilda Shakespeare (age 26) and his father was Edward Lewis. The last slave owner for Jno and Matilda was Jeff Flippo of Caroline County, VA. Edward's's last slave owner was Abt. Flippo of Caroline County, VA. This was interesting because the family Bible also contained an entry for Eddie Lewis (born April 21, 1901) who was born near Ezra Caroline County, VA.

I suspected that Sancho and Lucinda Shakespeare's daughter, Louisa, may also be William Woolfolk's wife since their birth years were similar. The family Bible also indicated Louisa Woodfork died in December 1920 in Caroline County, VA. I used this information to order

Louisa's death certificate which indicated her father was Sanker Shakespeare and mother was Lucy Zander of Spotsylvania County, VA.

In addition to Sancho Shakespeare, I have also found the first name spelled Sanker and Suekey. Suekey Shakespeare is listed as the father and informant for the death of Beverly Shakespeare in 1876. Sancho Shakespeare is listed as the father on the death record for Matilda Rollins (Matilda Shakespeare married Dingo Rollins on February 15, 1868 in Caroline County, VA). He is also listed in the Census as Sarah (1870) and Sanker (1880). Some of these name discrepancies can be attributed to transcription errors (Sanker vs. Suekey).

Slaves were considered property and only free Blacks were listed in the census prior to 1870; therefore, it is necessary to search the slaver owner property records to perform genealogy research for Blacks prior to 1870. Now that I had Sancho and Lucinda's last slaveowner's name (Mary Wigglesworth), I began to research her family in order to obtain more information about my Shakespeare ancestors. I learned that Mary Wigglesworth's maiden name was Waller and she was the wife of Elijah Wigglesworth. Mary and Elijah had several children: Absolom Waller Wigglesworth, Bennett Nathaniel Wigglesworth and Mary Ann Wigglesworth. I was able to locate Elijah Wigglesworth in the 1830 Berkley Township of Spotsylvania County, VA census. I also located M.D.M. (Mary) Wigglesworth and her children in the 1850 Berkley Township of Spotsylvania County, VA census.

Since Mary Wigglesworth was listed as the last slave owner of Sancho and Lucinda Shakespeare and was the head of household in the 1850 census, I suspected Elijah Wigglesworth had died between 1830 and 1850. I searched the microfilm index for Court Records in the Clerks Offices of Fredericksburg, VA in order to locate Elijah Wigglesworth's Will which I hoped would contain a list of his property. I found one entry titled: ***Inventory and Appraisement of the Estate of Elijah Wiglesworth dec as exhibited to us by Mary D. Wiglesworth admintratrix this 18th day of June 1842*** which contained the following list of slaves:

Man	Sanker	\$50
		0
"	William	600
"	Kenny	600
Woman	Lucinda	300
"	Abby	350
"	Betsy	400
Girl	Sally	250
"	Lucy Ann	150
"	Eliza	250
Boy	Richmond	300
Girl	Louisa	200
"	Nancy	100
"	Matilda	75
Boy	Thornton	100
Girl	Patsy	75
Boy	William	150
"	William	175
Girl	Maria	250

I compared the inventory list with the entry for Sancho and Lucinda Shakespeare in the Freedmen's Bureau documents. There was a match for Sancho (Sanker), Lucinda and all of their children except the youngest three. After looking at the ages of the missing children, I realized they were born after 1842, which would account for them not being listed in Elijah Wigglesworth's inventory list.

From the Caroline County, VA census, I located John Henry Shakespeare, who is the son of Beverly Shakespeare and Frances ??? (Frances later married Peter Buckner after Beverly's death). I believe John Henry Shakespeare is the descendant of Sancho/Sanker and Lucinda Shakespeare, but I have not yet located any information to support my theory. John Henry Shakespeare married Sarah (Sallie) V. Ferguson on February 8, 1899. Their son, John Herbert Shakespeare, was born February 14, 1909. John Henry Shakespeare had two nephews, James E. and Richard D. Shakespeare, who are listed as members of his household in several censuses. James and Richard are the sons of Richard Shakespeare, who I suspect may be the brother of John Henry Shakespeare. John Herbert Shakespeare moved to Baltimore between 1920 and 1930 and married Ethel Amos (the daughter of Robert and Ethel Amos). John Herbert & Ethel Shakespeare had a daughter named Shirley Shakespeare.

I have not located any of Sancho/Sanker and Lucinda Shakespeare's living descendants; however, my Cousin Gladys, who is the great granddaughter of William and Louisa Woolfolk and grew up in Baltimore, MD, recalls an Mrs. Sallie whose last name was Shakespeare. She also remembers Shirley Shakespeare who recently passed. I believe her Mrs. Sallie is Sarah (Sallie) Ferguson Shakespeare, John Herbert Shakespeare's mother.

Although it is circumstantial evidence, I believe the Woolfolk/Shakespeare connection is, Louisa Woolfolk, the wife of William Woolfolk and the daughter of Sancho/Sanker and Lucinda Shakespeare.