

## JACOB ELLER, JR. AND MARY BIFFLE ELLER: EARLY WNC PIONEERS

Janine Eller Porter

The story of Jacob Eller, Jr. and Mary Biffle's life together begins in Rowan County, North Carolina.

Jacob was born about 1754, probably in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania where his parents were married on 11 December 1753. Jacob was the eldest son of immigrant Jacob Eller and his first wife, Maria Eva Goettge, daughter of Johannes Goettge and Christina Hamm. In Rowan County, NC records, the Goettge name became Getchey.

(ed.-Getchey in time became Ketchie)

Mary Biffle was born about 1760, probably in Rowan County, NC, to Johann Adam Biffle (Buffel) and Catherine Henkel.

Johann Jacob Eller and Mary Biffle (Marlena Buffel per county records, Mary on every other record I have found) were married 7 May 1776 in Rowan County, NC (Pilgrim Evangelical and Reformed Church, Davidson County, NC marriages.)

Jacob and Mary Biffle Eller, along with her parents, Adam Biffle and Catherine Henkel Biffle, left Rowan County, NC after 7 August 1778. Neither Jacob Eller or Adam Biffle are listed on the 1778 tax list for Rowan County, but Adam Biffle is listed as a Tory and permitted to take the Oath of Allegiance on 7 Aug. 1778. A John Eller is also listed. Is this Johann Jacob Eller? (Abstracts of the Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Rowan Co., NC, Bk. 4, p.164.)

On 29 July 1779 land grants were entered by Jacob Eller and Adam Biffle on the south side of the Holston River in present Sullivan County, Tennessee (at that time a part of NC). Since no creeks are mentioned on the deeds, and the Holston River runs the width of Sullivan County, it is hard to determine where their land was situated. However, Catherine Henkel Biffle's nephew, Paul Henkel, was a traveling minister and he kept a diary. On 27 July 1785 he stated he held services on Reed Creek and John and Elizabeth Biffle, (children of Adam and Catherine) were in attendance. (The Henkel Genealogy, 1500-1900, ANCESTRY AND DESCENDANTS OF REVEREND ANTHONY JACOB HENKEL, 1668-1728, Pioneer Evangelical Lutheran Minister, compiled by William Sumner Junkin and Minnie Wyatt Junkin, 1964, p.194.)

Reverend Paul Henkel was one of the ministers to visit Sullivan County, TN (History of Tennessee, Goodspeed Pub. Co., 1887. reprint 1980, p. 914). This history also states the first Lutheran immigrants to the Holston Valley in

Sullivan County settled in the neighborhood of Line Church, on or near the headwaters of Reedy Creek. Reedy Creek runs into the Holston River approximately two miles from the Western border of Sullivan County. Therefore, Jacob and Mary Biffle Eller and her parents, Adam and Catherine Henkel Biffle, must have lived in the extreme western corner of present Sullivan Co., TN.

For Jacob Eller and Adam Biffle to move with their families into eastern Tennessee at that time took great courage because of troubles with unfriendly Indians.

While living in Tennessee, Jacob Eller met and became friends with John Sevier, who later became the first Governor of Tennessee. Before becoming Tennessee's first Governor, John Sevier was the Governor of the new State of Franklin taking the oath of office March 1, 1785. On one occasion John Sevier was arrested and Jacob Eller was said to be among those that helped him escape.

Before the 1790 census, Adam Biffle and his sons, Jacob and John, left Sullivan County, TN and with their families crossed the Appalachian mountains south into an area of Burke County that later became part of Buncombe County, NC. Here they are listed as heads of families in the 1790 census.

Jacob and Mary Biffle Eller remained in Sullivan County, TN for several years and raised a large family.

Jacob Eller is listed in the 1796 and 1797 tax lists for Sullivan Co., TN. In February 1798 he bought 150 acres on a branch of the Holston River, but he was not to keep this land very long. The original 100 acres he received as a grant was sold to John Sevier, the highest bidder, for \$12.54 to satisfy the cost of a suit of the state against Jacob Eller. His 150 acre parcel was sold in September 1799 to John Sevier, Jr., Attorney-at-Law, for services rendered. One wonders what this case was about. Did it have anything to do with Jacob helping John Sevier to escape?

At this time John and Mary decided to join Mary's family in Buncombe Co., NC. Jacob Eller is listed as a head of a household in the 1800 census of Buncombe County. The household consisted of Jacob over 45, 1 female 26-45, 3 females 16-26, 1 female 10-16, 2 females under 10, 1 male 10-16, and 2 males under 10.

Jacob learned from his experience in Tennessee. He did not put land in his name in Buncombe County. Instead, he gave his son, Joseph Eller, a land grant of 100 acres on Rimes (Reems) Creek in November 1801. Joseph was only 8 years old at the time. On 20 Jan. 1802, Jacob Eller, Junr. paid Jacob Wagoner \$30.00 for 50 acres including all houses,

buildings, and water sources. Jacob Eller, Junr. was only 13. I wrote a letter to the Secretary of State, Land Grant Office, Raleigh, NC in September, 1983 and received the following reply, "A father could give his young son a land grant, but there had to be a guardian and the son could not sell the land until age 21."

Problems begin to arise in Jacob and Mary's marriage. Jacob was not satisfied staying in Buncombe County. He deserted his wife and children. In December 1806, Mary was granted a legal separation from her husband by the N.C. General Assembly. The papers state he would leave and come back whenever he choose, each time taking whatever Mary had managed to save for her family. After coming back for a third time, Mary decided she had had enough and obtained the legal separation.

Where did Jacob Eller go after leaving Buncombe County? Is he the Jacob Eller who married Elizabeth Winterbower on 18 November, 1809 in Jefferson County, TN? This Jacob Eller was age 70-80 in the 1830 Jefferson County census with a wife age 45-50, 1 male 15-20, 1 male 10-15, 1 female 10-15, 1 male 5-10 and 1 female 5-10. A grandson of Jacob Eller of Buncombe County stated his grandfather lived to be 108 years of age.

In Buncombe County, Jacob Eller and William Edmonds were involved in a court case in January 1807. The charge is not stated and they were found not guilty. I believe William Edmonds is the Mr. Edmonds that married Jacob and Mary Biffle Eller's daughter, Elizabeth.

Mary Eller continued to live in the Reems Creek Valley near present Weaverville, Buncombe Co., NC next to her sister and brother-in-law, John and Elizabeth Biffle Weaver.

According to the 1800 census, Jacob and Mary had nine children, only five have been identified. They were: Elizabeth Eller, born ca 1780, married Mr. Edmonds, (probably William Edmonds); Rosanna Eller, born ca 1887, married Mr. Fore (probably Calvin Fore); Jacob Eller, born 25 Dec. 1789 (in NC according to his Bible). His mother must have been visiting family in North Carolina when he was born. Jacob married on 29 Sept. 1810 Susannah McCarty (McCarthy), daughter of James McCarty (McCarthy) and Elizabeth Pruitt, in Buncombe Co., NC. They moved to Cooper County, MO by August 1819 (Ed.- this is the Jacob Eller in the story by Edith D. Lyle in the Nov. 1987 Newsletter); Joseph Eller, born ca 1793 in Sullivan Co., TN, married first ca 1810 Sarah Stephens, daughter of Joseph and \_\_\_\_\_ Stephens, in Buncombe Co., NC. Joseph married second, ca 1848, Elizabeth Clorinda Hamilton, daughter of John Hamilton and Rebecca McVey. Joseph owned much land in the Reems Creek Valley and Flat Creek area

near present Weaverville, NC; Adam Eller, born 25 January 1795, Sullivan Co., TN, married on 20 Aug. 1816, Elizabeth "Betsy" Fields in Buncombe Co., NC. Her father may have been Lewis Fields. Adam Eller lived in the Flat Creek area north of present day Weaverville, NC. Many descendants of Joseph and Adam Eller still live in Buncombe and surrounding counties in North Carolina. Two other possible daughters of Jacob and Mary Biffle Eller may have been Martha Fore, wife of Lewis Fore, Sr. of Buncombe County, NC and Susannah "Susan" Eller of Rabun Co., GA.

At age 76, Mary Eller left her will in Buncombe County, dated 25 March 1836 and proved 5 July 1837. She is buried in the Weaverville Cemetary near the graves of her sister Elizabeth Biffle Weaver and her husband, John Weaver. Mary's tombstone is impossible to read.----- Janine Eller Porter, 1209 Fernwood Ct., Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

(Ed.-The preponderance of evidence points to Johann Adam Buffel as the father of Mary Biffle Eller. He was b. 18 Apr 1728 in Contwig, nr. Zweibrucken, Germany to Joh. Paul Buffel and Catharina Apollonia nee Han (Haan). Paul and Catharina emigrated from Germany to PA in 1738 along with 6 children.-- Annette Kunsel Burgert, Eighteenth Century Emigrants, Vol. II, The Western Palatinate, The Pennsylvania German Society, Birdsboro, PA, 1985, pp. 71-72.-- By 1751 the Paul Buffel family was in Rowan Co., NC where in time the name became Biffle).

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**ANNOUNCEMENT:** Janine Eller Porter, Charlotte Eller Marshall and J. Gerald Eller, current officers of the Eller Family Association, are collaborating on a book, "Jacob Eller and Mary Biffle and Their Descendants". All descendants are invited to include their family line. Fill out Family Group Sheets as fully as possible with all references cited. Begin with your immediate family and work back to your ancestor who was a son or daughter of Jacob And Mary Biffle Eller. Please send the sheets to anyone of the three whose addresses are found on inside of the front cover. For assistance and further information, contact any one of the three researchers. Forms will be provided upon request.

**Announcement:** A most remarkable story has been received from Geraldine Crill Eller of Wenatchee, Washington. The 43 page booklet, entitled: JAY VERNARD ELLER (1899-1978) MASTER TEACHER, MINISTER, CIVIC LEADER, HUMANITARIAN paints an inspiring story of the life and family of an Eller we will all be proud to know. His life and family will be a highlight of the next issue of the Newsletter. JAY VERNARD ELLER, a minister in the Church of the Bretheren, is one of many descendants of JACOB and MAGDALENA ELLER of Botetourt Co., VA. Dr. DAVID B. ELLER, Editorial Director of the The Brethern Press of the General Board of the Church of the Brethern, another descendant of this Virginia Eller family, will begin a two-part research paper on the genealogy of the family of Jacob Eller and Magdalena and the history of the relationship of the Eller family and the Church of the Brethern (formerly the German Baptist Brethern or Dunkards.)