

## Bio: John Markham

by Pamela Hutchison Garrett

John Markham was born sometime around 1740 in Orange county New York. He was the son of John Markham and Catherine Mathews. It is difficult to determine exactly where he falls in the lineup of nine Markham children, but he likely was among the three oldest sons, probably born between 1738 - 1745. He must have been a young boy when his family moved from Orange county New York to Chesterfield county Virginia. The move was made some time after 1748 and his father first appears "of record" in Chesterfield county Virginia in 1752. Little is known of his childhood or youth, but he probably received some style of education as he could sign his name, held positions of public trust, and was occasionally noted as a "gentleman".

As an older man, John Markham was referred to as Colonel. His military career has been challenging to trace. The Chesterfield County Virginia Militia Rosters show a John Markham appointed Lieutenant on 2 February 1759. It is uncertain who this refers to. In 1759, John Markham Sr would have been about fifty to sixty years old. As a respected "elder" of the community, it doesn't seem likely that he would be given the position of Lieutenant. John Markham Jr could have been, at most, age twenty and was more likely between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. Would this qualify him for a position as Lieutenant of the Militia? Possibly. There was another, unrelated, Markham (Marcum) family that passed through Chesterfield county Virginia between about 1758-1764 who could be considered.

A few years earlier we find this record:

*Petition of John Markham who in 1755, was sent out with a detachment of the Prince William County Militia. He served 66 days as corporal but by some mistake was left out of the list certified by the assembly 27 Sep 1758.*



Revolutionary War Soldiers - In Camp at Valley Forge

The mention of Prince William County Virginia suggests that he belonged to a family of Markhams (likely unrelated) who settled around Westmoreland county, Virginia in the mid-sixteen hundreds. Their immigrant ancestor was Lewis Markham, who immigrated to America

from Wales. The Lewis Markham family served Virginia well in the counties of Westmoreland, Stafford, and Fauquier. Several of its members were active in the military and navy.

About 1766 we find mention of a George Pitt of Richmond county Virginia who had served under Maj. Markham in the 11th Regiment of Foot. Again, this may refer to a member of the Lewis Markham family.

John Markham did serve during the American Revolution. He was the only one of the Markham brothers to join the Continental Troops. More detail is given on his service in the sketch titled - Chesterfield County Virginia during the Revolution.

It is of interest to note that John Markham Jr removed from Chesterfield county Virginia to the more westerly Virginia county of Pittsylvania, in about 1777-1778. Perhaps, with his soldiering days behind him, he felt it was time to move on. His father, John Markham Sr, had died in 1770 and in his Chesterfield county Virginia Will he had left to his namesake, slaves and 250 pounds from the sale of property. John Markham Sr's property seems to have fallen primarily into the hands of his son Bernard Markham and son-in-law Francis Smith. The other Markham children gradually "moved on". John Markham Jr was the first to move west.

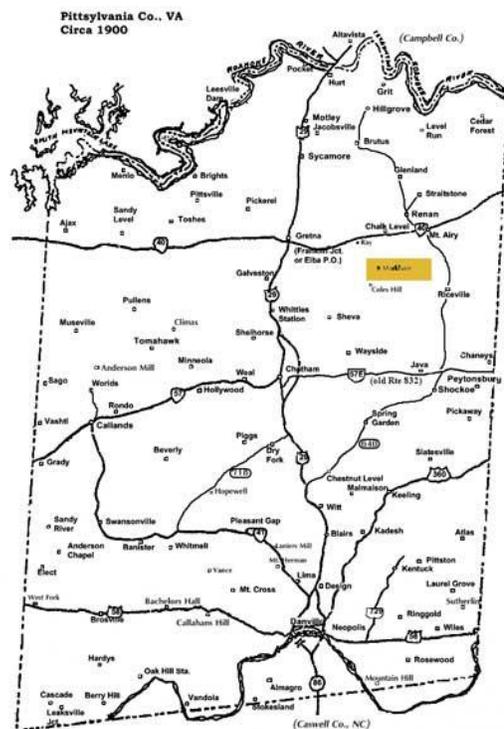
John Markham Jr must have fared reasonably well from his father's estate. When he arrived in Pittsylvania county Virginia he purchased a significant property. This property on the north side of the Bannister River, belonged to Col John Donelson. Donelson family records indicate that John Markham paid 2,800 pounds for the nearly 1000 acres. The land had been in possession of the Donelson family since the 1740's and was sold when Col John Donelson decided to move to Tennessee. Much has been written about this property as it was the birthplace of Rachel Donelson, future wife of President Andrew Jackson. Col John Donelson was her father.

William Clement, in his 1929 "History of Pittsylvania County Virginia", gives this interesting detail:

*[John Donelson] made his home on the Banister River, near the mouth of Whitehorn Creek, where the house is still standing with long sloping roof and wide rock chimneys . . . [About 1779] he disposed of his properties in Pittsyloania, selling his home plantation to Col John Markham, from whome the place has taken its name, and is known today as 'Markhams'.*

In 1936, the Works Progress Administration did an inventory of Historic Pittsylvania county Virginia properties and it included 'Markhams'. Their report indicates that the Markham family retained ownership of the homesite until 1919, when it was sold to G C Creasy. This long period of ownership has not been confirmed. But, the report also remarks that, *The house was torn down a few years ago, and only a few rocks from the chimney mark the spot where the building stood.*

A look at a detailed map of Pittsylvania county Virginia will pinpoint where the John Markham family lived. It is about eight miles northeast of Chatham near today's Route #685. The homeplace can probably be identified, but the extent of John Markham's landholdings is a bit difficult to determine. He bought, sold and leased a variety of large properties near his homeplace. His "neighbors" seemed to change regularly in the various deed descriptions but the neighborhood definitely sported the families of Markham, Shelton, Lewis, Roberts, Tunstall, and Crenshaw. On several occasions John Markham worked in tandem with William Todd or Crispin Shelton, buying, selling and mortgaging properties.



In 1780 the Vestry Book of Camden Parish (Pittsylvania county Virginia) names persons who are to process (make procession of) the Parish lands:

*... ordered that Crispin Shelton, Charles Lewis Sr, John Markham, Joseph Roberts, Abraham Shelton, Benjamin Shelton, Gabriel Shelton and William Pace . . . procession all patented lands from the mouth of Stinking River, up Bannister to mouth of Whitehorn . . . and return to vestry by 16 May, Recorded 22 Mar 1780.*

The next big question that arises in the John Markham story is-- Who was his wife? Records only tell us that she was Mary or "Polly". Her descendants recall stories that she might have been Mary Tunstall, but no proofs have been forthcoming. We don't know when or where John and Mary were married. We don't even know when their first child was born. And so, the scenario below is merely speculative:

*John Markham, a single man, was just past the age of 35 when he moved to Pittsylvania county Virginia about 1778. Shortly after, he was married to Mary, possibly Mary Tunstall, and settled on his property on the north side of the Banister River. Their first child, Peter Markham, was born about 1778-80.*

A possible clue to the marriage date for John Markham is a list of names that appears in the front of a Henry county Virginia Order Book for 1777-78. The short list of names includes John and Polly Markham. No one really knows why the names are listed there. But, as Henry county adjoins Pittsylvania county Virginia we might think the young couple was married by 1778.

A study of the Tunstall family in Pittsylvania county Virginia has yielded few helpful results. But, the possibilities are interesting. She may be related in some way to Thomas Tunstall who died in 1787. John Markham is executor to his Will in Pittsylvania county Virginia.

John Markham set right to work becoming a part of his new county. On the 23 July 1778 the Pittsylvania county deed book records:

*We John Markham and William Todd of Pittsylvania are held and firmly bound to Justices of Pittsylvania in sum of 500# as witness our seals this 27 Aug 1777, John Markham for 250#, has this day undertaken to build a prison, stocks and pillory for use of Pittsylvania co, near the meeting house spring, the place where Pittsylvania court is now held. If John Markham and William Todd shall truly build the prison, stock and pillory in a good and workman like manner, agreeable to the plan this day produced, by next Mar 1, then this bond to be void. John Markham Will Todd*

A few years later John Markham also built a bridge for the county.

John Markham did not abandon the war effort after his move to Pittsylvania county, Virginia. The "Virginia Publick Claims" show that in the years 1782 and 1783 he provided to the Continental Army, 40 pounds of bacon, 1 bushel of corn, and 300 pounds of beef. For the State Militia he provided flower (sic).

The Lodge of Masons in Williamsburg Virginia shows John Markham as a member from January of 1770 to July 1780. When Pittsylvania Court House decided to form their own Lodge in 1788, John Markham was among the founding members. He served as the first Junior Warden.

John Markham appears in the census records of Pittsylvania county, Virginia in 1782, 1787 and 1790. By 1790 he is shown with 5 white souls and 9 black. This fits well with what we know of his family. He probably had three children born by 1790 and another born in that year. In the ten years following, five more children were born, bring the total to nine. A variety of records have helped to identify the names of those children: Peter Markham, Elizabeth Markham, Mary Markham, John Markham, William H Markham, Catherine M Markham, Judith R Markham, Rebecca J Markham, and Thomas Bernard Markham. Almost all of the names of John Markham's children are commonly used in the Markham family, except for Peter and Thomas. Do they provide clues to the name of Mary's father? The name Peter is not seen in the Markham family, either before or after its use here. Was Peter Markham named for his maternal grandfather, Peter Mathews?

As mentioned above, in 1788, Thomas Tunstall Sr died and John Markham was appointed executor of his estate. As executor he 'sold' property to Thomas Tunstall Jr in 1792, adjoining his brother Edmund Tunstall. Then in the following year, John Markham and Mary his wife sell to Edmond Tunstall for 208 pounds, *all the tract of about 378 acres of land in Pittsylvania on north side of Bannister River, bounded by mouth of Lick branch, said Markham, Nathaniel Crenshaw, a steep*

*cliff of rocks, a pile of rocks at edge of low grounds.* John Markham had received this land by patent in 1786. The deed was signed by John Markham and Mary Markham and witnessed by Will J Tunstall and Rebecca Tunstall. Was this a 'family transaction' between the Markhams and Tunstalls?

Very little is known about John Markham's family beyond what can be found in the county records and histories. It appears that he lived in his spacious home, on his abundant property, with his wife and children for twenty years. His last-born child arrived on 1 March 1800. John Markham died in 1801. He was about sixty years of age. He did not live to meet any of his grandchildren.

John Markham likely wrote a Will but it has not been found. In the Mixed Probate Records of Pittsylvania county Virginia we find an inventory taken on 4th day of August 1801 for the Estate of John Markham, deceased. It is lengthy and difficult to read, but it provides some insight into life in the Markham household.

[notes on John Markham's Inventory]

Four "negros" are listed: Delpha, a woman valued at 75 pounds; Beck, a woman valued at 55 pounds; Molly, a girl valued at 55 pounds; and Randolph, a boy valued at 25 pounds. John Markham's farm animals included: 10 cows, 4 young heiffers and 5 calves, 2 hogs, an old sow and a sow with pigs. He also had a yoke of oxen and a sorrel horse. His household furniture was simple: several walnut tables, 4 chairs, beds and bed furniture, a desk and book prop, cubbard, counterpane, chest, and 5 old dutch blankets. His kitchen hosted flat irons, a parcel of old pewter, old knives and forks, 2 old silver spoons, cannisters, coffee and butter pots, 2 dutch ovens and various iron kettles. Also listed in the inventory are a coffee mill and cask. Spinning must have been included in the household chores as the inventory includes a cotton wheel and 2 pair of old cotton cards. The parcel of feathers was probably used for stuffing beds. There was also one womans saddle, an old shotgun and pistol. For "tidiness" he had 1 looking glass, 2 old razors and shop (?), a jug and pitcher and 1 washing tub. The tub may have been for washing clothing. Tools made up the largest portion of the inventory. Some of the items were wheels, barrels, hand saws, scythe and cradle, piggins and a pale, slays and harness, iron wedges, grubbing and hilling hoes, coopers ax, spade and a grindstone. A small trunk, listed at the end of the inventory, may have contained the pair of spoons and 2 tablecloths. A value was given to each item, but no total was shown. The inventory was recorded 21 December 1802.

It was in 1805 that Mary Markham received her one-third share of her husband's property, which amounted to 302 acres. A drawing, accompanying the record, indicates that she remained in possession of the 'mansion house'. At the time of John Markham's death, their oldest child, Peter Markham, was about twenty years of age and their youngest was an infant. Mary Markham was able to remain in the family home and raise her children, probably with the help of her oldest son. Daughters, Elizabeth Markham and Mary Markham, were married in 1804 and 1808. Then, in 1809 Mary Markham died. Six minor children were still living in the home. Peter Markham became their guardian.

The inventory of Mary Markham is found in the Mixed Probate Records of Pittsylvania county Virginia. It indicates that the inventory was taken on the 31st day of October 1819. This date is probably incorrect, as it appears with the records of the Court of October 1809. Her inventory was considerably smaller than that of her husband's eight years before, but it included many of the same items.

[notes on Mary Markham's Inventory]

Her household had only the 'negro woman named Milley and her child' valued at 100 pounds. Her animals included a bay horse and mudd colt, various cattle, 22 hogs(?), 10 ducks, 21 geese and 14 turkeys. They were probably fed from the stacks of blade fodder and 6 barrels of corn. Her furniture remained simple: 3 feather beds with furniture and 1 curtained bedsted, 2 tables, 4 chairs and a case. She still had the looking glass and side saddle. Her kitchen had most of the same items listed in John Markham's inventory: pitcher, butter boll, earthenware, coffee pot, tea kettle, dutch oven, pott hooks, parcell of pewter and knives and forks. A candlestick has been added. She still had the cotton wheel and cards. Added to that are 2 flax wheels and a loom. The household contained 1 bag of feathers. It is likely that the farming operation had been turned over to her oldest son Peter. She had only a parcel of old iron tools and 1 hoe. A total of 218 pounds was given for the inventory.



In the years following Mary Markham's death, some of the Markham property in Pittsylvania county, Virginia was leased out or sold off. It has been difficult to determine if the family homeplace was sold at this time. Several of the Markham children remained in Pittsylvania county Virginia, but there is no clear indication that any of them took up long-term residence in the old Markham home. After 1812, no further record is found of the children Peter, John or Judith Markham. From the remaining six children we can confirm that John Markham and his wife Mary had at least twenty-nine grandchildren and fifty-five great grandchildren. There were probably others.

Do you want to know more?

[Sketch: Markham Brothers in the American Revolution](#)

[Link to John Markham](#)

Photo Credits:

Revolutionary War Soldiers - In Camp at Valley Forge; Barnes, A.S. A Brief History of the United States. New York: American Book Company, 1885. Available via U.S. History Images by Karen J. Hatzigeorgiou; <http://ushistoryimages.com/>

**Bio: John Markham; Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2014.**