

Bio: John Markham

by Pamela Hutchison Garrett

John Markham was the oldest son of Bernard Markham and Mary Harris. According to Markham family Bible Records, he was born on the 20th of January 1770, a few years prior to America's Revolutionary War. He grew up in Chesterfield county Virginia, a child of fortunate circumstance. He was one of ten children, but half of his siblings died in childhood. His father, Bernard Markham, was a successful planter and an active public servant. It is probable that John Markham and his brother George received an education at the hands of local tutors or schoolmasters, and may have had the opportunity for some university studies, but no record has been found.

John Markham secured a good marriage at the age of twenty-four. His bride was Lucy Champe Fleming, daughter of Judge William Fleming of neighboring Goochland county Virginia. Lucy was one of four daughters of Judge Fleming. Her mother, Elizabeth Champe, died when the girls were young, and William Fleming did not remarry. Records attest to William Fleming's careful and attentive care of his motherless daughters.

John Markham and Lucy Fleming were married on the 9th of January 1794 in Goochland county Virginia. It is not clear where the young couple first set up housekeeping, but within a few years of their marriage they were settled in Goochland county Virginia, possibly on property given to them by Lucy Fleming Markham's father. John Markham and Lucy Fleming were the parents of eleven identified children, born between 1795 and 1821. Their order of birth is not certain, but records suggest: Bernard M Markham, Champe Fleming Markham, William Fleming Markham, Mary Elizabeth Markham, Judith Virginia Markham, George Washington Markham, Linneaus Bolling Markham, Hugh Mercer Markham, Martha Bolling Markham, Aubin Maria Markham, and John Norborne Markham.

Despite the advantages of his childhood home, solid marriage, and growing family, John Markham proved not to be an emotionally stable man. The first clear evidence of his 'illness' appeared in 1801 when he was committed to the Williamsburg Hospital.

Lists of patients in the Hospital of Williamsburg 1800-1837:

John Markham, Goochland; 25 Sep 1801 to 29 Jun 1802

John Markham, Goochland; 7 Jul 1806 to 14 Jul 1806-07

A record appearing in the Court Order Books of Goochland county Virginia, sheds further light:

23 Aug 1801; Col William Fleming and Bernard Markham of Chesterfield and Thomas Harris of Maidens Adventure in Powhatan are by the court appointed a committee to manage the estate of John Markham, an insane, and it is ordered that they be summoned to appear at next court to enter into bond according to law. An inventory of the estate of John Markham, an insane, is presented in court and ordered to be recorded.

According to the hospital records, John Markham was housed at the Williamsburg hospital for about nine months in 1801-02. The nature of John Markham's 'insanity' is not known. Alcoholism may have played a role, but a study of John Markham's descendants does reveal several sad occurrences of depression and suicide. The lengthy duration of John Markham's hospitalization might fit with the 19th century diagnosis of melancholia (depression).

The 1801 court order demonstrates that three relatives took over the management of John Markham's estate during his hospitalization: His father-in-law William Fleming, his father Bernard Markham, and his uncle Thomas Harris of Maidens Adventure in Powhatan county Virginia.

John's father, Bernard Markham, died on the 13th of July 1802, about two weeks after John Markham's first release from the Williamsburg Hospital. Bernard Markham's Will is of record in Chesterfield county Virginia. Specific legacies of land, slaves, and money are given over to his wife Mary Harris Markham, younger son George Markham (still at home), married daughter Mary Markham Bolling, and grandson Efford Bentley (son of his deceased daughter Martha Markham Bentley). Perhaps his oldest son, John, had been provided for at the time of his marriage, eight years previously. In the closing paragraph of the Will, Bernard Markham requests that his remaining properties be sold, and the monies be divided among his four living children (John Markham, Mary Markham Bolling, George Markham, Judith Virginia Markham), and his grandson Efford Bentley. Bernard Markham's lack of confidence in his oldest son John probably shows in his appointment of his younger son George Markham (about age nineteen) among his executors.

The John Markham family lived at 'Balquither', on Beaverdam Creek, in Goochland county Virginia. Just how John Markham came by this home is not presently known. Thanks to the Works Progress Administration of Virginia, a Historical Inventory was made on the home, by Cassie Burruss in 1937. Her report, in brief, gives this information:



Scotland - The Braes of Balquidder

Balquithier is located 1.2 miles southeast of Gammon's Store and .4 miles east of Route 250 [in Goochland County Virginia]. Markham is thought to have owned this house at the time the building was put up. About 1830 it was bought by Col Charles Guerrant . . . It remained in the Guerrant family for many years, but has been sold for taxes in recent years, and at present Mr David Leake owns the place. This was a large tract of about two hundred acres, and was a beautiful place at one time. There have been no repairs made and the place is in a badly run down condition. Information provided by Mr Forest Guerrant, a descendant of Col Charles Guerrant.

The plantation name, Balquither, is curious and tempted me into further research. Other spellings might be Balqithier, Balquhither, Balquhidder. The village of Balquhidder is located in Perthshire Scotland and is known to be the home of the infamous Rob Roy (the Scottish Robin Hood). There is also a popular old Scottish folksong by title, "The Braes (Hills) of Balquhither". It seems possible that John Markham's 'Balquither' has connection to his wife's Fleming family that came to Virginia from Scotland. Further research would be needed to draw any connections.

Goochland county Virginia deeds and court orders give good indications of John Markham's neighbors. We know that the Guerrant family lived nearby, and eventually came into possession of the Markham property about 1835. Other nearby neighbors included: John Lewis, Joseph Pollard, Josiah Hatcher, and John Curd.

John Markham seemed to be in constant dispute with his neighbors. The Goochland county Virginia Court Order Books and Chancery Court Records point to several instances wherein a judgment was taken out against John Markham for monies owed. Markham usually claimed he did not owe the money, or had already paid the money. John Markham's trustees were regularly brought into court over these matters. Markham had a disagreement with his overseer over wages and a horse, and with John Lewis, carpenter, for "waggonage done by contract with Mrs Markham". This dispute lingered in the court for years. When James Taylor "waited upon John Markham for the purpose of collecting seventy-four pounds owed to him, for which he held a bond" he indicates

. . . no sooner had the defendant (Markham) gotten possession of the Bond than he informed your orator (Taylor) that he should keep it that he might get payment as he could - that having the possession of the Bond he would never pay a thing of it.

In July of 1806, John Markham was again committed to the hospital.

. . . We, John Shelton, John Curd and William Gray, Justices of the peace of Goochland having upon due . . . before us had of John Markham been of the opinion that he was a person of unsound mind and that it was expedient he should be removed to the public hospital for the maintenance and cure of persons of unsound mind in the city of Williamsburg and having accordingly directed him to be so removed by our order bearing date 4 Jul 1806.

Another inventory was taken of his estate, and his younger brother George Markham took over the management. William Fleming and Thomas Harris probably continued as a part of a committee to oversee John Markham's affairs

On this occasion John Markham was hospitalized for a full year. This must have proved a tremendous challenge for Lucy Fleming Markham, at home with six or seven children to raise up. But, in mid-July 1807 the directors of the Hospital certified that, *. . . John Markham was then of sound mind accordingly discharged from the said hospital . . . on his motion it is ordered that the*

committee appointed by the court to collect, preserve and manage the estate of the said John Markham, do deliver up the same to him.

John Markham was thirty-eight years old, and he lived another fourteen years after his second hospital release. Perhaps he was better, but if court records tell any story, he seemed to continue in his old patterns. Several old cases in the court were resurrected, and new disputes with family members, including his brother George, appear. Finally, in 1810, John Markham agrees to turn his affairs back to the care of his family. The committee of father-in-law William Fleming, brother George Markham of Chesterfield county, and uncle Thomas Harris of Millwood in the county of Powhatan . . . *witness that the said John Markham for the consideration of making the best provision in his power for the payment of his just debts and for the better future support and maintenance of himself, his wife and family,* took possession of his land on Beaverdam Creek in Goochland county Virginia, also slaves and a lengthy list of property. They agreed to cultivate the land and care for John Markham, Lucy Fleming Markham, and their children. It was agreed that at the death of John and Lucy the land would be divided equally among their children.

John Markham must have remained continually in debt, for a number of fresh court cases arose in 1814. He did manage to remain with his family – three more children were born to John and Lucy between 1810 and 1820. But, as new babies were born, the older sons were deserting the family to move off to Kentucky. They may have faced poor prospects in Virginia.

After 1814 the Goochland County Court Records are quieted on John Markham's account. Then in December of 1820, William Fleming *asks for an act empowering certain trustees to sell and convey a fee simple estate in Goochland County where John Markham and Lucy Champe (petitioner's daughter) dwell in order to pay his debts.* John Markham may have been a very ill man by this point. I have never been able to confirm his death date, but it seems likely to be in 1821. Many years later, one of his younger daughters, Martha Markham, wrote to her niece - *My father (John Markham) died when I was a little child, I can just remember being taken to his bedside when he passed away.*

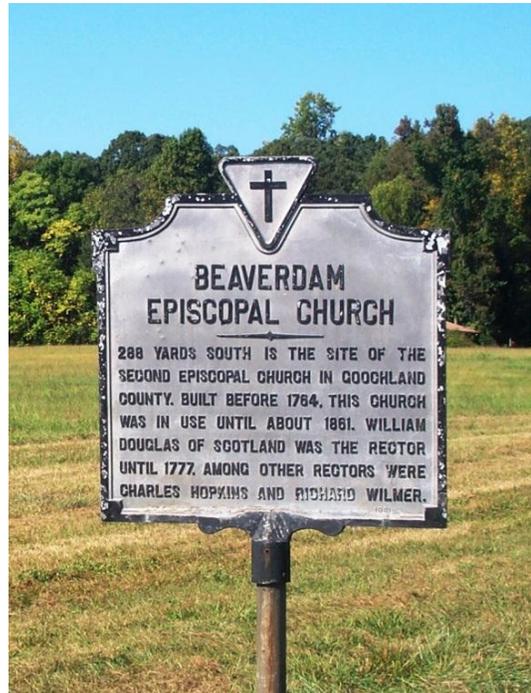
At the time of John Markham's death, his wife was left with a large family at home. Two of her older sons had moved off to Kentucky, but her second son Champe Markham had married a few years earlier, and was probably living with, or near, his parents and managing their farm. There were three more sons in the home and four daughters. Three of these children were under age ten. The stalwart Lucy Fleming Markham, at about the age of forty-five, gave birth to one last son following her husband's death. The child was named John Markham. What a kindness to a man who gave such sorrow to his family.

Lucy Fleming Markham survived her husband by almost twenty years. Her devoted father, William Fleming, lived until 1824. He must have been a guiding light to this struggling family; he probably insured that all of his Markham grandchildren were modestly educated, and had some small advantages. For, despite struggles, their futures were mostly bright. Lucy remained in Virginia many years, managing the family farm with the help of her son Champe.

About 1835 the Virginia property was sold, and she moved to Kentucky with her younger children in tow. Several of her older children were already established in Kentucky and Mississippi. Lucy Fleming Markham died in 1840 in Versailles, Woodford county Kentucky.

A line from her obituary –

. . a few hours before she died, a friend, anxious to know the state of her mind, made the enquiry, and with her expiring breath she articulated -- "Firm as a rock."



Do you want to know more?

[Sketch: Insanity – The Williamsburg Hospital](#)

[Link to John Markham](#)

Photo Credit:

The Braes of Balquidder – Looking across Loch Voil to the hills on the south side of the Loch. A beautiful autumn day . . .; photo by Adam Ward, October 2009; shared at geography.org.uk.

Bio: John Markham; Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2014.