

Sketch: Our Colonial Governor - Three Theories by Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2015

The purpose of this sketch is to introduce three theories that have come about in response to the statement that Catherine Mathews, the wife of John Markham, was the daughter of a Colonial Governor. It introduces some interesting characters to our family - New York Colonial Governors Benjamin Fletcher and Richard Coote and Fletcher's friend, and likely relation, Peter Mathews. Like the Markhams, the Fletchers, Cootes, and Mathews were Englishmen who had considerable ties to Ireland during the 17th century.

In 1897 Mrs Flournoy Rivers (Liddie Avirett Rivers) published her Markham Genealogy in the "Virginia Magazine of History". It includes the earliest statement I have found related to the wife of John Markham. She states, ". . . *John Markham, of England, who came in 1720 to New York, married Catharine Mathews, daughter of the Governor of the Colony, afterwards settled in Virginia (Chesterfield county) . . .*" Liddie Rivers gives no source for this information, but I suspect that it comes from family tradition that was passed down or uncovered by Liddie Rivers, who was a descendant of John Markham. She was in correspondence with various descendants of John Markham during the preparation of her genealogy. Liddie River's Markham Genealogy was published approximately 160 years after the proposed marriage of John Markham and Catherine Mathews. I have never found evidence of a written genealogy of John Markham, identifying his wife, prior to the publication of Liddie Rivers' statement in 1896.

Catherine Mathews' parentage has not been absolutely determined. Some questions remain as to whether she is the daughter, or granddaughter, of Peter Mathews and his wife Bridget (maiden name unknown) of New York. Further discussion of that topic can be found in the links to individuals in the database at the close of this sketch.

What did Liddie Rivers refer to when she said, ". . . *Catharine Mathews, daughter of the Governor of the Colony . . .*"?

Theory one - Catherine Mathews was not the daughter of a Colonial Governor, but she probably had family ties to one. After considerable searching, it has been concluded that the Mathews family had a "kinship" with Governor Benjamin Fletcher who served as Colonial Governor of New York 1692-1698. Several strong points of evidence exist. But, to date, no proof has been found. More detail on this relationship is given in the Feature Article at this website, titled - Peter Mathews and Benjamin Fletcher – What's the Connection?.

Two other theories have appeared to address the statement that Catherine Mathews was the "daughter of the Governor of the Colony".

The second theory was introduced in a statement made in the "Virginia Magazine of History" following the publication of Liddie Rivers' Markham Genealogy in 1896. Liddie Rivers does not

give a name to the Colonial Governor. One researcher believed that she might have referred to Governor Samuel Mathews of Virginia. This comment appeared in a succeeding issue of the Virginia Magazine (Vol 5, 1898, pg 343):

There is, it is believed, no grounds for the statement in the October Magazine (VMH, Vol 5, 1897, pg 205), that Jno Markham, who died in Chesterfield in 1765 [1770], was a native of England, and married a daughter of Governor Mathews of New York. There was no Governor of New York of that name, or if Governor Mathews of Virginia is meant, it is impossible, for he died, and old man, in 1659.



The third theory proposed to connect Catherine Mathews to a Colonial Governor is one concerning Lord Bellomont (Richard Coote), who served as Colonial Governor of New York following Benjamin Fletcher in 1698. As best I can determine, this theory was first proposed by the Cox family around the same time that Liddie Rivers' Markham Genealogy was published in 1897. The basis of this theory is that Catherine Mathews is the daughter, or granddaughter, of Lord Bellomont (Richard Coote) through his "proposed" daughter Bridget.

A family account, titled "Robertsons of Winterpock" was published in 1968 by Joseph Gresham. From his chapter titled "Our Colonial Governor", we learn:

For information concerning the ancestry of Catherine Traylor, wife of John Robertson Jr . . . I am greatly indebted to General Edwin P Cox, whose ancestor, Captain Henry Cox was married in 1805 to Mary Traylor, a sister of Mrs John Robertson Jr. He and his distinguished father, the late Judge Edwin P Cox, have preserved intact the family records showing that Catherine and Mary Traylor were lineal descendants of Lord Bellomont . . . , and I value very greatly a rare and most interesting book [by Frederick de Peyster] given me by General Cox which deals with the brief administration of this famous Colonial Governor. The book also traces Bellomont's relation to the peerage of Great Britain . . . Two sons of Bellomont are referred to by de Peyster, but General Cox and his father, Judge Edwin P Cox, have preserved records which show that there were also three daughters, Judith, Catherine and Bridget. The last named became the wife of Captain Peter Matthews.

There are several descendant branches of John Markham who still hold tightly to this ancestry today. It has been repeated in a number of published genealogies and in private family papers during the 20th century.

The evidence uncovered on Lord Bellomont (Richard Coote) in England, Ireland, and New York, does not give strong support to this theory. Here are three points of consideration:

1. Richard Coote married Catherine Nanfan in 1680. This is a very late date to produce a daughter, who eventually married Peter Mathews, and had offspring in the 1690's.
2. There is no clear evidence that Richard Coote had a daughter, or granddaughter named Bridget. Following his 1701 death, he did leave a Will. Minimal notes recorded in Betham's Abstracts of the Wills of the Prerogative Court of Ireland give the information that the Will was written 23 August 1697, and probated 1711. Heirs include his wife Katherine and sons Nanfan and Richard.
3. Richard Coote (Lord Bellomont) was an avowed enemy of Peter Mathews. Coote made mention of Mathews in several letters, but never made reference to any kinship. In this database see - Letter: Lord Bellomont to Secretary Vernon, October 1700.

The idea that Catherine Mathews was a daughter of Samuel Mathews, Colonial Governor of Virginia probably sprung from a simple misunderstanding. It is illogical and has not been pursued further by Markham researchers. But the debate as to whether Catherine Mathews was related to Benjamin Fletcher or Richard Coote will probably continue. Generally speaking, Richard Coote was probably more popular than Benjamin Fletcher – certainly he had a more impressive ancestry and title - Lord Bellomont. But, the evidence weighs out in favor of Benjamin Fletcher being our Colonial Governor. Now we just need to understand exactly how Fletcher is related to the Mathews family!

Do you want to know more?

[Link to Peter Mathews in database](#)

[Link to Benjamin Fletcher in database](#)

[Link to Samuel Mathews in database](#)

[Link to Richard Coote \(Lord Bellomont\) in database](#)

[Sketch: A Wife for John Markham](#)

[Peter Mathews and Benjamin Fletcher – What's the Connection?](#)

[Letter: Lord Bellomont to Secretary Vernon, October 1700](#)

Further Reading:

[Our Colonial Governor; Robertsons of Winterpock, Chapter 6; Joseph Gresham, 1968; at the Robertsons of Winterpock website.](#)