

Sketch: Death Comes to John Markham **by Pamela Hutchison Garrett**

John Markham wrote his Will on the 20th of October in the year 1770. It was proved in the Chesterfield County Virginia Court on the 1st of February 1771. His exact date of death isn't known, but these dates bracket a three month period of time for us. When the writing of a Will comes closely dated to the proving of a Will, it suggests that the author probably recognized his death as imminent.

We do not know the precise date of John Markham's birth, but he must have been around the age of sixty-five when he died. The Virginia Gazette, published in Williamsburg Virginia, was the only newspaper of note in Virginia 1770. No obituary has been found for John Markham.

Coupling John Markham's Will with other documents related to the settlement of his estate, we recognize that John Markham was a man of comfortable means at the time of his death. He named nine children living at the time of his death, the oldest children probably in their early thirties and the youngest still teenagers. No wife is mentioned.

*Will of John Markham; Chesterfield County Virginia Will Book 2, pages 138-139.
Written 20 October 1770; proved 1 Feb 1771*

In the name of God Amen, I John Markham of the County of Chesterfield being sick and weak of body but of perfect mind and memory do make and ordain this my last Will and Testament in manner and form following.

First, I give and bequeath unto my daughter, Rebecca one Negro fellow named Bristol with his wife Lucy and their two sons Jerry and Dublin with all their future increase to her and her heirs forever, also one feather bed and furniture at her brother Bernards.

Item - I give unto my daughter Judith one negro man George, with his wife Amey and their son London with all their future increase to her and her heirs forever, also one feather bed and furniture.

But in case of the death of my daughters Rebecca or Judith before arrive of lawfull age or marry, then my desire is that their parts be equally devided by my Executors one half to go to the surviving sister Rebecca or Judith, and the other half to be equally devided between my four sons, John, Vincent, George and Archibald, but in case of the death of both of my said daughters before they arrive of lawfull age or marry that then the whole of their parts be equally devided between my sons aforesaid.

Item - I give unto my daughter Cathrine Smith one feather bed and furniture.

Item - I give unto my son William Five pounds current money.

Item - I give unto my son Bernard five pounds current money.

Item - I give and bequeath unto my four sons, John, Vincent, George and Archabald my negroes, York, Toby, Wiggom, Tom, Silvie and Aaron to be equally divided between them, to them and their heirs forever.

All the rest of my estate both real and personal of every kind whatsoever I give and devise to my Executors hereafter named (except my land and Ferry opposite to Warwick in Henrico County) in Trust to be by them sold for the best price that may be got and in such manner as they shall think proper and the money arising from such sale after my just debts are paid to be equally divided between my four sons aforesaid John, Vincent, George and Archibald or so much thereof as will make their proportions of my Estate with what I have already given them amount to the sum of two hundred fifty pounds current money.

My lands house and Ferry opposite to Warwick in Henrico County as aforesaid I give and devise to my Executors hereafter named to be rented for the best price that can be got and the money arising from such rent I give to be equally divided between my sons John, Vincent, George and Archibald aforesaid, and my desire is that when Brett Randolph's Estate is divided between his children whoever of them gets Warwick shall have the offer, of my aforesaid Land and Ferry, and pay to my Exbis the price the said Land and Ferry shall be valued to by three indifferent men, but if they refuse to give the price it shall be valued at, that then my executors sell the same for the best price that can be got, and in case the legacies which I have given my sons John, Vincent, George and Archibald should not amount to the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds, then I desire it may be made up out of the money arising from the sale of the said Land and Ferry, and if there should be any overplus after paying my four sons the legacies aforesaid, then I give to my daughters Rebecca and Judith as much as will make their shares of my Estate with what I have already given them, amount to the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds, and in case there should anything remain after paying the legacies aforesaid, I desire the same may be equally divided between all my children.

And lastly I constitute and appoint my friend Benjamin Watkins and my sons Bernard, Vincent and George to be Executors of this my last Will and Testament. In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this twentieth day of October in the year of our Lord One Thousand seven hundred and seventy.

Signed, sealed and published in the presence of Dudley Brooke, William Ball, Samuel Branch, Thomas Wooldridge.

Signed John Markham (ff)

John Markham's Will gives clear identity to nine children who were living at the time of his death. The fact that he gave small legacies to his older children – William Markham, Bernard Markham, and Catherine Markham Smith – suggests that he had provided for them at the time of their marriages. Archibald Markham is consistently named last in the lists of John Markham's sons, indicating that he is the youngest son, and probably the youngest child of the family. He must have died shortly after his father. Unlike his underage sisters, no guardian is appointed for him, and no further mention ever appears for him. The two teenage daughters, Rebecca Markham and Judith Markham, came under the guardianship of their older, married brother Bernard Markham. It seems likely that he took them into his home. John Markham probably had three or four grandchildren at the time he wrote his Will, but they are not mentioned.

There were thirteen slaves mentioned in John Markham's Will. To his younger sons he left, York, Toby, Wiggom, Tom, Silvie and Aaron. To his daughters he left two slave families - Bristol with his wife Lucy and their two sons Jerry and Dublin; and George, with his wife Amey and their son London.

Brett Randolph, neighbor to John Markham, had died eleven years previously, in 1759. John Markham had served as overseer to Brett Randolph's properties in and around the town of Warwick, and was executor to Brett Randolph's Will. Both Brett Randolph (in 1757), and his wife Mary Scott Randolph (in 1760), made legal appointments of John Markham as their "attorney". Apparently Markham and Randolph had an agreement that Randolph's children, when grown, would have first offer of John Markham's property, which was across the James River from the Randolph property. John Markham styled his Will so as to hold "my land and Ferry opposite to Warwick in Henrico County" until the Randolph family made a decision on whether to purchase. Brett Randolph's son, Henry Randolph, did eventually come into possession of his father's Warwick property, but there is no indication that he ever purchased John Markham's "land and Ferry".

In June and July of 1771 John Markham's executors began to sell off property from the estate. Son-in-law, Francis Smith, married to John Markham's oldest daughter Catherine, bought two hundred acres from the Markham estate, which may have adjoined the family home place. This purchase was recorded in June of 1771.

Son Vincent Markham, who was probably in his mid-twenties, was living on the family home place. He, along with his brother George Markham, placed an advertisement in the Virginia Gazette on the 25th of July 1771. It described the Markham home place as "containing 800 acres with a large Apple and Peach orchard, a good dwelling house, and other convenient houses thereon . . . in good order for cropping, and will be delivered up in time to sow wheat." The advertisement went on to explain that property could be sold in one piece or in parcels, and the "payments made easy to any inclinable to purchase." The advertisement did not result in a quick sale. But, in December 1771 John Markham's executors sold the property to Richard

Crump. Then, on the same day, Richard Crump conveyed the property to Vincent Markham – no further details of this transaction.

The three executors, Benjamin Watkins, Vincent Markham and George Markham had been given the task of appraising the estate, when the Will had been presented in court February 1771. It was almost eighteen months later, in August 1772, when the inventory and appraisal was recorded in the court records.

Do you want to know more?

[Links to John Markham's Story \(A Table of Contents\)](#)

[Link to John Markham \(database\)](#)

[John Markham's Estate Inventory](#)

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