

MY PATERNAL GRANDFATHER

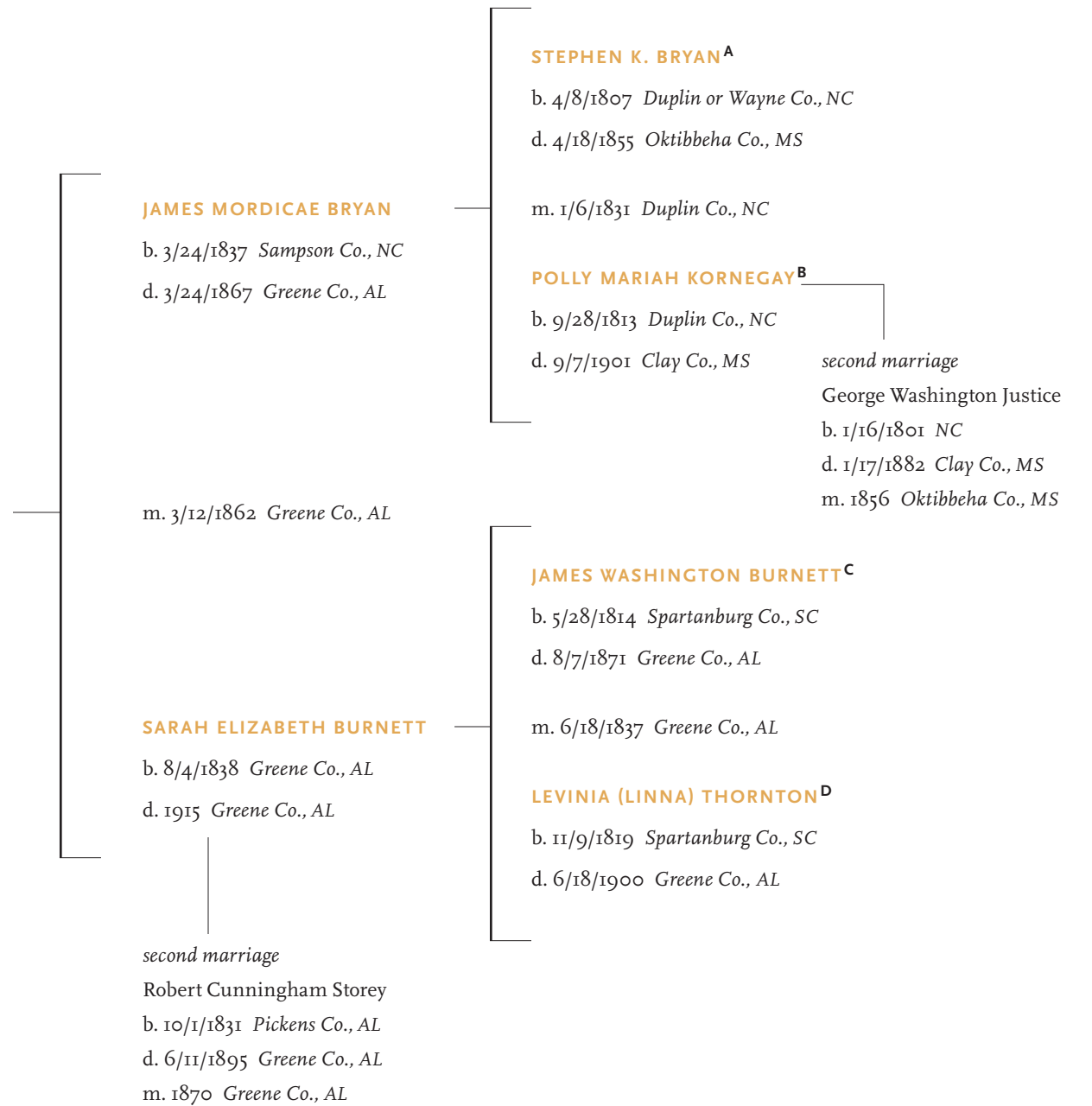
JAMES CHARLES BRYAN*

b. 9/27/1866 *Greene Co., AL*

d. 10/28/1930 *Clay Co., MS*



JAMES CHARLES BRYAN'S PARENTS & GRANDPARENTS



A, B, C, D
See Family Trees on pages 395–98.

JAMES CHARLES BRYAN'S ANCESTORS

The progenitor of my Mississippi Bryan family was my great-great-grandfather **Stephen K. Bryan (1807–1855)**, a North Carolinian. With his wife, **Polly Mariah Kornegay (1813–1901)**, and six children, he migrated from Sampson County, North Carolina, to Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, in 1848, before the town of West Point and the county of Clay were created.

The maternal grandparents of James Charles Bryan were **James Washington (Wash) Burnett (1814–1871)** and **Levinia Thornton (1819–1900)**, who came as young children with their families to Greene and Pickens counties, Alabama, from Spartanburg County, South Carolina, in 1821. Both of their parents had previously moved from Virginia to South Carolina in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Like all of my ancestors of that time, James Charles Bryan's grandparents were part of a great migration from the Southern colonial states to the “Southwest.”

MIGRATION | BRYAN/KORNEGAY & BURNETT/THORNTON



JAMES CHARLES BRYAN'S LIFE

In 1889, at age 23, **James Charles Bryan (1866–1930)** moved permanently to reside in West Point, Mississippi. His father, **James Mordicae Bryan (1837–1867)**, had left West Point about 30 years earlier. James Charles went to West Point to work for his uncle, **George Washington Bryan (1846–1937)**, who owned and operated a meat market there. The following account appeared in the West Point newspaper on March 19, 1890:

Mr. J. C. Bryan arrived in our city last summer and has been employed in the establishment of his uncle, Mr. G. W. Bryan. By his sober and Christian walk, he has proven himself worthy of a liberal patronage, which we hope he will receive.

There are differing accounts of my grandfather leaving his family in Greene County, Alabama, and moving to West Point (his obituary says he left at age 10). Whatever the facts, his move to West Point was a fortuitous one for him and his descendants.

James Charles Bryan as a young man.



For one thing, he avoided the 1895 typhoid epidemic that decimated his Greene County family. Also he learned the meat business as an apprentice to his Uncle George in West Point. That experience was the genesis of our family's business success in the meat industry throughout most of the 20th century.

I am sure that James Charles Bryan engaged in several entrepreneurial businesses during his early manhood in West Point. My father once told me that for a period of time my grandfather sold bananas for the United Fruit Company while riding a rail car from New Orleans up through Mississippi.



In 1897, at age 30, James Charles Bryan married a schoolteacher, **Jonnie Mae Parker (1871–1946)**. She was from Chickasaw County, which ajoin[s] Clay County. Family records say James Charles Bryan was in the cattle business at the time of his marriage. Between 1898 and 1908, James Charles and Jonnie Mae Parker Bryan had five boys, including the last born, my father, **John H. Bryan Sr. (1908–1989)**.

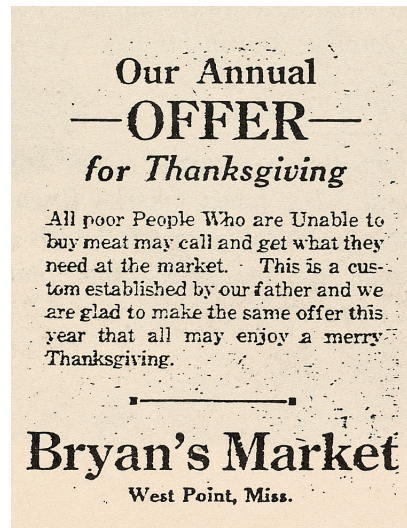
James Charles Bryan around age 30.



Standing left to right: George and W. B. Bryan, sons of James Charles Bryan (with knife), and his helper around 1909. The boy with the bicycle is unidentified.

In 1909, at age 42, James Charles opened his own meat market on Murff Row in West Point, Mississippi. During the First World War (1914–19), he became the meat supplier to an airfield called Payne Field just north of West Point.¹ Bryan's Market was a successful business throughout the remainder of his life, and that allowed him to accumulate farmland and commercial store buildings. Each of his five sons inherited a store building and some land.

Photo of my grandfather and two of his employees inside the meat market, c. 1910.



A Depression-era advertisement for Bryan's market.

I, of course, never knew my Grandfather Bryan.

He was a tall man, over six feet in height. He always wore a mustache or a beard. He has been characterized as a gruff, stern, and frugal person. There are many stories about his abrupt retorts to people who made complaints about his meat products.

My mother, who did not know him, recalled being told that her father-in-law, James Charles, was very kind to people. "He was rough in some ways. People would call him and maybe say that the meat had too much bone in it. He would say, 'Well, that's the way God made it.' He was a very outspoken person." Miss Virginia Hazard (1896–1989), a family friend, recalled another story about James Charles trying to serve the special requests of the meat market customers. One day someone called and she overheard him say, "Well, I'm sorry to tell you, but a cow is not all rump, and some of you have to take something besides rump roast. There's only so much rump to go around."

Bryan Market was owned by my father and my uncle **William Burnett Bryan (1905–1968)** after James Charles Bryan Sr. died in 1930. They operated the market until after World War II.

My grandfather also established a slaughtering plant to supply the market. The ruins of the facility still stand near the site of Bryan Foods, south of West Point.



Above: A photo of the original slaughtering facility, which is still standing off Church Hill Road in West Point.



Left: The interior of the slaughtering plant in the early 1920s.

James Charles Bryan,
c. 1920.



My grandfather was known as J. C. Bryan to the townspeople. However, within the family, he was always referred to as Papa. Coincidentally, this is the same name my grandchildren use when addressing me.

On October 28, 1930, James Charles Bryan died of a heart attack. My father was 22 at that time, and he was attending a movie (John Mack Brown and William Beery in *Billy the Kid*) at the Ritz Theater in town. Someone came to the theater to tell him his father had died.



The opening paragraph of James Charles Bryan's obituary, which appeared on October 31, 1930, on the front page of *The West Point Times Leader* read:

The hearts of the entire city were saddened Wednesday morning over the unexpected passing of James C. Bryan, age 65, which occurred Tuesday night at 10 o'clock, taking from the business of West Point one of its best beloved citizens and most prominent businessmen.²*

Taken just a few months before his death in October 1930, James Charles Bryan with two of his grandchildren, Billy (1928–1955) at left and Dorothy Ann (b. 1930) in his lap. Dorothy Ann was the first girl born in the Bryan family in 55 years. The previous Bryan girl was Lula Bryan (1875–1941), our grandfather's first cousin. After her birth, there were 14 Bryan boys born between 1876 and 1928.

*He was 64 years old.

JAMES CHARLES BRYAN'S LIFE

PAGES 30–35

1. PAYNE FIELD

With America's entry into the war, it soon became known that the federal government was seeking a location in Mississippi for an aviation training school. Some 300 Mississippi communities were competing for it. Following top secrecy in handling negotiations and spending thousands of dollars for road construction, electrical equipment, and clearing the land for the facility, the fledgling Army Air Corps awarded Payne Field to West Point. Located a few miles northeast of West Point, the installation was built at a cost of one million dollars.

When Payne Field was being built, everyone in town helped. The activity of Zula Gilmore, a first cousin of the five Bryan boys, was typical. She and her family made lunches for the workers. Every morning around a hundred of these workers would come by their home and pick up a bag with two sandwiches, cookies or fruit. When the government took over the field, J.C. Bryan sent a wagonload of meat every day [to the facility]. A black man and one of the Bryan boys—there were three of them around—would go to the pilot training field and sell the meat. It is believed that this was one of the ways J.C. Bryan made enough money to enable him to buy rental property and farm lands....

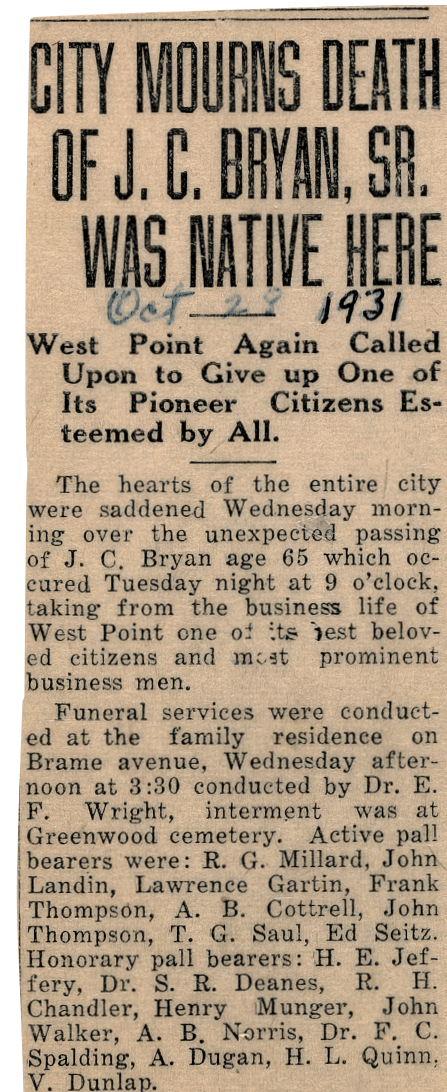
John Bryan, Sr. was ten years old when World War I ended. Several years ago, in an interview, he reminisced about his boyhood. "My earliest memories go back to when I was around seven or eight years old. I remember when cattle and hogs were slaughtered in a brick building. This was around 1915. I also remember when World War I started. I had two brothers in the war. My two oldest brothers left in 1916 or 1917. We had an aviation field near West Point, and we sold them quite a bit of meat. I remember as a kid going up there and delivering it. I was about nine or ten."

*As a young boy during his high school years, John Bryan [Sr.] spent most of his spare time down at the meat market on Murff Row. One of his chores was to help deliver meat on a wagon. Jordan Washington and John Cheatham, both young Negroes, were also employed at the meat market. Jordan Washington recalls that people would call in for a roast or steaks or other products, and he would deliver the meat on a bicycle. He and John Cheatham also used a wagon covered with a black cloth to take the meat all over the town through the week, on weekends, and especially on Sunday morning. They would go around yelling, "Meat, meat."**

*Source: Caroll Brinson, A Tradition of Looking Ahead: The Story of Bryan Foods, 1986.

2. JAMES C. BRYAN'S OBITUARY

My grandfather **James Charles Bryan (1866–1930)** died of a heart attack on Thursday evening, October 22, 1930. His obituary appeared in the West Point *Daily Times Journal*. The penciled note is an error.



He is survived by his widow and five sons: John, W. B. and Charlie of West Point and George of Starkville and Frank of Memphis all of who were here for the last rites.

Coming to West Point at the age of ten, an orphan, the deceased resided with an uncle for a number of years displaying that aggressive spirit which marked his entire business career, even when a lad on the farm. Always of a thrifty nature, he displayed that business sagacity as a young man just starting out in the business world, making every hour count. He has been in business in this city for the past 40 years during which time he has been always active in civic, social and religious life of the city being at the time of his death, owner of considerable business property here and at Starkville including two markets and groceries in West Point. He was also an extensive dealer in cattle.

The Odd Fellows order has numbered the deceased among its most active members since he became of age. He had also been one of the leading members of the Baptist church practically all his life being received into this denomination when a youth before leaving south Alabama. Since that time he has been actively attendant upon the ordinances of his church at all times until he was forced to cease much of his participation in public life because of his age.

ANCESTORS OF MY GREAT-GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

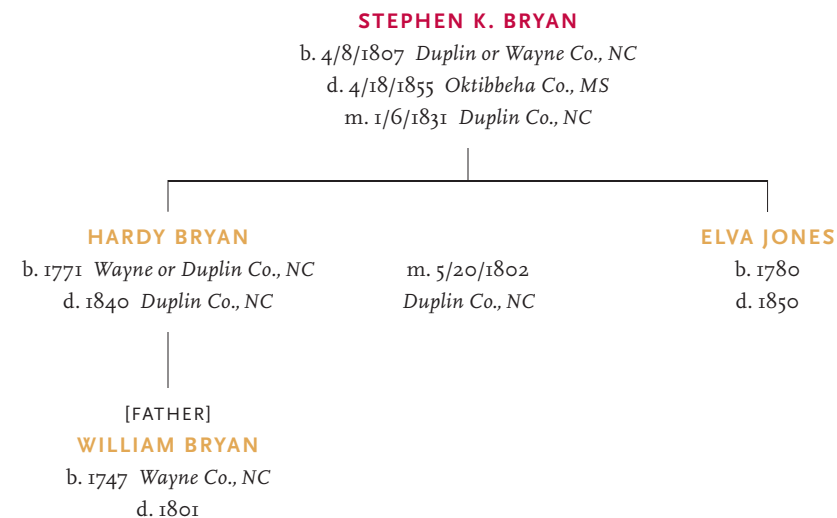
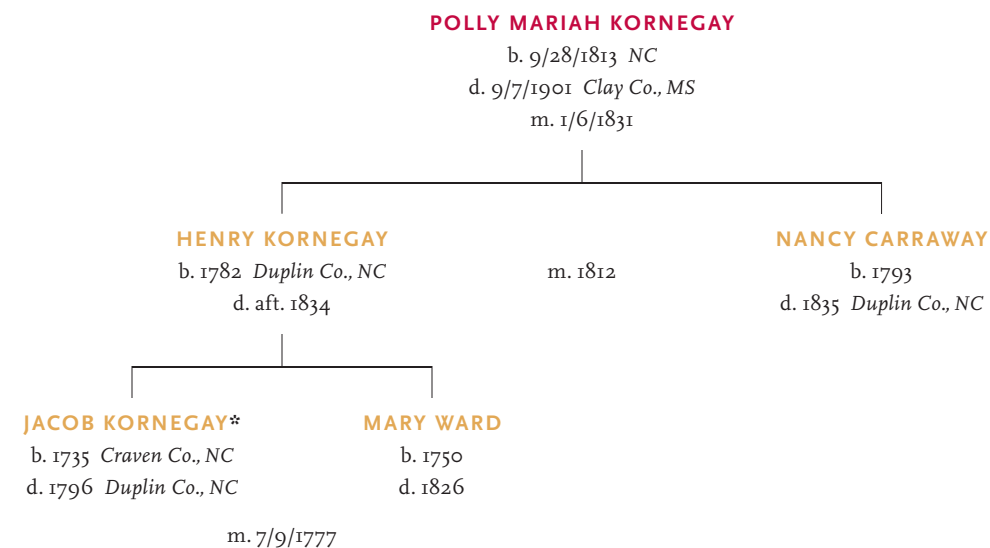
MY PATERNAL GREAT-GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

A Stephen K. Bryan (1807–1855)	page 395
B Polly Mariah Kornegay (1813–1901)	page 395
C James Washington Burnett (1814–1871)	pages 396–97
D Levinia Thornton (1819–1900)	page 398
John C. Parker (1818–before 1870)	<i>unknown</i>
Martha Ward (1819–1886)	<i>unknown</i>
Ezekiel Daniel Jr. (1806–bef. 1858)	<i>unknown*</i>
E Elizabeth Armistead (1799–1865)	pages 399–401

MY MATERNAL GREAT-GREAT-GRANDPARENTS

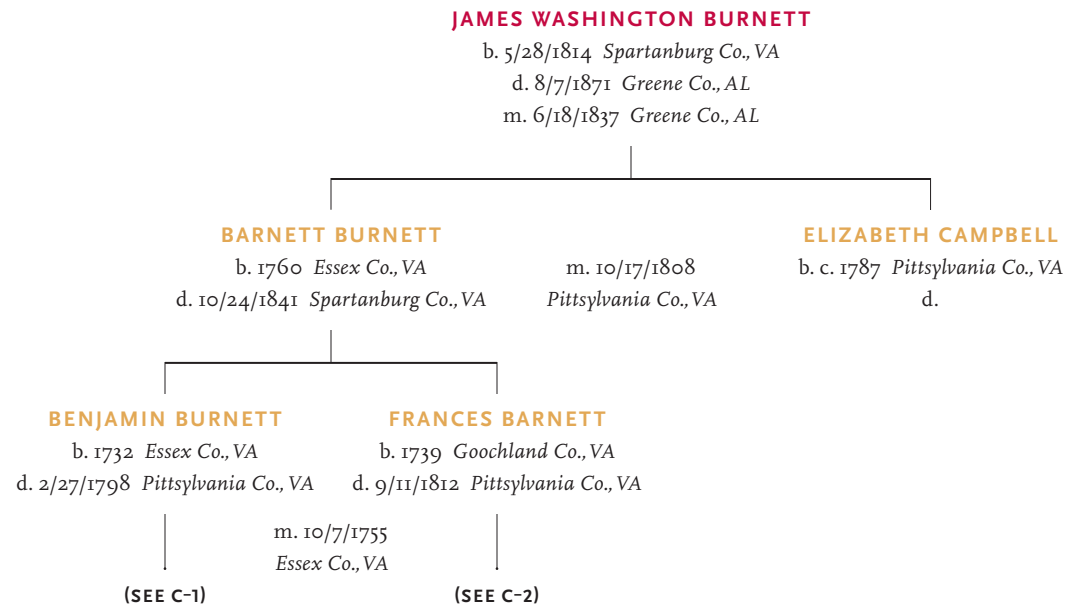
F Thomas Jefferson Wilkerson (1807–1868)	page 402
G Dorcas Elizabeth Cornelius (1830–1897)	page 402
H John Marshall Adams (1814–1862)	pages 403–04
Ida Princella Morton (1822–1888)	<i>unknown</i>
I William Pinckney Montgomery (1799–1876)	page 405
J Catherine Cameron (1811–1848)	page 405
K Gervas Storrs Mosby (1818–1867)	pages 406–10
L Eliza Glover Burks (1830–1862)	page 411

*Except for Ezekiel Daniel Jr.'s father Ezekiel Daniel Sr., born 1788 in South Carolina and died in 1858 in Lauderdale County, Mississippi. He first married around 1806, and again in 1827, and for a third time before 1850.

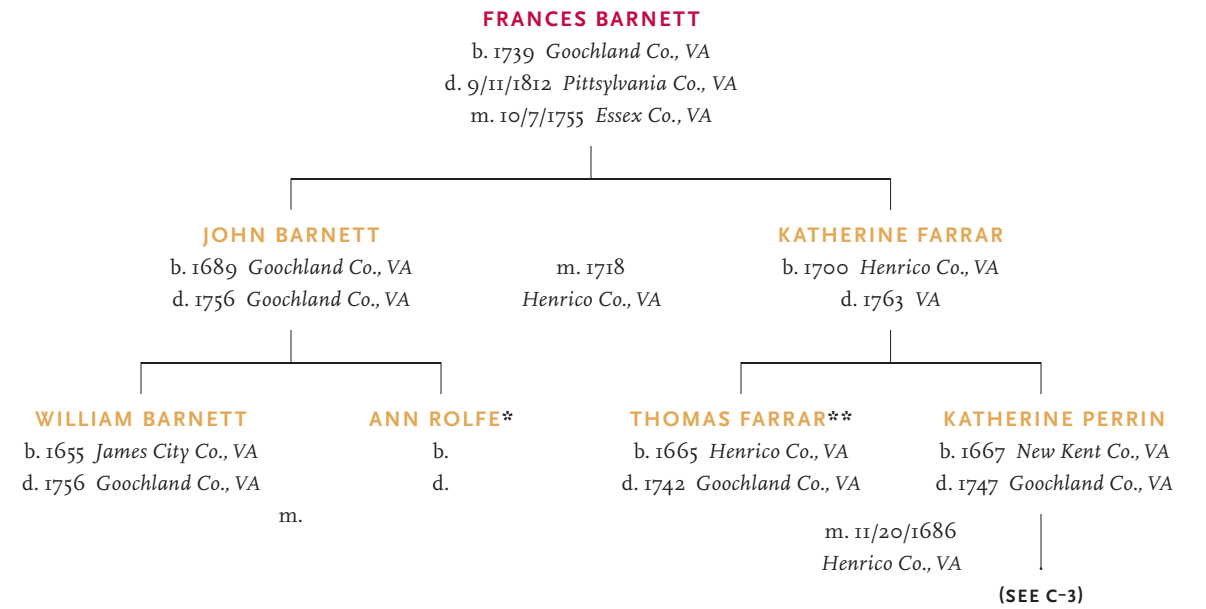
A**B**

*See Kornegay Heritage on pages 152–54.

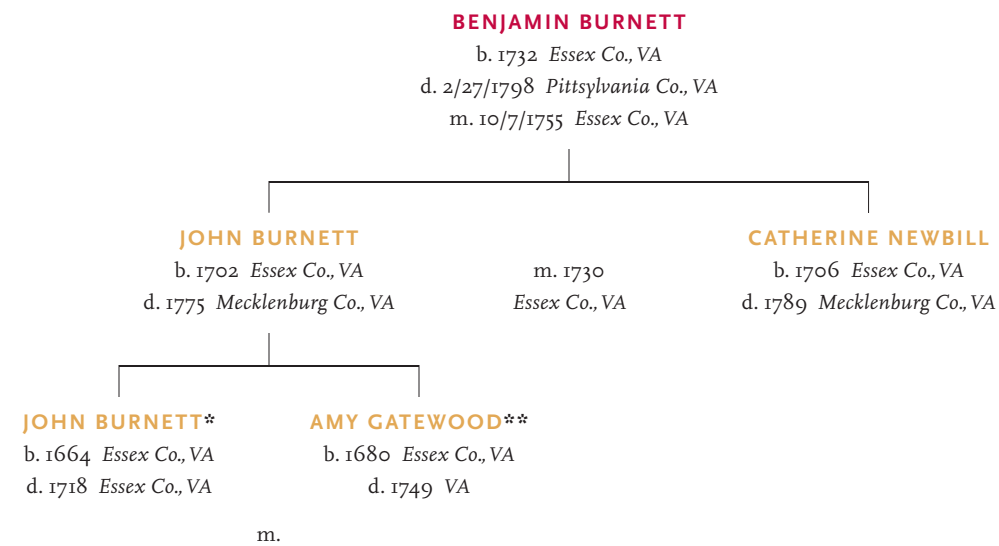
C



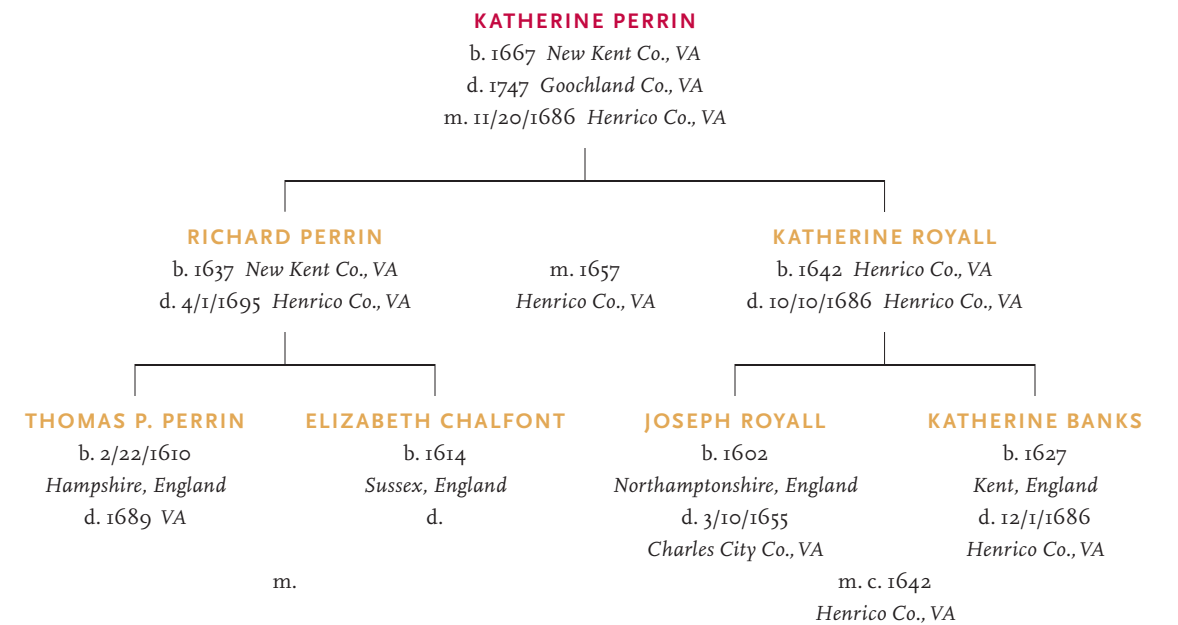
C-2



C-1



C-3



*See Burnett Heritage on pages 156–58.
**The Gatewood heritage is available on Ancestry.com.

*Information and ancestral data about Ann Rolfe is too confusing to include here.
She may or may not be related to John Rolfe, the early Jamestown settler.
**See Farrar Heritage on page 159.

D

LEVINIA THORNTON

b. 11/9/1819 *Spartanburg Co., SC*
d. 6/18/1900 *Greene Co., AL*
m. 6/18/1837 *Greene Co., AL*

LUKE THORNTON III

b. 12/29/1795 *Spartanburg Co., SC*
d. 8/8/1848 *Greene Co., AL*

SARAH REYNOLDS

m. 3/21/1816 *Spartanburg Co., SC*
b. 6/11/1800 *Spartanburg Co., SC*
d. 9/26/1870 *Greene Co., AL*

JOHN THORNTON

b. 1768 *Lunenburg Co., VA*
d. 12/16/1840 *Pickens Co., AL*

ELIZABETH CROW

b. 1767
d. 1855 *Pickens Co., AL*

GIDEON REYNOLDS

b. 2/2/1776 *Frederick Co., VA*
d. 6/18/1839 *Greene Co., AL*

MARY ROGERS

b. 6/16/1778 *Spartanburg Co., SC*
d. 11/29/1860 *Greene Co., AL*

m. 8/15/1789
Spartanburg Co., SC

m. c. 1797

(SEE D-1)

D-1

JOHN THORNTON

b. 1768 *Lunenburg Co., VA*
d. 12/16/1840 *Pickens Co., AL*
m. 8/15/1789 *Spartanburg Co., SC*

LUKE THORNTON II

b. 1743 *Henry Co., VA*
d. 1804 *Spartanburg Co., SC*

m. 1762
Lunenburg Co., VA

MARTHA ROGERS

b. 1747 *Orange Co., VA*
d. 1810 *Spartanburg Co., SC*

JOHN THORNTON*

b. 1715 *Richmond Co., VA*
d. 1800 *Spartanburg Co., VA*

JEMINA LONGWORTH

b. 1724 *Richmond Co., VA*
d. 1780 *Lunenburg Co., VA*

m. 1741
Orange Co., VA

*See Thornton Heritage on pages 160-61.