

# **VOIGHT FAMILY ROOTS**

**SECOND EDITION, 2014**



**The Great Dismal Swamp**

## INTRODUCTION

These chapters focus on the family history of John T Voight and Nancy Jane Rogers, their ancestors and their descendents. The chapters of "Voight Family Roots" can be arranged in birth order but they weren't written that way and they don't need to be read in any particular order either. You might want to start with your branch of the tree first, then work your way around the other branches before going back to the earliest eighteenth century roots. Or not. You might want to print out your own family's chapter for easy reference and sharing or print out the whole thing (more than 200 pages) for a coffee table book or even for bedtime reading. (It might even put you to sleep!)

- The folders on the CD contain copies of the original source material, filed by family lines, for anyone who's interested in examining those documents for themselves. In some cases the folders contain additional incidental, but potentially interesting, materials.
- The "RESEARCH & MISC" folder contains a folder of assorted Norfolk City Directories and:
  - > two stories of genealogical trivia ("Kissin' Cousins" & "Who Is Jesse Harrell?")
  - > two different kinship charts to use to help figure out relationships
  - > copies of various blank forms (in case someone wants to look at the census records more closely, for example, these blank forms can be very helpful)
  - > a summary of the 54 known grandchildren of John T and Nancy Jane Voight

Please share this information freely with your family. You can pass it around to let your relatives copy it and/or print it. Add your own information to your family group with documents, pictures and stories of your life, so your children, grandchildren and those who come afterwards will have a chance to know this root of their own family tree.

At this time all the chapters can also be found online - but without the folders full of reference documents. The link to the main page is:

[http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~vancgenealogyrecords/voight\\_family/voight\\_family.html](http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~vancgenealogyrecords/voight_family/voight_family.html)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my collaborator and genealogy mentor Janie Sue Norris Evans, webmaster and widow of our cousin Alvin Evans. Alvin was the son of Edith White Evans, grandson of Romie White Sr, great-grandson of Sallie Voight White, 2x great-grandson of John T. Voight and Nancy Jane Rogers.

I owe another huge debt of appreciation for her steady support for this project, month after month, to my first cousin once removed, A. Lynn Gordon Davis. Lynn is the daughter of Cornelia Lassiter Gordon King, granddaughter of Jessie Marie Voight Lassiter, great-granddaughter of Joseph Voight and great-great-granddaughter of John T. Voight and Nancy Jane Rogers.

Thanks, too, to all the other cousins who shared their photos, their memories and their good wishes!

## DEDICATION

This whole collection of sketches of the Voight family is dedicated to Marion Voight, daughter of Joseph Voight and Lillian Caroline Morris. She's my aunt who "went missing" after her mother's funeral at Christmastime in 1949. The search for Aunt Marion was the impetus for the Voight history project when a second cousin descended from Joseph Voight's Morris in-laws said – "What about the Voights? Maybe one of them took her in. Maybe they know where she went and what happened to her." I knew little to nothing about the Voights at the time. And thus began a study of our fascinating family. Thank you, Marion, for leading the way to my Voight roots.

Many corrections and additions have been included in this Second Edition. Still, any mistakes in this text are all mine, unintentional and hopefully benign. Y'all know I strove for accuracy.

Offered by  
Jacquelyn "Jackie" Rickabaugh Ballance  
Great-granddaughter of John and Nancy Voight  
Granddaughter of Joseph Voight and Lillian Caroline Morris  
Daughter of Lillian Louise Voight and Jack M. Rickabaugh  
Florence, Massachusetts  
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**BECAUSE OUR FAMILY TREE HAS ROOTS DEEP IN THE GREAT DISMAL SWAMP, THE SWAMP DESERVES TO HAVE A CHAPTER OF ITS OWN.** (Honesty I remember the Swamp in the early 1950's, when I was 7 or 8 years old, as a dark and scary place hung with Spanish Moss, full of poisonous snakes and other wild dangerous animals. I never dreamed the swamp waters were regarded as extremely pure and beneficial. Our ancestors made their home along the western border of the Swamp, in the Cypress Chapel area of Nansemond County Virginia and across the state line in Gates County, North Carolina. JB)

## The Great Dismal Swamp: A History

In the midst of the metropolitan area known as Hampton Roads, Virginia, and extending well into North Carolina, there is a unique primeval forest inhabited by a variety of mammals, 21 species of reptiles, 58 species of turtles, lizards, salamanders, frogs & toads, and over 200 species of birds, as well as history, mystery and lore... the Great Dismal Swamp.

The Great Dismal Swamp is a geological wonder. For millions of years before the Swamp was formed, it was under the sea. It is viewed by naturalists and other scientists as one of the best outdoor laboratories in the world! This natural treasure emerged as a landform when the Continental Shelf made its last significant shift. Though most of the trees that gave Cypress Chapel and the Cypress Magisterial District their botanical names are long gone, harvested for ship-building, the remains of the Swamp and the cypress trees are protected today, lying within the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. 111,000 acres are left of the original 1,000,000.



Just who “discovered” the Great Dismal Swamp and when is unknown. Colonel William Byrd II was a member of the commission that surveyed the North Carolina/Virginia state line through the Swamp in 1728 and provided the first extensive description of it. In May 1763, George Washington made his first visit to the Swamp and suggested draining it and digging a north-south canal through it to connect the waters of Chesapeake Bay in Virginia and Albemarle Sound in North Carolina. Joining with several other prominent Virginians and North Carolinians, he formed two syndicates known as the Dismal Swamp Land Company and the Adventurers for Draining the Great Dismal Swamp. This group hoped to drain the Swamp, harvest the trees, and use the land for farming.

The company purchased 40,000 acres of Swamp land for \$20,000 in 1763. Washington directed the surveying and digging of the 5-mile long ditch from the western edge of the Swamp to Lake Drummond, known today as Washington Ditch. In the late 1700's, Riddick Ditch was completed. Together these ditches provided a way to transport logs out of the Swamp and drain it as well.



The Adventurers soon realized, however, that the task of draining the Swamp was enormous and gave up that part of their plan to concentrate on lumbering. They cut much of the cypress trees for use in shipbuilding and the cedars for shingles and other products.

By 1796, Washington had become disappointed in the management of the Dismal Swamp lumber business and contracted to sell his 1/12th share to "Lighthorse" Harry Lee, father of Robert E. Lee, who was never able to come up with the purchase price. So Washington's share passed on to his heirs upon his death in 1799.



Cypress Trees in Fall

Camp Mfg. Company, a predecessor of Union Camp, acquired all the Dismal Swamp Land Company's property in 1909. Lumbering continued in the Swamp and by the 1950's the last 20,000 acres of virgin timber were removed. In 1973, Union Camp donated its Virginia swamp holdings to the Nature Conservancy which, in turn, deeded it to the Department of the Interior for creation of the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge consists of 107,000 acres of forested wetlands surrounding Lake Drummond, a 3,100 acre natural lake located in the heart of the swamp. William Drummond, the first Governor of North Carolina (1663-1667), discovered the oval lake which still bears his name.



Lake Drummond

Even though the average depth of the lake is only six feet, its unusually pure water is essential to the swamp's survival. The amber-colored water is preserved by tannic acids from the bark of the juniper, gum and cypress trees, prohibiting growth of bacteria. Before the days of refrigeration, water from the Swamp was a highly prized commodity on sailing ships. It was put in kegs and would stay fresh a long time. People spoke of the magical qualities of the Swamp's tea-colored water and how, if it were regularly drunk, it prevented illness and promoted long life.

The Great Dismal Swamp, located in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina has long been recognized as a mysterious place and a place in which people have easily lost their way. During slavery, many African Americans used the Great Dismal Swamp as a means to find their freedom. Some bondsmen, who were permitted to hire themselves out, earned enough money, through boat work on the Great Dismal Swamp Canal or through cedar and cypress shingle production to purchase their freedom. Others found refuge deep within the swamp, living off the land, and what they could steal. These “outlyers” established maroon communities on the higher points of the swamp. Still, for others, the swamp was a “stopping point” to get to Norfolk or Portsmouth, VA, or to the Albemarle Sound and Elizabeth City, NC where they could secure passage on a ship traveling north. During the Civil War US Colored Troops passed through the swamp in order to liberate enslaved people. Despite the method or living conditions, the swamp provided the means of freedom which so many sought.

<http://www.dismalswampwelcomecenter.com/History.php>

The following article is an excerpt from the book, *A Journey In Time, A History of Gates County* by Paulette Felton Wester found at <http://www.northeast-nc.com/dismalswamp/>

“On the eastern side of Gates County [Northeastern North Carolina] can be found one of the most unique natural wonders of the world. This is the Great Dismal Swamp. It is still one of the wildest areas in Eastern America. It is thirty-seven miles long and up to twelve miles wide.

Sixty percent of the swamp can be found in North Carolina in the counties of Gates, Perquimans, Camden and Currituck. The remaining forty percent is in Virginia.

Geologists tell us that an ancient sea once extended to the western border of the Great Dismal. Just imagine, there were once waves, sandy beaches and jungle where the swamp now stands. The sea was a result of the melting glaciers of the great ice age.

The swamp is alive with numerous trees, a wide variety of animals, plants (many rare species), birds and poisonous reptiles. An acid water can be found in the swamp. Tradition has it that this water is said to be healthy. It was reported that Blackbeard sailed near the Dismal and filled his barrels with the swamp's water. He would do this so his men would stay healthy on their mission.



Late 18th century depiction of fugitive slaves in the Great Dismal Swamp

To some early explorers the swamp was seen as so dismal that no one could possibly live or survive there. To others it was seen as a place of intrigue and beauty. Young George Washington saw it as a financial opportunity. He believed there were great possibilities for logging and farming in the swamp.

Washington acquired a 5,000 acre share in The Dismal Swamp Land Company (which held 40,000 acres). Along with his brother-in-law they purchased 1100 acres in Perquimans (now Gates County) and the Holly Grove area. He believed the land could be drained and used for farming. There was little profit in this, so he started producing jumpier shingles after the Revolutionary War which proved very profitable.

A canal was dug for use in shipping the shingles and other wood products. The first canal was cut five miles through the Western side of the swamp to Lake Drummond. Tradition goes that Washington had a plantation at Holly Grove and that he fell in a creek on his northward journey around the swamp. After this experience he called the creek "Deep Creek". The Jericho Canal was cut to Lake Drummond and the ten miles to Suffolk, Virginia. It was four feet deep and connected the Tidewater Landing to the Nansemond River and to ocean going vessels.



Halfway House VA/NC Border

In 1830 a railroad was laid through part of the Dismal Swamp to haul out the timber, shingles, staves and other wood products to be shipped for sale.

Washington used slave labor for much of his work. If not slave labor; he hired poor whites for very low wages. It was hard and dangerous work. The workers cut trees and moved them to the main camp. They had to move around in the muddy ooze of the swamp, fight the yellow flies, mosquitoes and snakes. The logs or shingles were moved out on timber bogys pulled by oxen or mules to be loaded onto the rail line.

The workers lived in small swamp shacks. This was a small cabin made of jumpier poles. It had a dirt floor covered with shavings from the lumber products. One end of the shack was daubed with mud for building a fire. There was a small opening in the roof to let out the smoke. It was under these conditions the swamp became inhabited by shingle and gutter cutters and lumbermen.

For many years people could find remains of these camps in the swamp. They serve not only as a reminder of the hard work of our ancestors but also as a reminder of the power that the wealthy had over the very poor and the slaves. Today, if you take a walking tour through the Dismal Swamp in the Washington Ditch area, you can still see signs of the old railroad bed. You will also see there are no virgin timbers left in the swamp. This is a result of the endeavors of George Washington and his businessmen.”



21<sup>st</sup> Century photos of the terrain around Cypress Chapel VA and the Swamp on the ground and from the air.

