

Early-Poindexters-in-America Research Committee

14. SPRING REPORT

[PDA *Newsletter*, Vol. XII, No. 2, pp 9–13 (Apr. 1993)]

Committee Activities, Winter 1992–1993

1. Researches are continuing in the Channel Islands and France.
2. We have completed round 2 of our scrutiny of the letters of Governor George Poindexter of Mississippi. We have found no direct genealogical evidence of value; many letters to George from various family members and friends simply confirm known and published relationships. Interestingly, there is a letter from a Robert W. Poindexter, living in Pittsburgh at the time. Perhaps he is an ancestor of our PDA Robert W. Poindexter. The only item of specific genealogical interest is a letter from A. M. Poindexter of Richmond to J. F. H. Claiborne, an early member of the prominent political family in Mississippi, and friend and collector of memorabilia of Governor George. This letter is discussed in *Technical Topics*.
3. Our plea regarding the Thomas-2 line in the previous EPARC report triggered interesting responses from two descendants in that line: C. E. Poindexter of Humansville, MO, and Christian Poindexter of Oregon City, OR. Both have worked to solidify the line from its beginnings in Thomas-1.
4. Nancy Jane Poindexter Gellner of Wheeling, WV, has sent us her current family history model and her views on some unsettled issues, such as the wife of George-1. She is of the line of Capt. Joseph Poindexter and Elizabeth Kennerly.

Remarks and Agenda

1. It seems likely at this stage that we have smoked out all the readily available info on the Early Poindexter era. We urge everyone to continue to submit whatever info they may have, but I am not optimistic that fundamental new original-source data is going to show up. From now on, it's up to us to track down new info! After reading the several letters by genealogically-concerned people more than 100 years ago, I feel that the proportion of Poindexters in the early days who were seriously interested in their own genealogy is about the same as now, i. e., not too many. Also, most of them were similarly waiting to get a round tuit before compiling and recording their precious orally acquired family linkages. And finally, most of them delayed till the knowledgeable old folks were dead and gone before they got interested. I still nurse the fond hope that somewhere out there are some letters or notes in someone's attic, or misplaced legal documents outside of New Kent and Hanover Counties, which would really solve some of the mysteries—sort of like the mid-1940's discovery of the 1765 Snead suit in Louisa County, which shed much light on Thomas-1 in Hanover County two generations earlier.

2. We hope some of our PDAers will be inspired to read and critique our Thomas-1 status report, below, and will offer new ideas or important missing facts. We hope for both supportive and contrary opinions.

Technical Topics

Status of the Thomas-1 Poindexter Problem. At this time we thought it would be wise to publish the current status of the Thomas-1 problem. We have not yet come upon any decisive direct evidence regarding his origins. In showing what we have, and the tentative conclusions we have reached, we hope to flush out any additional facts lurking out there among PDAers, and to inspire some rigorous thought and critique.

We have no direct proof of who Thomas's father was; this is the most important issue. We have tacitly assumed that he was of the Channel Islands clan. This is not a proven certainty. The Poindexters's earliest known existence was in Normandy in the 1100s; there are still a handful left in France to this day.¹ Several handfults live in present-day England. There are, however, several indirect bits of evidence which strongly favor a Channel Islands origin for Thomas-1.

First, in Virginia, Thomas and his family lived in close proximity to the family of George-1; they initially attended the same church, St. Peters Parish in New Kent County.² Second, the first names of Thomas's children and their children and beyond³ are all very much of the same selection as those of the Jersey clan and the George line.^{3,4} There is no hint of any other influence. Third, the early and universal adoption of the unique spelling Poindexter by all the Virginia clan further suggests a common origin. Different spellings have been used in France and the UK to the present time.

And fourth, we have a transcript⁵ of a letter from Senator Miles Poindexter (1868-1946) which states that his grandfather George Benskin Poindexter was a "close cousin" of Governor George. What he considers as "close" is unknown, of course. Nonetheless, the existence of a connection between the lines of Thomas-1 (great grandfather of Governor George) and George-1 (great-great grandfather of the first George Benskin) is attested in writing, and by a man of substance who lived three generations closer to the events in question than most of us PDAers. It presumably reflects oral family history tales.

Thus we assume that Thomas-1 was linked to the line of George-1 at the latest feasible date, to honor as closely as possible the "close cousin" assertion. As to whether the linkage was to George-1 or later, or via an earlier ancestor in Jersey, we argue against a Jersey connection. To justify this, we note that Payne's *Armorial*⁴ reports only one Poindexter who emigrated to North America in the 1600s, viz., George-1. While we know of another contemporaneous emigrant, Cecilia,⁶ her existence does not complicate the Thomas-1 problem. We stick to the simplest and most direct interpretation of Payne. We believe that Thomas, as a male member of the distinguished Jersey line, would not have been overlooked by Payne or earlier archivists if he had migrated as an adult.

We have previously deduced that George-3 could have been born no earlier than 1678, and more probably, 1683.⁷ Thomas-1 had his first recorded child, Susanna, in 1697.⁸ So, Thomas was likely to have been born no later than 1679, and more likely,

1677. Thus, he is favored to have been older than George-3, and hence, not the brother of George-3, who was the eldest son and heir of George-2. By this logic, Thomas-1 must be the son of George-1.

Thomas-1's three female children are the first Poindexter offspring whose births are recorded in the parish records,⁸ appearing nearly 10 years before children of any George Poindexter.⁹ This again suggests that Thomas-1 was older than George-3, and therefore, not the son of George-2.

A Sarah Poindexter married John Vaughan in 1686.¹⁰ She must have been born no later than about 1670. John lived at the Poindexter home in his later years;¹¹ so, Sarah was of the George line. If we consider that Philip was born to George-2 in 1708,¹² then it is impossible for Sarah to have been born to George-2's wife, Mary, at such an early date. So, Sarah must have been a child of George-1. She indicates a conception during the period 1657-1673, when George-1 and his wife Susanna appear to have lived apart, with Susanna residing away from Virginia. George-1 was a man of means, and was a shipowner.¹³ It is presumed that he and Susanna got together now and then, either here or there. Susanna became pregnant easily, as attested by the closely-spaced births of their first 3 children, George-2, John, and Elizabeth.¹⁴ It would be expected that she would bear a few more children during this long period of reduced cohabitation, which allows an opportunity for Thomas-1, together with Sarah, to have been the child of George-1 and Susanna.

In consideration of the indirect evidence above, we assign Thomas-1 as son of George-1 Poindexter. There is nothing which confines his birth date tightly. His first documented child was born in early 1697, which indicates a birth date no later than about 1679. From the other direction, if his mother Susanna bore George-2 about 1650, then 1679 may be a bit late. His brothers, George-2 and John-1, and his sister, Elizabeth, received a gift of a cow in 1664, 1665, and 1665, respectively.¹⁴ Presumably, the donor—Peter Effard—would have also given a cow to Thomas if he were older than John or Elizabeth. In view of all this, we set Thomas-1's birth between 1657 and 1677.

The date of Thomas-1's death has often been confused by the assumption that the child Julius Caesar Poindexter, born to a Mrs. Sarah Poindexter in 1719,¹⁵ was the son of Thomas-1. This particular Sarah cannot have been Thomas-1's wife. After Thomas-1's death, his wife Sarah remarried to the Rev. James Brechin, and had 4 more children by him.^{3,16} The Rev. Brechin died in 1721;¹⁷ there is not enough time between 1719 and 1721 for conception and birth of 4 children, except for a very unlikely set of triplets or quadruplets, or two sets of twins. Probably 6 to 10 years would have been required. There is the further problem of Sarah's age, probably 40 or more by 1720, based on her first child's birth in early 1697. An earlier death for Thomas-1 is clearly needed for an unstrained fit to the facts.

Thomas-1 disappears from the records of St. Peters Parish after 1702,¹⁸ and reappears (only once) in St. Pauls Parish in 1705.¹⁹ Thomas-1 himself never appears again in the St Pauls records, and land is processed in the name of James Brechin in 1711²⁰ and 1715.²¹ This land then passes into the hands of John-2 Poindexter, Thomas-1's eldest son, in or before 1719.²² These land records prove that Thomas died before 1711, but Sarah's childbearing potential suggests an earlier death, perhaps 1706 to 1708.

We now return to the above-noted letter from A. M. Poindexter of Richmond to the Hon. J. F. H. Claiborne of Mississippi in 1860.²³ A. M. Poindexter was son of Richard

Poindexter, Governor George's brother. This letter is apparently in response to an enquiry on the ancestry of Governor George Poindexter. In his letter, Poindexter, evidently not a serious genealogical hobbyist himself, cites word-for-word a passage on the legendary ancestry of the Reverend John Poindexter—the very same passage which is circulated among many of us present-day Poindexters. Poindexter says that he found the passage among his uncle Rev. John's papers. The Rev. John was the well-known baptist minister in Virginia and long-time clerk of Louisa County. The passage concludes with the assertion that all Poindexters in America are descended from the romantically attached immigrant couple in the legend. In his letter, Poindexter goes on to state, "I have not met anyone of our name who did not *trace* (emphasis by EPARC) back to this origin."

This is a most interesting comment. It implies that a number of Poindexters of that time knew their connected lineage to the first immigrant. These Poindexters would include descendants of George-2 and Thomas-1. This is 4 or 5 generations earlier than most PDAers, and only 3 or 4 generations after the death of George-1.

Temporal proximity is an advantage in the probable veracity of orally transmitted family history; and A. M. Poindexter, living in Richmond, was located amidst the largest concentration of Poindexters of his era, most of whom had not moved far from their birthplaces. Further, although 1800 is after the burning of New Kent County records in 1787,²⁴ it is before the destruction of records in Richmond during the Civil War.²⁵ Thus whatever information lay in these two archives, it had been available to genealogy buffs either during A. M. Poindexter's lifetime, or during the lifetime of his parents's and grandparents's generations. It is perhaps reasonable to believe that his information, though imperfect, is better founded than our own.

The mass of indirect evidence and our scheme of logic result in Thomas-1 Poindexter being assigned as son of George-1 Poindexter. His lifetime is estimated to have extended from 1667±10 yr to 1707±2 yr.

1. Private communication from Gilbert Dorey, 9 avenue Pierre Grenier, 92100 Boulogne, France. Information obtained from comprehensive directory of all telephone numbers in France.

2. *The Vestry Book and Register of St. Peters Parish, Virginia, 1684–1786*, edited by C. G. Chamberlayne (Library Board, Richmond, 1937) pp. 78, 85, 384. Book hereinafter called *St. Peters Parish*.

3. John Poindexter Landers, *Poingdestre-Poindexter—A Norman Family* (Robert Downs Poindexter, location unknown, 1975) p.104. Book hereinafter called "Landers."

4. J. Bertrand Payne, *An Armorial of Jersey* (publisher information unknown, 1865) pp. 323-324.

5. Miles Poindexter, letter to Parke P. Deans, Attorney-at-Law, Windsor, VA, 27 May 1920.

6. EPARC Winter Report, *PDA Newsletter*, Vol. XII, No. 1, 5–6 (1993).

7. EPARC Phoenix Report, *PDA Newsletter*, Vol. VII, No. 3, 20–25 (1988).

8. *St. Peters Parish*, p. 384.

9. *St. Peters Parish*, p. 385.

10. *St. Peters Parish*, p. 417.

11. *St. Peters Parish*, p. 446.

12. *St. Peters Parish*, p. 385.

13. *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 25, 374 (1917). Journal hereinafter called *Virginia Magazine*.

14. Landers, p. 91.

15. *St. Peters Parish*, p. 483.

16. Landers, pp 94-95.

17. *Virginia Magazine*, Vol. 21, 314 (1913).

18. *St. Peters Parish*, p. 85.

19. *The Vestry Book of St. Pauls Parish, Virginia, 1706-1786*, edited by C. G. Chamberlayne (Library

- Board, Richmond, 1940) p. 2. Book hereinafter called *St. Pauls Parish*.
20. *St. Pauls Parish*, pp. 225, 236.
21. *St. Pauls Parish*, p. 248.
22. *St. Pauls Parish*, p. 258.
23. A. M. Poindexter, letter to Hon. J. F. H. Claiborne, 4 Apr 1860.
24. John B. Poindexter, *A Poindexter History*, (unpublished) p. 1.
25. Bruce Catton, *The Centennial History of the Civil War*, (Doubleday, New York, 1965) p. 445.

Ed Poindexter
6284 Stofer Road
Chelsea, Michigan 48118

Phone: 734-433-9648
Fax: 734-433-9649
Email: epoindex@tm.net