

Old Town Cemetery
October 5-6, 2024
Battle Family Reunion



BATTLE HISTORY The earliest record of Battles was in Yorkshire England

In England- In 1650, John and Sarah Battle with their 2 children plus several other neighboring families moved from the English district of Yorkshire to Ireland which at that time, was under English control. It was because John Battle was “disgusted by ecclesiastical edicts”. It is unstated to whom this “disgust” was directed but



most likely, it was Cromwell who gained control of Parliament and executed Charles I the year before; Cromwell then defeated the Royalists still loyal to the monarchy. Following Charles I’s execution, Cromwell invaded and quickly conquered Ireland, compensating his soldiers by granting them Irish land grants.

After 2 years in Ireland and experiencing “the same offensive edicts”, these families set sail for Virginia, arriving in 1654. There is no mention of John Battle’s religion; as with most English, he probably was an Anglican. Few other specifics were given about John’s life, although records show that he was in “good circumstances” (i.e., a man of some means).

In Virginia (Nansemond County)

In 1654, the ship landed near the village of Norfolk and the family settled nearby on the southeastern tip of Virginia in Nansemond County on the west branch of the Nansemond River. Except for the occasional Indian village, the land was continuous forest. John Battle had acquired a King’s Patent for 1,000 acres. Battle and the other families settled into farming, but John continued to expand his landholdings, moving his family about 50 miles south, settling on the banks of the Pasquotank River near what is now Elizabeth City (North Carolina). William, John’s son, was born there.

When William was only eight, John died. William was returned to Nansemond County under protection of a guardian. He settled into farming on a tract near his father’s original land and married Elizabeth Hunter. William did not have the same adventurous spirit as his father, remaining there for the balance of his life. William and Elizabeth had five children: Elisha, our direct ancestor, being the middle child and youngest son.

NOTE: The Battle genealogy from the original Battle book (1930) gives strong circumstantial evidence that a generation is missing between John Battle and William Battle. If true, the account on the preceding page of John’s move to the Pasquotank region is not correct.

The reasoning:

- In an earlier account, John is the earliest Battle mentioned (mid-17th century in England) and details about his life are brief.
- Based on records, John was 48 when his 1st child, William was born (1682). Not impossible but fathering a first child that late in 17th century colonial America was unusual.
- More salient, if John and his wife (Elizabeth) were contemporaries, she would have been beyond childbearing age when William was born.
- In 1663 John was granted 640 acres in the Pasquotank region of NC; it is believed that John wanted this land for a son.
- Based on the above, the reason given for John’s move to Pasquotank is weak. Before sailing to America, John had been granted 1,000 and later 250 acres in Nansemond County; according to

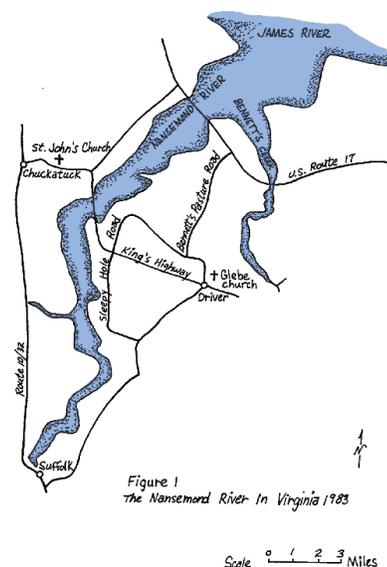


Figure 1
The Nansemond River In Virginia 1783

Scale 0 1 2 3 Miles

accounts, he moved 50 miles further south to the Pasquotank region because of an “adventurous spirit”.

Here is an alternate version of this piece of early Battle history:

- John remained in Nansemond and had at least one child (“X Battle”).
- John secured a land grant of 640 acres (1663) in Pasquotank for his son, “X Battle” to farm there;
- While In Pasquotank, “X Battle” had at least one child, a son William (1682).
- John died in 1690, and “X Battle” inherited his father’s land in Nansemond County.
- “X Battle” and his family (including William) returned to Nansemond to run the larger farm.

What is known:

- After returning to Nansemond, William settled into farming and at the time, lived a relatively long life (died in 1749 at age 67).
- William Battle had 5 children, the middle child was Elisha, his youngest son.
- In 1747, Elisha moved his young family to Edgecombe County.
- It is highly unlikely that any new information will be found, so this will probably remain a Battle family mystery!

In North Carolina (Edgecombe County)

Elisha Battle- in 1741, when Elisha was 18, he married Elizabeth Sumner. After having two children, in 1747, Elisha and his pregnant wife moved over 100 miles southwest from Nansemond County to Edgecombe County in what is now North Carolina. By then, the Tuscarora Indians had been driven from the area. The land was fertile, and he became a successful farmer, purchasing land on both side of the Tar River, raising crops and livestock. Elisha had a full life with many accomplishments.

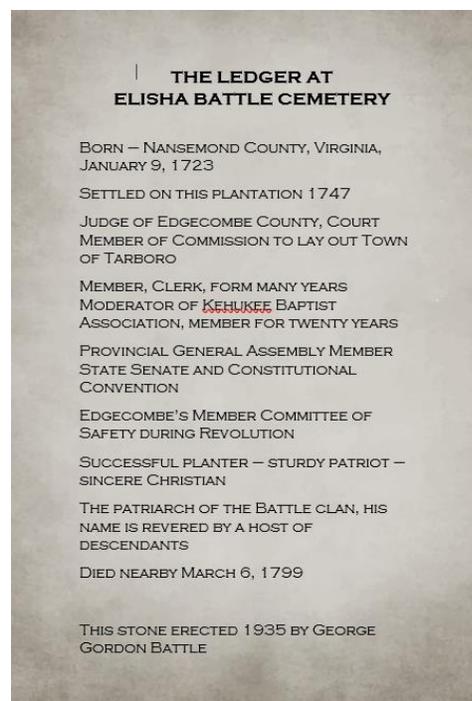
These are recorded on a granite ledger, given to the family in 1935 by Elisha’s 3X grandson, George Gordon Battle (1868-1949). The ledger was moved in 2024 from the Elisha Battle Cemetery (EBC) to the Old Town Cemetery (OTC).

There is no portrait of Elisha but descriptions by his grandson, Jeremiah, give a sense of the man:

- “Industrious and economical”
- “A strictly religious man”
- “Free to reprove or censure sin or imprudence”
- “No orator”
- “Very little education, but preserved order in his public and private business”
- “Never embarrassed with debts or business”
- “A free and bold spirit”

Although considered prudish and straightlaced by today’s standards, Elisha was a man of remarkable character and accomplishments. Three generations separate Elisha from his great grandson George Gordon Battle but there are striking similarities in both temperament and accomplishments (*DNA?*).

Jacob Battle - Elisha and Elizabeth had 8 children, all reached maturity which was a remarkable feat in colonial America. Jacob Battle (1754—1814) was Elisha’s 6th child and our direct ancestor. Although Jacob had 3 older brothers, it is believed that they had left the area resulting in Jacob inheriting the land. He married a widow Penelope Edwards and built a family house about ½ mile east of Elisha’s, on a deserted Indian village,



called Old Town. In 1980 this house was restored and is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Jacob and Penelope had 4 children, the oldest being James Smith Battle (1786-1840), our direct ancestor and pater of the Battles that are buried at Old Town Cemetery.

Like Elisha, there is no portrait of Jacob but again, a description of the man by his great nephew Jeremiah:

- “early member of the Baptist Church and led a consistent Christian life”
- “great industry in the transaction of business”
- extremely liberal in his views” (*not sure how much the definition of liberal has changed since 1820*).
- “rather under the size of Battles generally but possessed health and good constitution so that he could take much exercise”
- natural suavity of his manner was so striking that he performed all his duties without suspicion or wrongdoing”.

In comparing father and son from these brief descriptions, Elisha was a man of many accomplishments but formal and plainspoken while Jacob who didn't have Elisha's resumé, was more polished and relaxed. Both devoted themselves to farming and a love of the land.

Appendix A

Satellite Image of Old Town Cemetery

Note: The remains from the Elisha Battle Cemetery have been reinterred inside the yellow line (NW corner) of Old Town Cemetery.



Appendix C

Interment Process

Disinterment from Elisha Battle Cemetery- Reinterment to Old Town Cemetery

Introduction

In the pre-industrial South, cemeteries adjacent to family farms were common gathering places for reunions and other family events for both white and black families. During the post WW II period, these family cemeteries were lost at a rapid rate to land developers with little effort to preserve them; others had become over-grown and fallen into neglect. To avoid losing this piece of history, NC established a State Burial Association Commissioner. For family cemeteries, regulations required that the landowner receive permission from the local governing body before any development.

The Battles were fortunate that 75 years ago a cousin established a trust to maintain the 2 family cemeteries. Thanks to the income from the trust plus periodic gifts from family members as well as an engaged team of Battle cousins, the family cemeteries have been well maintained.

Following our 2012 Battle family reunion, the cemetery team (George Eatman, Gordon Folger and trustees Richard Battle & Stephen Battle) looked into the possibility of consolidating our 2 cemeteries; for various reasons, the team decided not to proceed. In 2021, the cemetery team (with Battle cousin Frank Wilkinson joining the team) revisited the question. An updated analysis was made and in early 2022, the 2 trustees (Richard & Stephen Battle) decided to proceed.

Disinterment from Elisha Battle Cemetery (EBC)

EBC was established in the latter part of the 18th century after Elisha emigrated from VA to Edgecombe County. His grandson James Smith Battle established the 2nd family cemetery, Old Town Cemetery (OTC) about ½ mile east of EBC with gravesites dating from the 1840's. OTC is still active while EBC is not. The proposed plan was to remove (disinter) the remains from EBC and move (reinter) them to OTC.

The Cemetery team met at the 2 cemeteries in May 2022, to decide on how best to proceed. Also, present was Steve Ward, who would handle the interment process and Gary Gurganus, who does the planting at OTC and advise the cemetery team on best spot to reinter at OTC.

Since there were no remaining markers at EBC, the question became: how many gravesites? There was a 1995 study done by John Clauser, a consulting NC archaeologist that examined ground depressions at EBC; this study concluded 14 probable gravesites. George Eatman who is our family genealogist looked at this from standpoint of family ancestry and felt there should be fewer.

To get better information, trustees engaged Richard Grubb & Associates, a nationwide consulting firm. Its principal business is working with real estate developers in states that require a search for gravesites before any development can begin. Grubb uses ground penetrating radar (GPR) a non-invasive analysis in the probable cemetery area, looking for anomalies which could be gravesites. On April 2022, Grubb made a GPR analysis at EBC. After the site visit, Grubb did its number crunching analysis producing a report; it concludes there are 7 probable gravesites. This supported Cousin George Eatman's view. For those who like to get into the weeds, the Grubb report is on the Battle family website.

The second hurdle was obtaining government permission to disinter. It was incorrectly assumed permission was needed from Edgecombe County, where EBC is located. Since Rocky Mount has a wastewater treatment plant near EBC, Rocky Mount's authority (through its Planning Commission) includes the EBC area even though 5 mile east of the city. After posting the required public notice in the local paper, the Rocky Mount City Council met in June 2022, and gave permission to disinter. In November 2022, George met with Steve Ward, the cemetery's maintenance person at EBC. Steve using his backhoe, began the disinterment process.



Skull & bones unearthed from a gravesite during the disinterment process (November 15, 2023)

Within the EBC area there is a large oak with an extensive root system; this could have resulted in the Grubb analysis giving false positives. Recognizing this, Steve took this into consideration and also found 7 probable gravesites: this confirmed Grubb's analysis as well as George's opinion.

Reinterment to Old Town Cemetery (OTC)

It was decided that the reinterment area should be the NW corner of OTC.

On March 31, 2023 George Eatman met with Steve Ward and Gary Gurganus, in charge of plantings met at OTC; Steve began the reinterment process.

Gary Gurganus & Steve Ward at Old Town Cemetery following reinterment (March 31, 2023)

