

# The Ball Family of the Potomac 1654-2004

By Doris LeClerc Ball and George L. Ball. Stevenson's Genealogy Center, Provo, Utah. 20005. 587 pp. \$79.95 plus \$8.95 shipping and handling from George L. Ball, 15639 Royal Lythan St., San Diego, CA 92128-4473.

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*Reviewed by Martha Beggs Orth*

An intriguing mystery for genealogists working on the Ball family, and particularly for those of us associated with the Ball-Sellers House in Arlington, Virginia, has long been the question: "Who was the father of John Ball of Stafford?" Or, in other words, what was the origin of this Ball family before 1695, the year John Ball of Stafford patented land in this area of Virginia? No one has yet been able to determine his origin. Our interest in this endeavor is his son, "our" John Ball, who in 1750 built the house still standing in Arlington, Virginia, and owned by the Arlington Historical Society. A further interest, of course, is to trace descendants of our John and Elizabeth's five daughters.

Over the years we have worked to learn more about this family. Our sources have included land, court, and county records of the period, as well as Ball family genealogies. All research has stopped at John Ball of Stafford, who died in 1722 leaving a will naming his wife Winifred, his sons James, John, Moses, and George, and daughters Mary, Dinah, Martha, and Ann.

The authors of this major new work have done extensive research on the family of John Ball of Stafford. Co-author George is the son of Bonnie Ball, who, with James E. Ball and Estelle Ball Brady, published *The Balls of Fairfax and Stafford in Virginia* some years ago.

The stated purpose of the authors in their introduction is four-fold:

- 1) To document more completely the beginnings of the Ball family of Stafford County, Virginia, and to attempt to utilize this information to identify an immigrant ancestor.
- 2) To add to present knowledge about the first six generations of this family.
- 3) To include present knowledge of the various branches of the family in one place.
- 4) To correct erroneous information and interpretations in existing Ball family genealogical records.

The fascinating chapter for us is the one in which they present their theory on the possible father of John Ball of Stafford. They are careful to point out that it is not proven, but they set forth some strong arguments in favor of their position. This appears to be the most logical of any of the many theories that have been offered by other Ball researchers.

They believe the father of John Ball of Stafford to be a James Ball who was transported to Virginia by John Drayton in 1654. Drayton owned 2000 acres in Westmoreland County (which became Stafford County in 1664, Prince William County in 1730, and Fairfax County in 1742). Drayton's land was on Mason's Neck, a peninsula in the Potomac River at the mouth of the Occoquan River.

The authors arrived at their position by the following steps:

- 1) They determined John Ball of Stafford to have been born between 1660 and 1674, based on the fact that he owned land in 1695 and had to be at least 21 years old at that time. He had his last child in 1720, so they assumed his birth to have been not before 1660 and no later than 1674.
- 2) They found no recorded John Ball to have immigrated to Virginia who would fit that precise time element.
- 3) They believe John Ball of Stafford followed the prevailing naming custom of the time, which was to name one's eldest son for the paternal grandfather. Thus, since the eldest son of John Ball of Stafford was named James, they believe John Ball's father was named James. Three of the sons of John Ball of Stafford seem to have followed the same custom: They all named their eldest sons John—for the paternal grandfather. John's 4<sup>th</sup> son (our John) did not have sons.
- 4) They found only one colonist named James Ball who immigrated to Virginia in the 1600's—the one listed above who came in 1654. This would be about the right time in connection with their theory #1 for this James to have become the father of John of Stafford.
- 5) The place to which this James came was another deciding factor. The land that John Ball of Stafford later patented for himself was only nine miles from the Drayton land to which James Ball had come.

These factors convinced Doris and George Ball that the immigrant ancestor of the Ball family of the Potomac area was James Ball who immigrated to Virginia in 1654 from England.

They reviewed other theories about the father of John Ball of Stafford:

- 1) A number of researchers have tagged a Richard Ball of Norfolk County, brother of William, George Washington's great

grandfather, as the father. But respected genealogists, both in New England and in Virginia, do not hold with this theory.

2) Charles Stetson, writing in the 1930s, suggested the father might have been Alling Ball of New Haven, Connecticut, and that John might have migrated down through New Jersey.

3) Many people try to connect these Balls to George Washington through his mother, Mary Ball Washington. The authors admit there are some points to be made for this position, even though it has not been proven to be valid:

a) The land of Moses Ball, a son of John Ball of Stafford, bordered George Washington's land, and the land of our John, also a son, was very close to Washington's.

b) George Washington several times had Moses Ball survey with him. He also mentions Moses four times in his diaries and refers to him as cousin. Historians have noted that George Washington referred to anyone named Ball as cousin, including his soldiers.

c) Moses Ball borrowed money from George Washington, and in his will made provision to repay this debt.

Interesting information introduced in this publication is the fact of DNA testing. The authors report that documented descendants of William Ball of Lancaster (George Washington's ancestor) and descendants of three of the sons of John Ball of Stafford submitted to DNA testing. It was proven through this testing that these two families are unrelated.

A good bit of discussion is given to the authors' belief that these Balls were Catholic. This is a new theory never encountered before. They base their assertions on these factors:

1) John Ball of Stafford married Winifred Williams, daughter of William Williams, a Catholic from Maryland. He had close documented connections with well-known Catholics both in Maryland and Virginia: the Boarmans and the Brents.

2) John of Stafford bought land from Robert Brent, executor of Nicolas Brent of Virginia.

3) No member of the family of John Ball of Stafford is listed in Anglican Parish records.

4) A member of James Ball's (son of John Ball of Stafford) family is listed much later (1800s) in Catholic records of Holy Trinity Church in Georgetown.

However, John Ball of Stafford, in his will of 1722, stated that he was "of Stafford County and Overwharton Parish," an Anglican Parish. And John of

Stafford's son, Moses, and his family, became Church of England. This religious angle is an interesting theory—one that suggests further study and research.

The authors devote a full chapter to each of the sons of John Ball of Stafford: 65 pages to James Ball, 152 pages to George Ball, a whopping 206 pages to Moses Ball, and a paltry 11 to “our” John Ball. This convinced us that we have not totally failed in our research on the family of our John Ball, who had five daughters. Other researchers besides us have not been able to trace the descendants of the daughters of the Ball-Sellers House. Records on “the girls” remain elusive.

This book is a great addition to the field of Ball family genealogy. The goals of the authors seem to have been attained: a new theory on the father of John Ball of Stafford has been thrown open for research and debate. Much has been added to previous findings on the family and pulled together into one publication. Corrections have been made to previous published genealogies. Documentation of sources is extensive, leading to new sources for research.