The following five colonial history posts are put together from a number of sources including published historical works,internetsites, and from the research of our contributors Dr. RhodesHolliman, Maxine Wright, Glenda Norris, RonHolliman, the late WaltHollimanand other family members who came before them. Those who have additional information or ideas for genealogy posts, please let us hear from you. Only by researching, critiquing, and listening to one other can our understanding of the past increase.

**"From where did we come" is one of the oldest questions we humans ask. For Hollimans, our American experience began in Jamestown, Virginia where English America was founded by some adventurous colonialists from London in 1607. In this post we begin an on-going series about the first decades of our family in American.**

By: Glenn N. Holliman

The map right identifiesSmithfield,Virginia, where ChristopherHolliman, Sr. settled by 1661. Jamestown is not marked but is just south ofWilliamsburg, where one can catcha ferry to Isle of Wight County on the south sideof the James River.

By any measure, the life of **Christopher Holliman, Sr**. (ca. 1630 - 1691) was one of adventure and economic success. We know he sailed over on a ship that was sponsored by John Coxe of London. Christopher stepped onto American soil in Jamestown, Virginia on May 22, 165o. He was only 19 or 20 years of age when he began his adventure in the "new world."

Christopher Sr.'s first wife was named **Anne**, last name unknown, and of that union, six children grew to maturity. Those of us reading this are descended from their eldest, **Christopher, Jr**. (You can review the "lineage" page at the top of this blog to refresh your memory.)

There is no other record of Christopher Sr. until 1661, when a deed states that he purchased land near what is now Smithfield, Virginia, across from Jamestown on the south side of the James River. He farmed several hundred acres along Cypress Creek, a tributary of the Pagan, which itself runs into the James River. From this body of water, Christopher, Sr. easily loaded hogsheads of tobacco onto ships which would transport his cash crop to England. He purchased more land along Cypress Swamp in 1668.

He did well economically because in 1684, now in his 50s, he patented a large amount of land from the Royal Governor between the Mill Swamp and the Blackwater River. The Blackwater River is the western boarder of Isle of Wight County. The plantation, as he styled it in his will, was large - 1,020 acres, a large farm for the time and place. When he died in 1691, his will divided the land among his children and his second wife, **Mary Gray Holliman**.

Where is the exact location of the original site? The deeds, dependent upon landmarks now gone, except for the Swamp and Blackwater River, are unclear. A family friend and professional geographer who also traces his family back to Isle of Wight County, Paul Fly, suggested I look along the border of Surry and Southampton Counties.

In March 2010 my wife, Barb, our oldest granddaughter, Holly, age 4 1/2, and I took a day trip from Richmond, Virginia down Highway 460 past Wakefield, Virginia to the hamlet of Ivor. There we turned east on Proctor Bridge Road, crossed the Blackwater River and made some interesting 'discoveries' that I will share with you next week!


TheBlackwaterRiver (pictured right) flows southward into North Carolina. It is deep and wide enough for boats to carry tobacco casts to ships bound for England. Tobacco was the cash crop of Virginia and was the mainstay of its colonial economy. In his 1691 will, ChristopherHollimanSr. records that he had tobacco barns, confirming tobacco too was his financial foundation.

 **In Search of Christopher Holliman Sr.'s 17th Century Virginia Plantation**

by Glenn N. Holliman

This is the second post of an on-going series of our ancestors.Last March, my wife, Barb, and granddaughter, Holly and I crossed the Blackwater River, the border between Southampton and Isle of Wright Counties, Virginia in search of Christopher Holliman Sr.'s plantation. Our little adventure continues....

We passed picked cotton fields and peanut storage units. Our noses told us that a pig farm, probably the home of future Smithfield Hams, was nearby. After passing Sycamore Corner, we were on Mill Swamp Road. A mile later we saw a decrepit sign which read: Holleman House.

Was this it, the remnant of Christopher Sr.'s 17th century plantation? Holliman has been spelled many ways - Holyman, Holleman or Holloman. No one was at home, so we took photographs and left a note. We noticed a family cemetery. The oldest visible stone is of Edward Adolphus Holleman, young son of Wilson and Ann Holleman, b 1810 - d 1819.

We did not expect to discover Christopher's grave. In the 17th, and most of the 18th century, there were no gravestones in the Tidewater area, as they were expensive items at the time. My guess is that his bones rest on this, or an adjacent, property.

Nor did we expect to discover a log cabin that housed the first Hollimans. No cabins from the 1600s survive in the Tidewater region. They burned easily and deteriorated rapidly without paint or protective coatings. It was after 1700 that the red brick plantation homes along the James River were constructed.

Constructed in 1830, this is the Holleman House, located on Mill Swamp Road, Isle of Wight Country, Virginia. This historic Federal period house, with over-sized front doors and saw- tooth cornices, is located on the site of Christopher Holliman, Sr.'s 1,020 acre plantation.
To our amazement, when we visited the Isle of Wight County Museum later that day, we discovered an 1983 book by Helen Haverty King entitled Historic Isle of Wight. The 200 page volume pictures numerous antebellum homes in the county, one being the Holleman home!

The book is available at [The Isle of Wight County Museum](http://visitsmithfieldisleofwight.com/) ($35). On the back cover is an illustrated map showing the location of the Holleman house and many others. 

In this volume, one will find confirmation that in 1684 Christopher Holliman, Sr. completed his purchase of 1,020 acres in a corner of Isle of Wight County.

Bordering the family's property were the Atkinsons (whose sons married two of Christopher Sr's. daughters) and the Gwaltneys (who also married future Hollimans). The Gwaltneys became retail sellers of peanuts and hams, and were the founders of the famous Smithfield Ham company. They did well financially, and several of their 19th century mansions are open to visitors in downtown Smithfield today.

Next week, we will continue with our adventure to Colonial Virginia and further explore the history of the Holleman House.

**Confirming the Family Tree**

by Glenn N. Holliman

For the past several weeks I have been writing about a trip I took with my wife, and granddaughter, to Isle of Wight County, Virginia. In the last blog we posted a [photograph of the Holleman House](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_onotc7qbTJk/S7IQMh-FTAI/AAAAAAAAAHs/uKEyIpRwgyA/s320/Holleman%2BHouse.jpg) which was constructed by a distant cousin, Wilson Holleman (1803-1873), a son of Josiah Holleman (1771-1848), who was a son of Jesse Holliman and a veteran of the American Revolution, who was a son of John Holliman, who was a son of Christopher Holliman, Jr., the son of Christopher Holliman, Sr., who patented the land in 1684. Christopher Sr. is my four-year-old granddaughter's 10th great grandfather.

Below is a photo of Wilson Holleman's headstone in the family cemetery located by the main house.



According to current information on our family tree, all in this family cemetery are relatives of Christopher Holliman, Sr., d 1691.

Pictured below is the view from Highway 621, Mill Swamp Road looking back toward the Holleman House on the left, and an older dependency building on the right. The soil is sandy and the ground is flat in the Virginia Tidewater region.

Isle of Wight County is only 59 feet above sea level at its highest point. The fertility of the soil was maintained in the 19th century with marl, a local mineral, which helped reclaim the vitality of the soil that was leached by tobacco farming.

Perhaps, as with many early Virginians, the first Holliman generation tilled only a small portion of land for the cash crop tobacco, and utilized the rest for corn, vegetables, wood fuel and range for hogs, poultry and cattle.

The historian, Edmund S. Morgan, reports that in the 1600s and 1700s Virginia, one laborer could handle at most 3 acres of tobacco and three acres of corn. This was the monetary crop and food source for humans, horses and cattle alike. Of course, wild game, still in abundance in the early colonial days, supplemented diets.

As one author of Virginia history notes, “Tobacco chews through soil fertility with ferocity possessed of few other crops. In the absence of fertilizer, it can only be grown on virgin land for four seasons maximum.” Perhaps this first Christopher tilled his acres with the help of children for several years and then moved on to another piece of his land. Future Holliman families would do the same, and as their land was exhausted, they would move south and west into the Deep South, at least until the Civil War and Reconstruction.

***Next week we examine the Mill Swamp Cemetery, adjacent to the 1684 plantation, that is the final resting place of 19th and 20th Century cousins.***

**Mill Swamp and the Church**

by Glenn N. Holliman

For the past three weeks, I have described a journey to our family roots in Isle of Wight County, Virginia. Just down the road from theHollemanHouse is a church that has become part of the family story.

The Mill Swamp Baptist Church, Isle of Wight Co., Virginia has been rebuilt many times in nearly 300 years of existence. The church and cemetery are adjacent to land owned by theHolleman'sandGwaltney's. According to cousin Jeanette Holiman Stewart, from 1798 to 1801 JesseHolleman, Sr. was joint minister of the church with JohnGwaltney. Later Jesse Sr., a direct descendant of ChristopherHolliman, Sr.pastoredthe church alone from 1819-1820 when he was 83 years of age.
The first Hollimans were Anglicans, members of the Church of England. Until the American Revolution, there was only one official church in Virginia, and that was the Anglican or as now styled, the Episcopal Church. Our Virginia ancestors did not come to the New World for religious freedom. They came to better themselves economically, and Christopher Holliman, Sr. succeeded.

There were few Episcopal parishes in colonial days. Only one or two in each shire (as the first Virginia counties were called), and many persons felt something missing spiritually in their lives. Into that religious void came the Baptist Church, which gradually spread out of New England into the Middle Atlantic and Southern colonies by the early 1700s. Presbyterians and Methodists soon followed.

Our cousins and contributors, RonHollimanand Maxine Wright, have pointed out that oneHolliman, Ezekiel of Rhode Island, was a founder of the American Baptist Church. EzekielHolliman, from the same part of England as ChristopherHolliman, Sr., baptised Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island and the Baptist Church in America! More on this probable distant cousin in later posts.

One of the first Baptist churches established in southeast Virginia was located adjacent to Holliman and Gwaltney land. The Mill Swamp Baptist Church, founded 1719, was named after the marshy ground and a stream that ran nearby. This church's location proved perfect for baptisms and became the mother church of many others in the Virginia tidewater region.In the adjacent cemetery are numerous graves of 19th and 20th century Hollemans plus Cofers, Gwaltneys and Atkinsons, all who intermarried in the Holliman family. Photo by BarbaraHollimanof Glenn, 2010. A list of those buried in Mill Swamp Baptist Church Cemetery can be found at <http://www.iwchs.com/>

Yes, there truly is a Mill Swamp near theBlackwaterRiver as noted on the 1684 patent for ChristopherHolliman, Sr.



**Next week we begin to examine the cash crop, tobacco, which was grown by theHollimanfamily in the Colonial Era.**