

Chapter XIX: Neal

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We now reach the *pièce de résistance* of this entire family history: the identity and origins of Edward Neal, who married Matthew McCammon's daughter, Jane. Until recently we knew almost nothing for certain about this man's early years and ancestry. Before our first confirmed sighting of Edward Neal (as we have seen in the previous chapter, a marriage bond in Jessamine County, Kentucky, in 1802), there seems to be no earlier reference to him in any document. The marriage bond suggests that he could have just reached maturity by the late 1790s, which might explain why we have no earlier documentation for Edward Neal. Other than guesswork about his place of birth and his parents and the family lore we have reviewed in that chapter, though, until recently we were as stymied as my grandfather had been in 1956 when he first got interested in delineating our Neal family's history.¹

Indeed, we know hardly anything more about Edward Neal's presence in Kentucky after 1802, either. The 1800 census for Kentucky was among those destroyed when British troops burned the U.S. Capitol Building during the War of 1812, and Edward is not listed in any early Kentucky tax records. Our only evidence that he remained in Kentucky after

¹ There were a surprising number of Kentucky Neals who *could* have been Edward Neal's father. The Virginia tax rolls for 1787, for instance (which include some areas that would later become part of Kentucky), list more than fifty men with the name Neal – however it is spelled. Several of them bore the first names of Thomas or William or Edward, the most likely given names of our Edward Neal's father. The first Neal I have observed being present in Kentucky was a Barnet Neal. He was one of eighty-eight persons, mostly from Harrodsburg, who had bought land from the Transylvania Land Company. He signed a petition in 1776 protesting the actions of the company and asking Virginia to absorb Transylvania.

1802 is the 1810 census, which as we have seen shows him in Shelby County (created out of a portion of Jefferson County). Although there are a good number of Neals in Kentucky during those years, no contemporary evidence links Edward to any one of them. So where did Edward Neal come from, and who was his father?

This mystery finally began to unravel in 1998, when two Neal family history researchers published a book on their ancestor, an Edward Neel (as he spelled it), who lived in a place called Pilot Knob in Logan County, Kentucky.² After this man died, sometime before 1815 the book says, his son, Benjamin, purchased portions of his father's estate from the other heirs and their spouses. The book cites a document, not clearly identified but probably a deed, that names those other heirs. Among the seven couples listed in this document as the older Edward's heirs – five Neel males and two Neel females and their spouses – were “Edward Neale and wife Jenny of Knox County, Indiana.” (In 1815, Knox County still included the area that would become Sullivan County two years later.) The book related some information about this Edward Neale of Indiana and his descendants. Some of that information was correct and some of it was not, but there was no mistaking the fact that a plausible link could be made between the man who was our William Neal's father and this Edward Neel of Pilot Knob in Logan County, Kentucky.

² Judging from a contemporary family Bible referred to in the book about him, It was about the time of Edward Neal's move to Kentucky, that these O'Neals began to call themselves *Neals* (however they spelled the name): in this Bible, the letter “O” in the O'Neal names has evidently been erased. I have not seen this Bible myself.

I had seen an earlier reference to this document, which I had discounted for several reasons. First, our branch of the Neal family had no known connection to Logan County, which is located along the Tennessee border in the southwest part of the state quite a distance from the Bluegrass region where our own Kentucky Neals had apparently resided during the early 1800s, before moving on to Indiana. In most instances, such a pronounced disconnect means no family relationship exists. More importantly, the document identifies the heir living in Indiana as *Edward* Neal rather than as *Thomas Edward* Neal, the name by which my grandfather and other researchers of our Neal line knew William's father. These Logan County Neals appeared to be members of some other Neal family, so I put the reference in a file where I keep a lot of quasi-useful information I have run across during my research in the hope that this information might lead somewhere, someday. This single piece of evidence was all we had to suggest that these two Neal men could have been related: in and of itself, it was not conclusive proof that they were father and son, or even that they were members of the same larger Neal line.

But the existence of this document, and other things we learned about Edward Neel of Logan County after this book was published, did encourage descendants of both Edward Neals (the supposed father and son) to undergo DNA testing during early 2003; I submitted a DNA sample myself in 2010. All these tests showed a very close DNA match between these groups of Neal descendants, including myself, establishing without

a doubt that our Edward Neal of Sullivan County, Indiana, was almost certainly the son of **EDWARD NEAL** of Pilot Knob in Logan County, Kentucky.³ These results obliged us to review and evaluate the historical evidence about our own Neal line differently than we once did. In this instance, the hope that a possible lead would open the door to a long-sought-after solution to an important mystery was realized.

To be sure, as published the book in question had some clearly incorrect or suspect information that gives us pause, although to their credit the authors have revised some of their opinions, withdrawn certain conclusions, and corrected many of the book's errors and inconsistencies since they have come into contact with the descendants of Edward Neal of Sullivan County, including myself. Among the initial mistakes that have been corrected are the identification of the wife of the younger Edward Neal (the authors thought she was Jane Wynn rather than our Jane McCammon) and the listing of three earlier children for Edward and Jane that are unknown to researchers familiar with this couple.⁴ The book also estimated that Edward Neal of Pilot Knob was born about 1750

³ It remains possible, although unlikely, that both men named Edward Neal were themselves descendants of a common ancestor rather than father and son, but the other evidence cited in this chapter argues for a father-son relationship. For the sake of clarity, this chapter will, as needed, distinguish between the two men by calling the older one "Edward Neal of Pilot Knob" and the younger one "Edward Neal of Sullivan County." Although these men spelled their family's name in various ways, for the sake of consistency both men will generally be referred to as Edward *Neal*.

⁴ Two of those putative earlier children – all three of whom grew to adulthood – bore names virtually the same as two offspring we know our Edward and Jane later did have, which seems unlikely. Even more significantly, none of the three earlier children of the Edward Neal of Pilot Knob were in the household of the Edward Neal of Sullivan County on the censuses in 1810 or in 1820. It is difficult to imagine the Edward Neal of Pilot Knob having had a first family totally unaware of his later second one and vice versa. As it turns out, there is no firm evidence linking these three other children to the younger Edward Neal, and the authors of the book on Edward Neal of Pilot Knob now concede that they may well have been children of Edward's sibling instead.

and his son Edward about 1763, which is very doubtful, but the authors subsequently revised their estimate for the birth of the earlier Edward to the more plausible period of 1740 to 1745.

For me at least, the last remaining stumbling block to accepting Edward Neal of Pilot Knob as the father of Edward Neal of Sullivan County was the fact that the latter man was remembered within our family as Thomas Edward Neal, even if, as we have already seen, contemporary documents never referred to him with that first given name.⁵ How could this be? Might he have chosen to add “Thomas” to his original name of Edward, either because he liked it or wanted to honor someone – perhaps a relative or a friend named Thomas? Was Thomas a “phantom” name given to him at birth that he used only within the family? Or, did someone simply remember Edward’s name incorrectly? In my opinion, the last explanation makes the most sense, as some additional digging revealed that all of those who referred to William Neal’s father as Thomas Edward Neal had relied upon the same source. This source was one of our Edward’s daughters, born in 1828, who evidently recorded his name in error – or whose account was misread by someone else.⁶ A dubious sole source with information that is found nowhere else but in family lore must give way to unanimous documentary evidence – and the conclusive

⁵ In addition, it seemed noteworthy that our William Neal named his first son Thomas, a choice of names that often (though not always) indicates the name of the boy’s paternal grandfather.

⁶ It may be significant that this daughter’s next-oldest sibling was Thomas Neal. Born in 1824, this Thomas died in 1841, just a few years before his father did. Perhaps this is how the confusion of given names arose in her mind.

DNA findings. Our Edward Neal of Sullivan County, Indiana, we can now be quite sure, was the son of Edward Neal of Pilot Knob in Logan County, Kentucky.

Having resolved our questions about the name and parentage of Edward Neal of Sullivan County, let us consider what we know about his father. We believe this elder Edward Neal arrived in the new (1792) Logan County, which was just opening to settlement, not long before late 1798: on November 21 in that year, Edward had surveyed and was awarded 125 acres of “second-rate” land on Terrapin (or Tarpin) Creek on the south side of Pilot Knob.⁷ According to one of this Edward’s other sons, these Neals came to Kentucky from South Carolina and first lived in an “upper part” of Kentucky (where we can assume our Edward lived, somewhere near the McCammons, before his marriage in 1802). Based on evidence we will examine in this chapter, we can estimate the move of the South Carolina Neals to northern Kentucky took place between 1795 and 1797. A search of nearly a dozen likely counties in that part of Kentucky has not turned up any documentary evidence of the presence of *either* Edward Neal in central and northern Kentucky, though, so the elder Edward Neal’s stay there was evidently brief before he obtained the grant in Logan County in 1798 and moved to his new property at Pilot

⁷ The area including Pilot Knob is now part of Simpson County, Kentucky. Terrapin Creek is now called Spring Creek, and Edward Neal’s property lies on the upper reaches of one branch of it. (James Bowie of Alamo fame was born on Terrapin Creek in 1796, about the time Edward Neal arrived there. The Bowie family, which owned a mill on Terrapin Creek, had come to southern Kentucky from South Carolina in 1793 after a sojourn in northern Tennessee.) The 1797 act that authorized Edward to receive the land in Logan County was meant to encourage settlement on the south side of the Green River. Neal’s “second-rate” land (a tax-assessor’s valuation of it) would have cost him \$50. See the USGS map for Auburn/Kentucky for the location of his property near Pilot Knob and slides 12945-50 (2008) for views of Edward Neal’s land there.

Knob. Does this information do anything to enlighten us about the physical movements of the younger Edward Neal?

Matthew McCammon and his family, including the daughter our Edward Neal would marry in 1802, had left South Carolina for Kentucky by the mid-1780s. This was a full decade or more before the elder Edward and most of his sons seem to have made the same journey, which would eventually lead them to a part of Kentucky some distance south and west of the more mature and populous part of Kentucky where we first find our younger Edward Neal. Assuming the Neal clan had remained more or less together in “upper Kentucky,” and that our Edward was among them, it seems noteworthy that he stayed there when the other Neals relocated to Logan County, and that he would then move on to Indiana instead of heading for that Kentucky county too.

Should we suppose that our Edward Neal stayed in upper Kentucky because of his romantic interest in Jane McCammon, whom Edward – evidently in his late teen years or early twenties in 1797 – did not want to risk losing to another suitor? (This possibility is also intriguing because, as we shall see later in this chapter, the Neal and McCammon families might have known one another previously in South Carolina.) Or, did Edward remain in upper Kentucky for other reasons when his father and brothers went off to Logan County about 1798 and only sometime later met and wooed Jane? These are questions we cannot answer with the present evidence.

Edward Neal of Pilot Knob is on the Logan County tax rolls first in 1799 (there is no tax list for 1798) and then every year thereafter through 1802. In most of these years he is shown as own 122 acres – now described as “third rate” land – near the Red River in the tax district of Commissioner Chatham Ewing. (The Red River has several branches; most of the river remains in Logan County today, but Edward’s land was in the portion of that county that would become the new Simpson County in 1819.) He had four horses in 1799 and five horses in years 1800 through 1802. We have no further information about Edward and his life in Logan County, and unfortunately the 1800 census for Kentucky is lost.

From the 1803 tax list, we learn that Edward’s wife was a woman named **SARAH**. Assuming he had never remarried, it was this woman, therefore, who was the mother of our Edward Neal of Sullivan County. In 1803, it is Sarah who is shown on the Logan County tax list as the head of the Neal household – which had no adult males in it – at this same location. This suggests that her husband Edward had died after the 1802 tax list was prepared. There is no tax data for 1804, but in 1805 this same property is listed under the name of Moses Neal, a known son of Edward and Sarah. It is possible, therefore, that Sarah did not survive her husband by more than a year or so, but because these tax lists did not record the presence of any females unless they were heads of households we cannot be sure of this: Sarah could have lived (presumably with either Moses or another son or daughter) into the second decade of the 1800s but almost

certainly had died before the 1820 census, on which she is not listed in Kentucky, either alone or with one of her children.⁸

The 1799 Logan County tax list also reveals that there was one black male over sixteen years of age in Edward Neal's household, but this person is not shown on subsequent tax lists. It is possible that Edward had rented someone else's slave or hired a free black man to help him put his new land under cultivation, but that is only speculation. It is also possible, as some family lore recalls, that Edward Neal had brought a slave with him from South Carolina to Kentucky, where slavery was also permitted. The South Carolina census for 1790, however, does not show any slaves in the household of the man we think was our Edward Neal of Pilot Knob.

It is family tradition, too, that Edward Neal was buried in Crab Orchard Springs Cemetery, in Simpson County, Kentucky, but there is no record of such a cemetery in that county. It is possible that he was buried in a crab orchard on his own property at Pilot Knob, or perhaps in some other cemetery unknown to us. One candidate is the cemetery of the Pilot Knob Church,⁹ which has outlived the church itself; not far from

⁸ Because there is no known David among the family of Edward Neal in Logan County, the authors of the book on Edward suggested that on the 1810 census Edward was mistakenly enumerated as the David Neill who is listed – among several of Edward's known sons – as forty-five years of age or older. In view of the younger age of the female in this David's household, I think it is more likely that if Edward Neal were still alive in 1810 (and so in his seventies) he would have been the male forty-five years old or older who was living with his eldest son, Thomas, or the male also that age who was living with his daughter, Nancy {Neal} Stone. Especially given this David's placement in the sequence of names on the census sheet, it seems more likely that Edward had died about 1802 or 1803. Who this David Neill on the 1810 census was remains a mystery.

⁹ See slide 12951 for a 2008 view of the Pilot Knob Church's cemetery.

Edward Neal's home, this cemetery would have been a logical place for his burial if his family worshipped there or decided to inter him at a nearby existing cemetery. We have no information whatsoever about Edward Neal's date of birth, but the evidence presented in this chapter suggests it occurred sometime during the 1740s.

We now shift our attention to the trail of Edward Neal of Pilot Knob before he migrated from South Carolina to Kentucky during the mid-1790s. We know that a group of Neals (often O'Neals here) lived in that state's Camden District – the same South Carolina district, it should be remembered, where Matthew McCammon seems to have lived before relocating to Kentucky during the 1780s. In South Carolina (where Edward's son Benjamin says he himself was born), we find evidence that a Thomas O'Neal owned property “on the Charleston Road” and on Fishing Creek – again, where some of the McCammon family is known to have resided. A plat map for this area as it was during the mid-1790s shows the location of Thomas O'Neal's property, which was adjacent to land owned by families with whom we know our Edward Neal's siblings intermarried. There is no Edward Neal listed on this plat map, and neither is there any deed for him in any of the relevant counties (York County, Chester County, Lancaster County, and Fairfield County) that would later be formed out of Camden District. There is, however, an *Edmund* Oneal on the 1790 census in Fairfield County, Camden District, and he was probably the *Edmand* Oneel whose name was written on an adjoining property on a plat surveyed in the Cedar Creek area of this same county in 1791. Both of these sightings,

assuming they were of the same man, may be our Edward Neal who later lived near Pilot Knob in Logan County, Kentucky, but we must keep an open mind on this matter until we examine some additional information.¹⁰

First, we must try to establish a credible earlier timeline for Edward Neal of Pilot Knob to see if it meshes with this South Carolina information. If we can also identify this Edward's father as well, we may then be able to draw some conclusions about the relationship between the two Neals, Edward and Thomas, we have seen in Camden District during the 1790s. One thing we can be quite sure of is that the Edward Neal of Pilot Knob lived in Virginia from 1791 to 1794. On April 15, 1791 – as a resident of Henry County, Virginia – he bought from Jacob Adams, Jr., property in that county consisting of 140 acres on both sides of the north fork of Spoon Creek. Spoon Creek was in the part of Henry County that would fall in Patrick County, Virginia, when the latter came into being about two months later in 1791. Edward is not on the tax lists in Henry

¹⁰ Fishing Creek can be located on a number of USGS maps, principally the ones for Catawba/South Carolina, Edgemoor/South Carolina, and Rock Hill West/South Carolina. In my judgment, the most likely location of Thomas Neal's land is where the last of these three maps shows Robertson Road crossing Fishing Creek. See digital images 00842-00854 and 00866-00868 for views of Fishing Creek in 2010 and digital images 00859-00863 for 2010 views of the Cedar Creek area. Although there were other Neals and O'Neals in Camden District, South Carolina, at this time, they do not seem to have been part of the family we are studying in this chapter. There were numerous other Neals living along the Broad River in South Carolina's Ninety-Six District, south and west of the Camden District, but their given names and physical movements do not seem like the right ones for members of our South Carolina Neal family. There is also an Edward Nill on the census in York County in 1790, and he cannot be ruled out as having been the Edward Neal of Pilot Knob. A Thomas Neal of Chester County, South Carolina, sold one acre to the Sandy River Baptist Church in 1803, but this probably was after the Thomas Neal discussed in the text had left for Kentucky and so probably was the action of a different man. A William Neel served in Wade Hampton's South Carolina Regiment at the same time Matthew McCammon did, a Charles Neale fought at the Battle of Eutaw Springs, and there are other Neals among the Scotch-Irish in South Carolina. Any of these men might have been related to the older Edward Neal, but there is no evidence of this.

County in 1790 or earlier, which suggests that he might have arrived there in late 1790 or early 1791 and purchased land soon thereafter.

The land Edward bought from Adams in 1791 was originally part of 458 acres patented by John Barker, whose surveyor's map for his patent is quite helpful in identifying its location.¹¹ Edward does appear on the tax list in Patrick County in June 1791, and in October in that year he assented to the marriage of his daughter in that county. This daughter, Nancy, was the Nancy Stone who later lived in Logan County, Kentucky, which is how we know we have the right Edward Neal here. There is no additional evidence about his time in Patrick County until there is a deed of sale for his 140 acres dated September 4, 1794. This deed, on which Edward made his mark, was recorded in March 1795. Can we presume Edward Neal left Patrick County at this time for upper Kentucky? Before we can answer this question, we must extend our search for him to the years prior to 1791.

Here we run into a roadblock, however, for we *have* no information for this man for five or six years before 1791. We must skip those years for now and take a detour north to where we last saw Edward Neal prior to 1791. This sighting, in 1785, locates him in Hampshire County, Virginia (now West Virginia), in the northwestern part of the state. Abundant Neal family lore says that Edward and his children lived during this period of

¹¹ See the USGS map for Stuart/Virginia and digital images 00786-00798, taken in 2010, for the area of Patrick County where Edward Neal's property on Spoon Creek lies.

time. We also find here several other Neals, in addition to Edward, and this information will be quite helpful as we endeavor to identify Edward's father. These other Neals in Hampshire County included a Benjamin, a Hugh, and a Thomas. There is no deed in Hampshire County to show that Edward owned property there. But he is on personal property tax lists in Abraham Hite's district between 1782 (the first year for which these lists exist) and 1785, after which he never appears again. This man appears to have had several children, which is consistent with what we know about the Edward Neal who later lived in South Carolina and Kentucky. There is no other sign of Edward Neal in the records of Hampshire County or of Frederick County, Virginia, from which (along with Augusta County) Hampshire County had been formed in 1752.¹²

Thus we can place Edward Neal in two counties in Virginia from about 1782 until 1785 (Hampshire County) and from 1791 to 1795 (Patrick County), then in Kentucky from sometime during the mid-1790s until he died in 1802 or 1803. After studying the evidence, I believe that in 1785 Edward went from Hampshire County to South Carolina with his father, who was, as we will see, most likely named Thomas, and remained in South Carolina until 1791, when we know he moved to Patrick County, Virginia. If he did go from that Virginia county directly to Kentucky, he probably did so after the weather broke early in 1795. We cannot dismiss the possibility that Edward returned to

¹² Hite's district ran from the mouth of the South Fork up the South Branch of the Potomac River (that is, south) to the county line. An Edward Neal of Southampton County, Virginia, is on the 1787 tax list for Hardy County, Virginia, but this was probably another, unrelated man.

South Carolina for a brief time after selling his Patrick County land in March 1795 but before departing for Kentucky, perhaps a year or so later; that possibility seems very unlikely, however.

Our next task is to examine what we know about the Thomas Neal of Hampshire County to see whether we can establish that he was the Thomas O'Neal we have already observed was in South Carolina later, and to see whether information about him further enlightens us about our Edward's movements before 1791.

A published list of Lord Fairfax's Northern Neck grants shows us that on October 14, 1774, a Thomas Neal of Hampshire County, Virginia, obtained such a grant for 312 acres that county, which had been created principally out of Frederick County, Virginia, twenty years earlier. In fact, this property, which had been surveyed in December 1750, had passed through the hands of several previous owners before Thomas finally took possession of it during late 1774. (The document outlining Fairfax's grant recounts these earlier transfers.) It is not clear now exactly what circumstances account for this rather tangled ownership trail (the language in the grant suggests it was the death of one owner and a forfeiture), but Neal's deed of sale a decade later also establishes that he had become the owner in 1774.

Thomas Neal's 312 acres bordered the 360 acres of Abraham Hite, a leading figure in this frontier area of Virginia, and also adjoined the boundary line of Lord Fairfax's extensive manor. Hite's holdings extended from around the mouth of Mill Creek, very near Petersburg, to the upstream (southern) beginning of the unusual geological feature known as "The Trough" through which the South Branch of the Potomac River flows. The location of Thomas Neal's rectangular property, which was just to the north and west of Hite's, encompasses a large section of Turnmill Run, a couple of miles north of the crossroads community of Old Fields, and reaches as far east as Mudlick Run on Hite's land.¹³

Other records in Hampshire County mentioning Thomas Neal or his property also exist for 1778 and 1779. In addition, he appears on the county's personal property tax lists (the ones for which Hite was the collector) for the years 1782 through 1785 – the same years as our Edward Neal appears on them, as we have seen. Based on the data detailed on these lists, Thomas seems to have had fewer children than Edward did but a larger contingent of horses and cattle. This data seems consistent with Thomas having been an

¹³ Both Turnmill Run and Flag Meadows are mentioned in the deed of sale for this property; the latter feature cannot be identified today. See the USGS map for Old Fields/West Virginia for the area that included Thomas Neal's 312 acres. My files have one map marked to show where modern researchers estimate his property was situated, based on land descriptions in contemporary deeds. This area is west of West Virginia Route 28 and U.S. 220. See digital images 01191-1202 for 2011 views of Thomas Neal's property. A new highway being driven through this area may afford better views of Thomas's acreage in the future.

older, well-established man, most of whose children had left his immediate household by this time.¹⁴

One of the very first deeds recorded in the brand-new Hardy County, in mid-April 1786, tells us that Thomas Neal and his wife Lettes or Lettys (spelled both ways on the official documents, this name was presumably a variation or transliteration of the name Lettice, or perhaps a nickname for Letitia or Latitia) had two weeks earlier sold their 312 acres in Virginia to a man named Vanmeter. Hardy County had been created out of Hampshire County only a short time before, in October 1785.

But this Neal-Vanmeter transaction had actually occurred a year earlier, on April 1 and 2, 1785: under the “lease and release” process that colonial Virginia often employed for land sales, the seller and buyer would have agreed on the terms of this land transfer then. On April 1, Vanmeter would have received from Thomas (Lettes giving her assent) a nominal one-year lease for the land; when this lease terminated at the end of the stipulated twelve months, Vanmeter would then receive the couple’s final, formal release of the property (which, like the lease, had already been written up and signed by both parties the year before). In April 1786, the two documents were then officially recorded in the county’s deed book.

¹⁴ Early settlers in the valleys of Hampshire County played a major role in Virginia’s burgeoning cattle industry by fattening up the cattle before their sale for consumption north and east.

There are, consequently, two documents in Hardy County's first deed book for this transaction, the April 1 lease and the April 2 release. Thus the effective date of the sale by Thomas and Lettes Neal was actually April 2, 1785, although Vanmeter did not have full legal possession until April 1786. This early 1785 date is consistent with our supposition that Thomas and the other Neals of northwestern Virginia left that state for South Carolina during 1784 or 1785. They most likely did so not long after signing over their property in early April in the latter year.¹⁵

Thus we see a Thomas Neal who lived in – and then left – northwestern Virginia at the same time our Edward Neal of Pilot Knob did. Next we need to address the issue of whether this was in fact a father-son combination: did these two men, Thomas and Edward, remain associated in South Carolina after their relocation there, and is there any documentary evidence to indicate there was a blood relationship between them?

Thomas Neal apparently obtained his land on Fishing Creek in Camden District of that state in January 1785, when a tract of 102 acres was surveyed and platted for him. Whether or not Thomas himself had traveled to South Carolina at this time cannot be determined; a son or agent could have acted on his behalf. It is this property that is shown, with Thomas O'Neal's name on it, on a modern plat map describing landowners and their land parcels in this area during the mid-1790s. Then, in 1793, a Thomas Neal

¹⁵ Thus Thomas Neal lived not far from where our Abraham Vanderpool had lived three decades earlier. The Vanmeters had been among the Dutch who settled there when the Vanderpools did.

purchased 89 acres in this same area, and in 1797 he sold both the 1793 purchase *and* the parcel of 102 acres that Thomas “O’Neal” had had surveyed in January 1785. After selling these two properties in 1797, this later Thomas Neal went to live near our Edward Neal of Pilot Knob in Logan County, Kentucky. This information about the ownership of land indicates that these Neals of Virginia, South Carolina, and Kentucky were indeed members of the same family. *How* were these individuals related to one another?

There is in fact some good information to guide us here. At the time of the sale of the 89 acres in 1797, Thomas Neal’s wife Esther was also listed on the deed of sale. This suggests that her family had earlier held an interest in this property (had her parents made it a present to the couple?), and the fact that the 1797 sale was to a member of her Murray family adds credence to this idea. For we also know that Thomas’s wife was a woman named Esther Murray, who in 1787 had married a Thomas Neal. This Thomas is identifiable as a man who was born in Hampshire County, Virginia, in 1767 – in other words, the son of Edward Neal of Pilot Knob and an older brother of our Edward Neal of Sullivan County (who was born about 1775-1780). Family information confirms that Edward’s eldest son was named Thomas – and the husband of Esther Murray.¹⁶

Clearly this Thomas Neal who sold the two properties was too young (eighteen years old) in early 1785 to have been the man of that name who had obtained the 102 acres on

¹⁶ The published book on Edward Neal of Pilot Knob erroneously states that our Edward of Sullivan County was his oldest son; this issue was addressed in the previous chapter.

Fishing Creek that year, just as he was too young to have been the adult Thomas Neal who had been residing in Hampshire County, Virginia, during the 1770s and 1780s. The younger Thomas must have accompanied both his father, the Edward Neal of Pilot Knob, as well as that Edward's own father, the Thomas Neal we have been focusing on in this section, when this intergenerational clan of Neals migrated from Hampshire County to South Carolina about 1785.

Another South Carolina document, dated July 1785, refers to "*Mrs.* Neel's line" on this part of Fishing Creek, which suggests that the elder Thomas Neal from Hampshire County might have died earlier in 1785, perhaps not long after having arrived in South Carolina from northwestern Virginia – maybe even during the arduous journey south. Apparently confirming the scenario of Thomas's move and almost concurrent death is a reference in South Carolina records to the estate of a Thomas Neel, dated in mid-1785, though this man has "Jr." written after his name – possibly nothing more than an error in identification or transcription. Unfortunately, the South Carolina estate records themselves for this deceased man no longer seem to exist, and so we cannot be positive he was the Thomas Neal we are trying to trace, but the lack of any later sightings of a man with this name in Camden District would seem to corroborate that he did die sometime in 1785.

(The real estate sale to Vanmeter in Hardy County, Virginia, would not have been affected by Thomas Neal's death in South Carolina in 1785, as the formal release Neal and his wife had already signed on April 2 in that year would have taken effect in April 1786, at the termination of the one-year lease, without or without any further action on Thomas Neal's part.)

Thomas's widow Lettes (assuming that she was the same woman referred to in the 1785 land documents in Hardy County) may not have survived Thomas for long: there is no sign of her as a head of household on the South Carolina censuses in either 1790 or 1800, although she might have been living with a relative and for that reason was not recorded by name on either census. Perhaps it was the death of his mother Lettice between 1785 and 1791 that led Edward Neal of Pilot Knob to leave South Carolina for Patrick County, Virginia, during 1790 or 1791.

This brings us back to the land sales in 1797. After the demise of his grandmother Lettice, Edward's son Thomas, in his capacity as the older Thomas Neal's eldest grandson left in Camden District, would have inherited from his grandfather the 102 acres the latter had acquired in 1785. Thus young Thomas would have been the one to sell this property in 1797, which he could do without his wife Esther's agreement (unlike the 89-acre property sold the same year for which Esther did have to sign). This chain of

ownership of the 102 acres establishes that the two Thomas Neals were blood relations, in this case grandfather and grandson.

Let us recapitulate what all of this data from South Carolina and Virginia seems to tell us and construct a larger scenario to make sense of it. The patriarch of this family, Thomas Neal, appeared in Frederick County, Virginia (later Hampshire County) at least by 1774, possibly much earlier, since a Thomas Neal (not necessarily ours) is recorded as a witness in Frederick County in 1757. Thomas and other Neals living there, including our Edward of Pilot Knob, departed northwestern Virginia for South Carolina, evidently during the spring of 1785. Thomas may have died either later that year (presumably not long after arriving in South Carolina, since his name was on the Fishing Creek property in that year) or soon afterwards, a guess that is supported by his absence from later records in Camden District. Thomas's son Edward remained in South Carolina, presumably living with or near his widowed mother, Lettice, until sometime before 1791, when he can be placed in Patrick County, Virginia. Edward's oldest son, Thomas (who was born in 1767), married Esther Murray in 1787. After he inherited his grandfather Thomas's 102 acres, he also acquired some additional land (in 1793), possibly with the help of the Murray family of his wife, Esther Murray.

Edward Neal remained in Patrick County until March 1795, after which he apparently decided – again for reasons unknown to us – to head west to “upper” Kentucky.

(Although it is possible that Edward Neal and his family returned to South Carolina for a short time after leaving Patrick County in 1795 but before migrating to Kentucky, such a detour back to South Carolina seems improbable to me.) Edward and the other Neals who joined him in this venture across the mountains would remain in upper Kentucky only until the unoccupied land around Pilot Knob in the newly opened area in southern Kentucky became available for settlement in 1798. Among these other Neals would be Edward's son Thomas and his wife Esther, who sold their South Carolina properties in 1797. Perhaps their delay in moving to Kentucky came because Esther wished to remain near her parents until they both had died.

Notable by his absence from this transplanted cluster of Pilot Knob Neals in what would become Logan County, Kentucky, was our own Edward Neal, later of Sullivan County, Indiana, who would remain in upper Kentucky and marry Jane McCammon there in 1802. The reason why Edward did not accompany his parents and brothers when they moved to southern Kentucky during the late 1790s is not known to us. It might well have stemmed from Jane's reluctance to be separated from her own father, Matthew, with whom she and Edward seem to have been living in upper Kentucky – and with whom the couple would move to the territory of Indiana soon after 1810.

The scenario just presented incorporates and is consistent with what we know about both the Edward Neal of Pilot Knob and the Thomas Neal found in Virginia and South

Carolina, along with the evidence we have about Edward's own son named Thomas. It does not explain why this group of Neals left Virginia for South Carolina about 1785, why Edward left South Carolina for Patrick County, Virginia, in 1791, or why he went to Kentucky after living only a few years in Patrick County. Unless some new evidence comes to light, though, I believe we are justified in concluding that the father of Edward Neal of Pilot Knob was **THOMAS NEAL**, who was first seen in Hampshire County, Virginia, and then in Camden District, South Carolina, where he and Lettice likely died.

Unfortunately, no information about Lettice or her family has yet come to light, and neither is there a record of her marriage to Thomas Neal. All we can say is that if she was our Edward's mother, she must have been born between about 1715 and about 1725. It is possible, though, that the Lettes named on the Hardy County lease and release documents in 1785 was in fact a later, second wife of Thomas. If so, she also could have been a younger woman – and, therefore, not the mother of Edward Neal of Pilot Knob but his stepmother instead. Until we can resolve this matter, we cannot designate Lettice the mother of Edward Neal. The fact that none of the female descendants of Thomas Neal are known to have been given the name Lettice or one of its variations suggests to me that this woman was Thomas's second spouse, but at present we must leave this an open question.

The uncertainty about when Lettice and Thomas married widens considerably her estimated lifespan and the span of years during which the couple must have married. But because this woman had such an uncommon given name, if we could attach her to a family – and assuming she was indeed Edward’s mother – doing so might help us in making a positive identification of her husband, Thomas, and in establishing the particular Neal family from which he came. A thorough search of available birth and will records in more than a dozen likely Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland counties has turned up more than twenty women with the distinctive name Lettice (or such similar names as Letitia and Latitia), but none of them discovered so far have presented the family information or possessed the proximity to identifiable Neals that would make them plausible candidates to be Thomas’s wife.¹⁷

We now turn to the period before the elder Thomas Neal and the Edward Neal of Pilot Knob first come to our notice in Hampshire County, Virginia, in 1774. Assuming that the latter was born between 1740 and 1745, his father Thomas would have to have been born about 1720. This in turn makes it very probable that Thomas was born somewhere other than in the area that would become Frederick County and then Hampshire County, Virginia, as this area did not begin to be settled until at least a decade after 1720. A

¹⁷ These counties include Berks, Bucks, Philadelphia, Chester, Lancaster, York, Cumberland, and Bedford in Pennsylvania; Frederick, Loudoun, Orange, Fairfax, Spotsylvania, and Hampshire (formerly West Virginia) in Virginia; and Frederick in Maryland. One of the Letitias who was turned up, the daughter of Stephen Ashby of Prince William County, Virginia, seemed like an excellent candidate until it became clear that her age and her known children – not to mention her marriage to a Thomas Neale who could be traced to a different part of Kentucky – makes it impossible for her to have been the wife of Thomas Neale who signed the sale document in 1785.

necessary corollary of this timeline is that Thomas's own father, given name unknown to us, must have been born before 1700.

One early Neal researcher searching for Edward's origins speculated that he might have been from a Middleton Township in Pennsylvania because of military records, in both Harrisburg and the National Archives, pertaining to a Revolutionary War soldier from Pennsylvania named Edward O'Neal, who was from Middleton Township in Cumberland County. These records document O'Neal's laudable service from 1775 to 1784 as a member of the First Pennsylvania Regiment, including his wounding at the Battle of Green Spring Plantation, an important clash with the British near Williamsburg, Virginia, on July 5-6, 1781.

But other documents in Pennsylvania reveal that this Edward O'Neal, exact birth year uncertain but probably around 1752, not only was a pensioner in Cumberland County during the 1780s but was incapacitated by his war wounds and died in a hospital there in 1789. Thus he cannot be the Edward Neal we are researching. Nor is there any evidence that our Edward Neal of Pilot Knob ever served as a soldier during the Revolutionary War, and his estimated age during that conflict – he probably would have been in his mid-30s after 1776 – makes it doubtful that he was ever in uniform during that conflict.

Even if we have to set aside this clue about the Neal family's origins that seemed so promising, there is abundant oral tradition among the various descending lines that trace back to Edward Neal of Pilot Knob that our earliest Neals in North America originated in Pennsylvania and no reason to distrust that tradition. Thus it behooves us to examine information about Neals who were residing in the settled (principally southeastern) parts of Pennsylvania during the middle years of the 18th century to see if we can make a link between them and Edward and his father Thomas. Scouring the available information pertaining to several counties west and south of Philadelphia, along with Philadelphia County itself, for Neals who might have been our Edward's father has turned up a few who do spark our interest. (Edward himself would have been too young during the mid-18th century to have appeared in any Pennsylvania records, so our focus must be on a Thomas Neal in Pennsylvania.)

Two men named Thomas Neal (or variants on that name) were living in York County during the 1750s but do not appear to have migrated to Virginia prior to 1774, when our Thomas Neal obtained his Fairfax grant. In Lancaster County, a Thomas Neal is seen living in Drumore Township in 1773; he could have left there for Virginia and taken ownership of the 312 acres in Hampshire County the next year, but farther than that we cannot go. There were two Thomas Neals in Cumberland County, but one was an indentured servant absent without leave (1771) and the other was the owner of a bawdy

house (1773); neither of them, either, would seem to be good matches with the Thomas Neal we see in Virginia.

Chester County is arguably the most likely Pennsylvania county in which to spot Thomas Neal due to its proximity to Philadelphia, the Neals' likely port of entry, and because it lies directly on the natural route from Philadelphia to northwestern Virginia. There are no Thomas Neals in Chester County's existing records, but there two men named Hugh O'Neal, whose given name appears in our early Neal line. One Hugh is seen in 1753 and the other in 1768; as single men, both presumably were either young and unmarried or else widowers. The adult Edward Neal living in Chester County in 1753 would have been born too early to be our Edward of Pilot Knob.

There is, therefore, no obvious and strong candidate for the Thomas Neal whose family we are trying to track back into Pennsylvania. In addition, without knowing the family name of Thomas's wife (or wives) we cannot employ the alternative strategy of trace her family until we find a suitable Neal. But one more option is available: exploring the family of Edward Neal's wife, Sarah, to see if that trail leads us to the Neals we are seeking to identify.

According to another tradition passed down in one part of his later family, Edward Neal of Pilot Knob married a woman named Sarah D. Ege, reportedly from North Carolina,

perhaps sometime during the 1760s. Many modern researchers (including the two authors of the book mentioned earlier in this chapter) doubt this tradition since there is no record of such a marriage and all the known women bearing the name Ege can be accounted for. In addition, no scenario we can imagine would have placed the young Edward Neal anywhere near North Carolina during the 1760s. (Patrick County, Virginia, borders North Carolina, but of course our Edward Neal did not live in that Virginia county until a couple of decades after he had to have married the woman named Sarah Ege, since the couple had produced numerous children as early as the 1770s.)

In light of the scarcity of evidence of any kind about Eges, it seems prudent to wonder if the Sarah in question was actually a member of an *Edge* family instead. This name is considerably more common than Ege is, and it is obvious that the two spellings can easily be confused. Because Edward Neal did meet and marry a woman named Ege or Edge (presumably, based on their children's ages, during the 1760s), it seems likely that he would have done so either somewhere in southeastern Pennsylvania or in northwestern Virginia.

Edges were living in first of these areas as early as 1702, and at least three Edge males were transported to America during the 1700s and thus could have been ancestors of Sarah Edge. One of the Edge families lived in Philadelphia County, which at that time adjoined Chester County, where we know some Neals resided at about the same time. In

the Chester County, a miller named John Edge and his wife Ann did have a daughter named Sarah, but she was born too late (1769) to be our Edward's wife. In York County, where we have also glimpsed some Neals, the 1750 will of a George Edge mentions a daughter Sarah whose mother, Anne, bound her out two years after George's death. Assuming this Sarah was about eight to fourteen years of age in 1752, she would have been about the right age to have become our Edward's wife a few years later. Unfortunately, we have no evidence to suggest that our Edward was in York County at that time to meet and marry this Sarah Edge.

Our lack of success in finding likely Neals and Edges in Pennsylvania thus encourages us to look for families with these names who were residing in the northwestern reaches of Virginia during the middle years of the 18th century and perhaps even before then. (This area would be designated Frederick County in 1738, but the new county would not begin fully functioning until 1743.) Because settlement here commenced during the 1730s, when Thomas Neal was still a minor, we must focus on searching for a man who might have been his father. Of the several adult Neals who had come to live in this part of Virginia, the earliest one may have been a Hugh Neal, who appears on the new county's tax rolls from 1744 through 1748. He died in Frederick County in May 1751. Other Neals living in the county included men named Lewis, John, Christopher, William, and Daniel.

Other possibilities for Thomas Neal's father should would include several O'Neals (an Edward and a Benjamin among them), militiamen from Prince William County – just east of Frederick County – for whose military service the county later claimed reimbursement from Virginia's House of Burgesses. This Edward O'Neal served ninety-three days in the militia in 1755, but exactly where and how is unknown. But Benjamin O'Neal, the claim indicates, was among the Prince William militiamen who in 1758 were sent to assist neighboring Frederick County and Hampshire County, highly vulnerable to Indian raids because they were on the edge of settlement.

This group of Prince William militiamen was posted to Fort Loudoun in Winchester from May 4, 1758, until December 20 of that year. On June 19, their commander, Colonel George Washington, ordered them to isolated forts out on the Hampshire County frontier, the area along the South Bank of the Potomac River. Faced with this order to hazardous duty, Benjamin O'Neal and a few others reportedly "deserted" for "some days" but later returned and so were paid for their militia service. Did this exposure to the South Branch area lead to a decision on the part of these two O'Neals to move to Hampshire County once it was suitably pacified?

The Prince William County militiaman named Edward O'Neal mentioned in this claim for payment almost surely was not the man of that name – the Edward Neal of Pilot Knob – born during the 1740s (and so too young to be in the Prince William militia barely a

decade later, even if these units sometimes did take teenagers). But this Edward O'Neal from Prince William County could well have been a brother of the Thomas Neal who was the father of the Edward Neal of Pilot Knob – the Thomas Neal, that is, who with his wife Lettes agreed to sell their property on the South Branch in 1785 in preparation for a move to South Carolina.

Lacking additional information, we can only speculate about when these very early Virginia Neals described here – Thomas and probably his father, whose name we do not know – actually came to this part of Virginia. Although Thomas did not secure his property on Turnmill Run in Hampshire County until October 1774, he very well could have been living in this general area for a good many years before then. If so, we have no way of knowing whether Thomas was residing on his father's property, on land Thomas himself had rented, on his employer's property, or on unoccupied land no one had yet claimed.

Once again we return to the family of Edward's wife, Sarah, to what we can learn about the Neals from exploring a parallel road. We find an Edge family of Orange County, Virginia, from which Frederick County was formed between 1738 and 1743, when the first county court was held. The road orders for Orange County show that in 1741 there was a road near Opequon Creek that ran from John Neill's Mill Branch to Spout Run near Edge's cabin and thence to the King's Road from Joist Hite's place to the Shenandoah

River. (Opequon Creek, located south of Winchester, was one of the very first settlements in this part of Virginia.)

This description would place Mill Branch in what is now Frederick County and so would position an Edge family reasonably close to where we have sighted Edward and his father Thomas Neal (and perhaps other Neals). That county's fee list shows a Robert Edge – perhaps the owner of the cabin – in 1748. Whether or not the Neal and Edge families did know one another or lived not far apart is beyond where the dearth of evidence leaves us stranded, but this kind of physical proximity of families is what leads to marriages and may account for how Edward Neal and Sarah Edge got acquainted with one another.

Until other, more persuasive, evidence comes to light, I believe this to be the most plausible hypothesis for how and where Edward Neal and Sarah Edge met and married. I also am inclined to believe that the woman named Lettice was probably a later, second wife for Thomas Neal and that the name and identity of his first wife (and Edward's mother) probably is information forever lost to us – which not does mean that we should abandon the search, of course.

Although accepting for now this particular hypothesis helps us to develop a credible picture of the composition and whereabouts of the Neal family during the 1730s and later, it leaves us still wondering exactly where in Pennsylvania the Neals (and the Edges)

came from, and when. But because Pennsylvania had just four counties in 1729 (York County would join them twenty years later), it is probably not critical or fruitful to pursue this matter. Nor is the scattering of Neals and Edges observed in Pennsylvania through the 1760s much help in determining exactly where these two families had (perhaps briefly) resided several decades earlier. Accepting the family lore that the Neals were from Pennsylvania, we can imagine that after arriving in Philadelphia (the largest port in the colonies) they made their way west and south, probably working the land of others, until one of the senior Neals – Hugh, perhaps? – led the clan south into the unsettled Virginia frontier, probably during the late 1730s or early 1740s.

How does all this additional information fit into the overarching timeline we have developed in this chapter for Edward Neal of Pilot Knob and his father Thomas? Let us postulate that Edward was born in Pennsylvania during the 1740s and married Sarah Edge during the 1760s, probably in northwestern Virginia after Edward, along with his father Thomas and other relatives, had moved south into that colony from Pennsylvania. Edward and Sarah {Edge} Neal and their many children took part in the Neal family's subsequent migration from northwestern Virginia to Camden District of South Carolina, a move that evidently occurred during 1785.

One of those children on that trek south was the Edward Neal who subsequently would live in Sullivan County, Indiana; he most likely was born in Hampshire County, Virginia,

around 1775 to 1780. The move to Camden District in South Carolina put young Edward in the same locale as Matthew McCammon and his even younger daughter, Jane. If their two families did not meet then and there, they certainly did later in Kentucky – Jane having been taken there by her father in 1785 or so and Edward having accompanied his father there perhaps ten years after that. The numerous pieces of the Neal puzzle we have studied in this chapter do fit together to make a complete picture without too much manipulation or trimming of edges (or Edges), and I believe we should consider the timetable laid out here the basis of a plausible and promising hypothesis about these early generations of the Neal family.

It is conceivable that the McCammon and the Neal families had known one another in Ulster before either one came to America. There were plenty of Neals and O'Neals in Northern Ireland, among both the Irish and the Scotch-Irish and English who were later planted there.¹⁸ Most of the Neals and O'Neals I have come across in records pertaining to Ulster seemed to have had links with County Antrim, in fact, although others were associated with County Down, County Leith, or County Tyrone. Since our Neals evidently were in America by the 1740s and our McCammons seem to have come later, perhaps three decades later, it seems more likely that they became acquainted in either South Carolina or Kentucky.

¹⁸ These English Neals came primarily from the counties between London and Wales, as well as from the northern counties of England. A large number of them were planted in County Antrim.

What do we know about the even earlier Neals, starting with the parentage of Edward Neal and his father Thomas? According to more family lore also mentioned in the book referred to throughout this chapter, Edward was the son of the unknown Neal male – still bearing the name O’Neal at that point – who crossed the seas from County Antrim in Northern Ireland to North America sometime during the early 1700s. The lore also relates this boy’s abduction as an eight- or twelve-year-old in Ireland and his subsequent service as a cabin boy, or perhaps midshipman, aboard a ship before a term of indentured servitude in America. This Neal boy's given name is not known but may have been, the lore tells us, either Charles or Edward. This family tale would seem to be telling the story of the father of Edward Neal of Pilot Knob, the Thomas who by our estimate was born around 1720 and who would die in South Carolina in 1785.

Other family legends describe this young Neal’s link to Irish royalty, his kidnapping by Spanish pirates, and his brief stay in Kingston, Jamaica, en route to the North American colonies. Such legends are so common in family history lore, though, that they cannot be regarded as trustworthy without additional evidence.¹⁹ In fact, there were numerous

¹⁹ The supposed Neal link to royalty is based on the contents of a will that Edward Neal is said to have learned about while he was living in Logan County, Kentucky. This will, no trace of which exists today, was reported (by an 18th-century Neal who claimed to have seen it) to have shown that Edward was the son of Sir Daniel O’Neill and heir of “The Great Hugh,” Prince Hugh O’Neill of Ulster. This will is also said to have stated that Edward Neal was abducted at the age of eight years old and taken to America. Additional family legends state that the O’Neill family lived at a place called Strawberry Hill at Castle Ridge in County Antrim, which I have been unable to locate. All these legends are very old within the family and may hint at the actual circumstances of how our Edward Neal or his father arrived in America, but without documentary evidence we cannot do more than speculate about their accuracy. Other Neals have similar stories, it should be noted, including links to The Great Hugh and to an Irish castle (Shane’s Castle, in one instance).

Neals in America from as early as 1620, and we cannot be entirely sure that our Neal line did not actually derive somehow from one of these early American Neals.²⁰

One surviving historical document, however, does make us wonder if there might be some truth in what has been passed down within parts of the Neal family. This document tells us that after having arrived in Philadelphia aboard the *Delaware*, an Edward Neal from Ireland – whose age is unknown but who was likely in his late teens or early twenties – began a four-year term of indentured servitude to a man named Richard Bevan on June 5, 1746. Not only does this historical fact dovetail with one of the family legends about how the immigrant Neal got to America but it places a plausible father of Edward Neal of Pilot Knob in Pennsylvania during the decade when he was probably born.

Could this first American Neal have done what so many such indentured servants did: skip out on his agreed-upon term of service and take off for parts unknown (to his master) – perhaps having changed his first name to Thomas in the process in order to camouflage his identity so his master could not trace him and compel him to finish out his term of service? Or, did he possibly have a brother, named Thomas, who would become the earliest confirmed member of our Neal family in America? All we can say is that we

²⁰ My limited research in early records turned up plenty of early Neals of interest in America, of whom the following are just examples. A Captain Neal came to New Hampshire in 1620. John Neale, a merchant, arrived in Virginia in 1632, and Jonathan Neal was transported to Virginia in 1635. Several Thomas Neals were in Virginia during the 1730s and 1740s, and there was a Thomas Neall living near our Chastains in Manakintown, Virginia, around 1720.

might have found an explanation of how and when our Neals got to this country, but this explanation must be regarded as highly speculative. For now, the discernible Neal trail peters out with the Thomas Neal we first see in Hampshire County, Virginia, during the mid-1770s.

Even if we do positively identify the antecedents of Thomas Neal, there will always be *their* fathers and mothers to challenge us: ultimately, research on each family in one's heritage inevitably reaches the same (one hopes, temporary) "vanishing point," and so the search for information and answers is never over. The true story of our early Neal family is not yet fully known, and the odds seem against our learning much more about it – but a determined researcher never gives up hope.

Complicating matters for us is the revelation, from ongoing male-specific DNA testing and analysis, that the DNA of our line of Neals does not match the commonest O'Neal haplotypes (a haplotype is a set of closely linked genetic markers that tend to be inherited as a unit) – or those of any of the researched Neal families in Ireland or Scotland. The working hypothesis that seeks to explain this phenomenon is that a man with a different surname evidently fathered a male child with a Neal/O'Neal woman, whose surname this child and his descendants continued to use in future generations, or that an unrelated male was adopted into our Neal line at some point. Further and more sophisticated DNA testing may clarify this situation – perhaps even identify the haplotype and surname of

this unknown male, though it is unlikely, too, that we will ever be able to put our fingers on when and where this event occurred. (This was another reason why I contributed my own Neal DNA to the study.)

These ongoing analyses of DNA results and the patterns they reveal also indicate that the Neal family to which we belong is, genetically, a part of the large Clan Colla population, a small (perhaps 5%) subset of the large L21 haplogroup (a haplogroup is a combination of haplotypes) that can be traced in Europe back some 4,000 years. Members of the Clan Colla grouping typically carry a Celtic surname, have a unique genetic mutation in a particular DNA marker (DYS 425), and share other genetic characteristics. This discovery, and the hypotheses about how Clan Colla developed over many centuries before the adoption of surnames (in the British Isles, shortly before and after 1000 A.D.), may help to explain how our Neals came to vary so much genetically from other Neal and similarly surnamed families whose origins also can be traced to the British Isles. The non-technical summary that follows here is only an introduction to this complex and continually evolving new contribution to family history research.

Clan Colla's progenitors first appear in northwestern Britain about 280 A.D.; some researchers believe they might have been Roman-trained mercenary soldiers, as there are connections, shown by shared DNA, between these Clan Colla members in Britain and clusters of families with similar genetic profiles throughout Europe north of the Alps.

These clusters may have been left behind as the main body of Celts, including the bulk of the Clan Colla members, continued to migrate further north and west within Europe and ultimately populated all parts of the British Isles. The Romans sometimes referred to these Celtic peoples of whom the Clan Colla formed a part as the Trinovantes, the Conrovii, and the Silures. Tribal subdivisions within these peoples were common.

The early Clan Collas proliferated as a family group, perhaps because they enjoyed a selective advantage over other families: privileges (power and relative wealth) that enabled them to thrive and to reproduce more rapidly than those other family groups who did not have such privileges. Such privileges would be consistent with military responsibilities and opportunities. With many more surviving members during these initial years, the Clan Collas obviously had more descendants, and over the generations their superiority in numbers over other family groups naturally grew apace.

The heaviest representation of the Clan Colla descendants today is in Ireland, including Northern Ireland, which seems to support the tradition that three Colla brothers (Colla Meann, Colla fo Chri, and Colla Uais, sons of Eochaidh) went to Ireland as soldiers about 340 A.D. Here they extinguished (and presumably intermarried with) the members of the indigenous population in Ireland. One consequence of this process is that more than half of those men with Clan Colla who have been tested in recent years do not, in fact, have the genetically unique Colla DNA, most likely because of such intermixing with

genetically different peoples. This situation would then become further confused by the advent of surnames.

Surnames began to be adopted in Ireland during the tenth century (about a century before they were adopted elsewhere in greater Britain). Although Clan Colla chieftains may have imposed their own chosen surnames on all those within the these leaders' respective tribes, a subtler process was probably at work. It is probable that the Collas living in Ireland had been accompanied there by persons with genetic differences (specifically, the absence of the key identifying mutation). Over several centuries, the members of each group – the Clan Collas and those who had accompanied them – had inevitably become distributed all over Ireland, and also had intermingled (and inbred) with one another. The adoption of surnames was the result of many factors, not just a perceived consanguinity, and the members of these genetically distinct Colla and non-Colla family groups could have acquired the same shared surname or taken different surnames, depending on circumstances. This circumstance helps to explain why genetically similar men may have very different surnames today.

This circumstance may also help our Neals solve our own puzzle. A Clan Colla male could have impregnated an O'Neal woman whose origins were outside the main Clan Colla tide that rolled over Ireland during the first millennium A.D., as mentioned earlier in this chapter. But a Clan Colla male could have been part of a family group or tribe

that, for one of many reasons, adopted the O’Neal surname, bringing to that newly surnamed grouping a different DNA profile than other groups or tribes, in Ireland and in Scotland, that ended up with that same surname. Or there might have been other factors at work – factors we cannot determine with the evidence, DNA and otherwise, available to us now.

It seems most unlikely that we can even follow the trail that evidence from DNA has helped us to travel any further back than what has been outlined here, but since it seems very possible that we Neals are ultimately of Celtic origin a few words about these people and their history is in order.

The Celts (pronounced “Kelts”) were a nomadic, horse-riding, pasture-exploiting culture that first came to notice in the Pontic area north of the Black Sea in Asia Minor (today, this is northern Turkey) toward the end of the Bronze Age, in about 1200 B.C. They were respected for their superior horses and horsemanship, as well as for their skills as warriors, but they also were proficient in dairy culture and agriculture in general. The Celtic language these people spoke evolved out of the Indo-European dialect, one of the basic foundations of many modern languages. Today the Celts are thought of primarily as inhabitants of Ireland and Scotland, and also parts of France. How they ended up here is quite a story.

During the sixth century B.C., groups of Celts – perhaps the bulk of the Celtic people, we cannot say – left Asia Minor and penetrated into the lower Danube Valley and then onto

the Hungarian plain. Here they would settle primarily in what is now Austria and transalpine Switzerland (the lower areas north of the Alps), where the Celts were a key component in what is known as the Urnfield culture owing to its preference for burials in ceramic urns. Later, finding themselves being pressured by the expanding Germanic Goths north of them and the empire-minded Romans to their south, many of the Celts continued to migrate further west and northwest into Gaul (France) and parts of Spain.

Not all the Celtic peoples pulled up stakes as the Roman Empire expanded across the Alps, however. Some of them remained in place and became Romanized (as we have seen, some of them even served as mercenaries for the Romans) and eventually lost their identity as a distinct people. As the Romans continued to enlarge their empire, a good many Celts, more stubborn and disinclined to accept the rule of others, took themselves even further westward, into Brittany and across what we know as the English Channel on to the British Isles. The Roman conquest of their island sanctuary of Britain during the first century A.D. then forced the most intransigent of these Celts even further northward and westward yet into a few fringe territories where Roman control did not (and would not) reach: Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

Thus our Neal ancestors likely were among the many tribes and clans (key aspects of how the Celtic social system was organized) whose own ancestors of many generations were part of this epic traversal of almost the whole of Europe from about 1200 B.C. onward. It is probably too much to hope that we can ever be more specific about the relationship between our Neal family and the Celts than this broad overview permits,

although miracles do happen: after all, before DNA was discovered as a tool for tracing ancestry, researchers thought that a scientific way of tracking even later generations was beyond the realm of possibility.

The search for our earliest Neal will at some point hit the proverbial brick wall that can never be breached or scaled; perhaps this genetic conundrum is that ultimate brick wall for us Neals. For now, though, we reach the end of our tale. Picking up where my grandfather left off in 1956, we have learned a great deal. Working with many other researchers, we have made significant progress since I began my research during the early 1990s, verifying existing information and discovering new information – new Neal generations and whole new other families, in fact – that none of us ever knew about. Even though we have achieved the immediate goal that my grandfather set out to reach half a century ago by identifying the father of the man he knew as Thomas Edward Neal, there is still much – for me, or for my own descendants if they wish – to work on during the years ahead. So be it.

“Those things which came under the notice of my own observation, I have been explicit and just in a recital of. Those which I have gathered from report, I have been particularly cautious not to augment, but collected the opinions of the several intelligencers, and selected from the whole the most probable and consistent account.”

George Washington