

The Rockingham County Virginia Line of Harrisons

Note: this document is not intended to be a comprehensive outline of this particular Harrison line, but rather a summary of the direct descendants of the line that ultimately culminate with Emma E. Harrison, the great great grandmother of the sons and daughter of George Miller, and their descendants.

Background

Family researchers of this line seem to agree that the Rockingham County Virginia Harrison line originated with the Norse Viking Kings, and early Harrisons were among the "free Danes" who were the last to withstand William the Conqueror, himself of Norse Viking descent. These early Harrisons¹ landed in Northumberland, the Danish area of England. Northumberland is the northernmost city in England, and it was from Northumberland that the Harrisons drifted south into other shires and eventually found their way to America.

The Rockingham County line can be traced all the way back to Henry de Hede², who died in Northumberland, England on March 31, 1374. Nine generations later, Isaiah Harrison, the immigrant ancestor to this line landed in Oyster Bay, NY.

And while Isaiah Harrison is the immigrant ancestor, he was not the first Harrison to visit America. Isaiah's father, the Reverend Thomas Harrison, was a friend of the Cromwell family and served as Chaplain in the Berkeley Settlement.

Rev. Thomas Harrison

Thomas Harrison was born in 1619. A native of Kingston-Upon-Hull, England, he was of Yorkshire parentage, with residence in London, and was descended from the Durham family of Harrisons. He came from the same family as the line of Alderman and Burgess of the city of Hull, which was granted a charter by Edward I in 1299. He was a friend of the Cromwell family.

Thomas Harrison came to the early Jamestown, VA settlement about 1640 as minister of Elizabeth River Anglican/Episcopalian parish. He was chaplain to Governor of Berkeley.

Following the second Indian massacre on April 18, 1644, he turned Puritan himself, and in 1648, after refusing to read the Book of Common Prayer, or Administer the Sacraments, abandoned his ministerial office.

He removed to New England where he married Dorothy Symonds circa 1648, daughter of Samuel Symonds of Ipswich, Massachusetts, the Deputy Governor of Massachusetts, and a native of Essex Co,

¹ Basic background information comes from Settlers by the Long Grey Trail, written by J. Houston Harrison. Originally published in 1935 in Dayton, Virginia, the book has most recently reprinted for the Clearfield Company, Inc. by Genealogical Publishing Co. Inc. in 1994, and The House of Cravens, by Ruth H. McConathy, published privately, 1972, Charlottesville, Virginia.

² Surnames were not commonly used until about the eleventh century

England. It was there that Thomas Harrison became an Independent or Congregational minister of the gospel.

It appears that Dorothy and Thomas Harrison had two children.

In 1650, Thomas returned with his family to England as minister at St. Dunstons-in-the-East, London. He then removed to Bromborough Hall, Cheshire, and in 1655, accompanied Henry Cromwell to Ireland.

Dorothy Symonds Harrison died in 1653.

Upon the Restoration, Rev. Harrison returned to Chester, where he preached to large congregations in the Cathedral. On February 28, 1659 he married Katherine Bradshaw. Following the passing of the "Act of Uniformity" in 1662, he settled permanently in Dublin, and founded there a flourishing dissenting church.

Katherine and Thomas had four children:³

Katherine Harrison, born 1663

Isaiah Harrison, born 1663

Thomas Harrison

John Harrison

With the rise of the Catholic element under James II, there was little hope for any former followers of Cromwell, or his children. Having been so closely allied with the Cromwell party, Thomas's fortunes were depleted by the time his son Isaiah came to America.

Rev. Thomas Harrison died in 1682 in Dublin, Ireland - "A midst general mourning." "He was a complete gentleman", "Much courted for his conversation." He was the author of several works, among them "Old Jacobs Account Cast Up." He left a valuable library. His will recorded in 1682, and other family records was destroyed in the courts' fire of Public Records office of Ireland in the rebellion of 1922.

Isaiah Harrison

Isaiah Harrison was the son of Rev. Thomas Harrison and Katherine Bradshaw. He was born on September 25, 1666 in Cheshire, England. Whether he was a refugee from Dublin or not, Isaiah sailed from or nearby Liverpool on the ship known as the "Spotted Calf", in 1687, landing first, Oyster Bay, Long Island, New York.

Isaiah Harrison came as a blacksmith to Oyster Bay; his name first appears in the town records when he was a freeholder, 2 January 1687. The following year, he purchased 100 acres of land at Suckscalls' Wigam from John Wright, his first wife's cousin, on 16 January 1688, for sixty pounds. On this land he made his home. Since this land had been purchased from the Matenacocke Indians only three years previously, there is little doubt that Isaiah was the first white man to live on the site. His house is

³ It is unclear exactly how many children Katherine and Thomas had. Some researchers place the number at seven.

mentioned in a deed dated 10 November 1695, which records the purchase of an additional 81 acres of land holdings.

Isaiah Harrison was married first, in 1688, about a year after his settlement at Oyster Bay, to Elizabeth Wright, daughter of Gideon and Elizabeth Townsend Wright. They had five children:

Isaiah Harrison, b. 1689

John Harrison (1691-1777)

Gideon Harrison (1694-1729)

Mary Harrison (1696-1781)

Elizabeth Harrison b. 1698

Isaiah's wife Elizabeth died about 1698, leaving him with five small children. In 1700 Isaiah married second, Abigail Smith⁴, on April 20, 1702, Isaiah Harrison sold his entire possession of land at Oyster Bay and with his wife, Abigail moved the family to Smithtown. He purchased a tract of land for 400 pounds from William Lawrence, on April 20, 1702. The new home consisted of 500 acres of woodland on the west side of the Nissequogue River in the County of Suffolk, Long Island, New York. It was here that Isaiah and his wife, Abigail made their home and raised their children, along with his children by his first wife, Elizabeth.

The children of Isaiah Harrison and Abigail Smith:

Samuel Harrison

Daniel Harrison

Thomas Harrison (1704-1785)

Jeremiah Harrison (1707-1777)

Abigail Harrison (1710-1780)⁵

On June 12, 1721, Isaiah Harrison sold the 500 acre home at Smithtown and moved with his family to Sussex County, Delaware, where he bought 900 acres of land, known as "Maiden Plantation". Up until this time Abigail's name appeared on all deeds. Her name was missing from deeds after April 28, 1722; so it is thought that she died in 1722.

⁴ While not 100% certain, it is pretty clear that Abigail Smith was the daughter of Jonathan Smith and his wife, Sarah Brewster, who was the son of the immigrant Richard "Bull" Smith, and Patentee of Smithtown, New York.

⁵ Abigail Harrison married Alexander Herring. They are one set of great grandparents of Abraham Lincoln. This means that all descendants of George Robert Miller are third cousins some number of generations removed of Abraham Lincoln.

In the Spring 1737, Isaiah Harrison, his sons and daughters, except Elizabeth and Gideon (who had died), with their wives, husbands and children, left Delaware and set out for the Valley of Virginia. As their former home was only 8 miles from Lewes, they most likely embarked from Lewes on a ship, going by water to the old town of Belhaven on the Potomac. The party of 16 went by the way of what is now Alexandria, Virginia, crossing the Blue Ridge at Thornton's Gap, and then followed along the South Fork of the Shenandoah River⁶. Isaiah Harrison never completed the trip, as he died on 1738 somewhere in the Shenandoah Mountains. His sons persevered, however, and each eventually took land in where Rockingham County, Virginia now stands.

Thomas Harrison

Thomas Harrison married Sarah Cravens⁷ in about 1729. Together they had nine (or ten children):

Abigail Harrison was born circa 1730 in Smithtown, Long Island, NY. She married Leonard Herring Aug 1761. Abigail Harrison and Alexander Herring were one set of the grandparents of Abraham Lincoln.

Jeremiah Harrison (1740-1779)

Davis Harrison (1743-1803)

Robert Harrison (1745-1797)

John Harrison (1745-1806)

Thomas Harrison (1750-1800)

Ezekiel Harrison was born October 3, 1751 in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and died 1834 in Sangamon County, Illinois.

Rueben Harrison (1754-1841)

Sarah Harrison (b. 1760)

James Harrison (b. ~1762)

Thomas Harrison and his brothers were the first to patent land in what is now Rockingham Co, VA.⁸ Thomas Harrison and his wife Sarah and daughter Abigail settled at the Head spring of the East Fork of Cook's Creek in 1737, eventually accumulating thousands of acres at the intersection of the Great Valley Road and the Spotswood Trail (which runs between Harrisonburg and Elkton.). While his first house was most likely a log cabin, he built the first house of limestone in the area and it still stands directly across

⁶ It is quite conceivable that the Harrisons first met Adam Miller and his family, who had settled along the south fork of the Shenandoah River in 1727.

⁷ There is some disagreement as to how many wives Thomas had and who the mother of his children were. The story that makes most sense to me is that Thomas Harrison married Sarah Cravens in about 1729, the only wife of Thomas Harrison and mother of all of Thomas' children.

⁸ Orange Co record Dec 8, 1739.

the street opposite the Northside entrance to the new Methodist Church, corner of Main & Bruce Street in Harrisonburg.



Thomas Harrison qualified as a Cornett⁹ on March 22nd, 1743 in Captain William Linville's Company, however it is unclear if he saw any formal military action. He may or may not have participated in the French and Indian War.

In 1779, Harrison deeded two and a half acres of his land to the "public good" for the construction of a courthouse. In 1780, Harrison deeded an additional fifty acres¹⁰, which became the area now known as "Historic Downtown Harrisonburg." In act of the General Assembly at Williamsburg, passed in May 1780, and signed by Thomas Jefferson, governor, established the town of Harrisonburg, County Seat, Rockingham Co, Va.¹¹

After a long full life, Thomas Harrison died in 1785 in Harrisonburg. Sarah Harrison died 1782. It is believed they are buried in an old burial grounds overlooking the public square in Harrisonburg¹².

⁹ Cornet was originally the third and lowest grade of commissioned officer in a British cavalry troop, after captain and lieutenant. A cornet is a new and junior officer. The cornet carried the troop standard, also known as a "cornet". The cornet is a rank that was eliminated and replaced with second lieutenant.

¹⁰ History of Harrisonburg City, at HarrisonburgVA.gov

¹¹ Henings-Statutes at Large of Va Vol 10, p. 295.

¹² Page 248, Settlers by the Long Grey Trail

Ezekiel Harrison¹³

Thomas Harrison's youngest son, Ezekiel was born October 3, 1751 in Rockingham County, Virginia. He married Sarah Bryan in Rockingham County in 1775. He fought in the Battle of Point Pleasant^{14, 15} and served in the Virginia militia.¹⁶ Later in 1780 & 1781 he served multiple tours in the Virginia Militia.¹⁷

Like his Father, Ezekiel was active in both public life, serving as the Sheriff of Rockingham County, and private as a member of the Smith Creek Baptist Church. It was in Rockingham County that he married Sarah Bryan in 1775 and began raising a family. Ezekiel and Sarah had several children:

Malinda Harrison

Sally Harrison

Thomas Harrison

Reuben Harrison

Jesse Harrison

Ezekiel B. Harrison

Lucinda B Harrison

George W. Harrison

The opportunity for land and the call of adventure eventually lured him away from Virginia, first to Christian County, KY in 1818 and then eventually settling into the wilds of the Sangamon Valley in Illinois in 1822. It was on his Cartwright Township homestead that he died in 1835 and is buried. The death announcement for Ezekiel Harrison in the Sangamo Journal on April 30, 1836 stated:

¹³ There is reference in some sources that Ezekiel Harrison and his descendants were of the same line as the Jamestown Harrisons, from which the signor of the Declaration of Independence and the Presidents Harrison descend. Research today appears that it is unlikely, however, if so, the connection is deep in the line and unclear where the connection actually occurs.

¹⁴ October 10, 1774. Ezekiel Harrison was wounded in the right breast. The Battle of Point Pleasant was recognized by Congress as the first Battle of the American Revolution.

¹⁵ In a Court held for the County of Rockingham on the April 29, 1783, the following is recorded "On the motion of Ezekiel Harrison, Reuben Harrison, and Isaiah Harrison, having advertised the Court of their intention of removing from this state to the state of Georgia and as they are informed it is necessary for strangers to carry with them a certificate of their character and conduct from the place where they remove from prayed the court would certify their knowledge of them. The court therefore taking the same under consideration and willing to do justice as well to the said Isaiah Harrison, Ezekiel Harrison and Reuben Harrison as to their fellow citizens where they are about to remove, the clerk of this court does certify that the said Ezekiel Harrison, Reuben Harrison and Isaiah Harrison were born and brought up in the County and during the long contest with Great Britain as behaved themselves as good and faithful citizens and soldiers and always possessed true Whigish Principles and upon all occasions exerted them for the service of the United States." There is no evidence that Ezekiel Harrison ever made the trip to Georgia.

¹⁶ (State of Illinois, SS; Sangamon County, Oct 9, 1832.), LGT, pg229.

¹⁷ National Archives, Revolutionary War Number W23211.

He was one of those men that lived in “the times that tried men’s souls;” and bore to the grave deep marks of wounds received in the wars of the revolution.

Reuben Harrison

One of the middle children of Ezekiel and Sarah Harrison, Reuben Harrison was born June 12, 1779, in Rockingham County, Va., married there, May 16, 1804, Parthenia Harrison. They had one child before Parthenia died.

Leonard C. Harrison, born Feb 4, 1805

Reuben Harrison later married Nov. 29, 1810 Barbara A. Harnsberger.

They had four children:

George M. Harrison, born March 20, 1813

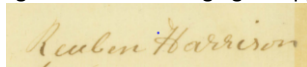
John H. Harrison, born April 6, 1815

Sarah U. Harrison, born 1817

Matilda A Harrison, born 1820

It was in 1822 that Reuben and Barbara permanently moved their family to Sangamon County along with his father Ezekiel and other family members. Reuben Harrison was very active in public life. He was appointed by an Act of the Illinois Legislature to serve as a Road Commissioner at least twice^{18,19}, served as a County Commissioner for many terms and later served in the Illinois Senate.²⁰ In addition he ran for County Surveyor twice, but lost each time.^{21,22} Reuben Harrison died May 3rd, 1852.

¹⁸ A Bill relative to a State Road Therein Named. [1835-02-12]. <https://papersofabrahamlincoln.org/documents/D200052c>. The Papers of Abraham Lincoln Digital Library. This Bill was authored by Lincoln. The final enacted Bill contains Reuben Harrison’s signature acknowledging his appointment.



¹⁹ An Act to Relocate a Part of the State Road Leading from William Crow's in Morgan County, to Musick's Bridge, in Sangamon County. [1837-07-21]. <https://papersofabrahamlincoln.org/documents/D200115b>. The Papers of Abraham Lincoln Digital Library. This Bill was authored by Lincoln.

²⁰ Election Returns for New Salem Precinct in Sangamon County, Illinois. [1835-08-03]. <https://papersofabrahamlincoln.org/documents/D303462>. The Papers of Abraham Lincoln Digital Library.

²¹ Election Returns for Springfield, Illinois, Poll 3. [1839-08-05]. <https://papersofabrahamlincoln.org/documents/D303497>. The Papers of Abraham Lincoln Digital Library.

²² <https://papersofabrahamlincoln.org/persons/HA01152>

George M. Harrison

George M. Harrison born March 20, 1813, in Virginia, came to Sangamon county, with his parents in 1822, Reuben and Barbara Harrison.

As a young man, he served briefly in the Black Hawk War, in Jacob Early's company, and alongside Abraham Lincoln.^{23, 24} It is clear they knew each other well.^{25, 26, 27} and in an eloquent letter to Lincoln in 1860 Harrison wrote

*"But I think you will know that what I say, I feel -- For the attachment [the friendship between Harrison and Lincoln] commenced in the Black Hawk campaign, while messed together, with Johnson, Fancher, & Wyatt, -- when we ground our coffee in the same tin cup with the hatchet handle, -- baked our bread on our ramrods around the same fire, -- ate our fried meat off the same piece of elm bark, -- slept in the same tent every night, -- traveled together by day and by night in search of the savage foe, -- and together scoured the tall grass on the battle ground of the skirmish near Gratiot's Grove in search of the slain, -- with very many incidents too tedious to name, -- and consummated on our afoot and canal journey home, must render us incapable of deception --"*²⁸

George Harrison studied medicine under Jacob Early, whom he served under during the Black Hawk War. He went to medical school Rush Medical College in Philadelphia, and in 1840 became the second person from Sangamon County to graduate from a medical college.

George M. Harrison was married May 18, 1840, near Harrisburg, Rockingham County, Va., to Maria B. C. J. Houston. They came at once to Sangamon county, and he engaged in practice on Richland creek, where they had three children:

Ann Amantha Harrison, b.1841

Reuben H. Harrison, b. 1842

Sarah B.C. Harrison, b. 1844

Maria Houston Harrison, died Jan. 11, 1845, and George Harrison married Mary A. Megredy November 25, 1847. They had nine children:

Emma E. Harrison, (1849-1894)

²³ It is likely through serving with Jacob Early in the Black Hawk Campaign that young George developed an interest in Medicine, later studying under Early during his training to be a physician.

²⁴ Muster Roll of Captain Jacob M. Early's Company of Mounted Volunteers. [1832-07-10]. <https://papersofabrahamlincoln.org/documents/D254535c>. The Papers of Abraham Lincoln Digital Library.

²⁵ <http://lincoln-live.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-lincoln%3A35056>

²⁶ <http://lincoln-live.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-lincoln%3A35796>

²⁷ <http://lincoln-live.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-lincoln%3A34615>

²⁸ <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal0295400/>. This letter was acknowledged on behalf of Lincoln by John C. Nicolay in June. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal0304800/>

Jennie Harrison, b. 1850

Julie S. Harrison, b. 1852

Abbie Harrison, b. 1854

Melinda "Lillie" Harrison, b. 1856

John E. Harrison, b. 1858

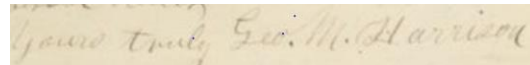
William H. Harrison, b. 1860

Mary B. Harrison, b. 1862

Henrietta Harrison, b. 1864

Besides being a physician and a respected farmer, George M. Harrison was a patriot to the end. In the same letter congratulating Lincoln in 1860, Harrison wrote:

"I am also glad to know, although we must act in vastly different spheres, that we are enlisted for the promotion of the same great cause: the cause which, next to that of revealed religion, (which is humility & love,) is most dear: the cause of Liberty, as set forth by true republicanism not rank Abolitionism -- Then let us go on in the discharge of duty, trusting, for aid, to the Great Universal Ruler."

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Yours truly Geo. M. Harrison". The ink is dark and the paper appears aged.

Dr. George M. Harrison died Sept. 1, 1873. He had been to the house of a neighbor, and was returning late in the evening. His horse arrived at home without him. A search was undertaken and his body was found at the crossing of a sharp ravine, where it was thought the horse had tripped and thrown him over its head. His widow Barbara continued to reside on the farm where he commenced practice in 1840, located north of Richland creek, and two and a half miles west of Salisbury. Mary McGredy Harrison died on September 15, 1893.

Emma E. Harrison

When Emma E. Harrison was born on April 27, 1849, in Pleasant Plains, Illinois, her father, George, was 36, and her mother, Mary, was 28. She married Philip Oscar Hodgen on March 28, 1872, in Sangamon, Illinois. They had ten children in 18 years. She died on October 8, 1894, in Afton, Iowa, at the age of 45, and was buried in her hometown.

Their daughter Ella "Elinor" Florence Hodgen was born on February 21, 1888, in Pleasant Plains, Illinois. She married Thomas Curtis Miller. Together they had five children, one of whom is George Robert Miller.