

"It's better to be ignorant than to know what ain't so." --Will Rogers

COMMENTS CONCERNING WRITINGS BY MILLIGAN AND SPROAT ABOUT JANE MASON

By

Dale Hanks

Since Mr. Tom Milligan's and Ms. Pat Sproat's claims about the family origins of Jane Mason Jeffery are unfounded and untrue, I offer these comments to set the record straight. Their essay, "*The Family of Jane Mason*" (2009) is completely lacking in evidence to support their claims, and so full of errors, fantasies, wild speculation, inconsistencies, contradictions, and irrelevancies it is hard to know where to begin.

The central problem with Mr. Milligan's and Ms. Sproat's writings is anchored in what logicians call *Petitio Principii*. This is an ancient Latin expression referring to a fallacy in which the conclusion is assumed by the premise. That is, the premise is assumed to be true without proof, or to put it another way, what is to be proved is implicitly taken for granted.

Their tale is stunning in its lack of cohesion, and provides a classic illustration of the notion of *Petitio Principii* where there is no valid independent evidence or reasons to believe the claim that Jane Mason Jeffery was the daughter of John Mason IV, a wealthy Colonial Virginian, and his wife, Jane Parham.

Their narrative demonstrates the fallacy of presumption, because it directly presumes the conclusion. Simply put, they have presented a circular argument where their conclusion essentially appears both at the beginning and end merely creating an endless circle, never accomplishing anything of substance. It is like saying "A" is true because "A" is true

After a tsunami of irrelevant historical tidbits (apparently gleaned from various internet websites) about John Mason IV, George Mason, George Washington, the Wellness Directory of Minnesota, Sir John Mason, Col. David Mason, J.J. Sams, Mary Epps, The Virginia House of Burgesses, John Raines Mason, horse racing, cock fights, Ambrose Jeffery, Daniel Mason, R. Bolling Batte Biographical Card Index, Thomas Jefferson Mason, Nathaniel Mason, Epps family plantations, the Virginia Conventions, Patrick Henry, small pox epidemic, etc.—the writers finally reach the circular conclusion that was stated in their premise.

Mr. Milligan and Ms. Sproat claim that a handwritten entry on a card by R. Bolling Batte is proof that Jane Mason was the daughter of John IV and Jane Parham. There was such a Jane Mason, but she was not the Jane Mason who married James Jeffery and settled in IZARD County, Arkansas.

In fact, this obscure card on which they base their claim is a boomerang proving exactly the opposite. Quite to the contrary of their assertion, this card actually proves that the Jane Mason on the card was not the person they claim is Jane Mason Jeffery. I have documented proof from the Library of Virginia that the Jane Mason they selected from the deep blue sky to be Jane Mason Jeffery died when she was about three years old.

The card in question clearly states a birth date of 1774, and that Jane was born in Sussex County, Virginia. It has long been established by reliable documents and grave markers in the Jeffery family that Jane Mason Jeffery was born in 1769 near Alexandria, Virginia and not in 1774 in Sussex County as they claim.

John Mason IV and Jane Parham Mason could not possibly have been the parents of Jane Mason Jeffery as alleged by Milligan and Sproat. John IV and Jane Parham had only two surviving children: a son John Raines Mason and a daughter, Elizabeth Mason.

Milligan and Sproat claim that Jane Mason Jeffery was called “Eliza Jane” in the John Mason household. This could not possibly be true because documented evidence proves that this Eliza Jane was not even the daughter of John Mason IV and Jane Parham Mason. She was their granddaughter and married one Benjamin Wyche—not James Jeffery.

These facts are documented in Jane Parham Mason’s Will. This document can be found in the 1804 Sussex County Wills beginning on page 395. These papers are in the Library of Virginia in Richmond. .

.Moreover, no Alexandria City, Virginia ever existed in Sussex County. Alexandria, where Jane Mason Jeffery was born, is a full 150 miles north of Sussex County. Her birth date and place of birth has been well documented in the Jeffery family for over 200 years.

Mr. Milligan and Ms. Sproat say that Jane Mason Jeffery was born in two different places--one of them being Kingston (Campbell County) Virginia. Jane was born in 1769 so it was not possible for her to have been born there because no Kingston existed there at that time. What is now Campbell County was a vast wilderness in 1769. In 1824, one Sackville King petitioned the Virginia General Assembly to establish a village on his land in Campbell County. He was successful in getting his petition approved and called the place Kingston. Jane Mason Jeffery was fifty five years old and living in Mt. Olive, Arkansas by this time. That village, Kingston, has long been gone with the wind.

The second place they say she was born was Sussex County, Virginia—at least 100 miles east of Campbell County. A preponderance of evidence shows that Jane was born near Alexandria, Virginia, 150 miles or so from either county.

The writers place a great amount of credence in some previous work about the White River valley by JJ Sams. Sams' piece is entertaining, but anyone who reads it should be aware of a caveat as to its credibility. Sams was close to eighty years old when he wrote his story from memory. There are some erudite sounding parts overflowing with pompous rhetoric that Sams, an un-schooled river pilot, could not possibly have written. One or more other persons have clearly added to his tale.

Much of Sams' saga is plagiarized from previous writings by Augustus Curran Jeffery. A peculiar genealogical chart appears along with Sams' narrative. Kathryn Langston, who transcribed Sams' story, is doubtful that Sams devised the chart. In any case, Sams refers to an Isaac Jeffery, both in the chart, and in his anecdote.

Sams claims that he had heard his uncle Jesse Jeffery tell about his voyage with his father Isaac and brothers across the ocean. Old Jesse Jeffery must have been spinning yarns to entertain his nephew. A great amount of genealogical information held by the Jeffery family is proven by names and dates on grave markers, family Bibles, and other documents. These records make no mention of an Isaac Jeffery in that era.

The records do show that a James Jeffery from England immigrated to America around 1750. He had a son, James Jeffery (brother of old Jesse) who became known as James Jeffery of Virginia to distinguish him from his father, James of England. James Jeffery of England, not Isaac Jeffery, was the progenitor of the IZARD County, Arkansas Jefferys.

Milligan and Sproat practice a peculiar form of "research" that is not research at all. It has no logical beginning and naturally leads to illogical conclusions. In their odd form of inquiry they have deposited Jane Mason Jeffery into at least two Mason family groups hoping to prove that she belonged there all along.

After starting with the family of Colonel David Mason of Sussex County, Virginia, they later switched her to the family of John Mason IV and his wife, Jane Parham Mason. In a piece called "Nathaniel, Daniel, and Jane" they wrote:

"...In the volume of research findings, we had temporarily traced Jane and Daniels' ancestry to the family of Colonel David Mason of Sussex County, Virginia. All of the evidence we had uncovered lead us to this logical conclusion. So we consciously made the decision that we would leave Jane and Daniel Mason with this family 'temporarily' until someone could prove to us (after they saw our evidence) that Jane and Daniel 'didn't' belong with the family

“No one has yet to step up to the “Research” plate...however...we are going to present new evidence that Jane Mason of Batesville, Arkansas descended from a man by the name of John Mason IV and his wife Jane Parham.”

In point of fact, I personally “stepped up to the plate” and sent both writers documented evidence that Jane Mason Jeffery was never in the family group of John Mason IV and Jane Parham. To my knowledge, they have never incorporated this truth in their futile quest to have people believe that Jane Mason Jeffery descended from the aristocracy of Colonial Virginia.

Incidentally, Milligan and Sprout say that the Library of Virginia is in Alexandria, Virginia. It is not. It is, and always has been, in Richmond. I should note, too, that Jane Mason Jeffery never lived in Batesville, Arkansas as they have indicated above. Nor did she ever live with the JJ Sams family as they claim

Jane Mason Jeffery lived at Mount Olive, Arkansas with her husband, James Jeffery, until they had a spat. When Jane and James spilt up, she moved in with her son Daniel, and lived at his place just below Mount Olive until her death.

The writers say that James did not want Jane buried in the old family graveyard where he was. Although they were buried in separate cemeteries, no one knows for sure who made this decision. It might have been merely a convenience to bury her at Daniel’s place since she was already there.

Milligan and Sprout, with no evidence to back it up, dispute some earlier writer’s claims that Jane Mason Jeffery was “headstrong.” I will take the word of the earlier writers who knew her personally and accept their characterization of her being headstrong. Milligan and Sproat say that Jane was “big-boned” and would give her son, Jehoiada, a “strappin.”

“Big-boned” in the south means fat or obese. People who knew her personally say that she ate sparingly, that she was slender, more on the petite side. If there were any fat women on the frontier they would have been a curious novelty. “Whuppings” or “strappings” were left to the man of the house—not the mother.

The writers quote A.C. Jeffery, an early historian of Izard County, as saying that Jane Mason Jeffery was a “breath of fresh air” in the early days of recorded Ozark Mountain History. .A.C. Jeffery never said that. That quote is from an article I wrote for the Izard County Historian many years ago.

The writers state that, *“The only real record that exists of her (Jane) is a single letter written during the Civil War by her Great Grandson, Ambrose Jeffery to his father*

Miles.” Really? There are several other records and other such letters by Ambrose Jeffery possessed by members of the Jeffery family.

The only thing that letter shows about Jane is that Ambrose was her great-grandson and that she was a sister to Daniel Mason in Loudon, Tennessee. No earth-shaking revelation here. The Jeffery family at Mount Olive has known this for generations. This single letter provides not one scintilla of evidence of a connection with John Mason IV.

Still left to be explained is how a daughter of the Virginia aristocracy could possibly marry an illiterate laborer such as James Jeffery? These things just did not happen in Colonial Virginia. But then if you believe in fairy tales, Cinderella is your girl.

Toward the end of their treatise on Jane Mason’s alleged family, Milligan and Sproat finally overwhelm us with this stunning revelation: “...*Jane Mason is not specifically found any longer in the Mason Family Records...*” WHAT? “Curiouser and curiouser,” cried Alice. “Good grief,” sighed Charlie Brown.

The writers wrap up their piece by saying, “*Grand Mother Jane, we have written you well.*” Oh?

On the upside, I should add that these writers seem to have much energy and a great passion for family history. Despite missing the mark on Jane Mason, they have made some contributions to the history of some other members of the early IZARD County Jefferys. With their energy and enthusiasm, they have the potential for future offerings to the legacy of the Milligan family, Jefferys, and others.

A note brief from the commentator:

I simply believe that family history should reflect the truth so I sent this commentary to Tom Milligan sometime around 2008 or 2009 and requested that he post it on his website, Milligan’s Campground (or something like that). He chose not to include it.

I am a direct descendant of James and Jane .Mason Jeffery. I believe that I am qualified to have made these observations. At the risk of sounding pompous, I share some of my background with the reader solely to dispel any notions that I have just ridden into town and fell off the back of a turnip truck

I have studied and written about Jane Mason and her Jeffery family for over forty years. My publications include several books and numerous articles in historical journals including the *Arkansas Family Historian*, *IZARD County Historian*, *Baxter County History*, and others. Three of these articles, by peer review, have won recent statewide awards

in Arkansas family history. One of the books received an award from the *Heart of America Genealogical Society and Library, Inc.*, Kansas City, Missouri.

I am a graduate of the National Genealogical Society in American genealogy. I have conducted numerous seminars in Richmond, Virginia for the past fifteen years in writing personal and family history. I have taught on adjunct faculties at the University of Virginia, Arkansas State University, Oklahoma State University, and George Washington University. I spent one year at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond as a visiting professor.

I once spent a full week with two other Jefferys at the Library of Virginia in Richmond searching for Jane Mason Jeffery records. There are none. We found eight or so Jane Masons from old Virginia but none of them were the Jane Mason who married James Jeffery and ended up at Mount Olive, Arkansas. Truth is--Jane Mason Jeffery did not descend from John Mason IV. No way. Will Rogers said it best, "*It's better to be ignorant than to know what ain't so.*"