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**20 July 2008**

***RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS***

**OBJECTIVES**

- Ultimately, seek to prove that John Dowell (born in 1810) was the son of John and Sarah/Sally Dowell. To do this, look for evidence that Margaret Dowell (born in 1816 in North Carolina and married Thomas Simpson in 1831 Washington County, Illinois) was the sister of John Dowell III (born in 1810) and daughter of John Dowell II.

**RESULTS**

- Unfortunately, no direct evidence has been found connecting Margaret to either John Dowell, despite an extensive search. On a more positive note, no conflicting information was found to disprove the theory.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Obtain a copy of the family bible of Mrs. Belle Dowell of Illinois.
2. Conduct a descendency search for the descendants of Margaret Dowell and Thomas Simpson to see if any living family members have private family history collections.
3. Contact additional local, county, and state repositories in Indiana to hunt down any other possible clues. Keep in mind that there are several possibly unrelated Simpson families in the area.

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***RESEARCH REPORT***

Extensive research had been conducted previously about the origins of the Dowell family over the course of several research projects. The primary objective has always been to prove the ancestry of John Dowell, born about 1810, who died in Prairie Township, Vigo County, Indiana. John may have been the third generation of that same name, therefore for the purposes of this report, he will be referred to as John Dowell III in order to distinguish him from his possible father John Dowell II and grandfather John Dowell I of Rowan County, North Carolina.

A descendency chart for John Dowell I is included in the documents of this report, prepared by Dowell family members.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there is a slight error in the date of Margaret Dowell's marriage to Thomas Simpson on page three of the descendency chart. The chart shows she was married 6 October 1813, when in fact she was married in 1831; the numbers were simply transposed. The compiled descendency shows Margaret Dowell and her brother John Dowell III as children of John Dowell II, but does not cite sources for their birth information and is thus informative, but cannot be taken as proof of their ancestry. The search, therefore, goes on.

Working backwards in time from known events to the unknown, John's life was researched previously in an effort to prove his relationship to the descendants of Philip Dowell of Rowan County, North Carolina. This family was the subject of a DNA study, which has been included again for reference.<sup>2</sup> Since prior research failed to reveal conclusive proof that John Dowell III was indeed the son of John Dowell II of Rowan County, North Carolina, collateral line research was suggested for this project using Margaret Dowell as a starting point this time. During previous research, John Dowell III was traced from Vigo County to Washington County,

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<sup>1</sup> *Descendants of John Dowell*, 14 July 2008, compiler unknown; provided by Dowell family members. Document 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Y-Chromosome DNA Project for Maryland Dowells and Dewells Descended from Philip Dowell*, [http://tecservice.com/Dowells/Maryland\\_Dowells\\_Chart.htm](http://tecservice.com/Dowells/Maryland_Dowells_Chart.htm), accessed July 2008. Document 2.

Indiana, where he married Phoebe Owen in November 1831. Another Dowell marriage in Washington County was also identified within months of John and Phoebe's marriage: on 6 October 1831, Margaret Dowell was married to Thomas Simpson.

Further research into the life of this Margaret Dowell conducted during the course of earlier projects revealed that she was born in North Carolina about 1814. Given the date of her birth in North Carolina and her presence in Washington County at exactly the same time as John Dowell III it was concluded that she may have been John's sister. This conclusion was not proven, but was based on the theory that although a possible distant relative John F. Dowell resided in nearby LaGrange County, there were no other known Dowell families in Washington County at the time of Margaret's marriage. It is unclear if Margaret's place in the family was known before or after the discovery of this marriage record, but the presence of two family members by the same surname in the same county born within years of each other in the same state strongly suggests a sibling or other very close blood relationship. It was hoped that perhaps Margaret's descendants had preserved information about her past. The primary purpose of this research project was to prove or disprove Margaret's relationship to John Dowell II and discover more information about her ancestry, hopefully connecting her to John and Sarah/Sally Dowell.

Pertinent historical background information and prior research details should be summarized in order to better illustrate and introduce the research situation. The southwestern corner of Indiana, particularly Washington County, Indiana, was a very popular destination for former residents of Rowan County, North Carolina at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as lands formerly held by Native Americans were released by the government for sale. In the early 1800s, North Carolina found itself in an economic crisis as once fertile farmlands lost nutrients due to over-farming. The concept of crop rotation had not yet been introduced, fertilizer had not yet been invented, and fields began to fail:

It surprises most people that under natural conditions the soils in North Carolina are too low in plant nutrients to sustain crop production...In 1822 Professor Elisha Mitchell wrote that across the state much land had been abandoned and that farmers were being forced to clear inferior land that their ancestors would have passed over as not worth cultivating.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J. Paul Lilly, "Agricultural History of North Carolina," *North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services*, <http://www.agr.state.nc.us/stats/general/history.htm>, accessed April 2008.

This early 1820 account was written at precisely the time when the Dowell family of Rowan County, North Carolina disappears. Southwestern Indiana, by contrast, was in a boom at this time. The Wabash River was a hub of commercial activity, radiating outward from the capital at Vincennes. Indiana's bottomlands, where the Ohio and Wabash rivers meet, held the promise of a productive livelihood for those brave enough to settle the growing frontier. Facing desperate times, many families packed their belongings and turned to Indiana, crossing Tennessee through the Cumberland Gap and then on through Kentucky. Along the long route many children were born, family members died, and some simply decided they had gone far enough and settled along the way, which at times can cause confusion in later family accounts. In the minds of pioneers, the frontier borders of Kentucky and Tennessee can become a blur, and oral accounts misremembered.

Although southwestern Indiana census records had been scoured in the course of previous research, no record of John Dowell II or III had been found in the 1830 or 1840 censuses. Previous research in Rowan County, North Carolina records also revealed that in the early 1820s the Dowell family of Rowan County faced financial hardship, not unlike many others throughout the state. By 1828, John Dowell III and his possible brother Philip would have been old enough to be hired as farmhands as their father faced potential bankruptcy. (Note that Philip is not listed as a child of John Dowell II in *Descendants of John Dowell* attached as document #1.) It is possible that one of two typical scenarios took place:

- a) John Dowell II and his family left Rowan County, North Carolina together; or
- b) John Dowell III and possibly his alleged siblings Margaret and Philip joined another local Rowan County family, leaving their family but with the promise of sending financial relief from their earnings in Indiana.

As a farmhand, John Dowell III would not have been enumerated in the census, since prior to 1850 only the head of household was enumerated. Listed only as a statistic by gender and age, John III and possibly even John II would pass unnoticed no matter how scrupulous the search. In such a scenario, even cross referencing all known landholders in the vicinity of the Dowell home in North Carolina with Indiana neighbors might never yield additional clues.

Furthermore, as farmers, John II and his son may never have received an education. Without the ability to read and/or write, they would not have kept a family bible in which to record their vital records, and may not even have been able to register for the vote, depending on local laws. This combination of events makes research for the time and area extremely difficult. It is probably for this reason that the DNA research study included as document #2 was commissioned in the first place, and it is for all of these reasons that the following sources and methods were undertaken during the course of this research project. Failing the presence of conclusive written evidence, substantial quantities of indirect collateral evidence are required, in hopes that tiny clues hidden here and there could add up to the desired proof that John Dowell III of Vigo and Washington Counties, Indiana, was indeed the son of John Dowell II of Rowan County, North Carolina.

### **Margaret Simpson (nee Dowell)**

In light of all of the background information described above, collateral research began with searching for information about Margaret Dowell, who was married to Thomas Simpson on 6 October 1831 in Washington County, Indiana.<sup>4</sup> It was hoped that the record would contain witnesses or bondsmen who could connect Margaret to John or other relatives; however, the record shows only that Margaret was of age at the time of her marriage and did not need parental consent.

Research therefore turned to historical information about Margaret that may have been compiled by her posterity, such as obituaries, family histories, or other accounts. Unfortunately, none were found. Margaret predeceased her husband Thomas, dying sometime between 1870 and 1880 in Salem, Washington County, Indiana. Previous research in Washington County records turned up the obituary of Thomas Simpson, but unfortunately it makes no mention of his wife or her history.<sup>5</sup> The obituary does state that Thomas was one of the oldest county pioneers at the time of his death, therefore other pioneer memorial works for Washington County were searched for further information, but no mention of Thomas or Margaret was found.

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<sup>4</sup> Washington County Clerk of the Circuit Court, *Marriage Records Jan 1815 – Oct 1918*, p. 51, Family History Library microfilm 1306388: marriage of Thomas Simpson and Margaret Dowel, 6 Oct 1831. Document 3.

<sup>5</sup> James E. Bolding, *Obituaries, selected newspapers of Washington County, Indiana* (Salem, Indiana : Indiana Historical Society, 1992), Family History Library book 977.222 V4b. Document 4.

Children of Margaret and Thomas had previously been identified as:

- i. Nancy J. Simpson, b. 1831/1832
- ii. Louisa Simpson, b. 1836/1837
- iii. Judge Emery Simpson, b. 1838/1839
- iv. John Simpson, b. 1840/1841
- v. Cordelia Simpson, b. 1844/1845
- vi. Thomas Simpson, b. 1846/1847
- vii. Mary M. Simpson, b. 1850
- viii. Sarah F. Simpson, b. 1852/1853

Searching family trees pertaining to the Simpson children led to the family tree of Nancy J. Simpson, wife of William Hurst, Margaret and Thomas' eldest daughter, but unfortunately no information about her grandparents was included in the pedigree chart, and no sources were cited.<sup>6</sup>

It was hoped that a family bible, county history, or other record could shed light on the origins of Margaret Simpson nee Dowell. Unfortunately, no such record was found in the Family History Library despite an exhaustive search. It was hoped that information might be obtained from a local repository in Washington County, Indiana; however, it appears that there is no relationship between Margaret Simpson (nee Dowell) and the Simpson family descendants on file there. One problem with Indiana research is that there is no central single index or repository for the copious volumes of journals, research notes, and loose papers collected over years of genealogical hobby research. Each town library, county library, university library, county historical society, regional historical society, and state historical society maintains small collections. Many of these organizations are working to produce indexes to their holdings, but with such a backlog of potentially valuable papers, there are enormous gaps in index coverage, which makes research sometimes quite challenging.

### **Indirect Evidence**

Since it appears unlikely that a single document proving Margaret and John's father to be John Dowell II of Rowan County, North Carolina will be found, it is necessary to take into

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<sup>6</sup> "Becker-Lane Family Tree," *Ancestry Public Member Trees*, <http://ancestry.com>, accessed April 2008. Document 5.

consideration all indirect evidence. When taken together, the two strongest pieces of evidence in favor of John and Margaret being the children of John Dowell II are:

1. Previous research placing John Dowell I in Lawrence County, Indiana about 1828. Lawrence County borders Washington County to the north and was formed in 1818.
2. John and Margaret Dowell, both born in North Carolina, probably lived close to each other in Washington County, Indiana for over ten years and were married within weeks of each other. This suggests a common migration path and similar ages.

The strongest indirect evidence located to date was reported after research conducted in November 2007:

In August 1828 Alexander Hall, the administrator of John Dowell [I]'s estate, was still attempting to settle the estate and he undoubtedly was owed money by John Dowell [II] (probably the same John Dowell, husband of Sally, who seemed to have disappeared from Iredell County after the summer of 1826). Alexander Hall wanted to collect this asset. In order to track down the money, Alexander Hall legally appointed Abraham Hawkins of Lawrence County, Indiana, his attorney, to collect the money.<sup>7</sup> This is significant since Lawrence County neighbors Washington County on the northwest. This places the prospective father of John Dowell [III] (1810) in the same area of Indiana just three years before the marriage to Phebe Owens.

Unfortunately, despite the almost tangible connection to neighboring Lawrence County, research during this session could not conclusively connect Margaret Simpson (nee Dowell) to John Dowell II or John Dowell III or even to Lawrence County in any way. As with many pioneer women, Margaret's history was absorbed into that of her husband, and no clear record of her personal ancestry has yet been located. Margaret and Thomas Simpson both told the 1850 census taker that they were born in North Carolina about 1816, but subsequent census records and Thomas' obituary indicate that he was actually born about 1810 or 1811.<sup>8</sup> He would have been almost of age at the time John Dowell II was living in Lawrence County, but unfortunately not quite old enough to determine whether his branch of the Simpson family traveled with the Dowell family.

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<sup>7</sup> Russell C. Black *Iredell County, North Carolina Abstracts of the Minutes of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1815-1822, 1826-1834, 1839-1850* (Statesville, North Carolina: s.p., 1999), pp. 71, 85, 140, 147-148, Family History Library book 975.6793 P2b 1815-1850. Document #18 in report Dowell 0708, 13 November 2007.

<sup>8</sup> 1850 United States Federal Census, <http://ancestry.com>: Posey Township, Washington County, Indiana. Household #520, Family #533, Thomas Simpson. Document 6.

It was hoped that, like so many migrating families, the Simpson and Dowell families could have migrated from North Carolina to Indiana at the same time, providing a second avenue for research in the future, but records located during this session essentially proved that to be merely a wishful theory. *Family Maps of Washington County, Indiana* shows land held by John Dowell III and an Isaac Simpson in Washington County.<sup>9</sup> John obtained land in Washington County between 1837 and 1851. His land was not far north of land held by Isaac Simpson, the only Simpson landholder in Washington County and possibly a relation of Thomas Simpson who married John Dowell III's probable sister Margaret. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when Thomas Simpson arrived in Washington County, and whether he ever came through Lawrence County, since there are no early land records in his name. Isaac Simpson obtained land as early as December 1821, when Thomas would have been about five years old. It is unclear whether John Dowell II had yet arrived in Indiana, but Isaac Simpson's first Washington County land record states that he was from Floyd County, Indiana to the southeast of Washington County. Lawrence County is to the north. Although this is not an insurmountable geographic distance, it does seem that the Simpson and Lawrence County families traveled from North Carolina to Indiana at different times. If Isaac were related to Thomas, this would indicate that Thomas Simpson and Margaret Dowell probably did not come to Indiana at the same time and were possibly not from the same location in North Carolina. Simpson family research therefore may not be of much help in future research. However, the relationship between Isaac and Thomas might be verified before the Simpson family is eliminated from consideration entirely, and Thomas' descendants may still possess some knowledge of their maternal Dowell family ancestors.

It was also hoped that one of John Dowell's land records would at least show Lawrence County or North Carolina as his original home; however, in each of his public land transactions he is listed as "John Dowel of Washington County, Indiana."<sup>10</sup> These early land transactions suggest that John had lived in the area for a while, perhaps as a farm hand, before purchasing the land, but unfortunately do little to prove his ancestry.

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<sup>9</sup> Gregory Boyd, *Family Maps of Washington County, Indiana* (Norman, Oklahoma : Arphax Pub. Co., 2006), Family History Library book 977.222 E7b. Document 7.

<sup>10</sup> "Public sale of land certificate to John Dowel in Washington County, Indiana," <http://ancestry.com>, accessed April 2008. Document 8.

## Additional Information About the Family of John Dowell III

During the course of research, a few additional facts about the family of John Dowell III came to light, which may be of help in the future. First, John's daughter Nancy Dowell married George W. Bishop.<sup>11</sup> In 1880, they resided in Atlanta, Logan County, Illinois. Although Nancy most likely died before official death certificates were issued, information about her ancestry might be discovered using Illinois records in the future. Second, *OCLC WorldCat*, a master card catalog of library holdings throughout the United States, suggested that a volume of Bible and church records produced in 1992 by the Illinois Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution might be of use.<sup>12</sup> The bible of Mrs. Belle Dowell was included in the 1992 work. It could be coincidence and Mrs. Belle Dowell may be of no relation to John Dowell; however, since Illinois is just over the border from the Vigo County home of John Dowell, this bible might be of interest in future research. It can be obtained from the Newberry Library in Chicago, Illinois, since it does not appear that the Family History Library has this exact book.

In summary, although documents assuredly proving the relationship between the Dowell family members discussed above might never be found, still nothing in all our research leads us to any serious doubt that John Dowell III was probably the son of John Dowell II of Rowan County, North Carolina. As remaining unsearched records and leads grow thin, it may be necessary to accept the connections as probable, hoping that better evidence somehow comes to light in the future. We do recommend a more extensive search for living descendants of Margaret Dowell Simpson to see if any of their heritage has been preserved. We hope to continue research on your family tree in whatever direction you deem best.

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<sup>11</sup> "Owens Family Genealogy Forum," *GenForum*, presented by Genealogy.com, <http://www.genforum.familytreemaker.com/owens/messages/6461.html>, accessed April 2008: Forum Posting regarding Phebe Owens (wife of John Dowell). Document 9.

<sup>12</sup> Daughters of the American Revolution, *Bible & Church Records*, Illinois DAR Genealogical Records Committee report. Ill: Ill. State Organization, NSDAR, 1992. Cataloged online in *WorldCat OCLC*, <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/29689786?tab=details#tabs>, accessed April 2008. Document 10.