

## BGB 440 The Family of George Brewer of Brunswick County, Virginia

To produce accurate pedigrees for those who have taken Y-Chromosome DNA tests with the [Brewer DNA Project](#), and who believe they are descendants of George Brewer of Brunswick County, Virginia, we must first establish an accurate reconstruction of George Brewer's immediate family. To date, this has never been done. I have yet to encounter a concise portrayal of George Brewer's family that was based upon sound genealogical research, and sound reasoning. None can be found in published genealogical research, and online "family trees," and websites, including the Brewer DNA Project's [current page of Brewer-Lanier pedigrees](#), are full of errors and inconsistencies.

Back on [December 16th, 2014, we presented the 1741 will of George Brewer of Brunswick County, Virginia](#), provided a transcript of the important aspects of the will, and placed a PDF and digital images of the original will pages online. **This will is the principal document we have that can be relied upon for a reconstruction of the family of George Brewer.**

Earlier attempts at transcribing and interpreting George Brewer's will by Marvin T. Broyhill in *Brewer Families of Colonial Virginia, Supporting Documentation Part I* (1994), pp. 5-6, and *Brewer Families of Colonial Virginia* (1992), pp. 89-90, and by Ben R. Brewer, *The Long Brewer Line* (1993), pp. 39-41, are inadequate. Neither provided the reader with copies of the original documents. (See the posts of [December 18, 2014](#), and [December 21, 2014](#)). Broyhill's transcription has errors, and his interpretation of the will for the purpose of reconstructing the family of George Brewer is seriously flawed. Brewer's transcription was an improvement over Broyhill, but he did not offer an interpretation of his own. Broyhill has two errors in his interpretation. His first was in assuming that George Brewer's children were mentioned in the will in the same order in which they were born. His second was in concluding that not all of George Brewer's children were mentioned in the will by name. Ben R. Brewer's failing was in not recognizing and correcting these errors.\*

To be clear: **The children named by George Brewer in his will, were not named in the same order in which they were born. All of George Brewer's living children were named in his will.**

A testator (any testator) writes a will for a reason. The will has a purpose. This was especially true during the colonial period when death often came earlier in life than today, and when a

death might mean leaving a widow and young children. In the case of George Brewer, the **purpose of his will was to provide for his wife, Alice, and for his younger children who had not yet established themselves with property or a household of their own.**

George Brewer named his wife, and all of his children, living at the time he wrote his will, in his will, and in the following order: son William, son Oliver, son Henry, son Nathaniel, daughter Sarah Vick, wife Alice, son Lanier, son George, son Nicholas, son John, son Howl (Howell in other records). The sons, Henry, Oliver and Nathaniel are then mentioned for a second time. There is no evidence that suggests this order was the order in which his children were born. This order does, however, reflect the **purpose** of George Brewer's will. George Brewer addressed the important issues first, that being providing for his wife and for his children who were not yet established. From his bequeaths we can learn the status, or condition, of each of George's children at the time he wrote his will. You are referred back to the post of [December 16, 2014](#) for the transcripts of what is summarized below (which, for reasons of clarity, does not follow the same order as it appears in the will).

George's son William received land on which he was already dwelling. Unfortunately, an accurate description of the location of this property was not given. It may, or may not have been adjacent to George's own property, but at the time of the will George was the owner of the property and William was living on it. From this it can be established that William was old enough to be living on his own (certainly in his 20s) and probably married as he had his own house.

His daughter Sarah Vick, clearly married at the time the will was written, received 150 acres of land. This could be considered a relatively generous bequeath to an already married daughter. She may have only recently been married (no marriage record survives), and this legacy may have been intended as a marriage gift, perhaps belated.

George Brewer's wife Alice, received the estate where they presently were dwelling, with all household goods and stock, for the purpose of maintaining his younger children born to him by Alice. (Alice was a second wife. George Brewer's first wife was Sarah Lanier, who will be addressed later).

George's sons Oliver, Henry and Nathaniel received similar bequeaths. Each of them received land and (later in the will) a gun. Oliver received the "rest of this tract of land where on I now dwell." These three sons were clearly not yet established with households and property of their own at the time George Brewer wrote his will. By setting the three up with both land, and a gun, George was exercising the **purpose** of his will. Oliver, by virtue of the fact that he received land where is father, and Alice, "now dwell," would have been (although not specifically stated) expected to care for Alice as she aged. **Oliver, Henry and Nathaniel were the younger children George referred to.** All though it is not completely certain, at least two, and probably all three, were sons of George's second wife, Alice. It is near certain that Oliver was a son of Alice. **By the fact that the three sons, Oliver, Henry and Nathaniel received property of considerable value compared with the five sons mentioned in the following paragraph, tells us that they were younger, and not older, than the five sons mentioned below.**

The sons Lanier, George, Nicholas, John and Howell, all received what could be described as insignificant legacies. Lanier and George received steers (a castrated bull). Nicholas and John, a cow and her calf. Howell, a horse and "feathers to make him a bed." None received land. None received guns, tools or farm implements of any value. The five were certainly already established with land (and guns) of their own. Perhaps George had taken care of each at the time each came of age. What we can conclude from George's will, that these five (as well as William) were the older sons. All were certainly older then Oliver, Henry and Nathaniel, although Broyhill in *Brewer Families of Colonial Virginia* (1992), p. 90, would have you think otherwise.\*\*

**From his will it can be established that George Brewer's wife was Alice, and that his ten children were William, Sarah (married), Oliver, Henry and Nathaniel (younger children without property), Lanier, George, Nicholas, John, and Howell (older sons, already with property). We have no evidence to include any others as children of George Brewer.**

George Brewer's first wife was Sarah Lanier. This is established from the will of Sarah's father, John Lanier, written 5 January 1718, and proved 14 April 1719 (Atwood Violet, "Lanier Family," *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, vol. 3 (1922), pp.130-131). John Lanier left his daughter "Sarah Brewer" a cow or heifer of 3 years. That George named a son "Lanier Brewer" in his will, leads us to conclude that Sarah Lanier was married to this George Brewer, and not some other George Brewer (or some other man named Brewer).\*\*\* We know that Sarah was alive on 5 January 1718. We do not know when she died. We do not know when she

married, and we do not know when she was born. Louise Ingersoll, *Lanier, A Genealogy of the Family who came to Virginia...* (1970), p. 378, suggested that Sarah was born ca. 1686, that she and George Brewer were married ca. 1705, and that she died between 1724 and 1729. No evidence, reason, or explanation are given by Ingersoll for these dates, although many have accepted them, **we will not.**

George Brewer's eldest son was most likely his namesake, George Brewer, who in his father's will received a steer. On 28 September 1728, George Brewer, Jr. received a patent for 530 acres on the south side of the Meherrin River (Broyhill, *Supplement, Part II* [1996], p. 47, and Varner, *Brewer Families of Southeast America* [2003], p. 342). It can be assumed that George, Jr. was at least aged 21 years when he received the patent, and was in fact probably older. Most males during the colonial period did not become established with their own property and families until at least age 25 or older. In addition, patents were often recorded after the fact, sometimes by a few years. Assuming that as his father's namesake, George Brewer, Jr. was the eldest son, it can also be stated that he was probably born close to 1700, and perhaps in the later 1690s. George Brewer, Jr. died between 16 August 1760 (will) and 27 October 1760 (proved). **George Brewer, Jr. was certainly a son of George Brewer's first wife, Sarah Lanier. He was born much earlier than the "ca. 1715" guess made by Broyhill.**

On 6 December 1736, George Brewer, Sr., Howell Brewer, William Brewer, John Brewer and Lanier Brewer were, among other men, assigned by the Court at Brunswick County, to William Acock, surveyor of the "Highway from William Wall's Road about half a mile from the River to the Beaver Pond Creek" (Broyhill, *Supplement I* [1994], p. 19). Their assignment was to clear the path for the highway. The four, Howell, William, John and Lanier, were certainly the sons of George, Sr., and deeds have confirmed that George Brewer and his family lived in this Beaver Pond Creek area. Varner (*Brewer Families of Southeast America* [2003], p. 208) states that those appearing on this list would have been at least sixteen years old. I would go further and say that in all likelihood the Brewer men recruited for this road work were older than sixteen, and were at least in their twenties and some perhaps in their thirties. They would have been men, with property in the area, and with a vested interest in clearing a road that would have been of use to them all. Although not on this road crew, George Brewer's son Nicholas Brewer could well be the Nicholas Brewer who on 2 February 1737/38, signing with his mark "X", witnessed a deed in Brunswick Co., Virginia between William Rainey (of Surrey Co.) and James Judkins (of Brunswick Co.) for land on the north side of Fontains Creek in Isle of Wight Co. ("Brunswick County, Virginia, Deeds, Wills, Etc., No. 1, 1732-1740," *The Virginia Genealogist* Vol. 2 (1958), pp. 103-104). If it is correct that this Nicholas Brewer was George Brewer's son,

then he was likely at least in his twenties or thirties when he witnessed the deed. Nicholas appears to have been living as late as July 1792, apparently much longer than his brothers George, Lanier, John, Howell and William, and so may have been the youngest of this group.

From the standpoint of onomastics, the given names Lanier, Nicholas, and John, are found in the immediate family of Sarah Lanier (her surname, her father was John, she had a brother Nicholas). **I would not hesitate to place the three, Lanier, Nicholas and John as sons of George Brewer's first wife, Sarah Lanier.** All of the men mentioned in this paragraph were certainly born by 1718, and it is very probable that as many as four or five of them were born by 1710. It is possible that all five, Howell, William, Lanier, John and Nicholas, were all born by 1710, which in turn would push the oldest son, George's birth back into the 1690s. This scenario is plausible.

George Brewer's daughter, Sarah Vick, was married when George wrote his will on 13 July 1741. Ben R. Brewer, *Long Brewer Line* (1993), p. 48, states (without providing a source) that Sarah's husband John Vick, of Meherrin Parish, Brunswick Co., Virginia, wrote his will in 1787 and it was probated in 1789. Eight children are mentioned in the will, three of whom are married daughters. One of the sons was named Howell Vick, but John Vick does not mention a wife and it is presumed that she was deceased. It has been assumed that this John Vick was Sarah Brewer's wife, and he may well have been, but more certain proof is required. By the fact that she was married in 1741, it is most likely that Sarah was born by 1720, most certainly by 1722, and very possibly much earlier in the decade of 1710 to 1720. **It is probable that Sarah is a daughter of Sarah Lanier, and named for her mother as was typical of the time, but it is also possible that Sarah was a daughter of George Brewer's second wife, Alice, and was named in honor of his first, deceased wife, Sarah Lanier. Here I would lean toward the former placement, but we have too little information on Sarah to be certain.**

George Brewer's second wife, the wife named in his will, was Alice. Her family name is not known. Broyhill (*Brewer Families of Colonial Virginia* [1992], p. 89, calls her Alice Burwell, but gives no source or reason for this claim (See Varner, *Brewer Families of Southeast America* [2003], p. 193). We have no indication, or hint as to when she was born, and so far no record of her death or settlement of her estate has been discovered. **Alice is very likely the mother of George Brewer's sons Oliver and Nathaniel, and is likely the mother of his son Henry.** Of these three, Oliver received, by his father's will, the property on which his father and Alice were living. It is common in colonial period wills for a younger son, not yet established with a household of his own, to be given the homestead and be expected to provide for their widowed

mother during her life or widowhood. Nathaniel appears to be the youngest of all as he does not appear as a principal in records himself until the early 1770s. The first deed in which Oliver is a grantor or grantee is dated 5 May 1762. Oliver died in 1792, and Nathaniel appears to have been living in 1800 (U.S. census). It is certain that Oliver and Nathaniel were born no earlier than the decade of 1720 to 1730, and Nathaniel may well have been born in the early 1730s.

Henry is a bit more problematic. He was very likely older than both Oliver and Nathaniel. He is on a tax roll in Orange Co., North Carolina in 1752 (along with his brother Howell Brewer).\*\*\*\* A confirmed grandson of Henry Brewer, named Jones Brewer, died 15 March 1853, "age about 92," in Robertson Co., Tennessee ([gravestone](#)). The 1850 U.S. census at Robertson Co. gives Jones Brewer's age as 84. Jones Brewer was apparently born in the early 1760s. Jones Brewer's father was Henry Brewer's son, George Brewer (who deeded his son Jones land in Chatham Co., NC in 1807). It is safe to assume that Henry's son George was at least 20 years old when Jones was born. If Jones Brewer was born between 1761 and 1766, then it is likely that his father George Brewer was born between 1741 and 1746 (but perhaps earlier), which in turn would imply that Henry was likely born between 1721 and 1726 (but perhaps earlier). The lower end of the given dates could well be earlier if both George and Henry did not have children until their mid-twenties or later. **Since we have no certainty as to the date of death of Sarah Lanier, or of the marriage of George Brewer and Alice, it is possible that Henry is a son of Sarah Lanier.** However, in his will of 2 September 1778, Henry Brewer names his daughters including a daughter "Alison." This daughter may well have been named for George Brewer's second wife, Alice, implying that **Henry Brewer was probably a son of Alice. But again, there is not enough information here to be certain.**

From the above, a more accurate picture of George Brewer's family than has previously been assumed, may be constructed as follows:

**George Brewer (b. ??, d. bef 2 Aug 1744), m. 1st (prob. bef 1700) Sarah Lanier (b. ??, living 2 Jan 1718).**

**Children (order of 2-7 uncertain):**

- 1. George Brewer (prob. b. ca. 1700, d. bef 27 Oct 1760)**
- 2. John Brewer (prob. b. 1700-1715, living in 1767)**

3. Lanier Brewer (prob. b. 1700-1715, living in 1752)
4. Howell Brewer (prob. b. 1700-1715, living in 1758 and perhaps as late as 1774)
5. William Brewer (prob. b. 1700-1715)
6. Nicholas Brewer (prob. b. 1705-1715, living July 1792)
7. Sarah Brewer (prob. b. bef 1720, d. bef 1787)

George Brewer m. 2nd, (perhaps in 1719 or 1720) Alice (\_\_\_\_) (b. ??, living 1750)

Children:

8. Henry Brewer (prob. b. 1721-1726, d. 1778 or 1779)
9. Oliver Brewer (b. after 1721, d. 1792)
10. Nathaniel (b. after 1721, living in 1800)

Of the above named children of George Brewer, it is provable that the sons George, Nicholas, Henry, Oliver and Nathaniel left children. They will be featured in future posts. William is awaiting the Y-DNA test of a male descendant and will be covered once the test results are in. The sons, Lanier, John and Howell require more research and presently lack identifiable children that can be proved, at least to the standard that we need for identifying pedigrees for Y-DNA participants from George Brewer. The last three may or may not be covered in future posts.

It should also be noted that the date and place of George Brewer's birth is not known. No dated document which includes George Brewer's age has been found. Broyhill in *Brewer Families of Colonial Virginia* (1992), p. 87, suggests he was born about 1685, but offers no explanation for that suggestion. Considering that George's son, George Brewer, Jr. was probably born around 1700, George, Sr. "possibly born ca. 1675," would be a better "guestimate." George appears to have been living in 1742 (sued for debt), which *if* he was born *in* 1675 would place him at age 67. He may well have been born earlier. It is not known if George was born in Virginia, if he was an immigrant himself, who his parents were, or if he is or is not related to any of the other Brewers found in the area of Virginia, south of the James River, prior to 1700. **However, if we are able to get enough descendants with reliable pedigrees from George Brewer, and from**

**some of the other early Virginia Brewer progenitors, to join the [Brewer DNA Project](#) and take Y-DNA tests, we may be able to answer some of these questions.**

No birth, marriage or death records have been found for any descendant of George Brewer through the colonial period. Family relationships have to be established through the use of probate records (wills and estate settlements), land records (deeds involving identifiable property, or in which a family relationship is specifically stated), and other court records (which may state a family relationship). Additional source citations will be available online when the Brewer-Lanier Database website is launched.

\*For a more expansive discussion of the errors made by Broyhill, see Foy E. Varner, Jr., *Brewer Families of Southeast America* (2003), pp. 206, 209-210. A digital copy is available from the author for the asking.

\*\*Broyhill adds three additional sons, Burwell, Joseph and Boyce, which he claims are the sons of Alice. He very briefly follows up with the three on page 121. Although all three names appear in at least one record in the area of Brunswick County, there is no record, or evidence, that would allow us to place them in the family of George Brewer. None of the three are named in George Brewer's will.

\*\*\*An copy of the complete, original will of John Lanier has not been examined. Lanier family researchers are advised to acquire a copy of the original and to examine and transcribe it themselves. They should not rely on earlier published transcriptions alone.

\*\*\*\*Orange Co., North Carolina was created in 1752 from parts of Beldon, Granville and Johnston Counties. Chatham Co., North Carolina was set off from Orange County in 1771. All three brothers, Henry, Oliver and Nathaniel lived in close proximity in Chatham Co., on, or near, the Haw River. (See this [map of Old Mills of the Haw River Watershed](#), which shows the location (no. 9) of Henry Brewer's mill, later Pace's Mill. Deeds involving Nathaniel Brewer included land on Dry Creek, a branch of the Haw R. at this same location. Oliver Brewer and his descendants were also involved in conveyances describing land on the Haw River).

December 29, 2014

[Brouwer Genealogy](#)