

About the Ingles Family

In 1760, in the midst of all the hostilities of the French and Indian War, a determined and ambitious young man by the name of William Ingles started operating a ferry across the New River in Virginia, and soon thereafter obtained an official license from the colonial government. The road leading to and from his ferry became one of the main arteries of travel and transportation throughout the eighteenth century, and became known by many names, including the Great Wagon Road, the Philadelphia Road, and the Wilderness Road, but always anchored by Ingles Ferry.

Anyone familiar with the history of Virginia's frontier can probably tell you something about the Ingles family, and especially about Mary Draper Ingles (William's wife), who was captured by the Shawnee in 1755, escaped with a German woman, and walked hundreds of miles back home to Virginia. Her remarkable story has been told and retold, in books, plays, and a movie made for television, but much less attention has been focused on the story of her husband, whose life was also characterized by considerable drama, hardship, endurance, and courage. Here, in brief, is an account of his life.

William Ingles (Inglis) was born in Ireland in 1729, to Thomas Inglis and his wife (name unknown). He probably had two younger brothers, and he may have had sisters, too. Family accounts state that Thomas Inglis, the father, was a wealthy merchant, and it is quite probable that he had brothers who were merchants, too. During the 1740s Thomas and his three sons were apparently imprisoned because of a political dispute, but by the autumn of 1744 all four of them had left prison, crossed the Atlantic, and journeyed into through Pennsylvania and into Augusta County, Virginia. Thomas had brothers (John and William) who came with him into Virginia, and he may have also had a wealthy cousin, John Inglis of Philadelphia, who may have provided transportation and financial support.

The spelling of the name Ingles (or Inglis) changed from one eighteenth century document to the next, and I believe it is reasonable to assume that all of the families with the name Inglis, Ingles, or English probably had common ancestors. Perhaps some researchers will uncover DNA evidence to prove or disprove that hypothesis. I have not yet started to trace the Inglis family backward into the seventeenth century through a genealogy site, but I believe that we will soon find out to which branch of the Inglis family our William Ingles belongs. Several online sources say that a branch of the Inglis family set up mercantile operations in London...and that is a likely match.

Thomas Ingles and his three sons showed up in the Augusta County court records when they were listed as workers to build a road, one of the most important chores facing this wild and undeveloped back country county. Another entry indicates that Thomas took over responsibility for an orphan girl, apparently with the intention of having her help him (a widower) with housekeeping chores. William Ingles probably spent much of his youth exploring and hunting in the wilderness, and we think he went on an early expedition into the far southwest (Burke's Garden) along with his uncle, John Ingles, who was hoping to put up money so that young William could settle there. The three Ingles brothers (the older generation) were

eventually thwarted from their dreams of moving into this fertile and tempting land by the outbreak of the French and Indian Wars, and by thirty years of bickering and legal wrangling over competing claims to the land.

William Ingles married Mary Draper in the summer of 1750, and by the summer of 1755 they had two sons (Thomas and George) and were living at Drapers Meadows (present day Blacksburg, Virginia), along with Mary's mother (Eleanor Hardin Draper), Mary's brother (John), and his wife (Betty Robinson Draper). On July 30th, the Shawnee Indians attacked the Drapers Meadows settlement, killing Eleanor Draper and her grandson (infant son of Betty and John Draper), as well as Colonel James Patton and another neighbor. Taken captive that day were Mary, her two sons, Betty Draper, and a neighbor. William Ingles and John Draper were off working in the fields and did not see the smoke and hear the commotion in time to put up any fight.

For the next four months William and John made trips to Williamsburg to try and stir up interest in launching a preemptive strike against the Shawnee villages in Ohio. The two men were sent to seek help from the Cherokee Nation, but came back home despondent in late November. They were greeted with the amazing news that Mary Ingles had somehow managed to escape from her captors and walk all the way back home. The happy couple were reunited at Fort Frederick (Dunker's Bottom – under present day Claytor Lake), but William soon left her there to recuperate while he went back to Williamsburg to try and convince the governor to order a military strike.

In February, 1756, a force of roughly 200 militia and 130 Cherokee warriors gathered at Fort Frederick to launch what has come to be called the Sandy Creek Expedition into Ohio. Records are unclear as to whether William Ingles and John Draper participated in the expedition, but we do know that many of the officers (Andrew Lewis, William Preston, William Fleming, and John Smith) later went on to take leading military and political roles in the turbulent years leading up to the American Revolution. Many point out that, even though the expedition was a total failure, militarily, it provided a valuable training ground for these men in the art of frontier warfare.

Just a few months after the failed campaign into Ohio, the French sent a large force of soldiers and Shawnee warriors against the settlements in Virginia, and in June they attacked a small fort (Fort Vause – near present day Shawsville) where the few remaining settlers were huddled for safety. Early in the morning on the day of the attack, William Ingles took his wife to a safer place – a fort near the Peaks of Otter (present day Montvale), and saved her from harm. William's younger brothers (John and Matthew) were at Fort Vause that day. John was killed and his wife (another Mary Ingles!) was taken captive. Matthew was wounded and probably died a few months later. Also wounded and killed that day were several brothers of Betty Robinson Draper.

William and Mary made a home in Bedford County for several years while Mary rested and recuperated from her ordeal. After the trauma of 1755, William and Mary were unwilling

to go back to Drapers Meadows to live, and their property eventually passed into the hands of William Preston (present day Smithfield Plantation, on the campus of Virginia Tech).

Because of his ongoing concern about George and Thomas, still in captivity among the Shawnee, William spent a great portion of his time on the frontier, growing crops, fighting Indians, and making trips into to Ohio to negotiate for his sons' release. His efforts were eventually rewarded when, in 1768, after thirteen years in captivity, Thomas Ingles (age 17) chose to return to Virginia and be reunited with his parents (and his four younger siblings - Mary, Susannah, Rhoda and John). By 1760 William had established a ferry on the New River, along with several related enterprises, and in 1772 applied for license to operate an ordinary (tavern) on the western side of the river (still standing today in Pulaski County).

During the years leading up to the Revolution, William Ingles worked closely with Thomas Walker and the Loyal Land Company, participated in battles (Point Pleasant), raised cattle (some were used to feed military campaigns), operated several lucrative businesses, held local office (Sheriff), and reached the rank of Major in the Virginia Militia. He was one of the signers of the Fincastle Resolutions. He tried for many years to secure his claim to land – along the New River, along the Holston River, in Burke's Garden, and along the Bluestone – but his ownership rights remained unsettled until a few months before his death, in 1782. His claims to the land were pretty solid since he had been one of a small group of settlers who actually stayed on the frontier during the years of greatest violence and uncertainty. He undoubtedly felt sympathetic with many of his neighbors who were fighting unsuccessfully to have their land surveyed and their titles cleared. His son-in-law, Abraham Trigg, apparently put up a long and drawn out legal fight to secure Ingles' claim to land. These land disputes fed the resentments between families on the frontier, and encouraged many families to be sympathetic to the Tory cause.

In 1780, when about fifty men (primarily Germans) were brought in for questioning about their alleged Tory activities, William Ingles was implicated as one of the leaders of the Tory plot. The committee, headed by William Preston, found most of the accused man guilty, and ordered some of them to pay a fine of £100 or to send one of their sons to fight in the Continental Army for a year. They did not have enough evidence to convict William Ingles of any crime, but they ordered him to put up a bond – of £100,000 – an unbelievable sum of money for that day and time. No one seems to know if Ingles actually out up a large sum of money or not. Soon thereafter he resigned from the military citing health reasons. This controversy may have hung over his name for many years, but the Ingles family historians have avoided any mention of the subject.

In the summer of 1782, Thomas Ingles' young family (wife Eleanor, plus William, Mary, and Rhoda) were attacked and captured while Thomas was out working in the fields near his home in Burke's Garden. Thomas immediately sought help from his neighbors and assembled a sort of posse to go after the war party. Even though he tracked them to their camp and made plans to attack at dawn, the plans went awry, and when he attacked at dawn, the Indians immediately started killing the hostages. Eleanor was severely wounded, but survived to bear other children. Both Mary and William were mortally wounded, and only the baby, Rhoda,

escaped unharmed. Back at Ingles Ferry, how hard it must have been for William and Mary Ingles to hear this news. Within a few months, William Ingles had died, at the age of 53.

Sources:

John Hale, great grandson of William Ingles, and author of *Trans-Allegheny Pioneers* (1884), describes the Ingles family this way:

Thomas Ingles, according to family tradition, was descended from a Scotch family, was born and reared in London, lived about 1730 to 1740, in Dublin, Ireland, was a large importing wholesale merchant, was wealthy, owned his own ships and traded with foreign countries, chiefly to the East Indies.

Sir Walter Scott states that in the reign of James I., there was a Sir Thomas Inglis who lived and owned baronial estates on the border of England and Scotland. He was much annoyed by the raids and border forays of those days, and, to escape them, exchanged his border estates called "Branx-Holm," with a Sir William Scott, ancestor of the late Sir Walter, and of the Dukes of Buckeleu, for his Barony of "Murdiestone," in Lanarkshire, to which he removed for greater peace and security. Branx-Holm, or Branksome, in Tiviotdale, on the Scottish border, is still owned by the Dukes of Buckeleu. From the close similarity and possible original identity of the names – both very rare – and now only differing from i to e in the spelling, Thomas Ingles of Dublin, may have descended from the Sir Thomas of "Branx-Holm Hall," but, if so, the present Ingles family have no record or knowledge of it. They only trace their line back to the Thomas Ingles of London, Dublin, and Ireland.

There are two families in America who spell their names Inglis. The ancestor of one of them emigrated from Selkirk, Scotland, to Montreal. Those of the other branch came from Paisley, Scotland, to New York. Descendants of the first still live in Canada, but while they spell their name Inglis they pronounce it Ingles, and say it has always, within their knowledge, been so pronounced. The descendants of the Paisley family live in Florida. These two families, and the descendants of the Ingles who came from London and Dublin, and settled in Virginia, are the only families in America, so far as I know, who spell their names either Inglis or Ingles.

In some revolution or political trouble, occurring during the time of his residence on Dublin, Thomas Ingles took a prominent and active part, and happened not to be on the right, or rather, on the winning side, for the winning side is not always the right side, nor the right side the winning side.

On the failure of the cause he had espoused, his property was confiscated, and he was lucky to escape with his life.

He and his three sons, William, Matthew, and John – he then being a widower – came to America, and located for a time in Pennsylvania, about Chambersburg.

Just when they came, and how long they remained there, is not now accurately known; but in 1744, according to the tradition, Thomas Ingles and his eldest son, William, then a youth, made an excursion to the wilds of Southwest Virginia, penetrating the wilderness as far as the New River.

John Hale's version of the family history has gone pretty much un-challenged for about 125 years, but twenty-first century historians have access to sources of information that can shed new light on the Ingles family. Modern day research is leading me, and perhaps others, to some new conclusions. Among the new sources are the *Pennsylvania Gazettes* (eighteenth century newspapers - available online, digitized and indexed), the *Chalkley Chronicles* (transcriptions of the Augusta County Court Records, also available in digital form online), numerous books and articles concerning the early backcountry settlers (and the settlements they came from in Pennsylvania and the Delaware Valley,) and an ever growing quantity of family research on the internet through sites such as *Ancestry.com* or *Family Tree*.

In order to dig deeper into the family tree, I have found it helpful to formulate some key questions that have stimulated my curiosity. With these questions in mind, I have played detective by combing through old newspapers and court records and by rereading many of the books in my personal collection. Here are some of the questions I have been asking:

- How was it possible for William Ingles (a youth in 1744) to own and operate a mill on the North Fork of the Roanoke by 1750? We know that William was born in 1729, so it is not surprising that he married Mary Draper when he reached the age of twenty-one, but could he have already been operating his own mill by that date?
- If William had younger brothers, where were they living during the years between 1744 and 1756?
- If Thomas Ingles had been a wealthy merchant back in Ireland, what happened to his land and possessions while he and his sons were imprisoned? How did he pay for his transportation to America? Did Thomas have brothers (thus William's uncles) who were also interested in securing land in Virginia?
- If so, could they have come to Virginia, too, and perhaps put up some capital for Thomas' eldest son?
- How did William Ingles spell his name? Did the early settlers pay close attention to the spelling of their names on court documents? If the spelling of names was often inconsistent, could that explain why there are so many contradictory references to Ingles' Ferry, English's Ferry, and so on?
- When searching on the internet for ancestors of Thomas Ingles, the trail runs cold, with no links to families in Great Britain. Could it be that the search can only be continued by tracing the name "Inglis" instead?
- During the Revolutionary War, when William Ingles was accused of being a Tory, they could not prove a case against him, but told him to put up bond (of £100,000). Why did the Patriots (the local government led by William Preston) feel that William Ingles had that much money? How could he have had that much money? Did he have financial backing from a wealthy relative?

As I have searched through old documents, I have found several entries that seem to provide answers to some of my questions:

According to the Augusta County Court records, there were two "English" brothers (Thomas & William) who came to Virginia in the 1740s. They were ordered to work on the road

“from the Ridge above Tobias Bright’s that parts the waters of New River from the branches of Roan Oak to the lower ford of Catabo Creek.”

About the same time, the records show that a William and a John Ingles made a trip into Burke’s Garden (present day Tazewell County) to search for desirable land. [As a general rule, the court records do not mention minors by name, so we might safely assume that John and William Ingles were both adults, and probably brothers, or cousins]

By searching through the Pennsylvania Gazettes (published in Philadelphia starting around 1730), I found many “hits” for a John Inglis, a prominent merchant. He even had a wharf named after him. He was born around 1700 and died in 1775. One especially intriguing entry reveals that in the spring of 1744, John Inglis, Philadelphia merchant, announced he was closing his shop (indefinitely?) and sailing to Great Britain. About four months later he ran an ad in the Gazette, saying that he had returned with new merchandise, and that he was opening his store at a new location.

I have found a considerable amount of information over the internet about this John Inglis of Philadelphia. According to his obituary, he was born in 1700 and died in 1775. He may have been a first cousin of the three brothers (Thomas, William, & John) who are mentioned in the court records for Augusta County, Virginia, in 1744. It might be hard to prove, but it is possible that he went to Ireland that same year to help spring some of his cousins from prison and transport them to America.

Not having access to copies of the Pennsylvania Gazette in Charleston, West Virginia, John Hale had never heard of John Inglis of Philadelphia, but knew only about the Inglis branches in Canada and New York.