



# NEWSLETTER of the *Tefft Family Association*

*uncovering the past*

*the descendants of John and William Tefft*

Vol. 1, No. 1  
July 2000

*The premier  
issue of  
the Tefft Family  
Association  
Newsletter!*



*Back to the Roots:  
John and William  
Tefft...See page 3*

Why questions persist  
about the origins of  
the Tefft name.

CRCS

*Just Call Me Tifft...  
See page 4*

A 1950s newspaper  
account tells of an  
unusual man with only  
one name—first, last  
and always a Tifft.

CRCS

*How old are the Tefft houses on Tefft Hill?*

## AS OLD AS THE HILLS

by A. Craig Anthony



tefft Hill, part of the 500 acre purchase made by John Tefft circa 1660 in South Kingstown, Rhode Island, was the locus for the Tefft family in America. For almost 250 years generation after generation remained to live, work and raise their children on their ancestral land. Yet, the land could only support a limited number of families as John Tefft's descendants increased diametrically over time. Many migrated early on throughout the United States seeking greener pastures. Fortunately, two known early Tefft homes have survived intact to the present day; as well as several well-preserved house foundations, the earliest of which appears to have been built circa 1685. These standing houses and house foundation ruins provide a rare glimpse into how the early Teffts lived.

The several houses are architecturally similar in their construction—one-story, wood-shingled Colonial Capes, with large, stone center chimneys and a central entryway with five bays. They all bear similar exterior dimensions of 35 ft. by 20 ft. While no exact dates are known, it is possible to determine the approximate

dates of construction through an examination of the historic record.

The Historic and Architectural Resources of South Kingstown, Rhode Island (RI Historical Preservation Commission, 1984) identifies the date of 1730 for the best known Tefft house located on Chestnut Hill Road in the Tefft Hill estates subdivision. How this date was determined is not mentioned; however, my research indicates the date of construction is perhaps a decade earlier.

My reason for giving this house an earlier date is from a reference to "My Now dwelling House" which corresponds with this structure in Samuel Tefft's will dated 1725:

*Item: I Give and bequeath to my Welbeloved Wife Elisabeth Tefft My Now dwelling House together with my Barne and Orchard with the one halfe of my Whomested farme Where I now live to be taken of at North Side of sd farme and bounded Southerly by the other halfe which I Gave to my son Samuelt Tefft Easterly by a highway Northwardly by Land of Henry Knowles and Westerly by Land of John Tefft to be & Remaine to my said Wife*  
**See Hills page 6**



Close-up view

*Traces of architectural features typical of other Tefft homes mark these ruins as the dwelling of an early Tefft ancestor, possibly Samuel Tefft, Jr. The ruins, located on the Tefft Homestead property in South Kingstown, R.I., appear to date from the early 1700s.*

Photos courtesy A. Craig Anthony



## Welcome Family, Associates and Friends . . .

Bringing our first newsletter to you is a labor that began over one year ago with a handful of Tefft kin meeting for the first time on the Internet. Many have been midwife to this effort and many have joined us since. My heartfelt thanks to all who continue to nourish our association with their interest, enthusiasm and effort. I'd like to believe our ancestors are looking proudly on our accomplishments.

The Tefft Family Association is about the past, but it also is about a living history that exists in each of the descendants of John and William Tefft. The aim of this newsletter is to discover them and, through them, learn more about ourselves and what it means to bear the surname Tefft. Who knows what we will find as we search for the facts and explore the way ahead? Curiosity surely calls us to the classroom. Yet, if our ancestors teach us anything, it is to realize the value of our own lives.

The publication of our first newsletter marks a beginning that coincides with the start of a new millennium. We have made it this far as a family that is truly American. From our colonial roots, we have spread across this new land and, now computers, the Internet and our own strong urges are bringing us back together to reconnect.

In the true spirit of family, we welcome you, one and all.

Darlene Tefft Cobb  
Interim President  
Tefft Family Association

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## Family Album



Alice Crawford, 13th generation from John Tefft of Rhode Island, through Pat Tift Crawford. I am a pastor candidate in the Methodist Church taking my first assignment to four small, country churches in West Virginia. At the end of two years, I will give up my full time job (and long time career) in higher education. I have a foster son, age 16. I enjoy nature photography and traveling as my main hobbies.



**Hello All,** I am Pat Tift Crawford. I am descended from John Tefft (1st generation) of Rhode Island. The 7th generation of his line, also a John, moved to Nassau, N.Y., and changed the spelling of his name to Tift. His son, also John (8th gen.), went to Michigan. John Junior's 4th son, Spellman (9th gen.), was my great grandfather; his 8th child was my grandfather, Fred Tift (10th gen). My parents (Dad, 11th gen.) and four of five siblings were born in Michigan.



Pat & Sassy

Most of our family remained in Michigan, but my parents travelled all over the USA, and I wound up in Kentucky and have been here for most of my adult life. I enjoy genealogy, drawing, painting and photography. Also love gardening and the beauty of nature.



**Hi—**My Tefft lines are (they had a habit of intermarrying):

1. John->Samuel->John->Joseph->Thomas->Thomas->William->William->Mildred Alice (my grandmother)
2. John->Samuel->John->Joseph->Thomas->Thomas->James->James->Bertha (married the second William, above)
3. John->Samuel->John->James->George->Lucy (married second Thomas, above)

My Tefts stayed in Rhode Island, moving from South Kingstown, to Richmond, then to Exeter, with one branch ending up in East Greenwich, and the other in West Warwick. My grandmother, Mildred Alice Tefft, was born in 1896 on a farm in what is now West Warwick (then Warwick), which her grandfather, William Tefft, had bought at the end of the Civil War. I was born and grew up in Rhode Island and my mother still lives there, but I now live in northern New Jersey, where I am a media cataloguer in a county library.

Linda Mathew  
mathew@main.morris.org  
ctmathew@aol.com





# BACK to the ROOTS

## John and William Tefte

Was John the son of William? Or his brother? Different researchers and records have it different ways. But William Tefte's will puts any such question to rest.

by Timothy Tefte



ver the course of my brief yet rewarding study of the Tefte family in the colonies of New England, I have often been puzzled at certain information that has sometimes passed along via the printed word, Internet Web sites and Internet mailing lists.

This article will deal with William Tefte and his wife Anne, his daughter Lydia, and a brother named John. Through the years John has at times been named the son of the aforementioned couple. Yet though this statement has been made, no documentary evidence has accompanied it.

The document with which I trace the root of my family is William Tefte's last will and Testament, which was entered and recorded at the Suffolk County (Mass.) Probate office Nov. 23, 1672. It is puzzling to note that this will was first probated in 1648. A copy of this document is set forth below.

The Town Records of Boston seem to indicate that William Tefte, a tailor, was admitted to inhabit that town Dec. 24, 1638. That same day he bought a house from Jacob Wilson.<sup>1</sup>

### THE WILL OF WILLIAM TEFFE Boston 1646\*

*The first day of the third Month one thousand six hundred and forty-six.*

*I, William Tefte, of Boston in the Massachusetts Bay doe make this my last will and Testament. First, I giue vnto my daughter, Lydia, the summe of twenty pounds, partly for the discharge of the seaven pounds which I receiued for her in England, being a Legacie given vnto her by one Robert Elving deceased, and partly as a Legacie from [my se] lfe, so as shee nevermake other demand of the said Legacie given by the said Robert Elvinge, and so shee doe not marry without her mother-in-lawes Consent, or the consent of such friends as her said Mother shall leave her vnto. To be payd in foure of the youngest Cattle, at due prices, except the least of all, and in such of the houshold goods and mon[ies] as indifferently shall*

*reach to the making up thereof according to the proportion of it (excepting the featherbed wheron I now lye, and vppon the praisment of the goods within two months after my decease her said portion to be putt forth for her best advantage vntil her age of twenty yeares or day of marriage wth consent as aforesaid, (if shee shall live therevnto, even either of them.)*

*Itm. I giue my least steere Calfe vnto the Eldest child of my brother, John Tefte, to be delivered vppon demand, after my decease, if it be then liveing, paying for the charg of the keeping of it, after my decease, vntill it be demanded. All the rest of my goods and chattells, whatsoever, together with my dwelling house and garden and grounds vnder and about it, and all the buildings therevppon, and fences about them, and also, together with my land at Long Island, and the Corne and fruites growing vppon the said ground, both vnder my house, and, at Long Island. I giue and bequeath vnto my beloved wife, Anne Tefte, whom I make sole Executrix of this my last will, to her and to her heires and Assignes, for ever, and in testimonie thereof I haue here vnto sett and putt my hand.*

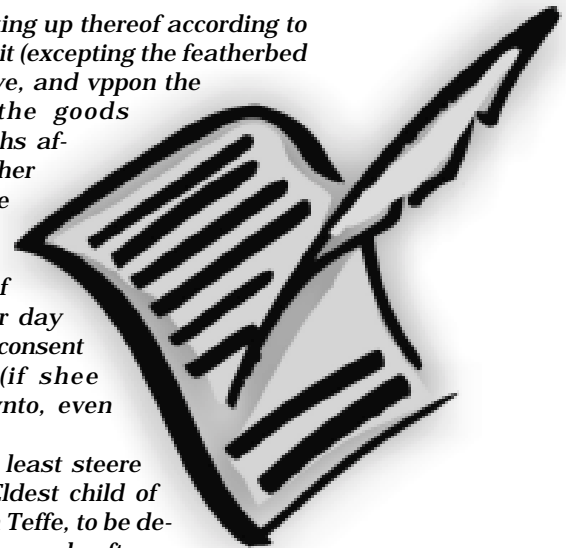
WILLIAM TEFFE

In the presence of  
Tho. Leverett, John Harrison,  
John Ingolsby.

Testified before the Govenour [Mr. No]jwell and Mr. Hibbins, by Mr. Tho. Leverett and John Harrison. 2, (9) 1648.  
Copiavera. Mass. Archives, Vol. 15 B. p. 69

[This Will is recorded at the Suffolk Probate office, Lib. VII, fol. 266. That record contains, also, the deposition of John Harrison, on the 19 June 1661, and of John Ingolsby, 23 Novr 1672, each, in

See **Roots** page 5



### ROOT WORDS Probate and Prove

The two words are used interchangeably and mean the same thing...the official proving that the will of a person who has died is genuine.

### Interlineation

Interlineation is the noun form of the verb *interline* which means 'to insert words or symbols between the lines of'. In other words, it is a correction, or an afterthought that was added in after a document was written.



# Just Call Me Tifft

*This news clipping was found in my aunt's attic. I contacted Mr. Edmund F. Jansen, Jr., Selectman Chair of Rollinsford, N.H., to see if he could tell me anything about Tifft. The following was forwarded to me in response—Kathleen Tifft Cooper*

## Tifft

Tifft bought the run-down Decatur house on Pinch Hill (also known for a time as Tifft Road) and remodeled it completely.

He had no first name because his father and mother couldn't agree on one. He married Ethel Ruth Peterson who graduated from Berwick Academy in South Berwick, Maine. Ethel belonged to the Garden Club. Tifft wanted to join, but he wasn't allowed to because it was strictly a women's club. Therefore, his wife resigned. He died after World War II and his ashes were scattered over his fields—**From Ruth Emerson, (presumed to be a former acquaintance of Tifft)**

## Tifft Road/Pinch Hill

Pinch Hill is located in Rollinsford, N.H., where the turnpike road is crossed by the highway to Rollinsford station. It was so named because it was too sharp and narrow to be crossed by more than one team of horses at a time. Rollinsford, however, wisely appropriated \$800 for the purpose of widening it at the town meeting of 1891.

## Afterword

The story of Kathleen Tifft Cooper's sleuthing to find the origin of this news clipping, believed to be published in the 1950s, is an interesting tale in itself. Worried that the TFA might violate copyright laws by printing it in our newsletter, the intrepid Kathleen got on the Net to track down the article's author. She learned that Stanford Calderwood was none other than the originator of the PBS Masterpiece Theatre series. Is this the same Calderwood? We don't know, but we can't help wondering how many Stanford Calderwoods can there be?



Tifft concludes that a man can feel at home with only one name.

## There's Only One Name for Him

WHEN Mr. and Mrs. Almon Herbert Tifft couldn't agree on a given name for their baby son, they really started something. Mr. Tifft, who didn't care for Almon or Herbert, finally said, "Let the boy choose for himself." What Mrs. Tifft said is not a matter of record.

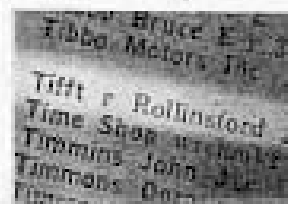
At any rate, their son, now aged seventy-two, has gone through life simply as "Tifft." His boyhood playmates called him nothing else. He never got around to selecting a first name, and when he went into business he found the one-cylinder name a high-powered asset.

As nearly as Tifft can determine, he is the only person in the country with only one name. He traces all such reports and found one other, a Doctor Gatewood, of Chicago, with whom he corresponded. The doctor died several years ago, and now lies under a tombstone laconically worded, "Gatewood."

Tifft's adamant stand that his name is simply Tifft, "first, last and always," headed to thousands of questions, but has been seriously challenged only twice. Once a Brooklyn registration clerk, who would have nothing of trick names, refused to let him vote until he produced a driver's license and pointed to a telephone directory listing, both simply for "Tifft." He won out that time, but lost to an insurance company which insisted upon making out his policy as "A. Tifft." "That," he concedes, "is fair enough, as I am a Tifft—although they could just as well have said 'The Tifft.'"

When Tifft established a wooden-bay business in Brooklyn, he found that letters signed with his sole name attracted no such attention as cleverly worded advertising circulars. Before long, a customer in the Azores Islands addressed a letter to "Tifft, U.S.A." and it was delivered without delay.

When he moved from Brooklyn to New Hampshire to set up a goose-and-bird business, a newspaper mentioned the disappearance of Tifft from the new phone directory. The news item was promptly forwarded by a man



from where he hadn't heard in thirty years.

Tifft has two sons, "both with the usual collection of three names," and several grandchildren. He now wishes that one didn't, so there could be three-generation reunions of Tifft, Tifft II and Tifft III.

The family lives at Tifft-Top on Tifft Road in Rollinsford, New Hampshire. For Mrs. Tifft, that's a little too much of the same. So she has given her husband the only nickname he ever has had, "Tifft."

—STANFORD CALDERWOOD



## News Briefs FROM THE TEFFT FAMILY ASSOCIATION

**Membership**—As of July 4, 60 members have been welcomed to the Tefft Family Association since the organization's formation in March 2000. Through the TFA's Web site presence, referrals from family and efforts to cull directories across the U.S. for the Tefft surname, the TFA's mailing list has grown to over 400 individuals.

**Homestead Donations**—In June, the TFA launched fundraising efforts with a mailing campaign addressed to Tefft families. The campaign seeks support to purchase the Tefft Homestead property in South Kingstown, R.I. To date, \$27,400 has been raised through the TFA and South Kingstown homeowners' efforts. A matching fund of \$80,000 offered by the Town of South Kingstown has spurred

the groups' efforts. In addition to private donations, purchase of the property is being supported with \$50,000 from the State of Rhode Island's Environmental Management. Purchase of the property is being coordinated through the South Kingstown Land Trust, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving green space. The Tefft Homestead consists of approximately 30 acres of land that was continually inhabited by Teffts from the mid-1600s to 1909.

**TFA's Second Homecoming**—A second homecoming/reunion in South Kingstown, R.I., is planned Columbus Day Weekend, October 7-9. Details of the event will be announced online and by mail to those requesting information.



### Want to know more?

Visit the Tefft Family Association Web site at [geocities.com/tefft\\_family](http://geocities.com/tefft_family)

Email  
Darlene Tefft Cobb at [dcobb@hughes.net](mailto:dcobb@hughes.net)

Write us at  
3535 West Ave. J-13,  
Lancaster, CA  
93536-6320

## Roots

From page 3

regard to an interlineation made in the latter part of the above will.

The said will was "entered and Recorded Novr 23d 1672" — twenty-four years after the instrument was proved.<sup>12</sup>

In the above document we are introduced to the author "William Teffe;" his only known child, "my daughter, Lydia;" his wife, "my beloved..., Anne;" and "my brother, John Teffe." The reader can plainly see that there is no son mentioned, let alone named, in the above will. It is the "brother John" who I believe made his way to Rhode Island in the early 1640's. It is also the "brother John" from whom I believe the Teffts, Tifts, etc., in the United States today are descended.

Georgia Washburn, in her genealogy of the Witter family makes the following supportive statement, "No other John Tefft but the one of Rhode Island has been found who might have been John, the brother of William Teffe."<sup>3</sup>

Relying on William's will as our primary piece of documentary evidence, we can conclude that in all likelihood it was these two men, William and John Teffe, who were our immigrant ancestors, the Teffe name dying out with the absence of a male heir on William's side, yet carried on with his brother John, in the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence

Plantations.

It would not be proper to close without mentioning a mysterious John Tefft of New Jersey, living in 1682. This John Tefft was among the subscribers to a protest in the Burlington (N.J.) Court Records concerning the retention of a ship and the subsequent prohibition of its cargo being unloaded on Aug. 15, 1682. The protest was dated Sept. 18, 1682.<sup>4</sup> This man could not have been our Rhode Island John, he was deceased in 1679 at the latest. Could John of Rhode Island have had a son named John? There is no John mentioned in his 1674 will, narrowing that possibility. Perhaps New Jersey John was a sailor or merchant connected with the ship, or its cargo, that was being held. To my knowledge no one has traced an ancestry to this particular John Tefft of New Jersey. All we can do for now is speculate, until further research can be conducted.

<sup>1</sup> New England Historic Genealogical Society, New England Historical and Genealogical Register, Volume 11, p. 310, October 1857.

<sup>2</sup> The will transcribed here is as it appears in Volume 11, page 310 of the October 1857 issue of the "New England Historical and Genealogical Register."

<sup>3</sup> Georgia Cooper Washburn, Mabel Thacher Rosemary Washburn, Witter Genealogy, Descendants of William Witter of Swampscott, Mass. 1639-1659 (National Historical Company, (c) 1929) page 232.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Story Devereux Eddy, A.B., A.M., The Eddy Family in America, (1930) p. 1081.



# Hills

From page 1

*During the Time of her Naturall life and after her Decease the sd Northward most halfe of my Whomested Farm with the Housing & Orchards Thereon to return to my two before mentioned sons John Tefft and Samuel Tefft to be Equally Divided Between them as they two shall agree in ye Division of the Same— (South Kingstown Probate 2:29).*

This "Now" house and the bounds can be still recognized today. The highway mentioned is South Road; the Henry Knowles boundary to the north is the approximate location of the Narragansett Electric Power Lines; and John Tefft (2) inherited the northwest corner of the property. The "Now" house still stands and remains occupied to this very day.

Almost all of the houses in the Pettaquamscutt Purchase were destroyed by the Narragansett Indians during the King Philip's War of 1675-76. At the time, Samuel Tefft first removed with his family to Newport for safety where we find his daughter Sarah was baptized in Newport in 1679.

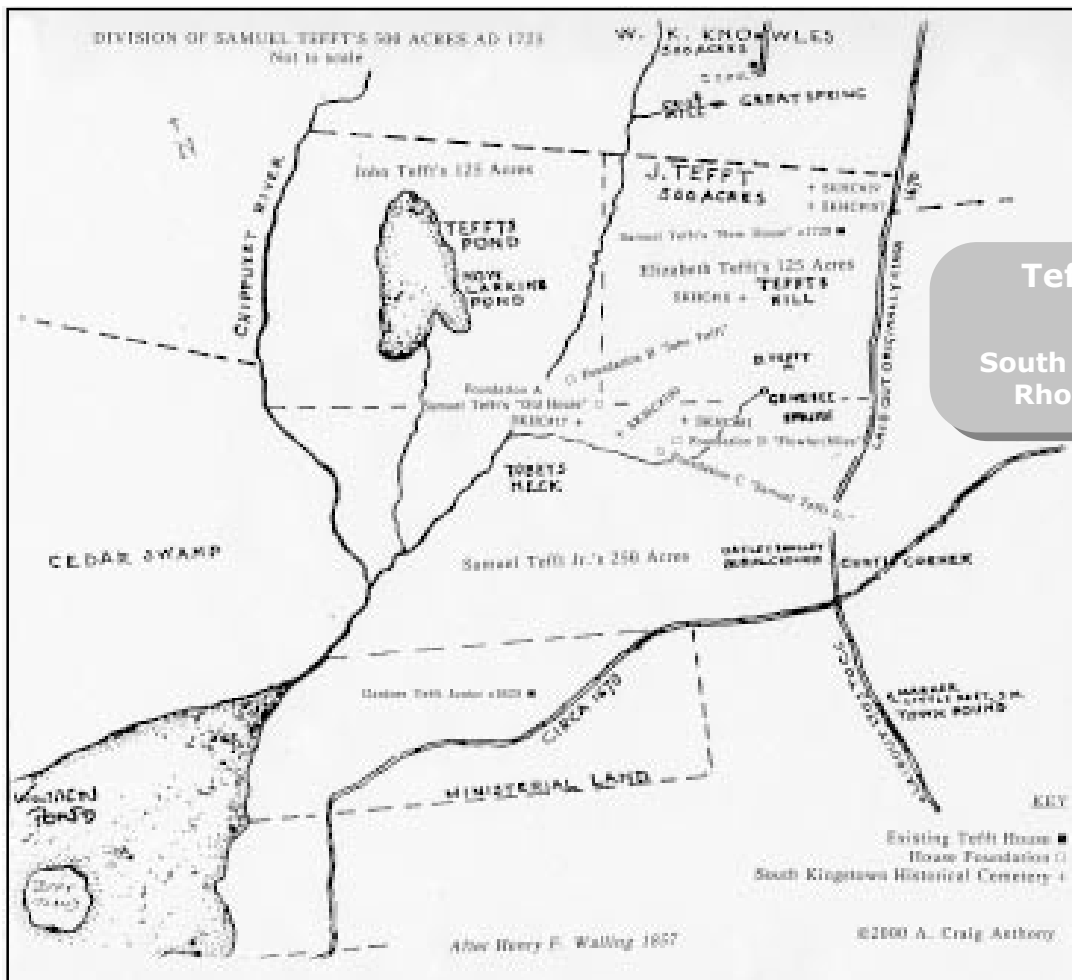
Samuel Tefft next appears at Providence where he remains at least until 1683. Finally, we find Samuel back in Kingstown in 1687, where he is taxed 9 shillings under the Andros administration.

Therefore, it is possible to approximate the date for the construction of Samuel Tefft's "old house" at circa 1685.

John Tefft's (2) will dated 1754 (South Kingstown Probate 5:191) is significant in that it clearly identifies the site of his father's "old house."

John bequeaths 120 acres to his son, John, Jr., beginning “near about north from the place where the old house stood that did belong to my honored father, Samuel Tefft, deceased,” bounded, “southward and easterly by land of...Samuel Tefft, Jr.”

Samuel Tefft, Jr., eventually bought out his brother's interest in the northeast section after their mother died in 1740; therefore, he would have owned the land "southward and easterly" of John. It is apparent from these records that the site of the old house and homestead was





*Gardner Tefft, Jr.'s, home, above, was built in 1825. The house still stands on property adjacent to Smithbridge Stables on Curtis Corner Road. Architecturally it is identical to the other known Tefft houses—a one-story, wood shingled Colonial Cape with a large stone center chimney and a central entryway and five bays. All of the early Tefft dwelling houses bear similar exterior dimensions of 35 ft. by 20 ft.*

Photo courtesy  
A. Craig Anthony

considered to be the geographical center of the 500 acre property. The chimney of Samuel Tefft's old house has been used as the corner bounds for property divisions to the present day. The chimney is repeatedly referred to as a corner bound in eighteenth and nineteenth century deeds.

John Tefft's will indicates that the old house collapsed sometime prior to 1754, possibly the provocation for building the "new house" in 1720.

A second house built was nearby the first structure just north of Samuel Tefft, Jr.'s, property line; therefore, it is assumed that this was in fact John Tefft's dwelling house. The date of its construction is uncertain at this time, although it is probable that its construction occurred at the same time, or soon after, that of Samuel Tefft's "new dwelling house."

Both this house foundation and the old foundation, as well as two associated cemeteries, livestock corrals, adjacent fields and gardens became known as "Gardner Tefft's Farm." Gardner Tefft, a Revolutionary War veteran, is buried with his wife Waity in the adjacent South Kingstown Historic Cemetery #17. Surface archaeological evidence indicates that it remained inhabited until the early-to-mid twentieth century.

Still another house which stands was built almost directly south of the old homestead. The historic record indicates this house to be that of Gardner Tefft, Jr., being built on land he purchased in 1821 as part of the division of the Ministerial

Lands. The building is adjacent to Smithbridge Stables located on Curtis

Corner Road and has had several additions, but it is interesting to note that the core building is architecturally identical to the other known Tefft houses.

In conclusion, it is possible to estimate the construction dates for at least three of the four known Tefft dwelling houses from the historic record. The earliest appears to have been built circa 1685, the second circa 1720, and the latest circa 1825.

It appears evident from a cursory look at the archaeological evidence, as well as vaguely indicated by the historic record, that the remaining house, now in ruins, most certainly dates to the mid-eighteenth century. Perhaps future historical inquiry and archaeological research might provide more answers.



### The Old Ones

- Samuel's "old" house, circa 1685
- Samuel's "new" house, circa 1720
- Samuel, Jr.'s house, probably early 1700s
- Gardner, Jr.'s, farm house, circa 1825

**UPDATE**—Since this was written over a year and a half ago, two more foundations have been located. The first is identical to the others and has an apple tree growing out of the chimney. It, too, appears to date to the early 1700s. Another foundation, dissimilar than the others, has been identified on the property. It is associated with the Fowler/Niles families who purchased the property from Benjamin Tefft in 1795 and probably dates to the same era. Thanks to Alan Durbin for bringing these house foundations and several other historical features at the site to my attention.



Graphic by Pat Tift Crawford (Murray, KY)

**If this newsletter found you, then our search is over!**

The Tefft Family Association welcomes new members. Benefits include the TFA quarterly newsletter and information of interest to genealogists, historians and others who are curious about Teffts, Tiffts, and other spellings of the surname. For more information, visit our Web site at [www.geocities.com/tefft\\_family](http://www.geocities.com/tefft_family).

**Come out of hiding to join us.**

Just complete the enrollment form below and mail to:

The Tefft Family Association  
P.O. Box 686  
Green Mountain Falls, CO 80819

### About the Tefft Family Association

#### Who can join?

Descendants of John Tefft (Tift) of Rhode Island and his brother, William of Massachusetts, including all variant spellings of the Tefft name.

Others who wish to join as associate members are also welcome.

#### What are the annual dues?

Dues are \$10 per year/per member.

Contributions to cover mailing costs and other start-up costs for the TFA would also be greatly appreciated.

**The TFA has not yet filed for nonprofit status.**

## Tefft Family Association Individual Membership Enrollment

1. Your name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_
3. Home phone \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Business phone \_\_\_\_\_
5. Email address \_\_\_\_\_
6. Are you a Tefft descendant? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
7. Are you applying for membership as a family (Tefft descendant) or associate member?  
☐ Tefft descendant ☐ Associate member
8. I am not a computer user and would like a printed copy of your quarterly newsletter mailed to the address above.  
☐ Yes. Send my newsletter by mail.
9. My primary interest in joining the TFA is: (please check one ONLY)  
☐ Preserving Tefft Homestead ☐ Attending Reunions ☐ Researching genealogy ☐ Preserving Tefft Cemeteries ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
10. I first learned about the TFA from: (please check one ONLY)  
☐ A TFA mailing ☐ Internet ☐ A member of my family ☐ Another Family Association ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
11. In addition to my annual membership dues of \$10, I wish to make a contribution to the TFA in support of the following:  
☐ Purchase the Tefft Homestead ☐ Additional mailings to "lost Teffts" ☐ Unspecified ☐ Dues ONLY at this time

Thank you! Please mail to: TFA Enrollment, P.O. Box 686, Green Mountain Falls, CO 80819

### Tefft Family Association Board of Directors Interim Officers

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