



NEWSLETTER *of the* *Tefft Family Association*

uncovering the past

the descendants of John and William Tefft

Vol. 1, No. 2
November 2000

This issue looks back on recent memories of a reunited Tefft family and the early ancestors who gave their descendants a place to call home.



Saving the Tefft Homestead...See page 3

Effort to raise money continues, but the good news is ...



Traces of John... See page 5

Who was John Tefft, our immigrant ancestor? Here's what the records say.



THE ROAD HOME

by Darlene Tefft Cobb

For Teffts, the road home will always lead to South Kingstown, R.I. It was here John Tefft, the family's founder in America, purchased land for a homestead that survived in the hands of the family for more than two centuries (from at least 1671 to 1909).¹

In October, about 45 family members followed the nation's network of highways and skyways to historic South Kingstown for a second annual reunion and homecoming. At the end of our journey, we hoped to find renewed connection to our roots as we came to understand more about the places and people that figured so prominently in our beginnings.

Our reunion began along a rough woodland path leading us into the 28 remaining acres of land that were the homestead and home to John's sons, Joshua (ca 1641-1676) and Samuel (1644-1725). The centuries peeled away as we stepped inside this island of the past, nearly surrounded today by new homes and fresh construction.

Once about 500 acres of this property was Tefft land. Tefft Hill, a hillside development of upscale homes that now covers part of the area, seems still to speak of its natural beauty and value as place to live. Old John, it appears, had an eye for real estate.



Photo Credits: Top—Darlene Tefft Cobb. Middle—Homestead tour. Bottom—Kingston Library. Background— Old South Road and Kingstown Road. Above—A child reaches for heather brought from England by colonial ancestors. Photos by Kathleen Tiff Cooper

See Road page 6

Welcome Family, Associates and Friends . . .

Another chapter in the Tefft family history was written with our return to South Kingstown, R.I., this year for our 2nd annual reunion. We left that journey behind to return to our homes knowing that we are more than ever connected to one another, our history as Tefft descendants and our goals as a family.

At our annual meeting, we set in place the bylaws that will shape and hold us together as an association. We also learned that the Tefft Homestead property is safe for now (see page 3).

With our first cemetery clean up at Cemetery 19, where John Tefft is reported to be buried, we started something that gave us a deep feeling of satisfaction. We are anxious to return and complete the job.

The two genealogy sessions we held gave us a chance to get to know each other and how our separate branches fit. Finally, we set in motion plans to return to South Kingstown next year for a 3rd annual reunion.

All this and more was done in only three days. We were just having fun, but look how much we accomplished in the process!

This issue of our newsletter opens the door for all who could not join us at the reunion this year. Peek inside and learn what we are learning. You are invited to participate and can expect a warm welcome when you do.

Happy holidays to all!



Darlene Tefft Cobb
Interim President
Tefft Family Association

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Family Album

Hi to all of the Teffts and any other spelling that has come about. I am James R. Tefft of Culatesac, Idaho. My wife Janice and son Anthony and I have a small farm and part of my grandfather's homestead land. My father was Joseph P. Tefft. My Granddad was Bertram Walter Tefft. Granddad came from Elgin, Illinois about 1886 and settled here before you could take a homestead. In 1895, he was able to file papers on his place. I collect Studebaker cars. I have five in the basement along with an orphan '28 Chev roadster. We built our own house in the '70s. I am 66 and retired from the telephone industry in 1982. We have a small herd of donkeys and used to take them fishing some distance from the road, but have given up a lot of hiking. I enjoy the email thing a lot and write to a lot of people. So if your hobbies and mine are compatible, drop me a line. My e-dress is jrtefft@lewiston.com. Love to hear from family.



James R. Tefft



Timothy Nathan Tefft

I am called Timothy Nathan Tefft. I am the 9th great-grandson of John Tefft of Rhode Island and the 28th great-grandson of Rynolde de Winterwode (Reginald Wentworth) of Strafford, County York, England. I call Maine my home, having lived here for 36 of my 43 years. My mother is a native of Maine and my father hailed from Connecticut. My interests are many, but the top of the list includes genealogy,

history (Civil War especially), fly-fishing, off-roading, and some sports. I work as an Inventory Control Manager for Shaw's Supermarkets at their Lewiston, Maine location. Hello all!

Hi—I'm Mike Tiff of New Orleans. I believe I am descended from John (1), Joshua (2), Peter (3), Samuel (4), John (5), Samuel (6), John (7), Frances (8), Henry (9), Clarence (10), and Roland F. Tiff (11). I'm interested in our



Michael W. Tiff, left, his dad, Roland, and son, Matthew

English (and French?) forbears, certain Tiffs of Key West, Fla. and the Tiff brothers who constructed ironclads for the Confederacy here in New Orleans during the Civil War. My wife is Camille and we have two children, a daughter, Mary Grace, and a son Matthew.



Effort to Save Tefft Homestead Alive and Well

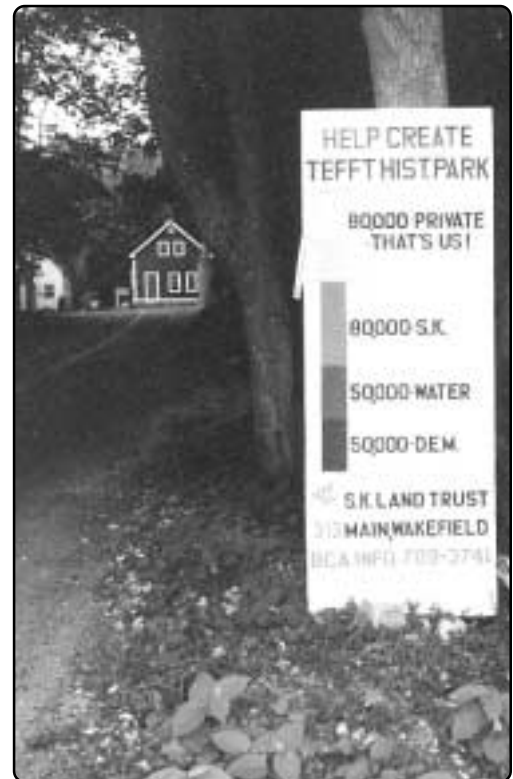
While about \$40,000 of the \$260,000 purchase price for the Tefft Homestead remains to be raised, it appears that the property will be saved and developed as a historic park. To make up the shortfall, those who initially donated from the private sector are being asked to consider contributing more in a second-round fundraising letter sent recently by the South Kingstown Land Trust (SKLT). Failing that effort, the Town of South Kingstown will be asked to cover the difference. In the meantime, SKLT has arranged a swing loan to cover the purchase price.

The fundraising effort by SKLT includes a mix of public and private money to purchase the property. Joining the Teffts in the effort to save the homestead were the Biscuit City Homeowners Association, whose neighborhood abuts the homestead land. Public funding has come from Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management, the South Kingstown Water District and the Town of South Kingstown, which offered an \$80,000 match for private funds last June.

Currently, SKLT is working with all parties involved in the purchase to develop a management plan for the property. Rick Norwood, an archaeologist and chair of the Tefft Family Association's Preservation Committee, and historian A. Craig Anthony, will represent family interests in working out these details. Questions that will impact the property and the ability to preserve what remains of the archaeological record of the Tefft's occupation will be addressed by the plan. These questions include access, pathways and signage among others. Without contributions by the Teffts, the family may not have had an opportunity to sit at the table during these discussions. Every dollar contributed by the Teffts improves the chance that our voice will be heard in these still important matters.

Our recent return to the property during the TFA's 2nd annual reunion confirms what an irreplaceable treasure the homestead is. My sincere and deeply felt thanks and appreciation to all who have supported saving and preserving it for the future.

— Darlene Tefft Cobb



A reminder of private fundraising efforts to create a Tefft Historic Park still stands on Biscuit City Road, placed there by the Biscuit City Homeowners Association in South Kingstown, R.I.

News Briefs

FROM THE TEFFT FAMILY ASSOCIATION

Want to know more?

Visit the Tefft Family Association Web site at geocities.com/tefft_family

Email
Darlene Tefft Cobb at dcobb@hughes.net

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

TFA Bylaws — Interim bylaws were adopted by TFA at the first annual meeting, held Oct. 9, in South Kingstown, R.I. The bylaws establish a framework for the association in which to collect dues, elect officers and focus effort. The bylaws call for an election of officers and adoption of a permanent set of bylaws by March 2001. Additionally, collection of annual membership dues of \$10 for 2001 will start in November 2000. All those interested in running for office or serving on a committee should contact the nominating committee—Timothy Tefft (New England) and Barbara Tefft (middle states). Contact Tim at troutfly@gwi.net or 207-353-6408. Contact Barbara at bjt@cornell.edu.

Reunion 2001 — A third annual reunion will be held in South Kingstown, R.I., on Columbus Day weekend, Oct. 6-8, 2001. On the planning committee are Otis Wyatt (RI) and Lori Horton (RI). With a running start on the planning and advance notice of the date, it is hoped that Reunion 2001 will top the former two years' events. Those interested in assisting the planning committee should contact Lori Horton at LHorton@LHorton.com or 401-782-2078. Details of Reunion 2001 will be announced on the TFA Web site, by email and by mail to those requesting information.

Newsletter — Got articles, suggestions, photos or information to contribute? Please contact dcobb@hughes.net.



Descendants of John Tefft

First Three Generations

John Tefft

b: Abt. 1614 in England
d: Bet. 1676 - 1679 in Kingstown, Rhode Island

Mary (Barber?)

b: Abt. 1620 in England or America
d: Bet. 1680 in Kingstown, Rhode Island

Mary Tefft

b: Abt. 1640 probably in Rhode Island
d: Abt. 1674 in South Kingstown, Rhode Island

Joshua Tefft

b: Abt. 1642 probably in Rhode Island
d: Jan. 18, 1676 in Wickford, Rhode Island

Samuel Tefft

b: 1644 in Portsmouth, Rhode Island
d: 1725 in Kingstown, Rhode Island

Tabitha Tefft

b: 1653 in Portsmouth, Rhode Island
d: After Oct. 29, 1722 in North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Samuel Wilson

d: 1684 in South Kingstown, Rhode Island

Sarah

d: March 16, 1672 in Warwick, Rhode Island

Elizabeth Jenckes

b: 1652 in Lynn, Massachusetts
d: April 1740 in South Kingstown, Rhode Island

George Gardiner

b: 1647 in Newport, Rhode Island
d: 1724 in North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Samuel Wilson

b: Bef. 1663
d: 1690

Mary Wilson

b: 1663
d: 1737

Sarah Wilson

b: 1666
d: 1739

James Wilson

b: 1673
d: 1706

Jeremiah Wilson

b: 1674
d: June 2, 1740

Peter Tefft

b: March 14, 1672

John Tefft

b: Abt. 1675 in Rhode Island
d: 1762 in South Kingstown, Rhode Island

Sarah Tefft

b: Abt. 1679 in Newport, Rhode Island
d: Abt. 1720

Esther Tefft

b: Abt. 1681 in Rhode Island
d: Abt. 1726

Samuel Tefft

b: Abt. 1683 in Rhode Island
d: 1760 in South Kingstown, Rhode Island

Mary Tefft

b: Abt. 1684 in Rhode Island
d: Bef. 1739

Susannah Tefft

b: Abt. 1686 in Rhode Island

Elizabeth Tefft

b: Abt. 1687 in Kingstown, Rhode Island
d: 1750 in South Kingstown, Rhode Island

Tabitha Tefft

b: Abt. 1688 in Kingstown, Rhode Island

Mercy Tefft

b: Abt. 1696 in Kingstown, Rhode Island

George Gardiner

d: Bef. 1716

Joanna Gardiner

Lydia Gardiner

Joseph Gardiner

b: Bef. 1671

Nicholas Gardiner

b: Abt. 1673
d: 1746

Samuel Gardiner

b: Abt. 1675

Robert Gardiner

b: Abt. 1677

John Gardiner

b: Abt. 1679

Hannah Gardiner

b: Abt. 1680
d: April 1756

Tabitha Gardiner

b: Feb. 2, 1687
d: 1760





Traces of John

What can we know and say with some certainty about the life of John Tefft? The best portrait we are able to construct of him is based on fragments preserved in the written record. This list was assembled by Timothy Nathan Tefft and we are indebted to him and all those who contributed to his research for sharing their knowledge with us.

- John came to America about 1630. It is unknown if he arrived on the same vessel with his brother, William, or at a different time. It is not known exactly when John removed to Rhode Island, possibly from Boston, Massachusetts, where William died (about 1642).
- It is unknown if John was married before or after arriving in America. Traditionally it is believed that his wife, Mary, was a Barber, possibly the daughter of James Barber.
- 1640-1643—Children, Mary and Joshua are born.
- March 1, 1643—John assigned three acres of land in Portsmouth, R.I. (Portsmouth Town Meeting minutes, from LDS microfilm, courtesy of Richard G. Tefft)
- Dec. 3, 1643—John *Tift* appears on list of Pettitt jurors at Newport, R.I. (From Colony records, courtesy A. Craig Anthony)
- 1644—Son, Samuel, is born, probably in Portsmouth, R.I.
- 1653—Daughter, Tabitha, is born, probably in Portsmouth, R.I.
- 1655—John is a freeman at Portsmouth, R.I.
- July 1656—John is paid from the Town treasury “to keepe ould John mott this year for dyat lodging, washing and looking to...” John took care of “ould mott” until sometime in 1657. The town record of Nov. 30, 1657 implies Mott is deceased, and John should be paid what is due him “about ould mott.” (Portsmouth Town Records).
- Nov. 30, 1657—Along with eleven other men—including A. Craig Anthony’s ancestor, John Anthony—John is supplied with “plantinge land on hoge Iland.” (Hog Island in Narragansett Bay, is about one-half mile northwest of Portsmouth.) He was to enjoy this privilege for a term of seven years. (Portsmouth Town Records)
- 1661—John is recorded as a witness to one of the deeds for the Pettaquamscutt Purchase, which includes most of present-day South Kingstown.
- 1662—John and John Basly are paid “with part of William Baker’s clothes” for watching him “in the time of his sickness.” (Portsmouth Town Records)
- Nov. 22, 1662—John sold 7 acres of land to Robert Spink of Newport. John probably went to the Tower Hill, present-day Narragansett, vicinity shortly after this.
- May 19, 1671—The inhabitants of Pettaquamscutt, among them John *Tift*, “did give engagements for their allegiance to his Majestie and fidelity to this Colony.”
- Nov. 30, 1674—John *Tift* makes his Last Will and Testament. He leaves his dwelling house and house lot of 20 acres to his son-in-law, Samuel Wilson. His wife, Mary, receives all his movables, as well as his cattle and other livestock, consisting of two oxen, two cows, two yearling steers, eight swine, one ewe, and a lamb. His son, Samuel, receives two shillings. Joshua receives one shilling. Tabitha receives one shilling and an iron pot, to be given to her upon the decease of her mother.
- Jan. 1676—John’s death is alluded to in a letter by Captain James Oliver. (This may be a misreading of a hastily or poorly written letter that deals with John’s attempt to recover his son Joshua’s remains following Joshua’s execution.) The letter suggests John was killed by Indians at the time. It does not answer why Mary did not sign in satisfaction of her thirds until three years later, in late 1679.
- Oct. 19, 1679 —John’s will proved.
- Dec. 1, 1679—Last record for John, found in *Fones Record* as well as Rhode Island Archives, Land & Public Notary 2:157, gives an account of his 500 acres. This and the date of the proving of his will, provide evidence that his death most likely occurred in 1679. (Courtesy A. Craig Anthony)

Rhode Island

- 1636 — Roger Williams founds Providence
- 1638 — Portsmouth, formerly Pocasset, settled by Anne Hutchinson.
- 1655 - 1675 — Approx. population of Rhode Island grows from 1,200 to 3,000
- 1675 — King Philip’s War begins



Road

From page 1

The past speaks quietly here today, hidden by a thick growth of plant life and trees whose fallen leaves cover whatever lies on beneath. If we were looking for home, the landscape seems to have swallowed most of it up.

It took the help of our guides, Lori Horton and A. Craig Anthony, for those on tour to distinguish a stone lined aqueduct from a natural feature. But it must have brought water from the spring on the hill above to people and assorted farm animals dwelling below for ages past.

It's probable that John never lived here, but remained throughout the later years of his life in Pettaquamscutt on 20 acres he willed at his death to his son-in-law Samuel Wilson.² The home and farm we now call the Tefft Homestead was built by his sons, Joshua and Samuel, and those who came after them. As the homestead land passed through various Tefft heirs, it sometimes succeeded as a thriving working farm and dairy. At other times, it lay fallow for years. It was sold out of the family in 1909 by Mary S. Northup, niece of John H. Tefft (7th generation).³

At one point on our tour, we crossed the aqueduct over a huge stone that served as a footbridge, placed there by whom? when? We can only imagine an unnamed forbear struggling with its weight to set the stone in place. A home improvement project with staying power. And a bridge to the past where our footsteps surely met.

A stone lined well—perfect in its roundness—and numerous stone walls remain as eloquent messengers of the labor that took place here. The ruins of a dwelling house, built about 1685,⁴ speak of a time when no more than 6,000 people called Rhode Island home. The walls of the structure have long since given way, but the outlines of a 20-foot by 35-foot foundation remain built around a central chimney.

Standing at the edge of twin basement cavities flanking the chimney, we could get only a faint sense of what this home might have been. Hannah Tefft's genealogy, quoting an earlier work by Stuart G. Wade, states that Tefft was originally a Saxon name, from Toft, meaning "a plot of ground on which a house once stood."⁵ A home that's missing and missed is such a melancholy thought. This spot suits that sentiment exactly...the home and family that lived there being so very absent.

The missing original occupants of the dwelling were, most likely, Samuel Tefft, his wife, Elizabeth Jenks (1658-1740), and their children. They occupied the dwelling from 1685 to 1720.⁶ The structure itself may not have seen other occupants for long, collapsing sometime prior to 1754.⁷

As though to remind us of the people who had lived here once, our tour path lead onward to two cemetery sites.

Not far from the ruins of the dwelling is a small cemetery where unmarked stones date to the 18th century. Some inscribed gravestones date from at least 1825 to 1886. In a peaceful grove of tall pines, at Cemetery 17 are Revolutionary War veteran Gardner Tefft (1745-1832) and his wife Waity Eldred (ca 1751-1826), along with 16 other Tefft couples, adults and children.

Just down the slope of a hill from Cemetery 17 is an open field that Indians used for growing their crops. A recent archaeological survey of the site tells us they were here long ago, leaving behind artifacts dating back 5,000 years.⁷ In this sunny space, heather was planted, brought to a new home by our immigrant ancestors. It still grows here in wild profusion, a symbol of their own yearning for a piece of home.

Others come to this place today, lured by the secluded beauty of the spot. A fresh trail made by an ATV and campfire litter attest to the area's power to attract even temporary tenants. The Teffts chose this place for a cemetery and it is the oldest on the property, as well as the oldest in South Kingstown. All of the graves are marked with simple fieldstones and probably date to the 17th century.

A large pile of stones in one corner of Cemetery 100 intrigued Anthony to speculate that this might be the last resting place of Joshua, who was executed January 18, 1676. It was our forefathers' practice and necessity to dig shallow graves in the frozen ground of winter and cover them with a pile of stones to prevent wolves from looting them afterwards. Anthony admits the idea that Joshua might be buried here is more conjecture than fact, still it's a tantalizing morsel for further investigation.

Seeing and imagining, afterall, may be what drew us to this place and guided walk among our ancestors. The need to know more will draw us back again. At the end of our trail, we carried home much to ponder along with photos and memories of a family reconnecting itself to its roots. This one journey ended only to remind us of the many roads that lead home.

1. Portsmouth Land Evidence 2:21 (John and Mary Tefft to Robert Spink, Nov. 22, 1662); *ibid.*, 2:45 (John Tefft to Thomas ffish, Jan. 6, 1660); Rhode Island Archives, Land and Public Notary 2:1.

2. John Tefft's will is recorded in Rhode Island Land and Public Notary 1:246.

3. Mary S. Northup is named in the will of John H. Tefft (South Kingstown Probate, Vol. 13:109) as his niece. Sale of the property is recorded South Kingstown Land Evidence 37:231, March 1, 1909.

4. Samuel Tefft was first taxed in Kingstown in 1687, and the date, 1685, is an estimation.

5. Hannah Tefft, "Tefft: A Genealogy", page 1. Her full quote reads: "Stuart G. Wade, a genealogist of New York, says the name is Saxon, from Toft, a plot of ground on which a house once stood, and is frequently found today in the County of Essex, England, from which many of the early emigrants came, though usually spelled Taft, Teft or Tofts." Generously donated to Timothy Tefft by Donald Tefft Birkmayer.

6. A. Craig Anthony, Tefft Family Association Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 2000.

7. As indicated in John Tefft's (2) will dated 1754 (South Kingstown Probate 5:191). It is possible that the dwelling was rebuilt at some point.

8. Alan E. Strauss and Suzanne Spencer-Wood, Phase IC Archaeological Survey of the Proposed Blueberry Hill Development in South Kingstown, R.I., (1999), Abstract. Unpublished report on file with the Town of South Kingstown. The survey identified five prehistoric sites on the property, the earliest of which dates to the Late Archaic (3,000 - 5,000 years ago). The artifact collection consists primarily of stone tools and flakes, indicating use of the area as a workshop location. The presence of nonlocal chert flakes also suggests trade or interaction with cultures from the west of New England.

ADDITIONAL NOTES: 1) Footnoted sources supplied by A. Craig Anthony and Timothy Nathan Tefft. 2) Joshua Tefft was tried and executed for treason after taking part in King Philip's War. For more information, visit the Tefft Family Association Web site at www.geocities.com/tefft_family.

Reunion 2000 *Remembered*



Kathleen Tift Cooper

Cemetery 17
Tefft Homestead Tour



Kathleen Tift Cooper

Stone footbridge
Tefft Homestead Tour



Rick Norwood

Timothy Tefft, left, A. Craig Anthony and Kathleen Tift Cooper
Gravestone, Marcy Tefft (1751 - 1829), wife of Gideon Lillibridge
Cemetery 19 Cleanup



Kathleen Tift Cooper

Lori Horton, left, as tour guide
House foundation, circa 1685
Tefft Homestead Tour



Rick Norwood

Darlene Tefft Cobb, recipient, Tefft Femur Award
Larchwood Inn, Wakefield, Rhode Island
Reunion 2000 Family Dinner



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.

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 - 2001

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

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