

[< Return to Table of Contents >](#)
[< Corrections to this Section? >](#)

[< Next—Before 1700 >](#)



THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

For many years, some descendants of **Thomas Baker** of Virginia, who married **Dorothy Davenport**, daughter of **Martin Davenport, Sr.**, of Hanover County, Virginia, have represented that **Thomas** was descended from Alexander Baker, who came to Boston in 1635 with his wife and two young daughters. They have posited his descent from a Samuel Baker, son of Alexander, who – they say – married Eleanor Winslow, and then from Samuel and Eleanor’s son William Baker. William, they claim, married Mary Corbee of East Haddam, Connecticut, daughter of Samuel and Mary Crippen Corbee. William and Mary then moved to Chester, Pennsylvania where **Thomas** was born.

There are any number of reasons why the story of Massachusetts-Connecticut-Pennsylvania origins for our Baker family must be taken with a grain of salt, if not with an entire salt lick. We begin with the fact that, although documentation of colonial births, deaths, marriages and the like in New England is vastly better than that available in Virginia (particularly the Burned Counties of Virginia), there is an utter lack of documentation of any kind of any of the events alleged. Alexander Baker did have a son Samuel, but there is no proof that Alexander Baker’s son Samuel is the same Samuel Baker who married Eleanor. There is no proof that Samuel and Eleanor Winslow Baker had a son named William (a list of their children does not include any William). There is no proof that any William Baker married Mary Corbee, no proof that William and Mary ever lived in Pennsylvania, no proof that **Thomas** was born there.

Although the asserted descent is possible, given nothing more than the names and the dates involved, so much of the Alexander Baker story itself is demonstrably untrue that it calls the rest into question. For example, many of those claiming descent from Alexander Baker identify his wife as Elizabeth Farrar and identify him as the son of an Alexander Baker whose first wife was Alice, daughter of Edward Jervys, and second wife was Frances, daughter of Michael Grigg, and grandson of George Baker and Anne Swayne. That is provably untrue, based on the records of Westminster Abbey in London (the Alexander Baker who came to Boston could not have been the Alexander Baker who married Elizabeth Farrar).

See APPENDIX A – ALEXANDER NOT HUSBAND OF ELIZABETH FARRAR

Next is the overall unlikely nature of the story. For example, Mary Corbee was born 13 November 1691. For the story to be true, she would have had to marry, uproot and move without her family to Pennsylvania (the Corbees themselves remained in Connecticut – Mary’s brother Samuel married there in 1724/25), and there bear a son Thomas to her husband – all well before her 20th birthday. Like the rest of the story, it isn’t *impossible* – it’s just not terribly *likely*.

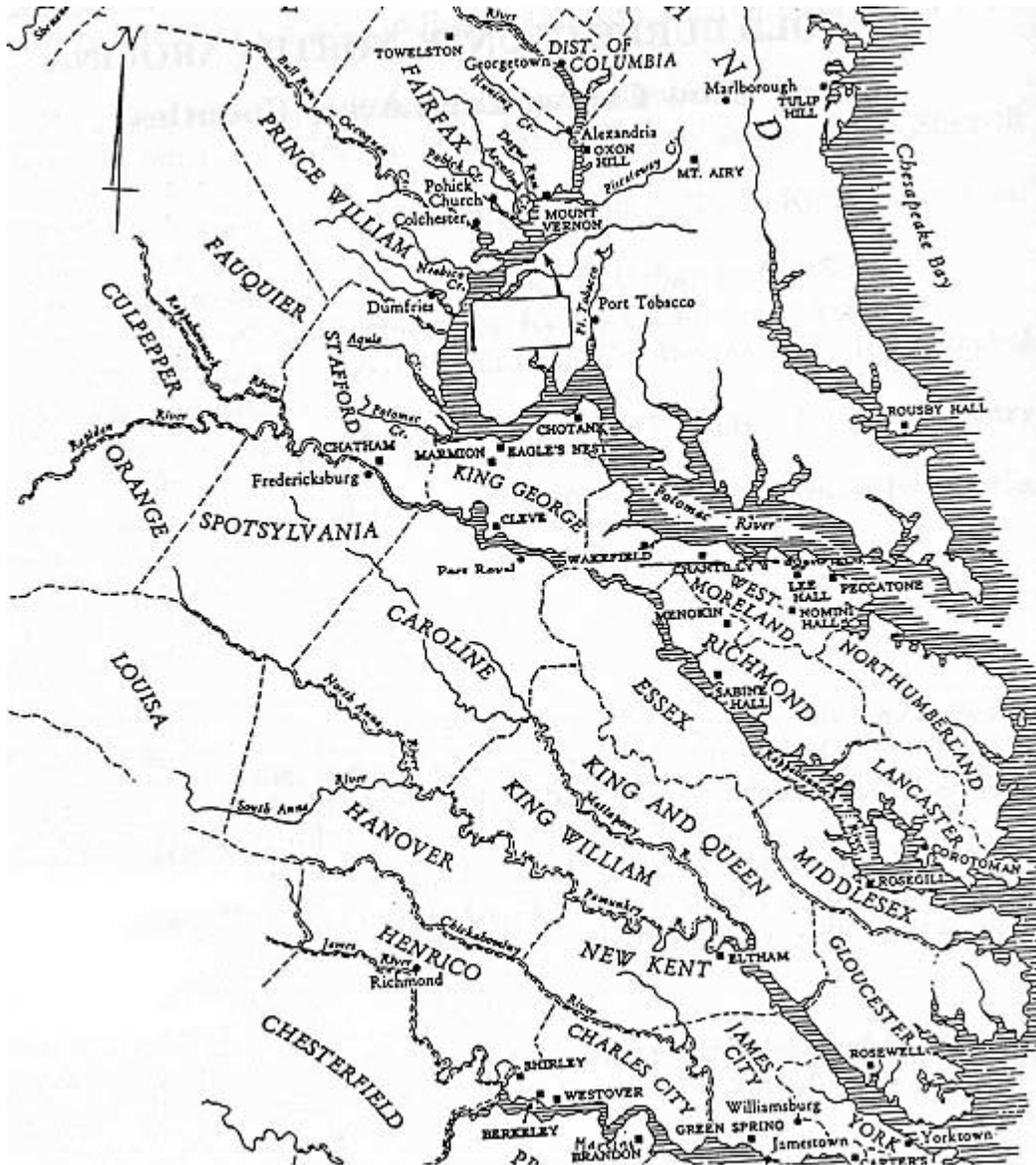
Finally, there is strong evidence that Bakers of the names of Thomas and William resided in the Pamunkey Neck area of Virginia, near neighbors to the Davenport family that produced Dorothy, **Thomas Baker's** wife, at least as far back as 1671, that one **Thomas Baker** was a landowner in Pamunkey Neck as far back as 1673, that a **Thomas** and a **William Baker** were landowners in the Pamunkey Neck area by the time of the 1704 Quit Rent Rolls. In short, there is at least *some* documentary evidence of Bakers who could well be the progenitors of our Bakers in Virginia, and *none* in Massachusetts or Connecticut or Pennsylvania. And a Virginia origin is not only *possible*, it's also *likely*, given the migration patterns of the time, and most particularly given the courtship and marriage patterns of the socioeconomic class into which both **Thomas Baker** and the Davenport family of his wife fell.

Until 2006, that was where the issue stood: the undocumented claims of a New England origin on one side and the skepticism and suggestion of a Virginia origin on the other. But something happened in 2006 that changes the equation altogether. In 2006, DNA testing came into the picture. Prior to 2006, several documented descendants of **Thomas Baker** of Virginia had been DNA-tested and their results showed what we would have expected: they all show the same DNA pattern or one sufficiently similar to justify a conclusion of a common parentage. Then, in 2006, Richard Baker of Massachusetts, a well-documented descendant of the Samuel Baker who married Eleanor Winslow, agreed to DNA testing to be compared to the documented descendants of **Thomas Baker**. The results establish clearly that there is no close biological relationship whatsoever between the Massachusetts Bakers represented by Richard and the **Thomas Baker** descendants who have been tested. The results, in fact, are *so* different that some Baker descendants have joked that, if there is a common ancestor at all, his name was Adam.

So the purpose of this research study is to examine the original records of Virginia and the Carolinas and develop a chronological data display of the **Baker** Family in Colonial Virginia—beginning in Lower Pamunkey Neck (now King William County) and then on both sides of the North Anna River where the counties of Spotsylvania, Hanover, Caroline and Louisa come together, then to the East Slope of the Blue Ridge in Orange / Culpeper, and finally to the mountains of Western North Carolina. It includes a look at the Baker Family as it was associated with the **Pamunkey Davenport** and related Families whose lives took parallel courses, sometimes with a “layover” in South Carolina. Specific focuses include: (1) A better identification of **Thomas Baker**, who married **Dorothy Davenport**, daughter of **Martin Davenport, Sr.**, of Hanover County, and of their family; (2) A better, more comprehensive identification of the family of **Thomas Davenport**, brother to Dorothy Davenport Baker and eldest son of **Martin, Sr.**; and (3) Examination and, we can hope, understanding of the role of two other families – the Strothers and the Kennerlys – in the **Baker-Davenport** social milieu.



THE TIME, PLACES, AND PERSONS OF OUR INTEREST



[Maribeth Lang Vineyard, *William Wiseman and the Davenports* (Genealogy Publishing Service, SC: 1997), p. 254]

Thomas Baker married **Dorothy Davenport**, believed to be the second daughter of **Martin Davenport, Sr.**, of **Hanover County**, Virginia, date uncertain, but believed to have been c1734. Henry Gambill married **Mary Davenport**, believed to be the eldest daughter of **Martin, Sr.**, date uncertain, but believed to have been c1732. **Thomas Davenport** appears to have been the eldest son of **Martin Davenport, Sr.**

Francis Strother assumed a role in the target milieu in 1730, if not before, when he bought the land adjoining **Martin, Sr.**, on the downriver (North Anna) side in Hanover and was a next-door neighbor for the next two decades or so. We harbor the notion that **Dorothy**, yet unidentified wife of **Thomas Davenport**, was a Strother, for Francis Strother, **Thomas Baker**, Henry Gambill, and **Thomas Davenport** uprooted on the North Anna, 1748-1751, and relocated in a tight cluster on the East Slope of the Blue Ridge in Orange/Culpeper counties (now Culpeper/Rappahannock).

In the Orange/Culpeper area, the families were joined by **William Wiseman**, who married **Mary Davenport**, daughter of **Thomas Davenport**, date uncertain, but believed to have been c1761, and by William White, who married **Thomas Davenport's** daughter **Sophia**, date uncertain, but believed to have been c1750, in Culpeper County.

Within a few years, and certainly by the end of the Revolutionary War, most of these related families had left Virginia. Some went, initially or permanently, to South Carolina. Ultimately, the majority of the related families ended up in the mountain country of Western North Carolina, mostly in what was then Burke County.



CONVENTIONS:

AS TO APPEARANCES IN RECORD CITATIONS:

All **Baker** mentions are in **Bold Blue** (if our Bakers)
and **Blue** (if not known to be our Bakers).

All **Davenport** mentions are in **Bold Black**.

All **Wiseman** mentions are in **Bold Brown**.

All County locations are in **Bold Red**.

AS TO SPELLING IN RECORD CITATIONS:

Spelling in Colonial and early American records was not standardized nor, for that matter, was the spelling of names. What appeared as “Woodruff” in one document might appear as “Woodroof” in a second document or “Woodrough” in a third. Generally, no effort has been made to standardize these spellings; what appears in the document (or the abstract relied on) appears here.

NOTATION OF EXCERPTS:

Items prefaced by **◇** have been excerpted with permission from *The Further Chronicles of the Pamunkey Davenports*, compiled and annotated by **John Scott Davenport, Ph.D.** Material or commentary may have been added or subtracted in order to focus on the persons and matters of interest here. Without “Doc” Davenport’s guidance, encouragement and assistance, this research study would never have gotten underway, and we are deeply indebted to him.



RESEARCH / ANALYSIS LIMITATIONS:

There are a number of limitations inherent in the research and analysis set forth in this document. Please keep them in mind at all times.

1. DRAFT Status

This document is an *incomplete draft*. It has all of the faults, flaws and limitations of an incomplete draft. Treat it as it is: a work in progress.

2. Research Completeness

No original records from South Carolina have yet been reviewed; few original records from North Carolina have yet been reviewed; a fair number of original records from Virginia have yet to be reviewed. Much analysis remains to be done, especially of North and South Carolina records. It is entirely possible that some or all of the tentative conclusions reached herein will be changed, even abandoned in their entirety, as additional research is done and information received.

3. Research Biases

This document written by and from the perspective of a descendant of **David Baker**, eighth child of **Thomas Baker** and **Dorothy Davenport**, through **David's** eighth child **Martin Alexander Baker**. As of yet I have done little research into the family lines of **David's** brothers and sisters and not nearly enough even into the family lines of **Martin's** brothers and sisters. I hope to repair those deficiencies as time goes on. Unfortunately, I still have this minor problem of having to work for a living (my cat refuses to share his food with me) and my research time is limited. I must necessarily focus on the issues of most concern to me.

4. Researcher Limitations

This is also written by and from the perspective of one who is not a trained or certified genealogist. This is on-the-job training, and I am learning every day. I hope to learn from others as well as from the records, so I welcome comments, corrections, even criticism. My permanent email address for this project is < bakers@jgrussell.com >.

5. Record Availability – the “Burned Counties” Conundrum

Another limitation is that the geographic area in Virginia where we must look for information includes many of the Burned Counties of Virginia. These are counties where many of the original records were lost, mostly to fires during the Civil War. (In particular, many counties feared the loss of their records to deliberate destruction by Yankee troops during the Civil War. They packed up their records and sent them to Richmond, the Confederate Capital, expecting that they would be safe there. You can almost write the rest of the story without knowing more: you're right – the county

courthouses were often completely safe, but the records in Richmond were destroyed when that city suffered a devastating fire.) The Civil War fires weren't the only problems; other ordinary fires took many of the records we would surely love to review.

As explained by the Research Staff of the Library of Virginia:

Several Virginia counties, most of them in the eastern part of the state, have suffered tremendous loss of their early records during the intense military activity that occurred during the Civil War, and others lost records in fires. At some point, almost everyone conducting genealogical or historical research will face the problem of finding information from a so-called "Burned Record county." Burned record counties might be grouped into three basic categories: Hopeless, Almost Hopeless, and Difficult.

Included in the Hopeless category are ... New Kent (county court records were destroyed when John Posey burned the courthouse on 15 July 1787, and records created after that date were lost to fire in 1865), ... [and] King and Queen (county court records were lost in fires in 1828 and 1865. One plat book and three mid-nineteenth century Superior Court record books survive)....

Almost Hopeless [is] Hanover (most county court records were destroyed by fire in Richmond on 3 April 1865. A few isolated record books that were not sent to Richmond and various scraps of loose papers survive)....

Difficult counties [include] Caroline (most records prior to 1836 were destroyed during the Civil War. Some deeds and wills are recorded in extant Chancery Papers, and a considerable number of order books and loose papers survive), ... [and] King William (all county court records prior to 1885 (except for seventeen will books) were destroyed in a fire in that year....

I would add to that list Culpeper County, where only one 18th century county court book – from 1763-64 – survives, although deed and will books do survive.

6. Circumstantial Conclusions

Because of the lack of many records, many of the conclusions we must draw must necessarily be circumstantial. We are not going to find birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates or similar documentary proof that would put our conclusions beyond question. Nonetheless, we must do the best we can, mindful always that even in a court of law, circumstantial evidence is often more than enough. As no less an authority than the United States Supreme Court has stated: "direct evidence of a fact is not required. Circumstantial evidence is not only sufficient, but may also be more certain, satisfying and persuasive than direct evidence." *Michalic v. Cleveland Tankers, Inc.*, 364 U.S. 325, 330 (1960).

[< Return to Table of Contents >](#)
[< Corrections to this Section? >](#)

[< Next—Before 1700 >](#)