

**Reverse Research Methodology:
Tracing the Wife of William Gibbons⁵ Stuart
of King George County, Virginia,
to Find Him**

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Anyone involved in genealogy for any time has heard that the best method for finding ancestral women is to thoroughly research the men. Men led public lives, and therefore, left a better paper trail. In trying to discover more about William Gibbons Stuart (1809-1855) of King George County, Virginia, however, the records his wife and her family generated were the key to solving the problem of what happened to him beyond his marriage in 1833-34 to Sarah Foote Ashton.

Though the Stuarts of King George County, Virginia, married into such prominent Virginia families as the Fitzhughs and Conways, little has been published about them or about William Gibbons Stuart. Stella Hardy published in 1965 *Colonial Families of the Southern States of America*,¹ which presented the Stuart lineage beginning with the Reverend David Stuart, born in Scotland, and later resident of King George County, Virginia, through his first son, William. William Gibbons⁵ Stuart's descent,² however, was through Rev. David¹, John², William Gibbons³, and David⁴, which Ms. Hardy does not follow.

Carol A. Hauk in 1997 privately published *Descendants of David Stuart of Virginia* in which she attempted to compile a full genealogy covering ten generations. Largely undocumented and containing numerous errors, Ms. Hauk did not carry the line of William Gibbons Stuart forward, only stating that he was "living in 1833."³

An undocumented, unpublished genealogy compiled in 1961 by Mary Stuart Fitzhugh (1881-1976), "The Fitzhugh Genealogy," reported that she had "no facts" for William Gibbons Stuart.⁴

In 1968, Dr. O. Garth Fitzhugh commissioned the late George H.S. King, FASG, to research the Buckner-Hawes families, which was posthumously published in *The Virginia Genealogist* in 1999. Mr. King did not go much further than naming William Gibbons Stuart as the son of David⁴ and Charlotte Hawes (Buckner) Stuart.⁵

¹ "Stewart or Stuart Family" in Stella Hardy, *Colonial Families of the Southern States of America* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1965), 492-93.

² For William Gibbons Stuart's ancestry, see George H.S. King, "The Buckner Family," *The Virginia Genealogist* 43 (Jan-Mar 1999): 30-41, at 36-37.

³ Carol A. Hauk, *Descendants of David Stuart of Virginia* (Huntington, Ind.: privately published, 1997), 9.

⁴ Mary Stuart Fitzhugh, "The Fitzhugh Genealogy," p. 68. A copy of this manuscript was supplied to this compiler by Mary Eleanor Fitzhugh Hitzelberger of Fond du Lac, Wisc.

⁵ George H.S. King, "The Buckner-Hawes Families of Caroline County, Virginia," research report commissioned by the late Dr. O. Garth Fitzhugh in 1968, published posthumously in two installments, "The Buckner Family," *The Virginia Genealogist* 42 (Oct-Dec 1998): 243-255 and 43 (Jan-Mar 1999): 30-41, at 37.

All that seemed to be known about William Gibbons Stuart was his lineage, that he had two sisters, Mary Fitzhugh Stuart and Lucy Fitzhugh Stuart, and that he was an “infant” when his father died in 1822. Mr. King found that William had married Sarah Foote Ashton around 1833 or 1834, but beyond that, all accounts showed no further record for him.

In retracing Mr. King’s steps, William and Sarah had signed a prenuptial agreement on 4 September 1833 in King George County, Virginia, and it had been recorded on 1 May 1834.⁶ Mr. King had also uncovered the division of David Stuart’s land on 4 August 1831; but King stated that the document named “Charlotte Stuart, widow, and her two infant children, William G. and Lucy Stuart.”⁷ Indeed it does name them, but only Lucy Stuart is identified in that document as an infant:

...James M. Fitzhugh and Mary his wife late Mary F. Stuart...is the daughter of a certain David Stuart late of the County aforesaid but now deceased, that he died possessed of a valuable estate real and personal in the year 1822 lying in aforesaid County, that he left a widow and three children of whom [Mary] is one, that her mother is called Charlotte and the other two children William Gibbons and Lucy...that the said Lucy is not of age....⁸

This document further states that “Lucy F. Stuart an infant under the age of twenty one years by William G. Stuart her guardian ad litem...” Additionally, William acted and signed on his own behalf; therefore, he was not an infant in 1831.

William G. Stuart had been appointed guardian ad litem for his sister Lucy F. Stuart a month prior on 7 July 1831, when James Madison Fitzhugh and his wife, the former Mary F. Stuart, had initially brought suit in chancery court for the division of David Stuart’s land.⁹ A year previous to this, Mary Fitzhugh Stuart had chosen her brother, William Gibbon [*sic*] Stuart, as her guardian at the King George County July 1830 Court.¹⁰ Mary, then about twenty, married James Madison Fitzhugh that same month, and this is no doubt the reason she needed a male guardian to give approval.

Further research showed that William began appearing on the King George County, Virginia, personal property tax records in 1831 and was listed until 1839. During this eight-year period, as William Jr., he owned from five to ten slaves, three to five horses, and a carryall (carriage).¹¹

Most of the tax entries listed him as “G. William Stuart Jr.” Another William Gibbon/s Stuart was listed as senior. Though the relationship between the two William Gibbons Stuarts is presently not certain, the elder one was likely the William Gibbons Stuart who married Frances M.W. Stuart on 8 April 1820 in King George County and owned property in King George County known as “Woodstock.”¹²

⁶ King George Co., Va., Deeds 14:206-07, FHL 32068.

⁷ King, “The Buckner Family,” *The Virginia Genealogist* 43 (Jan-Mar 1999): 37.

⁸ King George Co., Va., Land Causes, 1831-33, pp. 4-11, FHL 32091.

⁹ King George Co., Va., Orders 12:540-41, FHL 32083.

¹⁰ King George Co., Va., Bonds, 1824-1838, p. 215, FHL 32088, and King George Co., Va., Orders 12:430, FHL 32083.

¹¹ King George Co., Va., Personal Property Tax Records, 1831-1850, FHL 2024600.

¹² “King George County Marriages,” *Virginia Historical Magazine* 10:433-35 at 435; King George Co., Va., Deeds 14:322-23.

The two William Gibbon/s Stuarts are generally easy to distinguish in most records when junior and senior were not denoted. William Sr.'s household was larger, and he owned more slaves and property. In 1830, for example, William Sr.'s household consisted of a male under age 5, a male 20-30, a female under age 5, a female aged 5-10, a female 20-30, and thirty-eight slaves.¹³ The William in this study was not married until 1833-34. His 1830 enumeration listed two males 20-30 (one of whom was William; the other's identity is uncertain), a female age 10-15 (probably his sister Lucy, who was 13), a female age 15-20 (probably his sister Mary, who would have just turned 20), and a female age 30-40 (probably his widowed mother, Charlotte, who should have been 43). He owned nineteen slaves.¹⁴

In 1831, when William began to appear on the personal property tax lists, he owned seven slaves over ages twelve and four horses. William Sr. owned sixteen slaves over twelve, seven horses, and a carriage. Additionally, the tax lists for 1833 and 1834 showed William Jr. assessed on the same date as Charlotte Stuart, his mother; whereas, William Sr. was assessed the following month.¹⁵

Prior to his marriage to Sarah Ashton, on 28 November 1831, William Gibbons Stuart sold to W.A.G.D. Ashton for \$348 the parcel of land in King George County, containing 116 acres, which he acquired in the division of his father's estate.¹⁶ Not long after that sale, in January 1833, William was indebted to Benjamin Johnson for roughly \$483. He sold to Wiley Roy Mason and Benjamin Johnson the following property plus paid \$5 to satisfy his debt: one Negro woman named Tulip, three horses, six oxen, three cows, three younger [cattle?], "another stock also two wagons," and his right and title to his mother's dower property. The following year, Wiley Roy Mason sold the real property to [William] Alexander G.D. Aston.¹⁷

After William and Sarah had been married about five or six years, they sold to Sarah's uncle Lawrence Ashton 50 acres of land in King George County for \$100 in October 1839. The land had been devised to Sarah "by descent from her father the late John Ashton."¹⁸ This was the last entry for William in the King George County deed books and coincides with his disappearance from the personal property tax lists. No doubt this is the reason researchers had lost track of him after that. He and his family did not appear on the 1840 or 1850 census for Virginia. For all intents and purposes, the family had vanished. But William's wife, Sarah Foote (Aston) Stuart, had continuing ties to her family and showed up in King George County deeds nearly twenty years after her husband had disappeared from records. Breaking the deadlock was Sarah selling land in 1858, which she had inherited from her uncle.

On 11 January of that year, Sally F. Stuart of *Manchester, Missouri*, sold for \$500 the land she owned in King George County, Virginia, which was "formerly owned by John Ashton deceased[,] the father of said Sally....The said interest being the same which the said Sally

¹³ 1830 U.S. census, Virginia, King George Co., p. 62.

¹⁴ 1830 U.S. census, Virginia, King George Co., p. 59.

¹⁵ King George Co., Va., Personal Property Tax Records, 1831-1850, FHL 2024600.

¹⁶ King George Co., Va., Deeds 13:409-10, FHL 32067. The relationship between Sarah Ashton and W.A.G.D. Ashton is not certain. They were contemporaries, however. William A.G.D. Ashton (1810-1840) m. Betty Washington Lewis Ashton (Margaret C. Klein's *Tombstone Inscriptions of King George County, Virginia* [Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1979] 20-21).

¹⁷ King George Co., Va., Deeds 14:22-24, 361, FHL 32068.

¹⁸ King George Co., Va., Deeds 15:260, FHL 32068.

derived from her father J. Ashton which she afterwards sold to her Uncle Lawrence Ashton and which the said Lawrence subsequently devised to the said Sally....”¹⁹

Sure enough, William and Sarah had moved to St. Louis County, Missouri, shortly after the birth of their daughter, Virginia. The family, consisting of one adult male (age 20-30), one adult female (age 20-30), and two children (male 5-10 and female under age 5), was enumerated on the 1840 census for Central Township, St. Louis County. At that time, William was engaged in agriculture.²⁰

Three years after the Stuarts had settled in Missouri, Sarah’s uncle, Lawrence Ashton of Bleak Hill, King George County, Virginia, made his will in the fall of 1843, to be recorded in 1848. In this document, he devised to his niece Sally “that part of my land which I purchased of William Gibbons Stuart & his wife, the said Sally F. Fitzhugh”²¹ in October 1839.

While they still owned land in Virginia, the Stuarts had lived in Missouri for ten years and still owned no land there. In 1850, no occupation was given for William in the census, nor was there any value assigned to real estate.²² He did own two male slaves in their early twenties, however.²³ Whatever their hopes and dreams had been for moving and settling in Missouri are a mystery. At the age of forty-six, William died fifteen years after their move, leaving no will and no land for his family’s future without him.²⁴

Perhaps needing the money and knowing she would probably never return to her native Virginia, in January 1858 Sarah finally sold the land in King George County, which her uncle had bequeathed her and which had provided the key to the family’s whereabouts. The following April of that same year, a division of her father’s land was ordered, and she inherited another portion. The land was divided among Mrs. Segismonds Stuart (widow of John B. Ashton), and John’s children: Sarah F. Stuart, Horace D. Ashton, and Elizabeth Massie.²⁵ It is not known what became of this property.²⁶

After William’s death in 1855, Sallie F. Stuart was enumerated in 1860 with five of her children in Manchester Township, St. Louis County: Virginia S., Mattie T., Lavina B., William G., and Ashton J. No occupation was listed for Sallie, nor was there any real estate value. The value of her personal property, however, was \$1,200.²⁷ She owned only one slave, a male in his late twenties.²⁸

¹⁹ King George Co., Va., Deeds 19:19-20, FHL 32070.

²⁰ 1840 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Central Twp., p. 221.

²¹ King George Co., Va., Wills 4:19-20, FHL 32059.

²² 1850 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Manchester Twp., p. 358, #1179-1207. Grantee indexes for St. Louis Co., Mo., 1839 through 1860 were examined with negative results, FHL 529924.

²³ 1850 Slave Schedule, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Bonhomme Twp., no page numbers, but William is listed on the first page of Bonhomme Twp., line 35, where his middle initial is recorded as “H.” There were no other Stuarts owning slaves in this township.

²⁴ For negative search results, see Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, *David and Charlotte Hawes (Buckner) Stuart of King George County, Virginia, Including Three Generations of Their Descendants* (Simla, Colo.: privately published, 2000), 15n 20.

²⁵ King George Co., Va., Deeds 19:58-59, FHL 32070.

²⁶ Further research is needed on the named heirs of John Ashton to determine what became of this property. Sarah/Sallie was not found in King George Co., Va., General Index to Deeds, 1721-1892, FHL 32060, beyond what has already been mentioned.

²⁷ 1860 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Bonhomme Twp., Fenton P.O., p. 52, #407-385.

²⁸ 1860 Slave Schedule, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Bonhomme Twp., p. 3.

Sarah's last known whereabouts was in the city of St. Louis in 1870 when she was fifty-three. At that time, she was living with her daughter, Martha/Mattie, and son-in-law, N. John Corey. Not surprisingly, no occupation was given for her, and no amounts were listed for real or personal property.²⁹ Aside from Sarah and her daughter Martha, the other family members apparently left Missouri or had died between the 1860 and 1870 censuses. Since St. Louis was considered the Gateway to the West, they could have gone anywhere. Although what is known about William Gibbons Stuart and his descendants is one step further because his wife generated additional records of the family, once again, no further record of them has been found.³⁰

GENEALOGICAL SUMMARY

WILLIAM GIBBONS⁵ STUART (*David⁴, William Gibbons³, John², Rev. David¹*) was born in 1809 in King George County, Virginia,³¹ and died 15 April 1855 in Manchester, St. Louis County, Missouri.³²

William married SARAH "SALLY" FOOTE ASHTON, daughter of John B. Ashton, after 4 September 1833, when the couple signed a prenuptial agreement, and it was recorded 1 May 1834 in King George County.³³ Sarah was born about 1815-17 in Virginia,³⁴ probably in King George County.

Children:³⁵

- i LORENZ⁶ [probably LAWRENCE, named after Sarah's uncle] STUART, b. ca. 1836, Va., prob. King George Co.
- ii VIRGINIA S. STUART, b. ca. 1839, Va., prob. King George Co.
- iii MARTHA "MATTIE" T. STUART, b. ca. 1842-43, Mo.; m. N. JOHN COREY. John, a bookkeeper, was born about 1840 in Virginia. Children: *Ada*, b. ca. 1864; *Edwin*, b. ca. 1867. The family's last known whereabouts were in 1870 in St. Louis, Mo.³⁶

²⁹ 1870 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., City of St. Louis, 2nd Ward, p. 386, #686-811.

³⁰ For negative search results, see Carmack, *David and Charlotte Hawes (Buckner) Stuart*, 16n 28.

³¹ William was chosen by his sister, Mary Fitzhugh Stuart, as her guardian at the July 1830 King George County court; therefore, he must have been 21 by that date (King George Co., Va., Bonds, 1824-1838, p. 215, FHL 32088; King George Co., Va., Orders, 12:430, FHL 32083). Additionally, William first appeared on the King George County personal property tax lists in 1831 (FHL 2024600), which means he would have been 21 in that year. William's age was 40 on the 1850 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Manchester, p. 358, #1179-1207. Since his sister Mary was born in 1810, a birth year of 1809 is presumed correct for William. See Carmack, *David and Charlotte Hawes (Buckner) Stuart*, 11n 32-33.

³² Death notice of Wm. G. Stuart, *The Sunday Republican*, St. Louis, Mo., 15 April 1855 (n.p. on photocopy sent to compiler by Missouri Historical Society); this notice is also abstracted in Lois Stanley, comp., *Death Records from Missouri Newspapers, January 1854-December 1860* (privately published, 1982), 224.

³³ King George Co., Va., Deeds 14:206-07, FHL 32068.

³⁴ Calculated from 1850 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Manchester, p. 358, #1179-1207; 1860 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Bonhomme Twp., Fenton P.O., p. 52, #407-385; and 1870 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., City of St. Louis, 2nd Ward, p. 386, #686-811.

³⁵ 1850 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Manchester Twp., p. 358, #1179-1207; the last known whereabouts for all children, except Martha, is 1860 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., Bonhomme Twp., Fenton P.O., p. 52, #407-385. For negative search results, see Carmack, *David and Charlotte Hawes (Buckner) Stuart*, 17n 30-34.

- iv LAVINA B. STUART, b. ca. 1847, Mo.
- v WILLIAM G[IBBONS] STUART, b. ca. 1853, Mo.
- vi ASHTON J. STUART (female), b. ca. 1855, Mo.

³⁶ 1870 U.S. census, Missouri, St. Louis Co., City of St. Louis, 2nd Ward, p. 386, #686-811. No John N. or N. John Corey was found in the Civil War Index to Pensioners, FHL 540853; or the Consolidated Index to Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers for the State of Missouri, FHL 191227. This family disappears from Missouri after the 1870 census. They were not found in the 1880 Soundex for Missouri, where they would have likely had children under age 10, nor were they found in the 1900 Soundex for Missouri. Neither Corey (and spelling variants) nor Sarah/Sally Stuart were found in the St. Louis City Directories, 1868-1873, FHL 1377476-78.