



William Bull and Sarah Wells

Stone House Association, Inc.

183 County Route 51, Campbell Hall, NY 10916-2924 845-496-2855
info@bullstonehouse.org www.bullstonehouse.org

Family oral history tells us very little about William Bull's childhood or his family in England. He gave the name Hamptonburg to the area of Orange County where he settled. According to tradition he chose the name because of his birthplace, Wolverhampton, England. What we know of his family has been pieced together by examining the records for St. Peter's Church in Wolverhampton. From those we learned that William was the son of John Bull and his grandfather was Peter Bull. There are numerous records for baptisms, marriages, and deaths for the Bull families at St. Peters.

John Bull baptized ten children at St. Peter's Church. The last two, in 1689 and 1691, are both named William. It would not be uncommon for an infant to die and the next child born given the same name. After that there is no further mention of the John Bull family except for a daughter's marriage in 1706. That agrees with the family tradition that William was raised in Ireland.

William Bull, Our Immigrant Ancestor

When William Bull was young, his father left England and located at Dublin, Ireland, where he was apprenticed to learn the trade of a mason and stone cutter. During his minority we know nothing of him. When his apprenticeship ended, he, with a young friend and fellow mason, contracted to build the arch of a large bridge, which was then in the process of erection in the vicinity of the city, and had they succeeded, it might have established their credit as good workmen and talented young men; but just as they were closing the arch and finishing the job, down it tumbled, and with it the young and bright prospects of the venturesome builders.

Bull was overwhelmed by the unexpected calamity and, feeling that future success there

was hopeless, he at once determined to emigrate and build his fortune in America, which he had failed thus far to do in Ireland.

When the time came, he embarked, having nothing to encumber him but his clothes, five guineas, and a few books.

He mustered and counted up the money which amounted to five guineas, went down to the dock and on board a passenger ship bound soon for New York, and enquired of the officer on board if five guineas was sufficient to pay his passage. The reply was in the affirmative, and he forthwith completed his arrangements to leave. When the time came, he embarked, having nothing to encumber him but his clothes, five guineas, and a few books. When the ship arrived in port, Bull presented himself to the

captain to pay his five guineas and go ashore, but was told that it was not enough and, being informed it was all he had, replied that he must then be sold for the balance. Bull, very

much incensed at the trick put on him by false information in Ireland, and at the indignity so coolly about to be inflicted upon him here, promptly told the officer that he would not be sold, that he would abide by the ship and return to Ireland, and that if he had to be a servant it should be there and not in a strange land.

Just at that time, Daniel Crommelin, a wealthy New York merchant who had a share in the Wawayanda Patent in Orange County and was about to make a settlement on it, heard there was an Irish ship in port. Thinking that he might procure some laborers and artisans from among its passengers, he went on board and made his wants known to the captain. Proclamation was made throughout the ship that there was a gentleman on board who wanted to employ some workmen and mechanics to settle a new country, and if there were any persons who were willing to engage, to come forward. The proclamation fell upon Bull like a message from heaven. He spoke up and said he was a mason and, though presently short of money to pay his passage, if any gentleman would advance the money, he would undertake that he should have no cause to regret the kindness.

Crommelin, pleased with his appearance, prompt and manly bearing, advanced the money and they left the ship together. Bull, in company with other workmen, soon went with Crommelin upon the patent to prepare to erect a dwelling and make a settlement. Bull executed the masonry and others the carpenter work, and he cut the year of erection, 1716, in the stones of the chimney.

This stone mansion was known as the Greycourt House, and, for over a century, was a well-known landmark in Orange County. The name was presumably bestowed by Crommelin in remembrance of the estate of his grandfather, the Seigneur de Gricourt, in France. (Eager's account of the name is clever but fanciful.) The house stood nearly a mile northeast of the present village of Chester on a bluff overlooking the rich black bottom lands of the "Chester meadows." In Crommelin's day, however, none of this low-lying land had been drained and it is shown on the original survey as mostly swamp, through which ran a small water course, then called the Snake Kill, but which later took on a corrupted form of the original owner's name, the Cromline Creek. In spite of its wet environs, the house had the advantage of being located on the "Wawayanda waggon rode" as the survey quaintly records it, the only road through the patent at that time, leading from New Windsor to Warwick, following closely what later became the King's Highway. Thus Greycourt

was easily accessible from the Hudson River and in later years is said to have been a well-frequented tavern. However, when it was built, there was little to support a tavern, and its chief purpose was to serve as a headquarters



Stones originally from Greycourt, showing the construction date 1716, were installed in the West wall at the Bull Stone House.

in helping to promote settlement of the patent lands. It is unlikely that Daniel Crommelin intended to settle there, as he was in his seventieth year and settled comfortably in New York City. His son, Charles Crommelin, may have had ideas of retiring there, but for the present he was preoccupied with his own business affairs in New York. So the estate was probably occupied by tenants during its early years.

We can confirm the date 1716 given in Eager's account as the date of building Greycourt, since the stones bearing the date cut by Bull have been preserved. When the old house was torn down in 1832, Mr. Ebenezer Bull, a great-grandson of the builder, asked for the date stones and had them installed in the west wall of the ancestral "Stone House" in Hamptonburgh, where he then resided. These consist of two stones reading "D.C. 1716 C.C.,"

representing the owners, Daniel Crommelin and his son Charles. This date represents the completion of the Greycourt house, or at least the stonework, and we may suppose at least a season transpired in its

building, especially in such a remote location. Thus, with fair probability, we may place the arrival of William Bull in New York in the early part of 1715 at the age of 24.

Having completed the mansion-house, William Bull probably continued to live at Greycourt, employed in further settlement efforts for his patron. At that early day, the population was very sparse in that part of the county, and all living within a dozen miles of each other were considered near neighbors. Christopher Denne, a fellow patentee of Crommelin's, had settled only a few miles to the north, and in his household was a young serving girl named Sarah Wells. Small, but strong and agile, with flashing eyes and a sharp wit, she soon caught the attention of the young stonemason.

William Bull acquired 100 acres of land several months prior to his marriage. In fact, it was probably this show of landed independence that induced our level-headed

ancestress to accept his proposal. Part of this original lot of land is still owned by the Bull family and forms the portion of the home farm on which the old Stone House stands. It was located only a mile eastward from "Denne Hill." The deed to this land, apparently unrecorded, has always been kept at the Stone House, and is thus the oldest document we have relating to William Bull in America. It reads as follows:



This Indenture made the Second day of April in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred & Eighteen, Between Elias Boudinot & Samuel Clowes of the Colony of New York, Merchants, of ye one part, and William Bull, of Wawayanda in the County

of Orange in the Province of New York, Mason, on the other part:

Witnesseth, that the said Elias Boudinot & Samuel Clowes, for & in consideration of ye sum of five shillings lawful money of New York to them in hand paid by ye said William Bull, the receipt thereof they ye said Elias & Samuel doe hereby acknowledge & therefrom doe forever acquitte & releas the said William Bull & his Executors & administrators, and also for & in consideration that ye said William Bull is to settle and improve ye tract of Land herein after mentioned, they the said Samuel Clowes & Elias Boudinot have given, granted, bargained, sold, aliened, enfeoffed, assured & confirmed and by these presents doe give, grant, bargain, sell, alien, enfeoff & confirm unto him the said William Bull & his heirs, assigns, one hundred acres of land situate, lying & being att Wawayanda aforesaid, being part of a large Tract of land lately laid out to ye said Elias & Samuel.

Begining at the Chesnut oak tree markt in Minisink line & is one of ye corner trees of ye said large tract, from thence it is to run along ye line of Christopher Denne, in part & partly along by land not yet taken up, south thirty six degrees west three hundred & twenty roods, & from thence att right angles south fifty four degrees east fifty roods, & thence north thirty six degrees east three hundred & twenty roods, & from thence north fifty four degrees west fifty roods to the first station, with all the ways, priviledges, hereditaments, and appurtenances thereunto belonging, or in any way appertaining, and all the right, estate, tithe, possession, claim & demand whatsoever of them ye said Elias Boudinot & Samuel Clowes or either of them ...

In witness whereof the said granters have to these presents interchangeable put their hands & seals this day & year first above written.

Sealed and deliver in the presence of *Elias Boudinot (L.S.)*
Ebenezer Willson *S. Clowes (L.S.)*
G. McNish"

The grantors were both Wawayanda patentees. Elias Boudinot, a New York City merchant, had purchased a portion of the Rokeby share in 1704. Samuel Clowes, originally from Jamaica, L. I., was a relative newcomer, having obtained his share in the patent in 1714. He appears to have been the local agent for the patent owners, and was very active in the settlement of Goshen. From the nominal purchase sum mentioned in the deed, we gather that the sellers were anxious to promote settlement that would open up the wild land and induce a rise in real estate values.

On this land William Bull erected his first rude cabin and here he brought his dark-eyed bride following their marriage. He called the place "Hamptonburgh" after his native

Wolverhampton in England. For all its privations, that first cabin must have seemed like a princely palace to the young couple, being their first home on their own land. For the first time in their lives they were

accountable to no one except themselves and they could reap the profits of their own honest work.

... she replied that "Bull was born in England, and though brought up in Ireland, she did not know that that made him an Irishman...."

It is apparent that Christopher Denne did not hold Bull in such high regard at first as did his former servant girl. But then, the young mason did not represent independence to him, only the loss of a favored member of his household. This natural bias on Denne's part apparently provoked a tongue-lashing from the impetuous Sarah, now her own mistress. As related by Eager:

It will be recollected that Christopher Denn had promised Sarah Wells 100 acres of land for commencing the settlement of the patent, who now being of age and married, and having chosen a guardian to lean upon and protect her for life, requested a fulfilment of the promise. Without disclosing his object, he advised her "not to be in a hurry about it, that she had married a young Irishman who might play her some trick, and finally leave her; and the title might well be left where it was for the present." At this she became offended, as it cast an unworthy imputation upon her husband, and she replied that "Bull was born in England, and though brought up in Ireland, she did not know that that made him an Irishman; and that he was as good an Englishman as himself." Denn manifested no resentment at what she said and smiling pleasantly put her off. He told her, however, to go and select 100 acres of his unimproved land where she pleased, and locate it, and it should be secured to her. This was done and possession taken. It is not known whether anything more than a verbal agreement ever existed between Sarah and Christopher Denne concerning this land. Even if there were a deed, however, it would have been voided by

the upset of land titles resulting from the resurvey and final settlement of the Evans Patent in 1722, discussed below. In the midst of straightening out his land titles, Denne died, and it wasn't until 1729 that his widow drew up the final deed granting the 100 acres not to Sarah, but to her eight-year-old son.

This deed is also kept at the Stone House,

This deed shows that Sarah's land adjoined her husband's original lot along the latter's western boundary, doubling the size of their holdings.

In our next installment we hear some stories from William and Sarah's early life together as they build their future in the wilderness.

"Tales from the Blue Book", the William Bull and Sarah Wells Stone House Assn., edited 2015 by Robert Eager

Source: Emma McWhorter, Dolly Booth, Philip Seaman, History and Genealogy of the William Bull and Sarah Wells Family (Printed by The Service Press, Middletown, NY, T. Emmett Henderson, Publisher), pp 26-29, 61-66.

Cromlin House Roadside Marker photo courtesy of Sarah Brownell.

Bull Stone House date stone detail photo courtesy of Robert Eager.