

Bio: James Clarkson

This article has been titled as a Biography for James Clarkson to provide consistency with other articles on this website. But, it is actually more of a research summary, wrapped with a few biographical details. It was written in 1998 by my mother, Blanche Aubin Clarkson Hutchison. It was originally part of a larger Clarkson Family Summary. It has been slightly updated in 2015. Pam Garrett

James Clarkson is first recorded in the church records of the town of Blackley, just outside of Manchester, in Lancashire England:

James, son of Peter Clarkson, weaver of Blackley, was baptized 16 Apr 1748 [1749].

One of our best sources of information on James Clarkson's family is a genealogy that was prepared by Arnold Motley of Tappahonock, Virginia in the mid-twentieth century. Mr Motley worked, along with Fred Garrett of Center Cross, Virginia and Annie Mundie of Charlottesville, Virginia, in putting together a record of our Clarkson family and their descendants in America. On this website, see [A Clarkson Family Genealogy, by Arnold Motley](#).

The Clarkson family had probably practiced the weaving craft for several generations by the time Peter Clarkson passed on the tradition to his oldest son James. Accounts of the weaving industry in Lancashire would suggest that during the mid-eighteenth century most weavers were working at home, or in small workshops with several looms. Boys and young men apprenticed for four to eight years with their fathers, brothers, or other men in the community. Gradually they might build up a small workshop, and oversee the work of others. James Clarkson must have had some opportunity for schooling, and then followed that with years of learning the weaving craft from his father. After his stint in the army, and his settlement in America he returned to weaving as his life occupation. He has been credited with writing a Treatise on Weaving. As a man of fifty-five, he wrote [a letter](#) to his brother, "We get plenty of work here [Virginia] . . . my character is well established as good weaver."

Perhaps it was that youthful "spirit of adventure" that called James Clarkson to join the military. We know he served in the British Army during the American Revolution as Motley presents the following text of James Clarkson's passport when he deserted the British:

Headquarters, Rawlings Mill, Sept 29, 1777

Permit James Clarkson, a deserter from the British army, to pass from hence to Reading to find employment. He is by trade a weaver. James Pickering, Agent

Efforts to locate James Clarkson at the time he deserted may point to an area east of Reading Pennsylvania and NW of Philadelphia. A large Quaker settlement there included families named Rawlings. A search of deeds and wills reveals a Thomas Rawlings and wife Ann. A weaver by trade, he followed that vocation all his life in connection with farming. One of his tracts included a mill. His lands, in the townships of Milford and Richland, were in present Buck's County. Another suggestion by a Pennsylvania native was the passport may have referred to Rawlinsville, a small town near Mechanics Grove south of Lancaster. But it specifically says "Rawlings Mill". In regard to James Pickering, the agent signing the pass, he was likely a brother of Col. Timothy Pickering (born in Massachusetts but a resident of Essex County, Virginia) who was engaged in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown as Adjutant

General under Washington. We might speculate if James Pickering may have suggested Essex County, Virginia as a likely settlement prospect for James Clarkson.

An interesting book by James Slaughter entitled "Settlers, Southerners, Americans: A History of Essex County Virginia" may give a clue to why our James Clarkson ended up in Essex county Virginia. On 11 Sept 1777 a eleven-thousand man British army fought an American force of equal size in the Battle of Brandywine about 20 miles from Philadelphia. This was the first battle in which Essex Virginia men fought in the Continental Line. Well-disciplined British professionals maneuvered rapidly and struck Washington's army in several places. By late afternoon Woodford's Brigade found itself opposing a British advance across the creek near Bremlington Meeting House. Essex soldier Thomas Lee described the action:

The enemy's drums and fifes struck up the finest piece of music I ever heard. Their light horse made the attack and was soon reinforced with their grenadiers and light infantry in heavy columns. After three or four warm vollies we repulsed them, but they soon came up again with double vigor, fired a volley and advanced with charged bayonet. Our right wing gave way, which occasioned a general retreat. They followed us very closely for two miles, (sometimes within thirty or forty yards).

In late September the Redcoats occupied Philadelphia and Washington led his battered army to Valley Forge for the winter. James Clarkson may have received tempting suggestions about Essex county Virginia when he decided to desert on or before 29 Sept. The Essex Virginia troops may have been the ones to whom he surrendered. Or, it may be that the Quaker families of Rawlings lent a hand in getting him there. It would help to locate at that time James Pickering, agent, who signed the passport. It is likely he was related to Gen. Timothy Pickering, engaged in the Battles of Brandywine and Germantown as Adjutant under Washington.

A fourteen page "Clarkson Family Tree" sent to me by Mary Buchholz, author unknown, says the following about James:

He came to America during the Revolutionary war to fight for his native country, but he felt England in the wrong. One night he was put on picket duty and decided to desert his post and go to the American forces. He walked all night--next morning he was in hearing of the drum beat. To his disappointment, he found he had walked in a circle. He then turned his course and this time was successful in reaching the American forces. This has been told by his son, Joseph, and passed down to the present generation.



In 1997, Mary Clarkson Bucholz commissioned research on James Clarkson, to learn more about his military service, and ancestral link back to England. The work was done by John B Marsden of the Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society. His excellent report was dated 9 October 1997.

Much of the John Marsden report is concerned with the military record of our James Clarkson. James served with the 54th Regiment of Foot from at least 1774 and possibly as early as 1762. Since James was born 16 Mar 1749 it is unlikely he entered the service as early as '62 at the young age of 13 or 14. From what we already know of his talent as a weaver, his lifelong work in Virginia, he must have spent a few years learning that trade, probably under his father, before entering the military. But Marsden did locate several by the name of James Clarkson in the British musters. Two of them died while serving their regiments. In records of the War Office 12/6398, a third James Clarkson in the 54th Foot is almost certainly our man. There even appear to be two James Clarksons in the 54th Foot in the muster taken at Staten Island, New York on 11 Aug 1776. One in Capt John Breese's company is still listed with the company in Rhode Island on 20 Oct 1778. The other in Capt Robert Rannie's company was later shown on the list of "casualties since 25 Jan 1777" with the note "deserted 18 July 1777. But this coincidence is solved by a record showing James Clarkson transferred from Breese's company to Rannie's sometime between the Aug 1776 and Oct 1778 musters. And, it is suspected that this fact was not properly noted by Breese's company and his name appeared on their '78 record in error.

Marsden traced musters backwards from 1776 in the same WO record. They were missing from 1770 to 1774. His earliest find of James Clarkson was 7 Jan 1762 in John DeButts' company at Gibraltar. He was still listed 8 Jan 1763. From 29 Jun 1763 thru 11 Jul 1764 he was in Edmond Eyre's company at Gibraltar. From 5 Jan 1765 thru 30 Jan 1768 he was in George Ridsdale's company at Gibraltar.

The muster of the 54th Foot on 30 Jul 1770 at Granard, Ireland did not show James Clarkson in the surviving musters. But the name appears again from 5 Aug 1774 thru 1 Apr 1775 in the company of George Ridsdale at Cork. On 17 Jul 1775 he is still in George Ridsdale's company, but now at Dingle, Ireland. On 16 Oct 1775 he is in John Gordon's company at Carrick on Shannon. And finally on 10 Jan 1776 James Clarkson is in the muster of John Breese's company on board the transport ship "The Lord North" in Cork harbour in Ireland. Marsden leaves open the possibility that there well may have been two men named James Clarkson in the 54th Foot prior to service in the Revolution, one who served before the gap in musters, and one who began service possibly not till 1774. From the military information uncovered by Marsden we might conclude that James deserted more than two months before the date on his passport. Possibly he was that long "in hiding" in Pennsylvania.

The next we know of James Clarkson, our immigrant ancestor, is from information in the Motley genealogy.

[James Clarkson] located in Essex Co, Virginia in 1777 and on 14 June 1778 married Mary Adams, the Rev. Jessie Carter being the minister. Mary, his wife, died 17 August 1830. They had six children.

Jesse Carter is a deed witness one time in Essex records at June 1777 court. (LDSSL 31223 p. 324). In Episcopal records we find that he was minister in charge of Drysdale Parish in King & Queen and Caroline counties from 1778 to 1785. (Colonial Church in Virginia, E. L. Goodwin)

The children of James Clarkson and Mary Adams:

Peter Thomas Clarkson; 23 Jul 1779 to 1844; married Elizabeth Clarke

Anne Clarkson; 8 Apr 1785 to 9 Jul 1796

Richard Clarkson; 4 Sep 1788 to 21 Dec 1824; married Susan Lorinda Crittenden

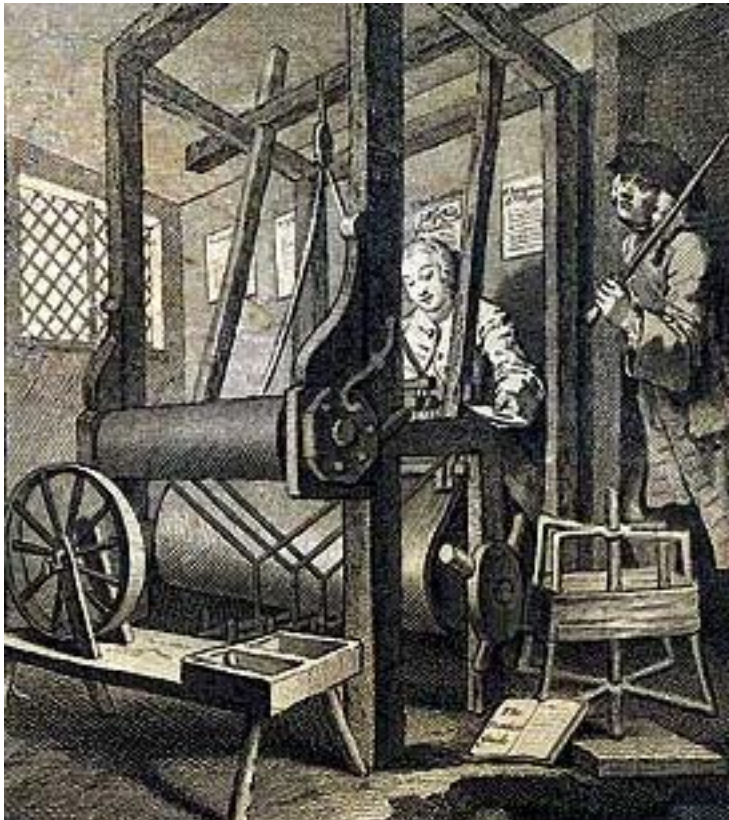
Benjamin Clarkson; 17 Jun 1791 to 1 Jan 1849; married Fanny Games

Joseph Clarkson; 12 Jul 1794 to 17 Feb 1871; married Susan Games, sister of Fanny

John Washington Clarkson; 9 Apr 1796 to 1836; married Mary Gatewood

Records need to be found showing the earliest possible mention of James Clarkson in Essex county Virginia to determine which of their six children were likely born there. It has been assumed that all were born in Essex but Motley claims son Joseph was born in Middlesex Co in 1794 which, if true, might indicate James and Mary were not always resident in Essex.

Any possible clue to where Mary Adams Clarkson might have had relatives merits investigation. Some very minor Adams clues are available in Essex county Virginia that I have pursued slightly. One to be wary of is Thomas Bowler Adams who, time-wise and because of his name, seems a likely candidate to be related, but he was the son of wealthy Richmond City merchant, Richard Adams. Thomas Bowler Adams had land in Essex Co and appears in court records there, but his brother Richard Adams, Jr was named executor of his estate when Thomas Bowler Adams met an untimely death in 1797. There are other early Adams possibilities but very little to go on. Two other Thomas Adams are identifiable, one being a free black. In 1767 South Farnham Parish did bind out one Godfrey Adams. There is also a Charles Adams of South Farnham Parish in Essex before the marriage of James and Mary, and a court record binding out his orphans William, James and Catherine on 16 Feb 1784. Also several female Adams' are in court records that could be considered as a widowed mother for Mary.



Reading the Essex Co Personal Property Tax lists (LDSSL 2024527) I find in 1783 James Clarkson, one white tithe. On the same list we see Lemuel Crittenden and Benjamin Fisher whose descendants intermarried with the Clarkson line. James Clarkson does not appear in 1784 or 1785. In 1786 James Clarkson appears again on the list of "upper district of South Farnham Parish". Lemuel Crittenden and Benjamin Fisher are still there. James is listed uniquely as "James Clarkson, himself, 1 tithe". He has no slaves nor livestock. This list is not alphabetized as some of them are. After Benjamin Fisher is listed Meriwether Smith with his 30 or 40 slaves, 8 horses, 60 cattle, etc. Next is Hannah Corrie with 8 slaves, a horse and 3 cattle. Then comes "James, himself" again. This may be 1787. Following James are the names Dunn, Gatewood and Clarke, later connected with the family.

In "Marriages of Old Rappahannock and Essex" by Wilkerson (LDSSL 975.534) are several marriage records for the sons, some apparently entered in court records long after the fact:

1811 Jan 23; John Clarkson married Mary Gatewood; 1/227
1813 Nov 18; Richard Clarkson married Susan Lorinda Crittenden; 1/229
1820 Dec 28; Benjamin Clarkson married Fanny Games; 1/237
1822 Dec 7; Joseph Clarkson married Susanna Games; 1/239

The marriage of eldest son Peter Thomas Clarkson to Elizabeth Clarke is not shown. They had no children. On 17 Nov 1813 James Clarkson certified in court that his son Richard Clarkson was beyond age 21 and of age to marry. Testifying to this were two of Richard's brothers, Benjamin and Joseph Clarkson. Lemuel Crittenden also requests the court to issue a marriage license to Richard Clarkson who intends to marry Lemuel's daughter, Susan Lorinda Crittenden.

Reading the Essex Processioners Records (LDSSL 31243) the very first mention of any Clarkson is a 29 Jan 1816 reference to a line run between Capt Streshley Reynolds and Richard Clarkson, Joseph Clarkson present. From 1816 on we see occasional mentions of the sons of James and Mary in court records but the lack of mention of James Clarkson in land records seems to indicate he possibly never owned any land and may have lived in the town of Tappahannock where he followed his weaving trade.

It is important to learn just where James and Mary Clarkson lived at the time of his death as a family letter indicates that family members were buried there. The letter says James Clarkson lived on the road to Rexburg. James Clarkson died on the 24th of September 1824, at around seventy-five years of age. His Richmond Inquirer obit of 8 October 1824 says:

Died in Essex co on 24th ultmate, age 76, Mr James Clarkson, a native of Manchester, England and a weaver. For almost 50 years was resident of Essex co.

James Clarkson left no will, but his [estate inventory](#) in Essex county Virginia shows he continued his work of weaving. The inventory shows a large collection of books. The collection is valued by dividing the books into seventeen lots, arriving at a total valuation of forty pounds. This suggests a sizable library. The inventory also lists his "Treatise on Weaving", and gives it a value of three pounds – significant in comparison to other items in the inventory. The most valuable items in the inventory are two bedsteads at twenty and twenty-four pounds. There are a number of items representing his weaver's trade. The household goods are very basic – simple furniture and kitchen supplies. There are no luxury items showing, beyond his large collection of books. The inventory does not suggest that he was farming at the end of his life.

James Clarkson's son, Richard Clarkson, died a few weeks after his father. Another son, Joseph Clarkson, is appointed administrator of both estates in Dec 1824.

Mary Adams Clarkson died on the 17th of August 1830. It was necessary for son Joseph Clarkson to deal with her care, as records show amounts paid out for her from the estate of James Clarkson. Census records may indicate she lived her last years with daughter-in-law Susan Lorinda Crittenden Clarkson, widow of son Richard.

Afterthought:

Blanche Aubin Clarkson Hutchison has also written a paper titled, Our Clarkson Family in England. It includes more details on the life of James Clarkson, addressing his British Military Service, his desertion during the American Revolution, and his life in Essex county Virginia. It repeats much of the information given here, but it also introduces further thoughts on what might have motivated James Clarkson, and what it might have been like to live among the Patriots and Tories of Essex county Virginia. It also addresses what it might have looked like to be a “Weaver”, both in England and America. If you want to know more, I recommend [Our Clarkson Family in England](#).

Do you want to know more?

[Link to James Clarkson](#)

[James Clarkson – A lingering question about his military service](#)

An excellent account of the Clarkson family can be found at the websites of researcher and descendant Mary Clarkson Buchholz.

[Buchholz/Clarkson families from South Dakota](#)

[Buchholz-Clarkson family tree](#)