

Sproul Family

by Elizabeth Morriss
c. 1965

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transcribed by William W. Sproul, III in 2003

Editorial notes, by William Sproul –

This manuscript by Elizabeth Morriss is her record including notes and letters sometime after 1965. I have attempted to exactly transcribe the faded old copy that was at the Sproul homestead, Locust Grove. Any recognized errors in the early Virginia Sproul family are **highlighted** and the reader is so cautioned. There are a few notes on and errors in the data which Elizabeth included which deserve special mention, based on well-documented sources which are available today:

- Any relationship to the Elder John Sproul of Raphoe, County Donegal, Ireland is still unknown.
- The earliest homestead of our first Sproul settler, William, was on the Cow Pasture River, and his land grant was from the Governor of the Colony and dated 1759.
- The maiden name of the first wife, Jane, of settler William is unknown. Ewing is the maiden name of the second wife, Susanna.
- “Squire Billy” was the name applied to the son of William the Settler and his first wife, Jane. Squire Billy married Esther Beard and lived near Newport. He was half brother to John, who was a son of Settler William and his second wife, Susanna.

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John Sproul, first Sproul of whom we have knowledge, was an elder in Raphoe Presbyterian Church, County Donegal, Ireland. (We learned this in 1933 from the Sproul family in Middlebrook, Virginia.)

His son, William Sproul, settled on Moffett's Creek in Virginia about 1750. In 1752 King George II gave to William a land grant. The original document is thought to be in Scotland. A faded copy in Locust Grove, the Sproul home on this land in Virginia, is inscribed:

“William Sproul
160 acres
Augusta
Crab Bottom”

William Sproul, known as “Squire Billy,” married Jane Ewing in 1757. They had four children: James, Alexander, Margaret, and William. William married a second time in 1773, his wife's name being Susanna (last name unknown) and they had ten children: Jean, Sidney, Mary, Joseph, Oliver, Martha, John, Fanny, Samuel, and Charles.

The Texas Sprouls are descended from Squire Billy and his first wife, Jean Ewing; the Virginia Sprouls are descendants of Squire Billy and his second wife Susanna. Authorities for this belief are the following letters:

Letter to W. W. Sproul, Mountain Home, Texas dated September 26, 1912 from W. S. Prouty, No. 7 E. Washington, Council Bluffs, Iowa. (Here are notes made by Annie Mae Morriss in 1934 re this letter which has apparently been lost or destroyed.)

Wrote to obtain permission to remove bodies of William and Esther, his wife, with an infant son, from old Wright Cemetery in Augusta County, Virginia, as the cemetery has been abandoned some fifty years and most of the bodies removed or graves obliterated saying also the site was a thicket and brush patch in the corner of an old field, three quarters of a mile from the wagon road. Descendants of Nancy Jane Sproul Hull, only daughter of above mentioned couple, and wife of Jacob Hull who is also buried there, wished either to purchase site, cover graves with a concrete vault and place substantial fence around grounds, or else to remove bodies to New Providence Church Cemetery, where graves would be perpetually cared for. The latter course seemed more practical and economical to them and was provisionally decided upon by them. They wished the consent and approval of the children of Samuel Brown Sproul and William M., the other children of William and Esther but it is not known now (1934) whether the undertaking was accomplished. Mr. Prouty was a grandson of Nancy Jane Sproul Hull.

Letter from Dr. Murphy, Middlebrook, Virginia, to Elizabeth Morriss sometime in 1933:

A letter long delayed in transit showed up the day after you left giving the key to your Sprouls. Saml. B. was a son of Wm. whose farm and mill were at Moffetts Creek about four miles beyond the present Sproul home. That Wm. was called Cousin by John

Sproul's family and is buried in a family graveyard on the hill near there. If he has a stone the dates will be available. I hope to be near there soon and will see. It's probable that he was a son of one of the original William's sons, the present Wm. S. is not sure. If so he was John's **first cousin.**

Letter from Mrs. W. W. King to Elizabeth Morriss in 1933:

Dr. Murphy told me that you are a lineal descendant of the Two Wm. Sprouls who are buried in a lonely hillside several miles from the very small village of Newport. I have been interested in rescuing from oblivion the names of the early settlers and Revolutionary soldiers, as the markers of most of them will soon disappear. I have the date of the will of the older Wm – July 22, 1806 – and the inscription on the tombstone of the younger one. “Departed this life Aug. 18, 1837 – aged 68 years.” J.J. Hileman Can you tell me if the older Wm. was a soldier of the Revolution – or if the younger one was in the War of 1812? I shall very much appreciate a reply. Thanking you in advance – Mrs. W. W. King, Kalorama, Staunton, Va. Nov. 26

Letter dated Feb. 10, 1937 from William W. Sproul, Jr., to Elizabeth Morriss:

1263 Griswold St.
Sharon, Penn.

Dear Miss Morriss:

My cousin Dr. Wm. A. Murphy of Staunton, Va. recently gave me copies of some correspondence he had with you in 1933 relative to some of the Sproul family history. I have been trying to collect some of the data and hope to eventually have a fairly complete record of the descendants of the William Sproul who settled in Augusta County Virginia.

I have some letters written by Dorthula Sproul in 1825 which I think you will find interesting and which I will be glad to send to you as soon as I have them copied. From these and other data I feel certain that Samuel B. Sproul was the son of William and Esther Sproul **and the grandson of “Squire Billy”.** **The Samuel who was the son of Squire Billy was born in 1789 and died in 1797.**

In your letter of December 4, 1933, you mentioned that some pictures of the old Sproul house on Moffett's Creek were probably in your uncle's possession. We would like very much to have copies of those pictures for the Sproul house near Middlebrook, Va. (Locust Grove) and if you could have this done for me I will be glad to take care of whatever the cost may be.

I will be glad to hear from you at your convenience.

Very sincerely yours,
William W. Sproul, Jr.

From the above letters it seems certain that William Sproul, father of Samuel Brown Sproul, had a farm and mill about four miles from the present Sproul home, Locust Grove. He is most likely the William Sproul whose stone reads: “Departed this life Aug. 18, 1837, age 68 years.” which

would make his birth date 1769. This is in agreement with his being the last child of the first marriage of Squire Billy, who remarried in 1773.

Samuel Brown Sproul was born October 11, 1806, on Moffett's Creek, Virginia. Little is known about his life in Virginia except that he was a graduate of William and Mary's College. He married Jane Margaret Withrow in 1834 at the age of 29. In 1850 or 1851 he moved his large family to Texas, coming by boat down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. One child died en route and was buried on the banks of the river but it is not known in which state. The records of births and deaths of his children show that a girl named Susan Virginia died in 1851 at the age of eleven months. As the record also shows that she was born in 1851, her death must have occurred in November or December. As no death is recorded in 1850, the move to Texas apparently occurred in 1851. The last four children were born in Texas: Calvin Theodore in 1853, Robert Stuart in 1855, Oliver Brown in 1857 and Franklin Pancost in 1860.

The Sprouls landed at Indianola and went directly to Austin. After a few months they bought land on the Cibolo Creek in Bexar County east of San Antonio. When a post office was established on his farm, Samuel Brown Sproul became the first postmaster of Selma. He also taught school at Selma. He died Feb. 5, 1878 at the age of 71 and was buried in the churchyard at Selma. His grave is unmarked. His wife, Jane Margaret Withrow, was born July 9, 1817 and died Aug. 4, 1896 at the age of 79. Her oldest granddaughter, Mary Jane Sproul Morriss, said that Jane Margaret was buried at Selma. No marked graves were found when the cemetery was visited by Mary Jane Sproul Morriss during World War II.

From the records, it is evident that there must be several Sproul graves at Selma in addition to those of Samuel Brown Sproul and his wife: their son John Erestus who died at the age of 15 years in 1852, their daughter Sally Stuart who died in 1853 at the age of 6, and their son James Wilson who died in 1861 at the age of 17.

William Withrow Sproul, oldest child of Samuel Brown Sproul, was born in Virginia on May 5, 1835 in Augusta County. His daughter, Mary Jane Sproul Morriss, said that he told of running his father's mill after his twelfth year. He would have been twelve in 1847 and they lived in Virginia until 1851 so he probably ran the mill three or four years. He recalled playing with J/E/B Stuart and said that they were cousins. (The name Stuart is used frequently in this family.) He was given full responsibility for the farm on the Cibolo in Bexar County, Texas, his father apparently never doing farm work after their arrival in Texas. It is interesting to note that between William Withrow and his brothers who lived to maturity, there was an age gap of 18 to 25 years. It was probable that he seemed to them to be of an older generation. Mary Jane Sproul Morriss said that the word "Cibolo" was pronounced "See-willow."

William Winthrow bought more land in later years which would become famous long after his death as Randolph field. It was there that his four oldest children were born. He married Margaret Elizabeth Edens in 1869 after having been through the Civil War, serving the Confederacy as a freighter. He was 34 years old when he married. In 1883 he moved his family to Kerr County where there was free grazing for cattle and land open for homesteading. They lived several years on the banks of Johnson Creek opposite the Reservation Road. A few miles above them on the Creek was the Morriss family, two of whose sons Sproul daughters would marry. About 1891 they moved to the headwaters of Johnson Creek about twenty-five miles west of Kerryville on the slopes of the Divide. William Withrow homesteaded land there and lived there until his death in 1918. His last remaining child, Dora, a spinster, died on this ranch in 1965.

The oldest child of William Winthrow was James William Sproul who was born in Bexar County in 1870 and died in Kerr County in 1889 at the age of 19 of typhoid fever. The second child was Mary Jane Sproul who was born in December 29, 1871 in Bexar County. She remembered seeing the first train ever to arrive in San Antonio as it passed through the Sproul farm on the new railroad bed. Another early memory was of her father's trips in the wagon to San Antonio for supplies. One of these trips he had not returned at bedtime much to the distress of his wife and children. When he finally came, he told them he had driven several miles out of town when he remembered that he had not bought the usual small bag of hard candies for the children. He had turned the team around and gone back six miles for fifteen cents' worth of sweets which his children would be expecting. He was remembered by his older grandchildren as the man who rode hard and fast, drank scalding black coffee straight from the can in which it was boiling, spoke with the Virginia accent with which he had grown up, and was totally oblivious to the dangers of unbroken horses and biting dogs. He died October 2, 1819 at the age of 83, just a few hours before the birth of his oldest great-grandson, Robert Hal Morris, Jr. His wife, Margaret Elizabeth Edens Sproul was born _____ and died _____, ____ years before the death of her husband.

The Sproul family of Middlebrook, Virginia, was first visited by the Texas Sproul descendants in 1933 when Margaret Merle Ward, her husband N.S. Ward, and her sister Elizabeth Morriss, called on them in their home, Locust Grove, two miles from Middlebrook and twelve miles from Staunton. This was July 31, 1933. The owner then was Will Sproul, a land appraiser and cattleman. He was not at home. His wife, daughter and son were gracious host, bringing out family records, inviting their guests to spend the night, and touring them through the historic home. They were introduced to Dr. Murphy, their cousin (his mother and Will Sproul's mother were sisters) who was a genealogist and well informed on the history of the local families. He later corresponded with them on this subject. It was from the Sprouls that the early history of the family was learned.

Locust Grove was built in 1800 by John Sproul, seventh child of Squire Billy and susanna. It was inherited by his son Archibald, who passed it on to will Sproul, his son.

The home is a two-story red brick set among large trees on a well-tended lawn. On the left as one enters is a blue spruce, and on the right is a boxwood approximately 45 feet in diameter and said to be 175 years old. Mrs. Sproul explained that the house was added to as sons married and brought their brides home, and this accounts for the fact that three flights of stairs are necessary as each gives access to only a part of the second story. In the yard the old kitchen, a separate building, had been converted to other uses. The large main house had long since built in a modern kitchen. The house was furnished with interesting antiques.

Dr. Murphy showed the Texas guests his own home. It was furnished with pieces made on the plantation—old rosewood beds, walnut chairs, etc. The bricks for the house were handmade, the lumber cut off the plantation, the glass for the doors measured and stained. In one cabinet were guns, belts, etc., from the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and World War I. This home was as interesting, historically, as Montecello, except that it laid no claim to a famous master.

Dr. Murphy took his guests to the old Bethel Church and Cemetery where there were a number of Sproul graves. They then visited the Misses Christian, four elderly spinsters whose mother was a sister of Archibald Sproul. Their home, several miles from Dr. Murphy's, was also very old and interesting.

Letters were received in later years from W.W. Sproul, Jr. as quoted on pages 1 and 2 and from Dr. Murphy.

The only further contact with the Virginia Sprouls was during World War II when W. W. Sproul, Jr. was in San Antonio and had dinner with Elizabeth Morriss and Sproul Morriss.

Sometime during the 1950's it was learned through John Hill Watts of Corpus Christi, a Westinghouse employee, that WW Sproul, Jr, had become a Vice President of Westinghouse Corporation.

In my letter written from Virginia in 1933 to my mother I stated that we learned from a book at Dr. Murphy's that in William Sproul's will there was a provision for a professional education to be given to Samuel Sproul. Whether this was Squire Billy's will and the provision was made for his son Samuel who died when he was 9, or whether this was the second William and the provision was for Samuel Brown, we are not certain. Later, in another book, we found a record of a transfer of a deed of land from a Mr. Jacob Lockhart to Mary and Samuel Sprowl, 210 acres in Beverly Manor, and this was in 175?. So it is probable that this Samuel was a brother of Squire Billy, or perhaps a cousin, but was certain to have been another Sproul who came from Ireland.

Elizabeth.....