

Baby On Board



There are many “coming to America” stories out there but none seem to me to be as harrowing as the one involving my daughter-in-law’s 5th great grandfather.

Joseph Musgrave Whittaker was born at sea in 1754. His parents, Charles and Rosy Ann, had made the decision to start a new life in America and Joseph just happened to be born aboard the ship taking them there. Tragically though, both Charles and Rosy Ann perished during the crossing, Rosy Ann during childbirth and Charles a few days later.

Now an orphaned infant, Joseph was looked after by friends as the ship continued its journey to America, along the Roanoke River until it reached North Carolina. There, the baby was “bound out” to indentured servitude, presumably to pay for his voyage or to reimburse for his care until he became of age.

At 21, he married Zobia Obedience Perdue whom he called Biddie. Together they had nine children. He was active during the Revolutionary War, serving in a regiment of the Virginia Militia. He fought in the Battle of Point Pleasant, the Battle of Whetsels Mill, and at Reedy Fork of the New River. He reportedly, for a brief period, served as a courier for General Washington.

After the war, he settled down to raise his family and his crops on a small plantation in Wyeth County Virginia. In his

will, he left to each of his children the sum of one dollar which, to be fair, was a dollar more than he was given at the beginning of his life.

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