

TRACING FAMILY LINEAGE TO THE TRUTH

by

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For generations people have relied on folklore as the truth concerning their lineage. Stories were passed down from their ancestors or writers of the histories of their families. I was one of these believers of the “word of mouth” scenarios. The family name of Bolling, Bowling, Bolin were my link to Pocahantas. Believing that nothing could change that fact, for eighty years I was proud to say that Princess Pocahantas was my ninth great grandmother.

The story of Pocahantas saving the life of the Englishman Captain John Smith has been in history books for decades. Princess Pocahantas had befriended the Englishman. She brought food to the settlers in the Fort and listened intently as Captain John Smith taught her the Englishman’s words.

Princess Pocahantas married Englishman John Rolfe in 1614. The ceremony was held in her village. Shortly thereafter the couple sailed to England. In England Pocahantas gave birth to her son, Thomas. She became ill with the flu and died at Gravesend, England where she is buried at St Georges Church in Kent. After his mother’s pre-mature death Thomas was raised in England by a brother of John Rolfe. Thomas married Jane Poythress, and their child Jane Rolfe, (Pocahantas’ granddaughter), married Robert Boling a successful Englishman. From this marriage and the subsequent establishment of the couple in Virginia, Robert *inherited land belonging to Powhatan*.

On a genealogy search in southeastern Kentucky, I visited a library in Jamestown, KY, home of my Bolin fourth great grandfather. The elderly librarian was excited when I mentioned I was researching the Boling family. “Oh, then you are a Pocahantas descendant,” she said. The librarian produced a volume authored by Judge Price, who was one of two authors who claimed Benjamin Bolling I was one of the direct descendants of Pocahantas. Judge Price’s genealogy chart lists my Benjamin Bolling I as a child of John Bolling II. For decades I believed my Benjamin was a Red Bolling. Red Bollings have proven they are direct descendants of the Princess.

I joined the Bolling Society, attended Bolling reunions in Virginia, and went on a tour with the Bolling Association of ancestral homes and churches in England. We visited Pocahantas’ grave site at Gravesend and had receptions with local dignitaries. In the association I met very distant cousins of mine who were, like me, related to Benjamin Bolling I.

The question remained. Were we related to Pocahantas? It was debated in the Bolling Association. In **1998 along came DNA, the double helix, the proof of one’s genealogical inheritance**. The Bolling Association conducted a DNA testing of men with the name of Boling, Bolling, and Bolin. Sorrowfully, my Benjamin was not a direct descendant of Princess Pocahantas.

I must accept that I am not related to the Indian Princess. She is not my ninth great grandmother. In libraries and on genealogy charts on book shelves and on computers there is erroneous information on Boling, Bolling, Bowling and Bolin family trees. I once thought these referred to my lineage and embarked on a journey to learn more about my heritage as a descendant of Pocahontas.

But in the end, science rules! DNA, the scientific power of relationships, had destroyed a part of my genealogy tree that I once accepted without question.

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