

THE TRUTH TELLER – DNA

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. Smith was the leader of Jamestown, Virginia in the early years of the seventeenth century. One day the Princess was in trouble. The village had gathered near the clearing in the center of the settlement of pioneers. Tribesmen, their dark eyes starring in disbelief, their bronze-skinned brows furrowed with anxiety looked on in horror and questioned the actions Pocahantas was taking.

Would her father, the Chief, the Great Powhatan, leader of the thirteen tribes, tolerate his daughter’s frantic plea to save the intruder, the Englishman? Each startled Indian wondered the outcome of the confrontation as they fixed their eyes upon their Chief, the Princess and the stranger.

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.

Chief Powhatan despised the intruders and was determined to drive them from his land. Powhatan intended to kill Captain Smith. Smith’s blond head was resting in the curve of the stone where he would meet his death. As her father prepared to attack Smith, Princess Pocahantas, desperate to save her new friend, threw her body across Captain Smith.

Powhatan considered his daughter’s intervention an act of daring and bravery and he relented and gave in to her pleas for mercy for the Englishman. Captain Smith was not harmed and later became an adopted son of Powhatan.

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 1.

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 Boling 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.

But science rules! DNA, the scientific power of relationships, had destroyed a part of my genealogy tree.

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