

My verbose Nicholas Roberts story (to date- 8/24/2022)

Until a few years ago, my great-grandfather Will Roberts was my oldest known Roberts relative. His father died young, and much information was lost, except for a census record that Will's father had come from South Carolina. I also knew that my father's side of the family has a strong Baptist identity (My mother's side is Methodist, and I'm an Elder in the UMC).

I am indebted to W.F. (Bill) Roberts of South Carolina. A few years ago, I discovered his research on Elder Nicholas Roberts and family. I can't overstate the value of Bill's work. Through correspondence with Bill, I learned that another cousin had uncovered an old note (written two generations after Nicholas) stating that Nicholas' family had come from Virginia.

Soon after discovering Bill's work, I took a detailed Y-DNA test. My Y-DNA matches fall into two batches: Those who, including Bill, share Nicholas as a common ancestor, and those who don't share a common ancestor until around the year 1350. For what it's worth, those very distant cousins trace their paternal line to eastern Wales (our common ancestor may be Sir Thomas ap Gwilym). Sir Thomas had a son named Robert who may be the namesake of this "Roberts" family. My known distant cousins descend from a different son, and they tend to carry the surnames Raglan(d) or Herbert. My feeble efforts to trace the Roberts family down from Robert didn't bear fruit.

Earlier this summer, I thought of a new approach for researching Elder Nicholas Roberts- looking into religious groups who traveled from Virginia to South Carolina in the 18th century. As I began, I started collecting possible hints (some, I admit, are very speculative) left by family stories and source material...

A few clues come from death notices:

The *South Carolina Temperance Advocate* in its February 8, 1844 issue reported:

"Died at his residence in Fairfield District in November 1843, after a lingering illness, Elder Nicholas Roberts, aged about 95 years, and pastor of Beaver Creek Church upwards of thirty-two years."

On September 1, 1844 Beaver Creek Church passed the following resolution.

"Resolved, that we mourn the loss of our venerable brother, Elder Nicholas Roberts, who was a faithful minister of the gospel for fifty-five years. Resolved further, that we tender to his afflicted family the expression of our heartfelt sympathies."

-Nicholas Roberts' obituaries listed him as "Elder Nicholas Roberts." His only recorded signature, on a formal document, doesn't include the title "Rev." Maybe he was part of a religious tradition that didn't use that the title "Reverend."

-His obituary was published in the *South Carolina Temperance Advocate*. His name was associated with the temperance cause- perhaps more so than your average Baptist or Methodist minister?

-His congregation is listed as “Beaver Creek Church.” Maybe the denominational status of the church is complicated?

-The different accounts of his years in ministry may hint that he served more than one congregation during his ministry.

As I pondered the clues above, especially the title of “Elder,” I began to consider that Nicholas’ history may be connected to Brethren congregations. When I remembered that many Brethren congregations are pacifist, two additional light bulbs began to flicker...

-Nicholas would have been the perfect age for military service during the Revolutionary War, but to date none of us have uncovered any documentation or family memory of his war service.

-Pacifist beliefs may explain the odd story of my family’s migration to Arkansas. Just before the Civil War, Nicholas Roberts (grandson of Elder Nicholas Roberts) and his branch of the family left South Carolina, presumably headed to Arkansas. Nicholas dies along the way (Feb. 1860, Talladega Co, AL). The family returns to South Carolina, and Nicholas’ sons enlist for military service that year. They migrate to Arkansas in the late 1860’s.

Looking back, I wonder if Nicholas (the grandson) was the last of the pacifists, attempting to keep his family out of the Civil War. (Note that Bill Roberts’ account of this story mistakenly places the first migration and Nicholas’ death after the Civil War).

-In his opening discussion of Elder Nicholas Roberts, Bill mentions how surprised he was to discover Elder Nicholas’ identity as a minister and can’t explain how this knowledge became lost to his family. Bill also mentions that the early history of Beaver Creek Baptist Church has been lost/forgotten. I may be stretching a bit too far in this case, but it seems to me that the family and/or congregation may have found it convenient to forget a history that no longer fit the beliefs of the family/congregation.

Another research angle- The Miller family

Earlier this month, as I began to focus more attention on Brethren history, I noticed how often the Muller/Miller surname appears. My father’s sister, Sue Roberts Miller, is a Miller by marriage. On instinct, I contacted her grandson for information about his paternal line. His oldest known paternal grandfather is William David Miller (1830 SC -1900 AR). William David Miller’s wife was Sicily Roberts, daughter of the Nicholas Roberts mentioned above. My Miller relatives have Roberts ancestry on both sides of their family.

I suspect that these Roberts and Miller families shared similar religious beliefs and have lived in close proximity to each other for most of the last 250-300 years. I’m hoping that one of my Miller relatives will agree to a Y-DNA test, which may confirm their family’s distant connection to Pennsylvania, Virginia, and SC Brethren communities.