

A common way of obtaining passageway to the English colonies for those lacking the financial means was by becoming an indentured servant. By this method, an immigrant agreed to serve a specified number of years in return for transportation, food and clothing. The length of the indenture depended upon the age of the immigrant. In the mid-seventeenth century a person over twenty-one agreed to serve four years; if between twelve and twenty-one, for five years; and if under twelve, for seven years.

Since Richard Nelms transported four additional persons to Virginia four years later in 1661, it seems logical to assume that they were replacements for the previous group. This four-year period suggests the contract required four years of service and that Richard Tidwell was at least twenty-one when he contracted to come to America. In his excellent manuscript history of the Tidwell family, General William A. Tidwell points out that the land grants due the planters who brought in indentured servants were often not granted immediately upon their arrival. He therefore suggests that the group that included Richard Tidwell may well have arrived in the colony sometime in 1656.

If we knew the exact number of years that Richard Tidwell worked for Mr. Nelms, it would be easy to estimate his age and possible birthdate. If he was, indeed, a younger son of Robert and Marie Marsh Tidwell, then he must