

Traversing the Grist Family Tree

by

Margaret McNab Gale, MLS

How well do you really know your family tree?

My mother was Carolyn Grist McNab. Her father was Joseph Patrick Grist, Sr., who was born in 1894. Grandfather Grist died around the time of my birth, so I never knew him. I often wondered about his background, and in recent years I decided to try and put together a family tree for my Grist kinfolk.

I grew up knowing very little about my grandfather. I found out he was born in 1894 in York, S.C., and is buried at prominent Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston, S.C. Mother grew up on Alexander Street, which is now located in the historic Mazyck-Wraggborough neighborhood in downtown Charleston near Citadel Square Baptist Church. The Grists were active members of this large church.

Sadly, Mother passed on over twenty years ago. My dad, Robert F. McNab, Jr., loves genealogy and he started researching his beloved wife's family shortly after her death. Dad and I made a trip to York during that time and we visited Rose Hill Cemetery.

I found out that Grandfather's father was Lewis G. Grist, who was born in 1867. His wife's death certificate states that she was Mrs. Emma Beattie Grist, and she was buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in 1943. Her death certificate also states that her parents were Mr. and Mrs. John G. Ferguson. John G. Ferguson was born in Chester County and his wife, Rhoda, was born in York.

Moving on down the "tree" is William L. Grist, who was born in 1836 in York. I found a reference to a William middle name "L." Grist in a source titled "Genealogical Abstracts from Spartanburg Co., S.C. Newspapers 1872-1879" compiled by Larry Vehorn. This citation states that "Wm. L. Grist, a brother of the editor of the Yorkville Enquirer, died on Mon. aged 39, of typhoid fever. [Spartanburg Herald, 14 Aug. 1875]".

I had heard there was a Grist family in York that owned a newspaper business, and, being a writer, I wondered if I could have been part of this printing dynasty. (I'm a librarian, and my Grist

related kin Melissa Mills recently graduated from library school at USC!)

The next name on my lineage chart was John E. Grist. I researched the owners of the Grist newspaper family in Yorkville and, lo and behold, I confirmed it was founded by my great great great grandfather, John Ellis Grist! John E. Grist was born in Spartanburg in 1807. I had no idea that my family once lived in Spartanburg! It's mortifying to learn the Internet knows more about my family than I do!

John E. Grist owned a stately home in York, built around 1819 or 1820 and still located at 203 East Liberty Street. (I used to work at the Aiken-Rhett House in downtown Charleston, so I have an affinity for stately old homes of the south!) I returned to the Internet and did a Google search of "John E. Grist". That search returned a link to him in the "Acts of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina Passed in December, 1844" :

"In the Senate, Dec. 13, 1844.

The Committee on Claims, to which was referred the Account of John E. Grist, for Printing done for the State, respectfully Report: that they have examined the same, and recommend that the said John E. Grist be paid the sum of forty-one dollars and seventy-eight cents, in full of his account.

Resolved, That the Senate do agree to the Report. Ordered, That it be sent to the House of Representatives for concurrence.

By order,

W. E. Martin, C.S.

House of Representatives, Dec. 18, 1844.

Resolved, That the House do concur in the Report. Ordered, That it be returned to the Senate.

By order,

T. W. Glover, C.H.R."

Great great great grandfather's company printed S.C. Senate government documents in the 19th century! This shows that John E. Grist's printing services were utilized all over the state!

But who were John E. Grist's parents? My father's genealogy charts ended with John E. Grist. I found through another Google search that an Isom Grist was listed as the father of John G. Grist on a

Sons of the American Revolution member application. I contacted my researcher at the Rebecca Motte chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and she said this application was put forth prior to today's rigorous requirements for acceptance into heraldry groups, and at the present time she has seen no documentation that confirms that Isom Grist was the father of John E. Grist as stated in the SAR records. The application further states that Isom Grist was the son of Lt. John Grist, who was born in 1757 in what is now Logan County, West Virginia and died in Spartanburg. His wife was listed as Rachael McHam, who was born in Spartanburg in 1761. This would make her 15 at the onset of the Revolutionary War, and John would have been 19 in 1776.

This service record seemed plausible to me. However, the DAR researcher said she could not find acceptable documentation verifying that a John Grist who fought in the Revolutionary War was part of my family tree!

I was crushed by the news that my family's online SAR papers were no longer accepted as a legacy for entry into current heraldry groups! This discovery led my husband Larry and me to do a road trip in July 2019 to Rock Hill and York to do some serious genealogy research. Unfortunately, my research in York County did not result in me confirming the names of John E. Grist's parents, or that my Grist relative fought in the Revolutionary War; but I was very excited to find grandmother and grandfather Grist's marriage license at the York County Court House!

I am still concerned as to who should be listed on my Grist direct lineage chart in the 1700's. The question still remains, how well do we really know our family's history?

Margaret McNab Gale, MLS, is the owner, along with her husband Larry Gale, of computer security company Perceptual Systems, LLC, and Larry Gale Photography. She has published over twenty articles on the history of South Carolina. She can be reached at mrmgale@earthlink.net.