

The English Origin of the Macomber Line in America

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This write-up cites several dozen entries of Parish records in southern England about members of the Macomber family who migrated to America in 1638, along with introductory and explanatory comments. Sources cited are listed at the end of this write-up. It is hoped that this and associated write-ups will assist in documenting and explaining facts and correcting errors in FamilySearch.org and Ancestry.com about the first Macomber's of record in America.

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Synopsis

The first Macomber's of definite record in America are two brothers, William and John, and William's wife and son, Ursilla and Thomas. Both William and John first appear in colonial records in America in 1638, and the record of Ursilla and Thomas appear thereafter. Colonial entries link William and John to Dorchester, Dorset, England. (See separate story entitled "The First Macomber's of Record in America"). Dorset Parish records from Dorchester, Dorset, England note that William and John were christened in the Anglican Church of St. Mary in the town of Bridport, Dorset, England 15 miles west of Dorchester where William is noted to have married Ursilla and where their son, Thomas, was christened. Parish records list the parents of William and John as John Macomber and Edith Locke. The marriage of John & Edith and the christenings and marriages of John's & Edith's children are also noted, along with the burials of John & Edith and some of their children and grandchildren.

The First Macomber's of Record in America are linked to Dorset Parish in southern England

When the passengers and crew of the ship Mayflower settled at New Plymouth in America in 1620, written Plymouth Colony records were judiciously maintained by the colonists as a matter of law, and most of these records have survived to the present day. During the

mid-1800's an historical preservation effort was undertaken in which all the original extant Plymouth Colony records of the time were transcribed and published in a multi-voluminous set entitled "Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England", some volumes of which are now available in digital format via the World Wide Web (New Plymouth (Colony: Massachusetts), 1855). These and other records contain numerous entries mentioning William, Ursilla, Thomas and John Macomber and several of their descendants in the New World.

The first American Colonial entry of Macomber's is that of 28-year-old William Macomber (sometimes spelled Maycumber, Maycomber, and Macumber in Colonial records depending on the specific person who wrote the record). An entry in the Plymouth Colony record dated 2 April 1638 is as follows. (Note that spelling conventions were quite different from today and the way a "u" and "v" were written was reversed):

"Willm Maycumber, of Dorchester, coop, is lycensed to dwell within this goument, at Plymouth or elsewhere, vpon the testimony of his good behauir hoe hath brought with him. Henry Madsley, of the same towne, carpenter, is also lycensed within this colony." (New Plymouth (Colony: Massachusetts) pp. 82, volume 1)

Although the above entry is brief, it contains considerable information and notes that William is a "coop", short for cooper (a professional craftsman who makes wooden barrels), and that he is "of Dorchester", which was a major town in southern England in 1620 and 1638. Dorchester is the county seat of Dorset County, England. Dorset County is next to Devon County where Plymouth, Devon, England is located. The last point of departure for the ship Mayflower in 1620 was the harbor at Plymouth about 95 miles west of Dorchester.

Dorchester was an historic "market town", one of only a few in the region authorized to have an open market where goods could be sold to the public (Dorchester, Dorset, 2013) and (Market town, 2013). Dorchester also had a well-functioning harbor on the banks of the River Frome and was the seat of Dorset Parish, a regional subdivision of the Anglican Church of England. Dorchester may have been the city where William Macomber, the first Macomber of record in America, worked as an apprentice cooper; the notation in the Plymouth Colony record "vpon the testimony of his good behauir hoe hath brought with him" is likely a letter from a master cooper testifying of William's skill and good behavior as a cooper; such written testimonies being common during the era; and the notation that William was of Dorchester may be due to such a letter being written in Dorchester. Dorchester is 15 miles east of the town of Bridport where Dorset Parish records note that William and John's parents were married and where William and John were christened and apparently born and raised, and where William married Ursilla and where their son, Thomas, was christened. Like Dorchester, Bridport was also a "market town", but Dorchester was the county seat and slightly larger than Bridport (Dorchester, Dorset, 2013) and (Bridport, 2013).

The church of Saint Mary in Bridport, Dorset, England

In the town of Bridport is an Anglican church (formerly a Catholic church) called St. Mary's. St. Mary's church in Bridport (as opposed to other churches named St. Mary's in other towns) was first founded by the Roman Catholic Church in the thirteenth century (about 1261), and was enlarged in subsequent years (Bridport, 2013). St. Mary's was confiscated by the emerging Church of England circa 1534 during the English Dissolution of the Monasteries. The parliament of England, in 1538, passed a law that required all ministers of the new Anglican Church of England to record baptisms, marriages, and burials, and all citizens of England were subsequently mandated by civil law to be members of the Church of England and to attend church regularly. However, religious supremacy in England passed back and forth between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church between 1534 and 1558, and it was not until the death of Queen Mary I in 1558 that the Anglican Church of England became the consistent supreme church of England. Thus, from about 1558 forward the records of the Anglican Church of England have survived, for the most part, to the present day, while most of the Catholic records of St. Mary's are no longer extant. The Anglican records of St. Mary's note the christenings, marriages and burials of various Macomber's, including the first Macomber's of record in America, namely, William, John, Ursilla and Thomas (Fiske, 1981).

Macomber family christenings, marriages and burials at the church of Saint Mary

In April 1981 Jane Fletcher Fiske, an American historian, genealogist and author familiar with colonial history, was examining the Francis Bartelot Collection of transcribed Dorset parish records located in the Library of the Society of Genealogists in London, England. Fiske reports that in the registers for the parish of Bridport, copied in November 1938 by Vaughan Crowell, she found the surname of Macomber. Fiske states the following:

"At that time [April 1981] I knew only that a family of that name had been in Massachusetts very early, and I did not have enough information to know whether or not their English home had already been discovered. However, I copied the entries relating to them, and when I returned home I could find nothing to indicate that this information had been previously published. The entries in the Bridport registers fit just about perfectly what is known of William Macomber, who settled in Marshfield with his wife Ursula [sic], and John Macomber, who was in Taunton at the same time." (Fiske, 1981). Note that Plymouth Colony was merged with the Massachusetts Bay Colony starting in 1691 and the region of former Plymouth Colony is today the southern part of the state of Massachusetts.

Jane subsequently wrote an article about her findings that was published in volume 2, number 2, page 170 of *The Genealogist*, then a

publication of the Association for the Promotion of Scholarship in Genealogy, Ltd. The article notes the entries for 3 marriages, 18 baptisms, and 9 burials of Macomber's (sometimes spelled Mackomber, Macumber, and Macember) and of pertinent in-laws at St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England between 1607 and 1637. Fiske's article contains other insightful information.

Since 1981, indexes of the Dorset parish registers have been created and made available via online databases; however, as all experienced genealogists know, reading 400-year-old English script can be very challenging, and modern indexes are usually the creations of either volunteer transcribers, some of whom are inexperienced youth, or low-wage transcribers, sometimes outsourced to India or other locations with limited understanding or exposure to English names, spelling and ancient scripts. Hence, upwards of about 20% of the data in modern indexes is simply WRONG in one form or another! However, digitized indexes give us a valuable GUIDE that lead us to the original text, and then when the original text or careful transcriptions by experienced people like Fiske and Crowell and others are examined, reasonable certainty about people and events can then be obtained and more fittingly documented.

The following list of marriages, christenings (baptisms), and burials at St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England matches the list made by Vaughan Crowell in November 1938 and reported by Jane Fletcher Fiske in 1981, except where noted hereafter. The list below, however, is organized into apparent family groups for clarity based on conjecture and assumptions which may not be entirely correct.

Note that during the 1600's it was common for children to pass away in infancy or early childhood, and it was the norm in southern England during the 1600's to honor deceased children by naming a newborn child after them. Hence, John & Edith Locke Macomber had two sons named Thomas. As the parish records indicate, two sons of John Macomber named Thomas passed away and after the second Thomas passed away apparently at age four, John & Edith apparently had no other male children. However, John's & Edith's oldest surviving son, William, who married Ursilla in 1633, named their second son Thomas who is apparently the same Thomas Macomber who, with his mother and father and uncle, is among the first four Macomber's of record in America. The parish records also list a male named William, the son of William, who passed away in 1636. Also note that minor spelling variations in the following list are due to different scribes making notations at different times, yet it is fairly clear that members of the same family groups are being noted despite the minor spelling variations.

Apparent family of John Macomber & Edith Locke noted in parish records of St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England

Marriage: John Macomber & Edith Locke, 8 June 1607.

Christening: Thomas, son of John Macember, 12 September 1608.

Christening: William, son of John Macumber, 25 March 1610.

Christening: Zephurah, daughter of John Macumber, 1 November 1611.

Christening: John, son of John Macumber, 26 October 1613.
Christening: Alice, daughter of John Macomber, 23 November 1615.
Burial: Zyporah, daughter of John Macumber, 19 June 1617 [age 5].
Christening: Edmond, son of John Macumber, 24 August 1617.
Christening: Richard, son of John Macumber, 3 December 1619.
Christening: Marie, daughter of John Macumber, 12 October 1621.
Burial: Thomas, son of John Macumber, 13 January 1622/3 [age 14].
Christening: Thomas, son of John Macomber, 14 September 1623.
Christening: Edith, daughter of John Macumber, 27 December 1625.
Burial: Thomas, son of John Macomber, 21 March 1627/8 [age 4].
Christening: Robert, son of John Macumber, 2 December 1627.
Burial: Robert, son of John Macumber, 5 April 1628 [age 4 months].
Burial: Marie, daughter of John Macumber, 24 July 1632 [age 11].
Burial: Edith, wife of John Mackomber, 10 May 1636 [age about 50?].
Burial: John Mackomber, [likely husband of Edith], 6 July 1650 [age about 65?, not part of lists by Crowell and Fiske] (England, Dorset, 1538–1936).

Apparent family of William Holway and Alice Macomber noted in parish records of St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England

Marriage: William Holway and Alice Macumber, 14 July 1617; [Note that this Alice Macumber would have to be too old to be the daughter of John & Edith Locke, but may be John's sister, niece or cousin].
Christening: Marie, daughter of William Holway, 24 May 1618.
Christening: Alice, daughter of William Holway, 29 October 1620.
Christening: Elizabeth, daughter of William Holway, 23 February 1622/3.
Christening: William, son of William Holway, 8 June 1625.
Christening: Christopher, son of William Holway, 9 November 1627.
Christening: Isacke, daughter [sic] of William Holway, 25 May 1630.

Apparent family of William Macomber & Ursella Cooper noted in parish records of St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England

Marriage: William Mackomber & Ursella Cooper [noted as Vssella by Crowell and Fiske], 16 January 1633/4
Christening: Thomas, son of William Mackomber, 28 February 1635/6.
Burial: William, son of William Macomber, 10 August 1636 [no christening record is found in Dorset parish records for this William].

Additional Entries noted in parish records of St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England

Burial: Thomas Macumber, 23 February 1622/3.
Burial: Richard Mackomber, 23 May 1637.

Commentary about the parish records for St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England

The eleven children listed as christened at St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England who are noted to be the children of John Macomber are likely the children of John Macomber & Edith Locke due to the christening dates beginning 11 months after John & Edith are married and averaging 20 months apart for the next 20 years, which is consistent with a typical large family during the 1600's. Christenings were most often done soon after birth, but sometimes were delayed several days or weeks. For example, William Macomber is noted to have been christened on 25 March 1610, which is Lady's Day, a special holiday being the first day of the year in the Old Style calendar system and exactly nine months before the believed birth of Christ on 25 December. Thus, it is reasonable to suppose William's christening was delayed a few days so it would occur on Lady's Day. Similarly, the six children listed as christened who are the children of William Holway are likely the children of William Holway & Alice Macomber, and the two sons listed as sons of William Macomber are likely the sons of William Macomber & Ursilla Cooper; there does not appear to be anything in the record to suggest otherwise.

As the original and derivative Plymouth Colony records attest, the first Macomber's of record in America are clearly William, John, Ursilla and Thomas Macomber. (See separate story entitled "The First Macomber's of Record in America"). The names, ages and family relationships of William, Ursilla, Thomas and John Macomber that appear or are otherwise suggested in Plymouth Colony records match perfectly with the names, ages and family relationships of William, Ursilla, Thomas and John noted in the parish records of St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England except for minor spelling variations which are perfectly understandable given the era and circumstances. And coupled with the fact that the Plymouth Colony record in America notes that William was of Dorchester, which is 15 miles west of Bridport, and coupled with the fact that "abruptly" no further pertinent entries for William, Ursilla, Thomas and John Macomber are found in the parish records of Bridport after 1638 when the four are in America is strong evidence that the four Macomber's noted in early Plymouth Colony records are the same four noted in Bridport parish records.

In 1908 Everett S. Stackpole, an author and historian, published several historical books near the turn of the nineteenth century, one of which is entitled "Macomber Genealogy", which is now available in digital format via the World Wide Web for free (Stackpole, 1908). It is evident that Stackpole used in part the 1855 collection entitled "Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England", some volumes of which are now available in digital format via the World Wide Web

(New Plymouth (Colony: Massachusetts), 1855). Stackpole was not related to the Macomber family per se, but apparently selected the Macomber line for the subject of one of his books because of the frequency of the surname in early Plymouth Colony records. The book "Macomber Genealogy" is an excellent derivative GUIDE; unfortunately, Stackpole did not have access to the Dorset parish records that were in England at the time, nor to other information that has since come to light. Stackpole was almost correct in his statement that "The old tradition concerning "three brothers" who came to America seems to be verified in the case of the Macomers...". However, it is now clear that William and John were indeed brothers, but Thomas was the son of William and nephew of John, and not the brother of William and John. From the parish records of St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England it is apparent that William and John did have two brothers named Thomas, but both brothers named Thomas passed away in England before 1638 when William and John first appear in American Colonial records, followed by the son of William named Thomas as he became older and Ursilla when the occasion dictated. It appears the reason why Stackpole noted that Thomas apparently did not have children is because Stackpole did not realize that Thomas was a child in 1638 or thereabouts.

The parish records show that the parents of William Macomber and John Macomber of Plymouth Colony are most likely John Macomber & Edith Locke who were married at St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England in 1607. In FamilySearch.org and in Ancestry.com the wife of John Macomber (1585-1650) is sometimes noted to be Edith Talbot Locke (1587-1636); however, the author has never seen any documentation or explanation as to why Edith Talbot Locke (as opposed to another Edith Locke) is the wife of John Macomber. The woman identified as Edith Talbot Locke and her ancestry may indeed be the wife and in-laws of John Macomber, but without documentation or adequate explanation, it is appropriate to consider at present that information to be an ASSUMPTION rather than a FACT. Assumptions are fine, but they should be noted as such and not considered factual without adequate explanation or documentation, which hopefully will surface in the coming months.

The wife of William Macomber (1610-1670) is noted to be Ursella Cooper in the parish records of St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England. Vaughan Crowell and Jane Fletcher Fiske noted the name as Vssella, which is understandable as the use of "u" and "v" were reversed in ancient times, and a cursive "r" can easily be miswritten or misread as a cursive "s". In FamilySearch.org and in Ancestry.com the wife of William Macomber (1610-1670) is sometimes noted to be Priscilla Ursula Thomas (1618-1675); however, the author has never seen any documentation or explanation as to why Priscilla Ursula Thomas (as opposed to Ursella Cooper or some other Ursella) is the wife of William Macomber (1610-1670). The woman identified as Priscilla Ursula Thomas (1618-1675) and her ancestry may indeed be the

wife and in-laws of William Macomber (1610-1670), but without documentation or adequate explanation it is appropriate to consider that information to be an ASSUMPTION rather than a FACT at present. Hopefully, documentation or adequate explanation will surface in the coming months, or another person will be identified as the wife of William Macomber (1610-1670).

The modern index of the original Dorset parish records list the wife of William Macomber (1610-1670) as Priscilla George (Church of England, 1633); however, given the nature of modern indexes as explained previously, and the name being transcribed as Vssella Cooper by both Vaughan Crowell and Jane Fletcher Fiske, both skilled and meticulous genealogists, it is reasonable to conclude that the modern index is simply WRONG! It is also easy to understand how Vrsella Cooper written in ancient cursive English could be misread as Priscella George by an inexperienced transcriber: An ancient cursive "V" could easily be misinterpreted as a modern "P" if the left part of the V in the original text was faint, as is sometimes the case at the start of writing when using an ancient quill pen, and thus the remainder of the name after the "P" or "V" would be similar with either name. Likewise, an ancient cursive "C" could easily be interpreted by an inexperienced transcriber as a modern "G", and ancient cursive "oo" misinterpreted as "eo", and ancient cursive "per" as "rge". Hence, there is apparently nothing in the original parish record itself as noted by Crowell and Fiske that the wife of William Macomber (1610-1670) is "Priscilla George"; rather, the original record apparently notes William's wife as Ursella Cooper. And without any documentation or reasonable explanation otherwise, it is appropriate to consider the name Priscilla to be highly suspect of being wrong.

Conclusion

With the aid of experienced genealogists such as Jane Fletcher Fiske and Vaughan Crowell examining the original texts of the Dorset Parish records and creating derivative records therefrom, the first Macomber's in America can be better identified, documented and explained than was the case previously, and errors in family history that have been perpetuated over the years can be appropriately corrected. It is hoped that this write-up will assist in that endeavor. More information from southern England outside of the parish records of St. Mary's church in Bridport, Dorset, England is needed to better identify the Macomber family line that was present in southern England during the 1500's, but the parish records of St. Mary's church in Bridport seem to identify the immediate family of the first Macomber's in America in the early 1600's.

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