

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR ANCESTORS ...

# NAMESAKE FOR COLONIAL VIRGINIA TOWN

**John Bruce  
(1690 – 1748) &  
Sarah Parrell  
(c. 1690 – 1748)**

— *Bradley Rymph*

### VISITS TO BRUCETOWN, VIRGINIA:

July 24, 2010 (with José Baquiran, Albert  
and Edna Mae Rymph)

June 1, 2013 (with José Baquiran)

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Rymph.

In the early to mid-1700s, in the years preceding the Revolutionary War, settlers near the Atlantic Coast of the British American colonies moved steadily westward — establishing new towns as they expanded British settlement and dominion. Three of these men (with their families) were ancestors **John Bruce** (an immigrant from Scotland); a Baptist minister, the Rev. John Gerrard; and a frontier captain in the French and Indian War, Jeremiah Smith (*see separate profiles for Gerrard and Smith*).

Little is known about the early life of John Bruce, other than that he was christened on September 6, 1690, at Fordyce, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. His family is believed to have belonged to the Church of Scotland (i.e., Presbyterian).

A family genealogy, *John Bruce of the Shenandoah*, records:

John Bruce brought his family to America probably by way of Ireland after 1724. It is considered that John may have lived for some time in southeast Pennsylvania before settling his family in the Winchester (called Frederick Town until 1790) [Virginia] area between 1735 and 1737 under the guidance of Joist Hite's son. John was a farmer, operating a grist and sawmill on



Restored log cabin in Winchester, Virginia, typical of homes built by settlers in Frederick County, Virginia, in the mid-1700s. Original home of John Bruce may have been very similar. (House maintained by Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society.)



Turkey Run six miles northeast of Winchester. With other families building their homes, along with carding and fulling mills nearby on Littlers Run, the community became a flourishing little village known as Brucetown.

Joist Hite, who is referenced in the above quotation, is believed to have been the leader of the party of Virginia settlers that included Bruce and his family, and either John Bruce or his son George is believed to have been the founder of Brucetown (hence, the town's name). In an 1850 biographical sketch about Hite in *Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical*, the Rev. William Henry Foote wrote:

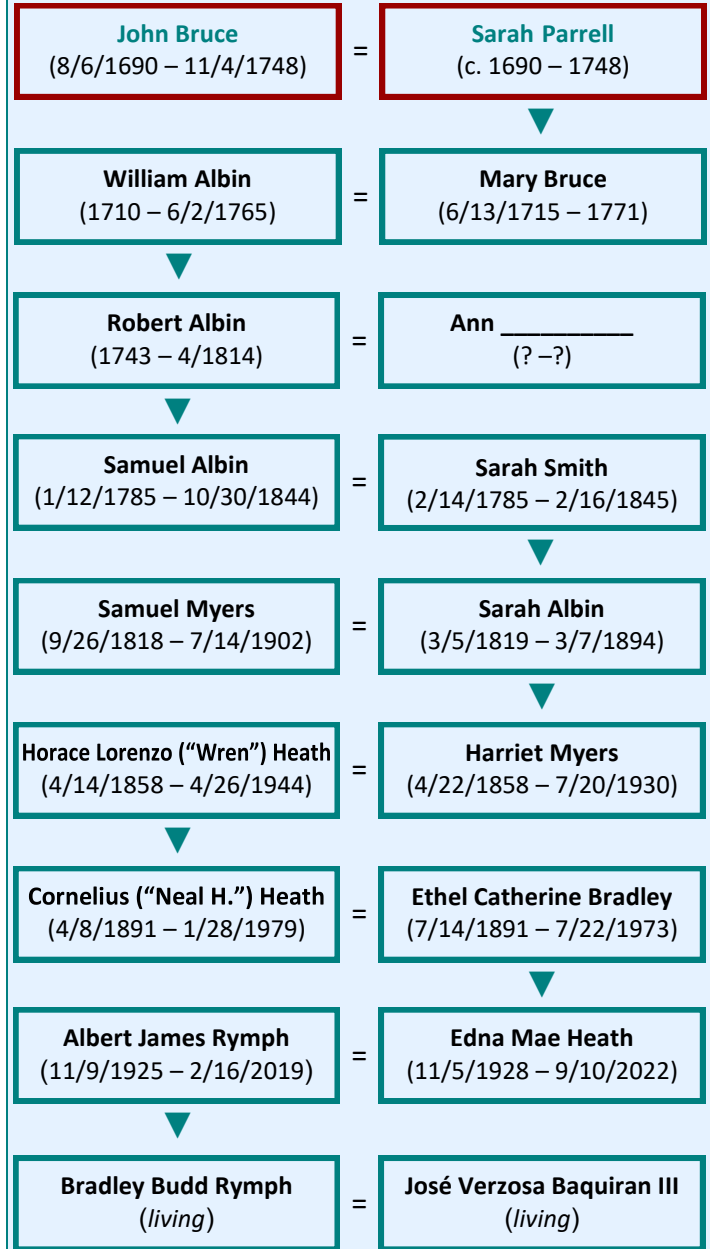
In 1701, large bodies of land, from ten to thirty thousand acres with exemption from taxes for twenty

years, to companies settling on the frontiers, — on conditions that there should be, in two years, on the land, one able bodied well armed man ready for defence, for every five hundred acres; and that these should live in a village of two hundred acres area, in the form of a square or parallelogram, laid off in lots near the centre of the town. In 1705 it was enacted that every person, male or female, coming into the colony, for the purpose of making settlement, be entitled to fifty acres of land: families to have fifty acres for each member; no persons possessing less than five tithable servants or slaves, were permitted to take more than five hundred acres; and no persons whatever were to take up more than four thousand acres in one

patent. These laws did not produce the effect designed. Villages did not spring up along the frontier as had been expected. The settlements in the Valley of Virginia were not made in consequence of these laws, whose provisions were offensive. They were effected principally by the labours of three individuals to whom Governor Gooch made grants of extensive tracts of land, on condition that within a given time a certain number of permanent settlers should be located on the grants; Burden in Rockbridge County, Beverly in Augusta, and the Vanmeters on Opeckon in Frederick. Great efforts were made by these gentlemen to persuade emigrants from Europe and also Pennsylvania and New Jersey, to take their residence in the Valley of the Shenandoah. Advertisements, describing in glowing terms the beauty and fertility of the valley, and offering a home to the poor emigrant on easy terms, were sent abroad in every direction, and attracted the attention of the hard working tenants in England, Ireland, and Germany, to whom the offer of a farm in fee simple was the offer of wealth. Joist Hite having obtained the grant of the Vanmeters came in the year 1732, with sixteen families from Pennsylvania, and fixed his residence

## HOW WE'RE RELATED

*John Bruce was my great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather through my mother, Edna Mae (Heath) Rymph.*



on the Opeckon, a few miles south of the present town of Winchester, on the Great Valley route, at a place now [1850] in possession of the Barton family. ... This was the first regular settlement west of the Blue



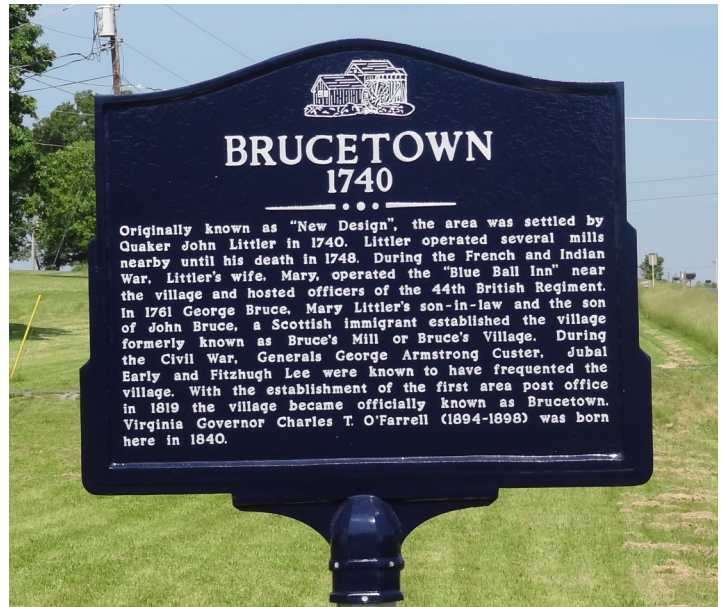


Ridge in Virginia. From this time the emigration to the Valley of the Shenandoah, and to the region at the eastern base of the Blue Ridge, was rapid. . . .”

Another report, *Genealogy of the Walker and Littler Families*, states:

During the 1730s, the offer of patented land to settlers in the lower

City limits of modern-day Brucetown. While we were in Brucetown in July 2010 (left), community residents told us they were developing a historical monument or marker to the town’s founders. Such a marker was unveiled and dedicated two years later in July 2012 (photo below, taken June 2013).



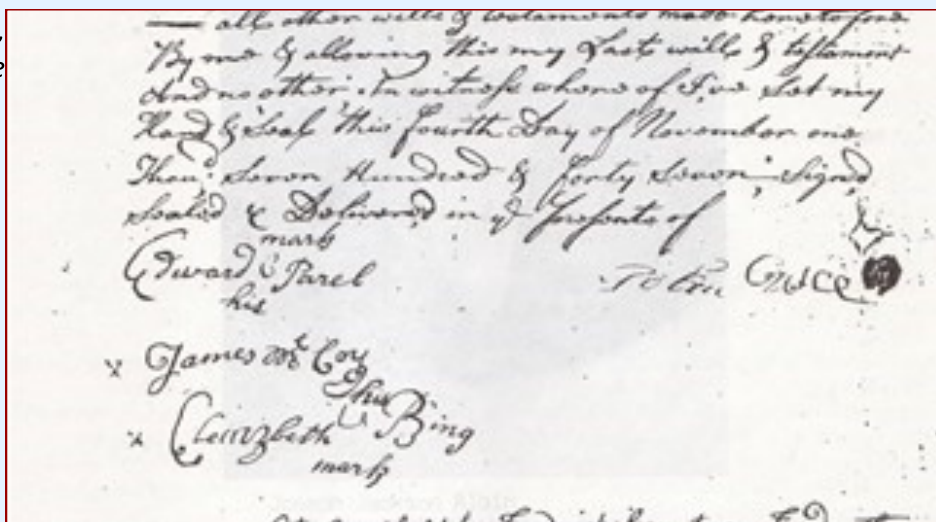
Shenandoah Valley [of Virginia], near the Opequon [Creek], attracted many Scot-Irish. Patents were issued under the seal of the Colony of Virginia and were grants from the Crown, free of any obligation of feudal services to the Fairfax family, who claimed the land as lords/ proprietors of the Northern Neck of Virginia.”

John Bruce was among 70 families who received these patents on November 12, 1735.

In a genealogical record of the Albin family into which Bruce’s daughter Mary married, *The Virginia Albins: The History of the Albin Family Out of Old*

# THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF JOHN BRUCE

Will of John Bruce,  
showing his signature



all other wills & testaments made hereof  
By me & allowing this my Last will & testament  
And no other. In witness whereof I have set my  
hand & seal this fourth day of November one  
Thou: seven Hundred & forty seven. Signed  
sealed & delivered in the presence of  
Edward Parrel  
James McCoy  
Elizabeth King  
John Cusee

In the name of God, Amen. The 4 day of November 1747. I John Bruce of Frederick County in the Colony of Virginia being sick and weak of body but of perfect mind and memory thanks be to God calling to remembrance it is appointed for all men once to die, do make, Constitute and ordain this my last will and testament as follows viz.

Item—I give and bequeath to my son James Bruce the plantation I now live on with all the improvements thereunto belonging being 150 acres.

Item—I give and bequeath unto my son George Bruce 150 acres of the remaining tract of land lying on the south side of the aforesaid plantation and on the Licks with the clear land that is now and also that his brother, James Bruce, be one half in building 1 house 24 foot x 16 foot with a shingle roof and also a barn of 25 foot X 18 foot etc.

Item—I give and bequeath to my son George Bruce and Ann Bruce all my movable estate to be equally divided between them and the desertation of William McMachin and Hugh Parrel after debts and funeral charges are paid, except my carpenter tools which I give to my son James Bruce and one yearling heifer to Richard Colbart and out of the above perquists I do oblige my sons James Bruce and George Bruce to maintain my loving wife Sarah Bruce as long as she lives or remains a widow.

Item—It is my will and desire that my son George Bruce also out of the above perquists give to my daughter Margaret Carter and Mary Albin ten shillings of currency each to be paid in grain, etc.

Item—I give and bequeath to my son James Bruce my new great coat and beaver hat and to Richard Carter, my son-in-law, my suit of woolen clothes and to my son-in-law William Albin my suit of linen clothes.

Item—I do constitute and ordain my sons James Bruce and George Bruce Executors of this my last will and testament. I do utterly disavow all other wills and testaments etc., no other. In witness whereof I have set my hand and seal this 4 day of November 1747.

Signed and Sealed and delivered in the presence of  
Edward Parrel / James McCoy / Elizabeth King / John Cusee



*Frederick County, 1739–1989*, the author Ethan Winifred Albin wrote:

[Bruce] was living on land on the south side of Red Bed about two miles east of Winchester. In his will of 1747, he mentions his son-in-law, William Albin [Mary Bruce's husband]. John was closely allied, if not related, to other families living along Red Bud, several of whom were related by blood or marriage to the Calvert/Colbert family, who came from County Armagh, Ireland. Among these families were George Hollingsworth, William McMahon/McMachen, Hugh Parrell [probably either the father or brother of Bruce's wife, Sarah Parrell], Joseph, James & Richard Carter, Lewis Neill and William Albin. John was a carpenter by trade and made the stocks and pillory in the town of Winchester in 1744.... There must have been some devastating epidemic during the years 1747–48, as a number of the earliest settlers and their wives died during that period, John Bruce included.

## TO LEARN MORE

Albin, Ethel Winifred. *The Virginia Albins: The History of the Albin Family Out of Old Frederick County, 1739–1989*. Decorah, Iowa: Anundsen Publishing Company. 1989. Out of print.

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- ♦ Foote, William Henry. *Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical*. 1850.
- ♦ Vale, George W. *Genealogy of the Walker and Littler Families*. 1973. Out of print.

Groen, Peter. "Collected Excerpts and Articles on the History of Berkeley County in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia." January 2005.