

# Tracing a Summers Family to Early Virginia

By Mary Ann Schaefer  
Boulder, Colorado  
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## Introduction

Back when I started all my Sommer research, the first order of business at that time was to [differentiate men who had my ancestor's name: Georg Sommer](#) (spellings varied). My 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin and I were quite excited that we could claim the Georg Sommer who arrived in Philadelphia (PHL) in 1752 aboard the ship Brothers as our relation who arrived with his brothers from Freistett, Germany, thus allowing us to eliminate the man with the same name who arrived in PHL much earlier (1738) and who later [migrated to VA](#) in 1766 along the Great Wagon Road. And now, long after establishing my ancestor Georg's family line but then persisting into exploration of his brothers, my Sommer research has suddenly taken a left turn into Virginia, the very area where the "other" Georg Sommer migrated to. It's not just Deja Vu, but also a bit of coming around Full Circle!

This new avenue of research comes about by having recently connected with a male Somers in Moncton, New Brunswick who descends from my ancestor Georg's older brother, Mathias. That Canadian Somers took the YDNA test this year, and the closest match to him is an American who apparently descends from a certain Michael Summers who died around Lacey Spring, Rockingham, Virginia about 1839. Depending on when that Lacey Spring Michael Summers was born, there is a possibility he could fit into the Freistett Sommer family tree in the following way:

The oldest brother of my Freistett Sommer family group was Mathias Sommer, who had a son from his first marriage in Germany named Martin, born 1737. Evidence does exist that Mathias brought Martin with him to PHL around 1747-48, and that Martin married and had his own family in PHL and did not accompany his father to Nova Scotia in 1766. It is thought that Martin married a woman named Anna Maria and the baptisms of several of their children were recorded at StM&Z between 1762-1777, the oldest having the name Matthias. There are, however, gaps in the years of these baptism records. It is entirely possible that in one of those gaps Martin and Anna Maria had a son named Michael. But honestly, I have found no documentation anywhere to support that idea, at least from the PHL end. The only circumstantial evidence we can point to is the [Great Wagon Road](#) from PHL. If one wanted to leave PHL for any points west and beyond, you would have taken the road that just happens to have traversed the [Shenandoah Valley of Virginia](#).

So if I cannot move forward in time from PHL, perhaps I can work backward in time from the family line of the American Summers whose DNA matches the known Canadian descendant of Mathias Sommer. The American man who gave the YDNA sample which matches the Canadian Somers donor is reasonably sure of his family history back to **Abner Summers**, born 1866 in Greene, Iowa and died 1949 in Vancouver, Clark, Washington. I have double-checked the documentation back to that point myself, and so in this article I will review the trail of evidence pertaining to the male ancestors *preceding* Abner Summers, specifically:

- Father of Abner, [James Summers](#), b. 1839 Tippecanoe, IN, m. 1) Corenia A. Jones, 2) Mary Louise Vancleave, d. 1922 in Franklin, Greene, Iowa.
- Father of James, [Michael Summers Jr.](#), b. 1792 Rockingham, VA., m. 1) Mary Schultz, 2) Ruth Ford, d. 1848 Tippecanoe, Indiana.
- Father of Michael Jr., [Michael Summers Sr.](#), supposedly b. abt 1763, supposedly m. 1785 to Mary Ann Acker, reportedly had a 2<sup>nd</sup> mg, d. 1839 Lacey Spring, Rockingham, VA.

I must here add a caveat that this research could all be for nothing because, perchance, the DNA connection in this case comes from something else I haven't accounted for. In that case, I happily

donate this research to others who might find use in it. I only ask that you credit me so others can find me if they have information they can, in turn, share.

## **James Summers 1839-1922**

Here is one place to pay some careful attention. According to some [excellently documented research](#), the father of Abner Summers was James Summers, born in 1839 in Tippecanoe County, Indiana. But, curiously, there were two James Summers born in Indiana around the same time, *and* two James Summers of the same age/birth place living in Iowa in 1870. How do we know which James to follow? I think mostly by locating Abner with his parents.

- In the 1840-1850 censuses, Benjamin Summers, b. abt 1814 in Kentucky appears in Fayette, Vigo county, Indiana with his family, including a son James. In 1860, 21-year-old James was working as a farm hand in the same town. The Summers family in Vigo county seems to have disappeared after that. Did that James fight in and die in the Civil War? If he survived, did he also relocate to Iowa where a man of that name/age/birth place was enumerated in 1870? If so, he lived in Sioux City, 175 miles from Greene County, and his family did not include a son name Abner.
- Between 1850-1870, census data and a marriage record show that James Summers of Lauramie, Tippecanoe, Indiana married Corenia Jones in Tippecanoe county in 1862, and subsequently moved to Washington, Greene, Iowa, the place where Abner Summers was born in 1866, and where 4-year-old Abner was enumerated in 1870.

Based on the combined evidence from these sources, my confidence level is high that the James Summers who lived in Tippecanoe county, Indiana was the father of Abner Summers.<sup>1</sup>

## **Michael Summers Jr. 1792-1848**

Now who were the parents of James Summers of Tippecanoe county, Indiana? Two documents associated with the previously mentioned James Summers name his parents as Michael Summers and Ruth Ford:

- 1907 marriage record in Greene, Iowa to his second wife.
- 1922 death certificate where son Alvin Summers was the informant. This document said Michael Summers' birth place was Tenn (or maybe Penn?), either is believed to be a mistake. Alvin, being James' youngest child, certainly never knew his grandparents and likely knew the least about his father's origins.

There was a Michael Summers in Tippecanoe county in the 1830 and 1840 census, and subsequent probate papers dated 5 Oct. 1848 indicate that Michael had a wife named Ruth. In the 1850 census, Ruth Summers appeared with her five children stating that she was born in Ohio.

Where to go from here? The previously mentioned research about James Summers explained that James was the first-born child of Michael's second wife, Ruth Ford, but how to corroborate that? I then located this source:

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<sup>1</sup> There is potentially some argument about who was the mother of Abner Summers because his death certificate states his father was James Summers and his mother was "Ford," which was the surname of his grandmother, not mother. As we see in the next section, we can establish both parents of this James Summers, so I assert that the informant for James' death certificate was ill-informed.

[Biographical History of Tippecanoe, White, Jasper, Newton, Benton, Warren and Pulaski Counties, Indiana, Vol. 1, Lewis Publishing Co, Chicago, 1899; pp. 281-282](#)

Generally, I am not a fan of old-time county histories because they are universally unsourced, contain proven errors, and are nevertheless widely used by modern researchers as a source of much misinformation. But said county histories can be used for clues that might be verified. So in this case, the clues given in this Tippecanoe history are very specific:

- Michael Summers was the son of Michael Summers Sr., a farmer in Rockingham County, VA who died there
- Michael Jr. was born in Rockingham but moved to Ross county, Ohio in early manhood
- Michael Jr. married Mary Shultz there (in Ross, OH, which is wrong)
- in 1830, Michael Jr.'s family came to Tippecanoe, mentions several tracts of land, and a homestead in Randolph twp
- names 9 of 10 children of Michael Jr. and Mary: John, Philip, Catherine, Andrew, Abraham, Sarah, Henry, Michael, and Edith (a daughter name Adaline is thought to be included among their children)
- states Michael Jr. married Ruth Ford after the death of Mary, and names the 5 children of Michael and Ruth: Melinda, James, David, Benjamin, and Mary (William is noted as having died early).

So next I set to work to verify these assertions, starting with a search in Ross County, Ohio. What I found was yet another county history:

[The County of Ross; A History of Ross County, Ohio, from the Earliest Days, with Special Chapters on the Bench and Bar, Medical Profession, Educational Development, Industry and Agriculture, and Biographical Sketches, editor Henry Holcomb Bennett, published 1902. p. 706](#)

This history gives a description of Thomas Summers, a son of David Summers and Margaret Howard, David having been born in West Virginia in 1793. It recounts how the couple moved to Twin, Ross, Ohio, but then moved to Indiana where the father died! The mother then returned to Ross county with all her young children and raised them there. Well, doesn't this story sound familiar? A Summers who came from WV rather than VA, but who lived in Ohio, moved to Indiana and died soon thereafter.

A quick search of David Summers and Margaret Howard will tell you that David was the son of Michael Summers Sr. of Rockingham, VA and the brother of Michael Summers Jr. who died in Tippecanoe county, Indiana. West Virginia was all part of Virginia until the Civil War, but Rockingham county always was and still is part of Virginia, so the part about West Virginia is probably an error. Still, now we have two Summers brothers who have much the same story, and twice as many clues!

But not so fast. Here's what I've found in looking for records to support this story about Michael Jr:

- There is an 1810 marriage record in Rockingham county, VA of Michael Summers to Mary Schultz, as well as an 1816 marriage record in Rockingham of David Summers to Margaret Howard.
- Of Michael Jr. and Mary's children, the oldest, John, was supposedly b. abt 1812 in VA, and all subsequent children, Philip, Catherine, Andrew, Abraham, Sarah, Henry, Michael, and Edith, were all born in Ohio between 1814 and 1830. I gather this only from birth places listed on

various censuses that enumerate the children as I have found no birth or baptism records for this family.

- All of this means there should be records of Michael in Ross county, Ohio, especially in the 1820 census, but so far, no luck locating him. I found three Michael Summers who were enumerated in early Ohio:
  - 1820: one in Harrison county; household makeup doesn't match “the story” of Michael Jr.
  - 1830: one in Harrison, one in Vigo (who was this?), and one in Tippecanoe
  - 1840: one in Harrison and one in Tippecanoe
- In a recent trip to SLC, I was able to find only one Ross County deed in 1833 that pertained to Michael Summers and here is my abstract:

Philip Howard, dec, late of Twin twp, in Ross county did verbally assure his nephew John Howard of the same twp that if John agreed to dwell with Philip and take care of things that Philip would make John his only heir. But Philip never wrote that down, and even though John did live with Phil and take care of things, he was not the only heir. Now in 1833, here come the other heirs: Christopher Schults and Jershua his wf, Michael Summers and Mary his wf, and Adam Dehart and Mary his wf, all of Tippecanoe county, IN where Christopher was Phil's nephew and Mary and Mary were his nieces. John Howard paid \$1 to all these other people in order to become the lawful owner of Phil's property. [ref 28-48]

Note here about the Howard surname: Because I believe these Summers were of German origin, I started to wonder how they were associated with a family with the surname Howard. More research tells me the Howard family was also German with an original surname of HAUER. Christopher Hauer and Anna Maria Lessle supposedly lived in Rockingham county, and among their many children was one Philip Hauer, 1767-1833. To figure out Philip's nieces and nephews mentioned in this deed, I speculate that:

- one of Philip's brothers had a son named John (John Howard),
- maybe the same or a different brother had a daughter named Mary (“Polly” who married Adam Dehart in Rockingham in 1811), and
- one of Philip's sisters married a Schultz, and from that marriage came Christopher Schults (m. Jershua Harrison) and Mary Schults (m. Michael Summers Jr.)

But how does Margaret Howard, wife of David Summers (Michael Jr.'s brother), fit into this scenario since she is not mentioned in the above deed as a relation of Philip? Another researcher<sup>2</sup> has reported finding “some papers” that named John Howard and Catherine Peck as niece and nephew of Philip Howard. Catherine Howard m. William Peck in Ross county, OH in 1818, and she is supposedly the daughter of Christopher Hauer (Christopher IV, supposedly a brother of Philip) and Elizabeth Armentrout. After the death of Christopher IV, Elizabeth remarried to William Caldwell in Rockingham and they moved to Ross, OH. Elizabeth left a will there in 1834 that specifically names some of her children (presumably those from her first marriage) as Mary Dehart, Elizabeth Dehart, Margaret Summers, Catherine Peck, and John Howard. So now we can account for John Howard and Mary Dehart in the previous deed, but still we don't know about the Schults-Howard connection, though it's safe to say there must have been one.

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<sup>2</sup> “Howard Sisters” by Nancy Sanders to Lorraine Chandler, ancestry.com member, posted to her family tree “Chandler-Hamann” on 6 Apr 2014.

The other significant thing in all this review is that we know the Hauer<sup>3</sup> family came to Ross county early on. I have looked for land patents in Ohio to either Michael or David Summers, and not found one. Where were the Summers in Ohio? This wonder has caused me to put together a timeline:

- 1820: David seems to have been enumerated back in Rockingham – the family group fits his family; I can't yet account for where Michael Jr. was in 1820.<sup>4</sup>
- 1830: David still enumerated in Rockingham; Michael Jr. was enumerated in Randolph, TippCo. IN, next door to Christopher Shults
- 1831-34: Michael got four land patents in TippCo, IN for a total amount of 280 acres
- 1839: Michael Sr. died back in Rockingham
- 1840: David enumerated in Twin, Ross, OH (where other Howard families had earlier settled); Michael Jr. enumerated in Lauramie, TippCo, IN
- 1843: I have found no record of David's death, so this date comes from this grave stone, which is no longer readable and has been replaced. It should be noted that I have seen another reference that David died in June 1844. In any case, I'm not sure he ever lived in IN, and if he did, he had just moved there. Maybe he died while visiting Michael and so is buried there. (court papers back in VA relating to Michael Sr. said David was of OH or IN)
- 1848: Michael Jr. died in TippCo, leaving a will that named his second wife, Ruth. Note that the TippCo probate volume listing wills and probate proceedings list only one Summers during this time period – only Michael, no trace of David, which means if David did ever live in TippCo, he owned no property.
- 1850: Ruth, widow of Michael enumerated in Lauramie, IN; Margaret, widow of David, enumerated in Twin, OH. Clearly Margaret returned to Twin where she had other Howard relations.

So all this seems strange to me – we have no record of Michael Jr. or Mary or their children in Ohio. Did they ever live there according to the county history story? The only other clue I have found is on the death certificate of Michael Summers b. 1842, d. 1931 in Darlington, Montgomery, Indiana, the son of John Summers and Elizabeth Shoemaker, and grandson of Michael Jr. and Mary Schultz.

Supposedly John was the one child of Michael Jr. and Mary Schultz born in Virginia, but the death certificate<sup>5</sup> of John's son, Michael, reported that both his parents were born in Darke County, OH. Darke county was created in 1809 and "official" by 1817. It's interesting that Darke county also has a twp called "Twin" close to the Indiana border, about 114 miles northwest of the Twin twp in Ross county, just southwest of Chillicothe. Nevertheless, this clue has not provided any additional insights.

Supposedly, Michael's second wife, Ruth Ford, was from Ross County, and her parents were Thomas and Ann Ford. There were four men named Thomas Ford enumerated in 1820 Ohio, none of them in Ross county or even in counties that adjoin Ross.

So the ties of this Michael Summers back to Ohio and Virginia before that, and more specifically to Rockingham county seem a bit nebulous given this data. The county history is the most "solid" evidence, but it can't be backed up with primary documentation. Maybe Michael Jr. and David were brothers, maybe not. Maybe they came from Virginia, maybe not.

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3 Other very good sources for information on the Hauer family: *A Hower History* by Charles C. Hower & Agnes Hower Wells, 1973, and *More Howers*, A Supplement, same authors, 1979.

4 See my article, "A Study of Men Named Michael Summers in Early Shenandoah Valley" (2017) under the Censuses section. There were multiple Michael Summers in Rockingham, but I don't believe either accounts for Michael Jr.

5 Informant was Anne E. Summers – I'm not sure yet who that was.

## Michael Summers Sr. d. 1839 Rockingham, VA

Pushing on, here is a summary of documentation that can reasonably be applied to this Michael Summers Sr. of Rockingham, VA.

1. A newspaper clipping which identifies Michael Summers as “sen'r”, a description of his property “near the Big Spring” to be shown by John or Abraham Summers (thought to be sons of Michael Summers Sr.), identification of David Lincoln as executor, and a date of Feb. 1841.

**Valuable Farm, &c.  
AT PUBLIC SALE.**

IN pursuance of the last Will and Testament of the late Michael Summers, sen'r., deceased, I will offer at public sale, on the premises, on *Wednesday the 10th day of March next,*

**The Plantation**

upon which the deceased resided at the time of his death, lying in the county of Rockingham, near the Big Spring, adjoining the lands of A. Brock, J. Cole, and others, containing, by a late survey, **370 ACRES**, 140 acres cleared, and the balance well timbered. The improvements consist of 2 **DWELLING-HOUSES**, a **BARN**, and all other necessary buildings, a small **ORCHARD**, and a Well of water near the dwellings. The lands will be shown to any person disposed to purchase, at any time previous to the day of sale, by Abraham Summers, of John Summers, both of whom reside on the farm, or by the subscriber, who lives near the premises. It will be divided to suit purchasers, if required.

At the same time and place will be sold about 30 bushels of **WHEAT** and about 13 bushels of **RYE**, by the bushel. The terms will be accommodating, and will be made known on the day of sale by the subscriber.

**DAVID LINCOLN,**  
*Ex'r. of the Estate of Michael Summers, dec'd.*  
February 6, 1841.—ts

Note that this clipping was provided by R. Carter (an ancestry.com member) who doesn't know what newspaper it came from because it was handed down. But we should be able to locate it – I'm still hunting.

Also note this is not the only reference I've seen that mentions Michael Sr's last will and testament, and I've even seen a passing reference<sup>6</sup> that says the will mentions Michael Sr's children by name and where they lived. I have spent some amount of effort trying to locate that will, but so far, no luck.

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<sup>6</sup> Remarks attributed to Mona Schaffer on ancestry message boards, subject “Rockingham Co. VA,” post dated 15 Oct 2005, “He (Michael Summers of Rockingham) left a will naming his son Michael of Indiana among others.”

2. *47 Pioneer Families of Rockingham County, Virginia who migrated through Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois to Missouri*, by Robert L. Brock, Gateway Press, Baltimore, 1997. pp. 349-355.

This book devotes a section to the Summers family, and the first two pages of which are the most relevant for my purposes. The author has identified two Michael Summers:

- one born ca 1750, lived in Linville Creek twp, west of Lacey Spg, spelled their names Zimmers or Simmers. Probable children were Catherine (m. Howman), John (m. Cratzer), Michael (m. Nicewander)<sup>7</sup>, Christian (m. Sourwine), Magdalene (m. Barnart), Susan (m. Van Pelt), and Abraham (m. Plumley). For the moment, I am dismissing this family from this discussion.
- One born ca 1763, m. twice, one abt 1783, second ca 1815; believed children of first were Rebecca (m. Weaver), Elizabeth (m. Campbell), Michael (m. Schultz), David (m. Howard), Abraham (m. Elizabeth Unk.); and possibly three children not named from second marriage; spelled name Sommers or Summers, probably subscribed to the Henkel newspaper. Supposedly this Michael lived near Big Spring, which the author thought might have been Kratzer Big Spring near Linville.

This is all great information, but the family groups are still unsourced. How are all these children associated with each family group? This author does list whatever sources were used and seems to have been familiar with the area, so this source does, nevertheless, carry some weight in my mind, which is why I include it here.

3. *The Lincolns in Virginia* by John Walter Wayland, 1946, Staunton, Virginia. Specifically see page 153 which shows a drawn map titled “Lincoln Homes in the Village of Lacey (Lincoln) Spring on Smith Creek, Rockingham County, Virginia, 1824-1934”. The map shows roads, the spring, creeks, a cemetery, and best of all, that Michael Summers lived in close proximity to several Lincoln families. Normally I would just snip this map into this article, but to be safe with copyright, you'll need to go see it yourself. The digital book can be borrowed [online](#).
4. Rockingham County Deeds. The following deeds seem to be applicable to this family group:
- 1832: Michl and Mary wf to Jacob Cole, exr. of Col. John Koontz dec, something near Smith Creek being part of lands Summers had exchanged for other lands [ref 11-31] My note: At first I thought this deed belonged to Michael Jr. and wife Mary before their move to Indiana. However, Michael Jr. had moved away long before this time, and in fact he was enumerated in Indiana in 1830. In that case, this deed refers to Michael Summers Sr.
  - 1832: Michl and Mary wf to Jacob Cole (this looks like a better copy of the previous!) - lands which Summers exchanged with Col. Koontz but it was never conveyed (?) [ref 12-437] See my note on previous deed.
  - 1842: David Lincoln exr of Michl Summers to xxx Summers and Simon Summers, mentions Smith Creek, 70+ ac. [ref 15-425]
  - 1845: David Lincoln exr of Michl Summers Sen to Abr. Summers, acc. to last will & test, all lands to be sold, in 1841, Lincoln sold, and Abr. bought 185 ac; adjoins some Brock land, something about a deed to John Summers and Simon Summers [ref 18-333]

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Simmers can be tracked in the 1820-30-40 censuses of Rockingham. He was clearly a different individual from Michael Summers Sr. of Lacey Spring (younger and lived longer).

Side Note: The mention of Koontz in these documents is interesting. A recent [book](#) was published about the 1865 execution Capt. Summers and Sgt. Koontz. Was that Summers related to Michael Summers Sr. of Lacey Spring? See my article “A Study of Men Named Michael Summers in Early Shenandoah Valley, Virginia” (2017) for my review of other evidence pertaining to Summers families in the Shenandoah Valley.

5. Rockingham County Chancery Court Records, Index #1845-017, original case #009, accessed [online](#). Here is my abstract (underscores are my emphasis):

On 14 Aug 1845, Mary Ann Deavers, daughter of Michael Summers, brought a suit against David Lincoln, the executor of her father's estate because her legacy was still unpaid. It then proceeds to name the other heirs: John Summers of Rockingham, Michael Summers of Indiana, Abraham Summers, David Summers of Ohio or Indiana, dec., Mary Ann Deavers of Rockingham, Polly “Mrs.” Moore, wf of Reuben Moore of Rockingham, and Sally Moffet.

On the same day, apparently, a summons was issued for the following people to appear in court: David Lincoln, exr of Michael Summers, dec, John Summers, Abraham Summers, Reuben Moore and Polly his wife, Jacob Cole and Sally his wife (she apparently was previously married to a Moffet), Michael Summers Jr. of Indiana and David Summers of Indiana.

Then on 27 Aug 1845, Mary Ann Deavers dismissed the case saying that the case had been brought about without her knowledge (!).

Having not yet located Michael Sr's will, this document seems to serve as a close second! This court case clearly identifies the children of Michael Summers Sr. and where they were living in 1845. And together with the other documentation listed in this section, I have much more confidence that Michael Summers Jr. of Tippecanoe, Indiana did indeed hail from Rockingham county, VA.

## **Conclusion**

The trail of the evidence presented here seems to reasonably lead from Abner Summers who died in Washington state in 1949 to Michael Summers Sr. who died in Rockingham, Virginia in 1839. There are multiple sources pointing to a man named Michael Summers Sr. who was a neighbor of the Lincoln's around Smith Creek near the Great Road. But who was that man and from where did he originate? See my companion article: “[A Study of Men Named Michael Summers in Early Shenandoah Valley, Virginia](#)” (2017).