

Who is Absalom's father?

Following standard genealogical procedure works

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For one hundred years, researchers have looked for the parents of Absalom Pennington born 1752 in either Virginia or North Carolina according to family church records. While in a state of hubris, I decided to use "Standard Genealogical Procedure" to see if I could discover his father.

First, I gathered every piece of information on Absalom Pennington by every possible spelling: Ab, Abs, Absolom, Absolm, Abselm, Absolum, Ib, etc. and Peneton, Peneltin, pynyngton, pinington, etc. My heart raced when I found Absalom Pennington in St Helena Parish, Louisiana. But the excitement was short-lived; that Absalom was 27 years younger than mine! He was not a son of my Absalom because both family records and Absalom's will give only one child: Mary, nicknamed Polly.

Finding Absalom Pennington in the 1790 census of Burke County, North Carolina sent a cousin and me on a long, merry chase. We searched both forward and backward in time and in increasingly larger circles out from Burke County, which was created from Rowan County June 1st, 1777. All Burke County parent counties of the right time period, needed searching: Anson, Bladen, and New Hanover. All those counties created from Burke which included or bordered Absalom's land grant were searched, such as Catawba, Lincoln and Watauga.

This step included computer surveys and visits to the Pennington Research Association site at <http://penningtonresearch.org/>, as well as a review of all family materials concerning Absalom Pennington.

Second, in order to find Absalom's father, I had to pin Absalom down to a specific place at a specific time, preferably when he was young. Absalom Pennington married Margery Perkins about 1774, daughter of Joshua Perkins of what is now Catawba County, North Carolina. This was our earliest definite time and place for Absalom.

Third, I established the requirements his father had to meet. Since Absalom was born in 1752, his father would most likely be born before 1732, would be married during 1751-2 and would die after 1752. Further, Absalom's father may have lived along the Catawba River in 1774.

The fourth step is a new step I've just added to my own list of standard genealogical procedures, thanks to Colette Thomas Smith, whose Southern States Research lecture I recently attended at the Family History and Genealogy Conference at Brigham Young University. She recommends using the book *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* by David Hackett Fischer to understand ancestors' folkways.

Since Pennington is a Scotch-Irish name, their folkways are recorded in Fischer's book. So I added a few other requirements Absalom's father might meet.

Absalom would most likely have lived with his family in both a derbfine, or a four-generation group, and a larger "clan" which was "a group of related families who lived near to one another, were conscious of a common identity, carried the same surname, claimed descent from common ancestors

and banded together when danger threatened” (p 663). Absalom, then, probably grew up and stayed with a large family of relatives.

In his family, a few members would open a path into new lands, then be followed by a steady stream of kin. Absalom’s father would live a mile or so from other family members clustered in the common settlement pattern.

Absalom’s father’s name would be a biblical, Teutonic or saint’s name. And names were repeated generation after generation but not in any of the formal patterns genealogists often see. So Absalom’s name and his father’s name should be repeated in succeeding generations.

Because of this useful information, it made sense that Absalom would abide with his family until adulthood, at least, and that would be about 1774 when he married Margery Perkins on the Catawba River. Was it possible a cluster of Penningtons lived on or near the Catawba River?

Step five of standard genealogical procedures then, is to find all possible men who meet the requirements set forth in steps three and four and either prove one of them is Absalom’s father or prove one or more are not his father.

As it turned out, the answer was simple and had been there all those one hundred years. Only three men in the right area of North Carolina at the right time met all the requirements. But Ephraim Pennington’s children were known, and they did not include an Absalom.

Levi Pennington’s will named his “five children,” and no Absalom was mentioned. Only Benajah Pennington was left who could possibly be Absalom’s father.

In step six of standard genealogical procedure, I’ll focus on finding documents proving (or disproving, as the case may be) the father-son relationship between Absalom and Benajah. In the meantime, I’ll add Benajah to my pedigree with a question mark.

Following standard genealogical procedure works!



Absalom Pennington cleared land similar to this Missouri landscape in North Carolina, Tennessee, Illinois and Missouri during his lifetime. Photo by LaRae Free Kerr.