

Descendants of Jacob Rasnake (“Hessian”)

By

Frieda Patrick Davison (Rasnake Descendant)

First Generation

1. **Jacob¹ RASNAKE** was born in Germany circa 1745. He died DEC 1826 at 81 years of age. Jacob's will [transcribed as written below] was probated in Russell Co., Va., 2 Jan 1827 and is dated 24 Nov. 1826.

WILL OF JACOB RASNAKE, Russell County, Virginia, Will Book 4A, Pages 272 – 273, Executed 02 Jan 1827 (transcribed as found in the Will Book).

Virginia, Russell County, November 24th day in the year of Christ 1826.

I Jacob Rasnick sener. of said County on this day make my last will and testament in the manner and form following, to wit:

1st that is to say I direct my executor as soon as practable after my decease see on a cedit as he may think best all my personal property.

2ndly I direct my funeral expenses be by my executor paid out of my estate

3rdly that all my just debts be paid out of my estate

4thly that my beloved wife Mary Rasnick receive of my executor out of my estate a reasonable suport dureang her natural life to the house and ground reserved to me & her in the contract between George & David Cowand & myself in the sale of my land to them that my executor give to here as she may need for her own suport.

5thly After the death of myself and wife I give to my son Jones Rasnick the sum of fifty dollars cash in addition to what I have allrady given him.

6thly that all the balance of my estate after the death of myself and wife be by my executor after paying all costs of administration and a reasonable allowance to my executor for his truble be eaqually divided between my daughters of the following names Christeana Fuller Nancy Fields and Polly Robinson

7thly and lastly that I apoint and constitute my friend Benjamin Sewell executor of this my last Will and Testament given under my hand and seal this day and date above writen in the presence of

Witnesses:	John Sewell	his
	his	Jacob X Rasnick Senr. (Seal)
	William R Robinson	mark
	Mark	

NOTE: Jacob signed his will by mark.

Virginia,

At a court held for Russell County the 2nd day of January 1827.

This instrument of writing was exhibited in Court as and for the last Will and Testament of Jacob Rasnick Senr. deceased and proven by the oaths of John Sewell and William Robinson the two subscribing witnesses thereto and ordered to be recorded and on the motion of Benjamin Sewell executor therein named he made oath together with William Nash and Samuel G. Gibson his securities entered into and acknowledged a bond in the penalty of \$2,000 conditioned as the law directs certificate is granted the said Benjamin Sewell for obtaining letters testamentary in due form.

Teste

James P. Carrell C.R.C.

NOTE: Of his sons, only Jonas is mentioned in his will. According to our current information, Jonas was born in 1803 and would have been about 23 years old when Jacob, Sr., died. We have Jonas' first child being born in 1832, so Jonas may have still been single when his father died. All the other sons were married with their own households. All of Jacob's daughters are mentioned in his will with the exception of Margaret [married to Samuel Miller]. **Further research is required to determine possibilities as to why.**

Jacob married Mary COUNTS (called Molly or Mollie) in Shenandoah Co., Va., 25 Feb 1784. Molly was born circa 1764. Molly was the daughter of John COUNTS Sr. and Mary Magdalena UNKNOWN. Molly died circa 1834. There is a bill of sale of her property on file at the Russell County courthouse in Lebanon, Va., dated 18 Oct 1834. Both Molly and Jacob are buried on their home place in Glade Hollow where a marker, dedicated by their descendants on 16 Oct. 1977, honors these early pioneers and reads as follows:

*In fond memory of Jacob & Mollie Counts Rasnake, Hessian Revolution War Soldier,
and the parents of all Rasnicks, Rasnakes, and Rasnics. Their children were*

*John
Jacob Jr.
Elijah
Margaret
Lazarus
Mary
Nancy
Jonas
Christina*

We have long suspected that none of the current spellings of Rasnic, Rasnick, or Rasnake are the original spelling of Jacob's surname. This suspicion is further advanced by the variations on file at the Shenandoah and Russell Counties' records. Variations include the following: In the 1783 Shenandoah County tax list, his name appears as

"Reversnuck"; in 1785 as "Rosenake"; in 1786 as "Raresnake"; in 1787-88 as "Rearsnake." Other variations recorded in Russell County include Raresnick, Raversnuck, and Reversnuk

In *Some Descendants of John Counts of Glade Hollow*, Elihu Sutherland writes, "Jacob Rasnake was German. When about 18 years old, he was conscripted by his ruler, probably in Hesse-Cassel, and hired to the British as a soldier in the American Revolution. Family tradition is that he was threshing wheat when seized by military officers. Failing to secure his release, his mother gave him a German Bible for use in the far-away land.

He came to America with the Hessian Troops, was captured at the Battle of Saratoga (?) in October, 1777, and held as a prisoner of war – most of the time in the Valley of Virginia. When the war was over, the Hessian prisoners were given the option of being returned to Europe or denouncing their rulers and remaining in America. He chose to stay in the new world.

He had already found many Germans, blood and speech of his own, in the Shenandoah Valley and the year after peace brought his release from the war prison, he married one of them. Shenandoah County tax records show that he owned 2 horses and 2 cattle the year following his marriage."

In *History of Virginia*, v. 5, 1924, p. 484, we find, "He was captured at the battle of Brandywine and like many of his compatriots, he decided to cast in his lot with the colonists and remain in this country."

Another version of the story is that Jacob was wounded and left on the battlefield. Rev. Counts and his daughter came onto the battlefield bringing water and trying to care for the wounded. As they approached they heard Jacob calling, "Muter, Muter" [German for Mother]. They removed him from the battlefield and took him to Rev. Counts' house and nursed him back to health. This is a very romanticized version and highly doubtful for many reasons. The closest battlefield to the Counts' cabin was many miles away and it is highly unlikely that he would have taken his young teenage daughter onto the battlefield.

The first version is probably closer to the truth although studies currently underway by Hessian scholars tend to disprove some points. First, prisoners of war from the Battle of Saratoga were not held in the Valley of Virginia. Also, as more German sources are being made available for research as they are translated into English. A major event in genealogical research into the descendents of Hessian soldiers occurred in 1976 with the publication of the "HETRINA" (*Hessische Truppen im Amerikanischen Unabhangigkeitskrieg*). This is a compilation of the names of soldiers by Dr. Inge Auerbach of the Staatsarchiv (State Archives) in Marburg (Hessen) Germany. Mr. John Merz of Canada has done extensive research for our family name and has determined that no where in the *Hetrina* is there a reference to any spelling of Rasnake. In *Mercenaries From Ansbach & Bayreuth Who Remained in America*, Clifford N. Smith lists soldiers from the Ansbach and Bayreuth regiments of German soldiers who (for whatever reason) remained in America after the Revolutionary War. On page 36 of that book is the following entry: "Reuhrschneck, Johan. Private. Ansbach Regiment. 1st Company. Mentioned on a muster roll of June 1783." In the German source *Die Ansbach-Bayreuther Truppen 1777-1783*, Dr. Erhard Staedtler lists soldiers who returned to Germany, who died through sickness or war action, or who remained in America. He

mentions Ruehrschneck only once and that is under the deserters and settlers in America. In the German source *Ansbach-Bayreuth Deserter List with Places of Birth*, Johann Ruehrschneck is listed as a musketer born in Watzendorf.

At this point, can we definitively say that Johann Ruehrschneck is our Jacob Rasnake – probably not but we are beginning to gather supportive information. I was at first bothered by the Jacob versus Johann as a given name. My genealogy colleague, German born John Merz, explained the German custom to receive two first names. The first name was typically the father's name. The second name was typically the "calling" name but the first name would have been recorded in the military records. Thus, his name might have been Johann Jacob Ruehrschneck. If it is our Jacob, he would not have been a "Hessian" with allegiance to the Duke of Hess, but rather to the Markgraff Carl Alexander von Ansbach-Bayreuth. As to the laws and rules of the time, all able bodied men between ages 17 and 40 were on conscription lists and required to serve in a military regiment of their ruler. If he failed to report for conscription, he could have been forcibly taken by soldiers. If it is our Jacob, the regiment in which he served was part of General Cornwallis' Army that was captured at Yorktown [not Saratoga] in October 1781. The captured soldiers were marched to Winchester, Va., where they remained until 28 Jan 1782 and from there were marched to Frederick, Md., where they arrived on 31 Jan 1782. On 13 May 1783, the captured soldiers were marched from Frederick through Lancaster and Philadelphia, ending up at Long Island on 27 May 1783. They boarded ships for Germany on 6 Aug 1783. Johann Ruehrschneck appears on a muster roll of June 1783 but is not on any of the ships' lists that go back to Germany. Thus we may assume that he either died or deserted somewhere along the march. Staedtler mentions him as a deserter – not a death. He would have been in the Winchester, Va., area approximately three months and then in the Frederick, Md., area another five. It is a well-documented fact that the German soldier prisoners were "loaned" out to area farmers to earn part of their keep and/or to obtain food for the prison camps. Winchester is located in Frederick County and the county next to that – Shenandoah. Given all of these known facts, is it such a leap to believe that Johann Ruehrschneck would end up a mere eight months later as Jacob Rasnake living in Shenandoah County married to the daughter of a German minister, Rev. John Counts? Although there were many German families in Shenandoah and Russell Counties, they were also highly populated by Scots. If one says "Ruehrschneck" aloud with a Scottish accent, it can easily be heard as "Rasnack" with a rolled "r".

While I'm sure there are researchers who will not and do not agree with me, I am convinced that Johann Ruehrschneck is indeed our Jacob Rasnake. One next possible step is to try to make a connection in Germany. If we could verify who Johann Ruehrschneck was in his village of Watzendorf, we might be able to determine if there are any surviving records as to what happened to him after the Revolutionary War. Given the family story of his mother giving him a Bible to carry, we can assume that he was of the Protestant faith. We do not know the denomination but Lutheran would be highly likely. We would be very lucky indeed to find church records for his family and perhaps learn more. He named his first son John and his second one Jacob. Referring again to German naming patterns, would he have named his first son for his father (or Mollie's father) and his second for himself or for his father if he had named the first for Mollie's father? Did he have brothers named Elijah, Lazurus, or Jonas? He named one

of his daughters Mary – the same as his wife. Was his mother named Nancy? Did he have sisters named Margaret or Christena? Was he from a family of farmers? Another point to consider is that if Johann Ruehrschneck is not our Jacob Rarsnake, then what happened to him?

We do know that about 1789, Jacob and his family left Shenandoah County and moved to Russell County, settling in Glade Hollow – a few miles from the place where Mary's parents later settled. Here Jacob and Mary became vital citizens of the county.

Jacob purchased land:

On August 17, 1790, a deed was recorded for 195 acres sold by Edward Smoot & Mary to Jacob Rarsnake. It was located in the Glade Hollow on the waters of Cedar Creek, a branch of Clinch River. It began along a conditional line of marked trees made between Jacob Rarnesnake [note variation in spelling] and Zachariah Hendrix including the south side of the said track of land which was granted to Edward Smoot by patent dated June 20, 1785. Jacob paid 85 pounds “current money of Virginia” for this property.

On August 23, 1796, two deeds were recorded for land sold by Zacheriah Hendrix of Botetourt Co. to Mary and Jacob Rarsnake. The first was for 164 acres on both sides of the Glade Hollow on the waters of Clinch River. It was originally land granted to Zacheriah Hendrix by patent dated March 14, 1792. Its beginning corner ran to a tract of land surveyed for Edward Smoot to the top of a spur of Copper Ridge, then crossing the Glade Hollow. The second was for 195 acres in the Glade Hollow on the waters of Cedar Creek, a branch of Clinch River. It began along a conditional line agreed upon between Zachariah Henricks & Jacob Rarsnake including the north side of the tract of land granted to Edward Smoot by patent dated June 20, 1785. [NOTE: When this deed was recorded, it was noted in the Deed Index book under Jacob “Rausnake”]

On July 24, 1804 a deed was recorded for 100 acres sold by David Calhoon & Fereby to Jacob Raresnake. It was located on both sides of Glade Hollow, a branch of Sinking Creek, the waters of Clinch River below Edmund Smoots and Richard Hendersons land. It began at Richard Henderson’s line and crossed the Glade Hollow.

On August 2, 1808 a deed was recorded for 150 acres sold by Jacob Raresnake & Mary to Joseph Shoemaker. It was in the Glade Hollow on the waters of Cedar Creek, a branch of Clinch River. It began on a line of the tract patent dated December 23, 1795 with a corner to a line between Jacob Raresnake & Shoemaker, then a corner to Smoot and crossing Glade Hollow. It was also part of a tract Raresnake bought of Zachariah Hendrixon by patent dated June 20, 1785 including a small field and still house agreeable to a line made between Raresnake & Shoemaker. On 23 November 1811, a deed was recorded for this same 150 acres back to Jacob & Mary from Joseph Shoemaker and Elizabeth.

Jacob also performed his civic duty in the county.

- He served on grand juries at the Court of Quarterly Sessions on 26 November 1793, 22 April 1794, 24 June 1794, 28 June 1796, 26 April 1797, 26 June 1798, and 25 September 1798.

- He served on grand juries of inquest at the Court of Quarterly Sessions on 28 June 1803, 23 April 1805, 2 September 1806, 2 June 1807.
- He served as a surveyor on roads 25 June 1799.
- He was appointed (with two others) to appraise the slaves & personal estate of John Cowan 27 November 1799
- He was appointed (with three others) to appraise the estate of William Gillespie 3 April 1805.
- He also provided information for court presentments against other road surveyors for not keeping the roads passable: (1) on the bank of Little Cedar Creek by Shadrick Williams, 24 May 1803; (2) public road from the Copper Springs to Russell Courthouse, 23 April 1805, (3) from the Courthouse up Copper Creek to where John Hackneys precinct begins, 2 September 1806.
- He was paid for 2 days as witnesses for the Commonwealth vs William Moore 4 September 1805.
- He was paid bounty for killing one old wolf 1 October 1805.
- He served as one of two securities for the will of Lawrence Vanhook, deceased, and was granted a certificate for obtaining probate 2 June 1807.
- He was the plaintiff when he brought suit against John Candler & James Sergent for debt, 1 September 1807.

Personal property had to be paid based on the number of white males in a household. All males over 16 had to be counted. Males had to begin paying taxes once they turned 21.

Russell County, Va., Personal Property Lists On Which Jacob Rasnake Appears
(Names are transcribed as appears in original records)

Date	Name	District Location	Commissioner	# of Tithables
1790	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District		1
1791	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Weir, John	1
1792	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Weir, John	1
1793	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District		1
1794	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District		1
1795	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Webb, Will	1
1796	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Webb, Will	1
1797	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District		1
1798	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District		1
1799	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District		1
1801	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Smith, Henry	2
1802	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Browning, Jesse	2
1810	Rasnack, Jacob	None given		2

In addition to personal property taxes, land taxes had to be paid. The table below presents the Land Taxes paid by Jacob Rasnake.

Russell County, Va., Land Taxes Paid by Jacob Rasnake
(Names are transcribed as appears in original records)

Date	Name	District Location	Commissioner	Land size
1790	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Weir, John	200 acres
1791	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District		200 acres
1792	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Weir, John	200 acres
1793	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District		200 acres
1794	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Webb, Will	200 acres
1795	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Webb, Will	200 acres
1796	Raresnake, Jacob	Upper District	Webb, Will	200 acres

In 1815, Jacob Rarsnake, Senr., was assessed for taxes as follows: one farm in Glade Hollow. 54 acres having thereon one dwelling house of wood, one story, 25 feet by 19 feet, one barn of wood, two stables, one loom house, one smoke house, one corn house, one spring house, one blacksmith's shop, valued at \$500.

1820 Russell County, Va. Census (page 21): Rarsnake, Jacob, Sr.

Males under 10	Males 10 and under 16	Males Between 16 and 18	Males 16 and under 26	Males 26 and under 45	Males 45 and over	Females under 10	Females 10 and under 16	Females 16 and under 26	Females 26 and under 45	Females 45 and over	Foreigners Not Naturalized	People in Agriculture
0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2

Analysis of 1820 census:

- The Male between 16 and 18 is the same male as between 16 and 26 [otherwise the number in that column would be more than 1]. This means the child would have been born between 1802 and 1804. In looking at our children list [below], we can determine that it is highly likely that this child is Jonas.
- The Male between 26 and 45 would have been born between 1775 and 1784. Since Jacob and Mollie did not marry until 1784, we can use John, Jacob Jr., and Elijah as possibilities since all their birthdates are "circa" information. However, John and Jacob, Jr., appear in the 1820 census as heads of their own households. This would mean that Elijah is the likely candidate for this category. This also means that he may be older than what we have thought to date.
- The Male over 45 is obviously Jacob, Sr.
- The Female under 10 would have been born after 1810. Since we have no birth information for Mary or Nancy, it could be one of them. It is almost impossible that it is Christina because we have one of her own children being born circa 1812.
- For the Female between 26 and 45, we can use the same rationale as for the Males above. This would require a birthdate around 1784. Again since we have no birth information for Mary or Nancy, it could be one of them. However, there is also a John Robinson in the 1820 Russell County census. In that household is 1 male

- under 10, 1 male over 45, 2 females under 10, and 1 female 26 to 45. This John Robinson could be Mary's husband but we don't know for sure. The female in the Rasnake household might also be Margaret as we have only a "circa" date for her. We don't know when she married Samuel Miller and we have no further information on either of them.
- The 2 people in agriculture would be Jacob, Sr., and whichever son is the 26 to 45 age bracket. As stated above, it could be Elijah.
 - One problem with this 1820 census is that there is obviously no accounting for Mary (Mollie). We believe she was born around 1764 so she would definitely be over 45 years of age. Where was she?

Jacob RASNAKE and Mary COUNTS had the following children:

- i. Mary² RASNICK (called Polly). She married John ROBINSON. We know nothing else about Mary and John. Further research is required. There is a John Robinson household in the 1820 Russell County Census but we don't know that it is this John.
- ii. Nancy RASNICK. She married Broady FIELDS. We know nothing else about Nancy and Broady. Nancy's brother John (below) married Rachael L. Fields. Could she and Broady have been siblings? **Further research is required.**
- iii. John RASNIC was born in Shenandoah Co., Va., circa 1786. He married Rachel FIELDS and had seven children.
- iv. Jacob RASNICK Jr. was born circa 1788. Some researchers believe Jacob and Elijah are twins. **Further research is required to establish that.** Jacob married Judith FINNEY and had thirteen children.
- v. Elijah RASNAKE was born 1788. Some researchers believe Jacob and Elijah are twins. **Further research is required to establish that.** Elijah married, first, Elizabeth SKEEN and, second, Elizabeth LITTON. He fathered sixteen children.
- vi. Margaret RASNAKE was born circa 1791. She married Samuel MILLER. We know nothing else about Margaret and Samuel. **Further research is required.**
- vii. Lazarus D. RASNAKE was born 23 May 1793. He married Elizabeth HOLMES. They had ten children.
- viii. Christina Lucretia RASNICK was born circa 1796. She married John FULLER. They had eight children.
- ix. Jonas RASNICK was born 13 Aug 1803. He married Rachael LAFORCE. They had nine children.