

The Plaskett Family of Lorton

The Plaskett's are thought of as the first family of Lorton

By Irma Clifton

It is already agreed by most people in the area that the name "Lorton" was given to a geographic area in southeastern Fairfax County by Joseph Plaskett. When he became postmaster in 1875 he named the post office Lorton Valley for the place in Cumberland County, England from which his family had immigrated. Before the post office was established in Plaskett's crossroads store, mail was received through the Accotink post office. The store was located near the intersection of Gunston Road and present day Route 1.

Joseph Plaskett left England with his family in 1853, sailing out of Liverpool, and after six weeks at sea, arrived in the port of Philadelphia. The family settled in New Jersey for about a year, but learning of a farm for sale in Virginia, Plaskett sent his oldest son John to look it over. The property was called Belmont and contained a brick home said to have been built in 1717. It possibly had been occupied by relatives of George Washington, but when John Plaskett arrived, the farm was in sad condition after having been neglected for many years.

The Plasketts left New Jersey for Virginia, and with the help of their large family, were able to turn Belmont into a productive farm where the family lived until after the Civil War. In 1859 John, the oldest son, married into the Cranford family and received from his new father-in-law a gift of 18 acres and a cow. On the property John built a home and in 1861 moved his wife, Mary Jane, and new daughter, Emma, into the dwelling. In later years descendants of the family claimed that on the day of the battle of Bull Run, the guns could be heard booming all day.

Members of both the Plaskett and Cranford families were suspected of being spies during the war and were arrested. John Cranford and Matthew Plaskett were prisoners of war in the Old Capitol Prison. After having refused to sign a parole in February 1862, Mathew remained a prisoner until he was exchanged in October of 1862 and duly enlisted as a private in the Georgia Infantry. He died of wounds received in the Battle of Chancellorsville in May of 1863. Mary was detained overnight after it was claimed that a Confederate soldier who had fired on and killed a Union soldier had been hiding in her cart as she traveled home from Alexandria. It was later determined that the soldier had fired from roadside bushes.

Having survived the war, some of which they spent in Alexandria, the Plaskett family returned home. By 1870 a railroad had been constructed connecting to the RF&P tracks from Quantico to Washington replacing the boat that had been previously used. The new station called Telegraph Road was just a mile from the Lorton Valley post office, and John Plaskett's sons were dispatched to deliver outgoing mail and pick up incoming mail at the new station.

John and Mary Plaskett's oldest daughter Emma married Joseph Springmann who opened a general store near the new station and became the first station agent. Later he became postmaster of Springmann, the name given for a while to both the post

office and station. Later both were changed to Lorton.

When Joseph Plaskett died in 1893, the store and post office continued to be manned by members of the Plaskett family until the Lorton Valley post office was discontinued in 1911. The store operated until 1915 when it burned. Another was erected on the original site and was operated by John Plaskett until his retirement.

The Plaskett family of Lorton had a long association with Lewis Chapel and then Cranford Church. Many members of the family are buried in the cemetery there. John and Mary Plaskett produced ten children, eight of whom survived into adulthood. A history of this remarkable family is chronicled in a book titled *Memories of a Plain Family; 1836-1936* by their youngest child, Susan Annie Plaskett, which was published in 1936 and republished in 2009. Today the many descendants of the Plaskett family can arguably claim that they are members of one of the first families of Lorton.



John & Mary Plaskett at the home place about 1920 Credit *Memories of a Plain Family; 1836*



Annie, author of a book on family history, stands beside her mother Mary and to the right is her brother John. Photo taken in early 1920s. Credit Memories of a Plain Family; 1836-1936



Plaskett Farm in undated photo. Credit Memories of a Plain Family; 1836-1936