

MATHEW SEAY

For many years, the ancestry of the Seay family in America has been the subject of much dispute. Some writers say that the Seays come from the Netherlands and are descended from someone named Zee. Others say the Seays are English. Others suggest the name is French Huguenot, derived from the name of Abraham de Saye or Jean Saye. I know of Seays who claim ancestry from the Cherokee and others who claim Irish ancestry. In no case, however, did any writer identify from original documents the immigrant who might have been the founder of the Seay family. Now, finally, I have uncovered conclusive evidence that the founder of the Seay family in Virginia was the free immigrant Mathew Seay. About this conclusion there can be no doubt because it is based entirely on the analysis and examination of the original documents which recorded these facts.

Clearing Up The Confusion Regarding the Legend of Abraham de Saye, the French Huguenot

I approach this part of the discussion with a high degree of respect and admiration for the early research into the Seay family as well as a significant measure of what Soren Kierkegaard might call "fear and trembling." One owes a huge debt to the hard work and the dedication which has characterized Seay family researchers, particularly Judge Burwell Seay, who in the 1950's authored two manuscripts on our family and who is directly responsible for generating much interest in the Seays.

Equally, I approach this discussion with much respect for the French Huguenot immigrants who have such a splendid history of courage and bravery and many of whom helped establish our country during the earliest part of its history. I wish to offend no one -- I simply search for the Truth, wherever that Truth may be found and whatever may be its ultimate constitution. The research which I have completed on our Seay family does not support the idea that Seay is a French Huguenot name, as has earlier been suggested in some quarters. To the contrary, the new and recent evidence and documentation which has been assembled by a variety of professional genealogists reveals that the Seay name is not French Huguenot and that the progenitor of the Seay family of Virginia was the immigrant Mathew Seay.

Some of these early Seay manuscripts -- of which I believe there are five, all of which I have read; two published works of Judge Seay and three free manuscripts -- attribute Seay ancestry to Abraham de Saye, a French Huguenot. In each case, the French Huguenot attribution is undocumented and unproved. The authors cite no sources for its validation but simply state the claim as fact using words such as ". . . a reliable tradition informs us . . ." or "We do not know but we believe that . . ." and so on and so forth. Before now, no researcher has ever conducted the kind of in-depth investigation and analysis which is necessary to reach an accurate conclusion about our family ancestry, owing to the scarcity of the records and the time and expense of such an analysis. In fact, I could not have uncovered the truth of our Seay family's origins without the help and support of a number of full time professional genealogists such as Lineages, Inc., Richard Price and Associates, Inc., and, most importantly, Utah Genealogical

Services. In addition, I owe an enormous debt to Jones Memorial Library in Lynchburg, Virginia, and the Virginia State Library in Richmond, the members of both of whose professional staffs have been an invaluable help on occasions too numerous to mention.

I make these comments because the question of Seay family ancestry is not an easy nor a routine one to resolve because (1) our family has been in America for so long (since before 1685) and (2) so many of the records have been lost or destroyed. Our Seay family question is like a large mosaic which includes many different pieces and which takes shape only slowly and over a long period of time, each new piece of the mosaic adding just a bit to the overall picture but the combined effect of all of the pieces providing a comprehensive and expansive view of our family. The mosaic still has some missing pieces here and there, but at least we can now see the entire picture and we now know what the Seay family looks like.

Newly uncovered evidence and documentation, upon which a legitimate claim of ancestry must be framed, now reveal that the story of the French Huguenot Abraham de Saye is a legend which is unfounded and that it must be dismissed, based on a number of plain reasons, primary among which is that no evidence or documentation exists to support such a claim. The surviving records of Colonial Virginia make no mention whatsoever of an Abraham de Saye (nor Say nor Seay) -- no tax record, no land record, no court record, no census record, no family record -- no record at all. In fact, the evidence makes it very clear that the name is *not* French Huguenot. On that basis -- that is, on the basis of the complete absence of his name on any record, the total lack of supporting documentation, and the contrary evidence -- one must conclude that Abraham de Saye never existed in America.¹

¹ The conclusion that the legend of Abraham Saye is fictional was reported by three separate genealogists working independently of each other. Each of them, without knowing the work of the others, concluded that the story of Abraham de Saye was a legend and without foundation. Unknown to me until recently, a substantial number of Seay family researchers over a period of years have seriously questioned the veracity of the de Saye legend on the same basis as we discuss here.

One must further conclude that someone must have arbitrarily connected the Seay family with the Saye family, probably based on the similarity of the spelling as well as on a small paragraph in Burke's American Families². However, upon reading this entry in Burke's, one is immediately struck by a number of facts which suggest that the entry is fundamentally incorrect. In the first place, the entry states that the Seay family "is *believed* to have sprung" (emphasis is mine) from the Say family in England but offers no documentation nor evidence to support that assertion. One is not told where this claim originated nor who it is who "believes" the Seays to have "sprung" from the SAYS. Secondly, it also states that *no connection* with the Seay family of Virginia has been proven, further illustrating the arbitrary nature of this assertion. A reader is given to wonder how one can state *ex cathedra* that one is related while at the same time confessing that he has no proof? Thirdly, the entry states that Abraham and his wife, formerly a Wilson, came to America with three sons -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob -- for whom he purchased plantations on the James River.

Fourthly, it connects the real Huguenot Jean Saye with the fictional Huguenot Abram Saye. Records of Mannichin town³ do in fact document the presence of Jean Saye but do not record that he had any children. In addition, a cursory review of the time frames involved makes it clear that it is impossible for Jean Saye to have been the son of the fictional Abram Saye (Burke's uses the name Abram; Judge Seay used Abraham) -- Jean Saye was an adult in Mannichin town at the same time that Burke's alleges Abram Saye to have come to America with three grown sons. One might question whether they could have been brothers and the answer to that question must be "no," owing to the fact that the records prove the existence of Jean while there is no record whatsoever to support the existence of an Abram or an Abraham.

² With reference to George Seay, Richmond banker, b. March 10, 1862, Burke's offers the following commentary: "This family, many of whose representatives have attained distinction in the New World, is of French Huguenot stock believed to have sprung from the same source as the English Barons Say whom Dugdale traces to the Conqueror's time. Abram Seay (Saye or Say) left France soon after the Bartholomew Massacre in 1572, and settled in England. Abram Seay (or Saye), whose precise relationship to the above has not been determined, left England early in the next century with his wife (nee Wilson), and three sons, Abram, Isaac and Jacob, and settled in Virginia where he purchased estates for his children near the James River. John Seay (or Saye) stated in the Virginia Historical Records to be "among the list of ye French Refugees that are settled at ye Mannachin town in ye first ship" in 1700, contributed to relieve the distress of the colony at that place, so that he must manifestly have arrived there prior to the general influx of 1700, as did many other individual refugees. His son, John Seay, b. 1736, m. 1781 Rebecca Moore, and had issue. Abram Barnes Seay, b. 1787, m. Susan Baker, and d. 1869, leaving a son, Robert Moore Seay, b. 1828; m. Henrietta James, dau. of Archibald Williams of Prince George County, and had issue, George James, of whom we treat." Burke's American Families, p. 2905-2906.

³ Mannichin town was a French Huguenot enclave in Virginia where the large majority of French Huguenots lived. The records there mention Jean Saye but not Abraham de Saye.

In genealogical terms, this story is undocumented and is not credible. Virtually any researcher can speak of having seen "official" genealogies claiming descendance from some great person, but offering absolutely no proof nor evidence for such a descendance. That conclusion is the case with regard to the legend of Abraham Saye, in so far as the Seay family is concerned -- there is not one scintilla of evidence to support such a claim and there is abundant evidence to suggest that it is not true. As an aside, it is interesting to note that whenever one of these generic genealogical books discusses the Seay family and says that the name is French/English, the author immediately begins to discuss persons by the name of Say, not Seay and *never* offers any evidence of a connection to the Seay family of America. In addition to which, the French Huguenot immigration from France did not begin in force until at least 1685, the date upon which Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes. Our ancestor, Mathew Seay, was *in America* in 1685.⁴ In fact, he had to have been in America sometime *before* 1685 in order for the circumstances to arise which eventually led to his filing the lawsuit in Old Rappahanock County on that date.

The implausible nature of the Saye legend becomes apparent by asking a few simple questions -- had a real Abraham de Saye of this stature come to America in this way,

- Would he not have had business and legal transactions as a result of which his name would have been recorded *somewhere*, as were most of the other prominent families of the day?
- ^ There is no record whatsoever of these three plantations, neither on the James River nor anywhere else; doesn't it seem likely that, if such plantations actually existed, they would be documented somewhere in some record? and . . .
- ∨ Wouldn't he have maintained his respected French Huguenot name, de Saye or, as it has been shortened, Say -- isn't it highly unlikely that this educated, wealthy and positioned person would have changed both the pronunciation to See and the spelling to Seay? Even today, the name Say is a highly regarded English/French Huguenot name. The town of Old Saybrook, Connecticut, is named for the Say family. Peggy Say has recently been in the news with respect to the Middle Eastern hostage crisis. Early Virginia records (and early records of other states) are replete with persons by the name of Say. But Mathew's name -- however it was spelled -- was pronounced in such a way as to sound like See.

It is also significant to note that the Virginia Quit Rents of 1704 make *no mention of an Abraham Seay or Say or de Saye*. While this list is may not be exhaustive, it is still quite thorough and one suggests that if a person by this name and of this stature had in fact come to America in 1700 and bought plantations for his three sons on the James, as alleged, then surely he would have paid the

⁴ *History Ireland*, Summer 1994, p. 18, "The Huguenots (French Protestants) had been fleeing from religious persecution since Louis XIV had revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685"

Quit Rent to the King of England and surely his name would have appeared on the only surviving Quit Rent list, that of 1704. Significantly, his name does not appear there nor does any similar name appear. The name of Mathew Seay (spelled See), however, does appear on this list. This is very strong evidence.

The only other "Saye" who is sometimes mentioned in this connection is Jean Saye, whom I briefly discussed earlier, and who did in fact come to Mannichin town in Virginia in 1700; however, the records for Mannichin town are extraordinarily complete and they do not record that he left heirs. Accordingly, this person cannot be a Say or Seay ancestor, based on that reason alone. Incidentally, the professional researchers with whom I have worked tell me that French Huguenot records in both England and America are quite complete and thorough and, if one has a French Huguenot ancestor, he can almost assuredly be found somewhere in the records. It is significant to note that neither the name of Mathew See nor Abraham de Saye are found in any French Huguenot record, neither in America nor in England.⁵

So, it is clear that the Seay family in Virginia cannot be traced to a legendary French Huguenot named Abraham de Saye. In contrast, however, the documents and records of Colonial Virginia point rather clearly to the fact that the original Seay family immigrant was Mathew Seay. Here is the documentation and the evidence which supports this conclusion.

The Early Records of Virginia

When one returns to the surviving records of the 17th and 18th centuries, one finds a number of persons by the name of Seay, or a variant spelling,⁶ many of whom were part of the original Seay

⁵ According to Utah Genealogical Services, Research Report, May 28, 1994, "Abraham SEAY is a fiction created to unite the second generating of SEAYs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and James). Added to this creation was the name of a wife, Mary WILSON, and a Huguenot origin. There is no evidence from any original record of any type or location that Abraham SEAY existed, or that he had a wife named Mary, or that her surname was WILSON. If Abraham SEAY were Huguenot, it would have been extremely doubtful that he would have married an English woman before coming to America. Further, though the records of King William County do not survive intact, they do for the period around 1704 (when Mathew SEAY is recorded). No Abraham is found in surviving records, even as a witness. If Abraham SEAY were Huguenot, he would appear in records of King William's Parish, which do survive and are in good condition. In fact, most of the records where the French Huguenots made their settlement in Virginia survive intact, and are therefore easily checked for the existence of an individual. That Abraham SEAY does not appear in any of these records is virtually conclusive evidence that he does not exist. The first SEAY of whom record is found is not Abraham, but rather Mathew SEAY." The other firms with whom I have worked make similar comments. Each of these firms made these comments independent of each other and unknown to each other.

⁶ Variant spellings include See, Sey, Sea and Cee. In at least one case in Campbell County, the S

family of Virginia, but some of whom do not connect to our family. Here are several examples.

Thomas Seag -- 1654

The English ship's captain Mordicai Cooke claimed the headright of **Thomas Seag** in 1654. Seag appears to be a Gaelic name but one finds no other mention of him in other records. According to Cavaliers and Pioneers, 1979, one reads the following information.

"MR. MORDECOY COOKE, 300 acs., upon the N. side of a swamp falling into Ware Riv., & opposite land of John Walker., 7 Sept. 1654, p. 375. Trans. of 6 pers: Thomas Seag (or Seay), Henry Norman, Mathew Borrowes, John Gassent, Thomas Cater, Richard Pevvis."

I have personally examined the microfilmed original of this document and attest to the fact that the recorder did in fact spell the name as *Seag* and not *Seay*. So, the correct spelling of this person's name is truly Seag. Seag seems to be a Gaelic name and could be the shortened version of *O'Seaghdha*, which is the original Gaelic name of O'Shea or O'Shee. It is an easy jump from Seag to Seay and the time frame involved allows for Thomas Seag to be old enough to be the father of Mathew Seay; nonetheless, I have no evidence to support such a notion other than the name itself and I do not suggest this idea as a conclusion. I simply point it out as a matter of interest.

Kath. Seay -- 1713

Thomas Johnson claimed the headright for **Kath. Seay** in Virginia in 1713, according to Passengers and Immigrants Lists, 1984. Cavaliers and Pioneers, 1979, includes this entry:

"Thomas Johnson, of K and Q County; 350 acs. St. Johns Parish, King Wm. County; on Mattapony River, bet. lands of James Edwards and Andrew MacAllister; 30 May 1713, p. 69. Adj. land of Rawlins; Sellers Race Ground; and the main Ridge Road. Imp. of 7 persons: John Price, Kath. Seay, James Lawless, Elizabeth Dempsey, James Munro, Richard Morris, Amey Morris".

Barbados Seays --1670 to 1680

A **Widow Seay** came to Virginia from the Barbados in 1680 with two children and Servants, according to the same source as mentioned above. Interestingly, one does find the names of five Seays mentioned in official records of the Barbados from about 1660 to about 1688. I obtained these citations from the Genealogy Department at the Orlando Public Library.

was misread as an L and recorded as Lea.

Joseph Seay son of **Captain Symon Seay**, born August 2, 1688.

Benjamin Seay a merchant in the 1670's.

Richard Seay listed in 1660 as a merchant.

Thomas Sea listed in 1679/1680.

One wonders what connection these Seays might have with our Seay family since virtually all the Seays I've ever met eventually find a relationship with each other. One also notes that the names Joseph, Benjamin and Thomas are in our family. Nonetheless, I have no evidence at this point to attach these Seays to our Seay family.

The Records of Old Rappahanock County First Mention Mathew Seay

The most apparent early Seay, however, is Mathew Seay. Mathew Seay's name first appears in the records of this country in 1685 when he brought suit against a resident named Hugh French in Old Rappahanock County, Virginia⁷ and the recorder spelled his name See. The record does not provide the reason for the suit or any other information, but it does establish the fact that Mathew was in America in 1685. The suit was continued in 1686 but no subsequent record exists, which seems to suggest that Mathew dropped the suit at that point. Since he was the plaintiff when he brought the suit in Old Rappahanock County, this implies that he was not actually residing in that county. His name does not appear on the county records while the defendant's name does, implying that the defendant was a resident of the county and Mathew was not. Apparently, and for whatever reason, he became engaged in some kind of controversy which necessitated his filing suit in that county, even though he was living somewhere else. Also, and for whatever other reason, he decided not to pursue the suit after 1686 and I find no other record of Mathew Seay there.

Please note that his name is spelled *See* on both documents, indicating that this pronunciation reflects the sound heard by the person who recorded his name. Misspellings of surnames was rampant during that time so it is entirely possible that Mathew's name sounded like *ASee@* or something very close to it and so that is the name the clerk recorded. One recalls that both the clerks and the principles were likely from different places in Europe, having different languages or, even if the language was the same, different accents. Under these circumstances, it is a wonder that the recorded names are recognizable at all. Note also that Mathew's Christian name

⁷ Records of Old Rappahanock County, specifically that part which eventually became Richmond County, "1 September 1685, p. 169 (248) [Old] Rappahannock County, Virginia, Court Orders: "Reference granted between Mathew See, Plt. and Hugh French Deft. till next North side court". Again on 1 December, 1686, "Mathew See vs. Hugh French referred till next court".

has the unusual spelling of one "t," which is exactly the way it was spelled in King William County in 1704 and following. As an aside, one finds other "one t" Mathews in early Virginia, suggesting that this spelling, while perhaps not the preferred one, was not particularly uncommon.

Mathew Seay in King William County

Mathew's name appears again 19 years later in 1704 King William County, Virginia, just a few miles to the south of Old Rappahanock County. I do not know where Mathew was living during these 19 years but I suspect that it was in either King William County or next door in King and Queen County, owing to the fact that many of his King William County neighbors came to that county from King and Queen County. Isaac Hill is a good example.

On May 20, 1704, Mathew purchased 200 acres of King William County land from James and Margaret Honey,⁸ who had themselves received this land in 1702 by way of a grant. Actually, it appears as if the Honeys had received some 600 acres of land -- they apparently sold 200 to Mathew first; they sold another 200 to Denet Abney,⁹ and they sold the remaining 200 to Isaac Hill. In the record which records the transaction, Mathew's surname name is spelled *Sey*.

In that same year, 1704, the records reveal that the Honeys sold another 200 acres of land to Isaac Hill. The description of the sale states that, of the original 600 acres owned by the Honeys, the other 400 acres had been sold to "Matthew Sea and Dennitt Abney." Note that Mathew's Christian name is spelled with two "t's" and his surname is spelled *Sea*.¹⁰

⁸ "James and Margaret Honey of St. Stephens psh county of King & Queen to Mathew Sey of King William, 200 acs in St. John's psh on the north side of Machacomico Sw. 20 May 1704." Old King William County Abstracts, 1702-1795, Volume I, Ryland.

⁹ According to Cavaliers and Pioneers, Patent Book No. 8, the headright for Dennitt Abney was claimed by John Lee in 1694 for land in Nansemond County. "JOHN LEE, 960 acs., Up. Par. of Nansemond Co; on E. side of Sumerton Cr., 20 Apr. 1694, p. 341. Beg. on a small island on E. side of said Cr.; to NE side of the Cyprus Sw., &c. Imp. of 20 pers: Dennitt Abney, Mary Emerson, Hannah Haines, Elizabeth Evans, Cath. Jones, Rachell Redfera, Alice Godale, Thomas Godale, Goe. Lawrence, Walter Wright, William Knowles, Adam Broach, John Watts, John Saterwhite; Pallas, Attkena, Jupiter, Vulcan, Mars, Negroes." Upper Parrish of Nansemond County is near present day Norfolk, Hampton

and Newport News, well south of King William County. If Denet Abney entered Virginia at this point -- which is by no means certain -- then he would have journeyed north to King William while Mathew would have journeyed south to King William from Essex County.

¹⁰ "James and Margaret Honey (late Margaret Dixon) of St. Stephens psh and c. to Isaac Hill of same psh and co. the remainder of a patent of 600 acs patented 13 Oct 1702, the other 400 acs having been sold to Matthew Sea and Dennitt Abney so that the afsd 200 acs is that part left at the lower end of the afsd 600 acs. Wits: John Hurt, Den't Abney, Rice Williams." Old King William County Abstracts, 1702-1795, Volume I, Ryland.

That same year, 1704, Mathew's name again appears in an official document, the Virginia Quit Rents. The Quit Rent was an annual tribute paid to the King of England by all of those persons owning land in Virginia. Since Mathew did in fact own 200 acres of prime Virginia countryside, he was required to pay this tax. Even though this was an annual tax, the record of 1704 is the only one which has survived. Mathew was taxed for his 200 acres on the 1704 Quit Rent record, where his name is again spelled *See*, as it was in 1685 and 1686. So, one sees *See* on two occasions, 1685 and 1686, and *Sey*, *Sea* and *See* in three recordings of Mathew's surname during the same year, 1704.¹¹ These spellings constitute strong evidence to support the opinion that his name was pronounced *See*, or something which sounded very close.

Mathew's name appears on the records for the forth and final time in King William County in 1721/1722 (the date is somewhat difficult to read -- it could be either year). In Virginia Colonial Abstracts, Vol. II,¹² where this event is recorded, his surname is spelled *Seay*, apparently for the first time on record. In this case, the 200 acres of Honey land originally sold to Isaac Hill was being sold by Hill to Joseph Hail and in order to describe the location of the land, the recorder stated that it was located near the land previously sold to Mathew *Seay*. This suggests that Mathew was alive at this time (1721/22) because the notation does not include the word "deceased," as was the custom if he were dead. By this point, his name was consistently spelled *Seay* and this is the spelling that all of his descendents have used. This suggests that the name did not evolve from some other name here in America and it seems logical to conclude that Mathew knew how to spell his name and that the proper spelling of the name was *Seay*. Whether the name *Seay* is a name of ancient origin in another country is up to question; but when Mathew came to America, I believe that he spelled his name *Seay*.

Charles Taliaferro's Claim of Mathew Sea's Headright

¹¹ The Virginia Quit Rents, 1704. Note that the name of Mathew See appears as having paid the quit rent on 200 acres in King William County. Note also the names of Patrick Shea and Luke Shea, whose names establish the presence in the area of landowners of Irish descent. Note further that no Abraham Seay or Saye or Say or other variant spelling is listed.

¹² Virginia Colonial Abstracts, The deed of land from Isaac Hill to Joseph Hail, ". . .being before sold and conveyed Part to Mathew Seay. . . ."

Richmond and Essex Counties (into which two counties Old Rappahannock was divided) was an area where many English, Scottish and Irish settlers first arrived in Virginia. As an example, Thomas Monteith of Richmond County was a "Merchant of Glasgow"¹³ and Francis Moore was a "merchant of Dublin."¹⁴ As the reader well knows already, most of the early settlers in Virginia were English.

In 1705, a Virginia gentleman by the name of Charles Taliaferro claimed the headright for Mathew Sea. The Taliaferro family was quite prominent in eastern Virginia during this time and Virginia records document the fact that they claimed numerous headrights over a long period of time, perhaps forty years or more, and that the persons whose headrights they claimed were English, Scottish and Irish.¹⁵ Charles was a son of the English immigrant Robert Taliaferro. The following citation records Charles' claim of Mathew's headright:

"Charles Talliafaro -- 966 A., 56 P., Essex County; on brs. of Ware Cr. and the Mount Cr.; on back of patent called Solomans Garden; adj. patent of John Hay & Christopher Robinson; & patent of Robert Thomas, Senr. 2 Nov. 1705, p. 695. Imp. of 20 pers: Symon Miller, Jane Miller, Wm. Eale, Tho. Thrap, Henry Gibbs, John Furrell, Symon Thompson, Patience Thompson, Elice Thomason, Isabella Harmon, Ester Smith, Richd. Board, Farmer Whitley,

¹³ "MONTEITH, THOMAS [GENTLEMAN] (circa 1694-1746/7) married by 1737 Phillis [Telis] Gallop, daughter of Robert Gallop who died testate in Richmond County in 1720. On 30 July 1714 Thomas Monteith, Merchant of Glasgow, gave a power of attorney to Thomas White of Hanover Parish, Richmond County" Marriages of Richmond County, 136.

¹⁴ "MOORE, FRANCIS (1660-1718) married 170? Ann, probably nee Harbin; this surname appears inconspicuously on the Richmond County Records. Francis Moore, merchant of Dublin, Ireland, and owner of the Dublin Merchant, imported many indentured servants into Virginia beginning in 1681. He appears frequently on the records of Rappahannock, Essex and Richmond counties and in 1703-1706 in Essex County was granted certificates for thousands of acres of land for the transportation of hundreds of indebted servants into Rappahannock River. On 10 May 1705, stating his age to be '45 or thereabouts,' he made a deposition in Essex County in regard to certain 'servants . . . he brought into the Colony . . . in the ship called the Dublin Merchant' in March 1699. . . ." Marriages of Richmond County, 136. This is another example of a person who saved and collected a number of headrights in order to secure a larger claim of land.

¹⁵ As an example, please note this citation from Cavaliers and Pioneers where Charles' brother, Robert Taliaferro, claimed the headrights for 14 persons: "ROBT. TALIAFERO, sonn of Robt. Taliafer, 739 acs., Rappa. Co., in the freshes & on S. side Rappa. Ri. adj. Hen. Corbyn, Esqr. & Mr. Grimes; 17 Mar. 1672/3, p. 445. 100 his due as *Grandchild* of sd. Grimes; 639 acs. for trans. of 14 pers: Tho. Dowler, Patrick the Irishman, Isaack Johnson, Geo. Flower, Richd. Beale, Lewis Davis, Jacob Plower, John Pettit, Pestee Sutton, James Bromfeild, Robt. Franckland, Tho. Brumfeild, Elinor Foord, Edwd. Starke." It is interesting and informative within the context of our See discussion to note the different spellings of names, even within the same citation.

*Margt. Signey, John Parkeson, Math. Sea, Eliz. Lefland, Fra. Wuitley."*¹⁶

¹⁶ Cavaliers and Pioneers, Nugent, p. 101 (Patent Book 9).

In Cavaliers and Pioneers, the citation reads ". . . Mathew Lea (or Sea) . . ." and so one would wonder which spelling was the accurate one. Utah Genealogical Services has examined the original document on microfilm and has concluded that the name which is here recorded is Sea, not Lea. UGS examined several pages of the document and found that the clerk who recorded the headright wrote his "L's" in one way and his "S's" in another way so that it becomes quite apparent that the name is Sea and not Lea.¹⁷ Thus, the document seems to suggest that Charles Taliaferro paid for the transportation of Mathew Sea to America in 1705. However, this is not exactly correct. Headrights, as you know, present several problems. In the first place, some people claimed headrights on immigrants who may have died or may never have reached these shores. Some headrights were fraudulent. Other headrights were sold. Sometimes, as is the case with Mathew, the headright was claimed many years after the immigrant arrived. So, the headright standing alone can sometimes be misleading; but the headright combined with other information can often help solve a genealogical problem.

In Mathew's case, a person by the name of Charles Taliferro claimed the headright of "Mathew Sea" in 1705 for land in Essex County, Virginia. But, we know that Mathew was in Virginia, in Old Rappahanock County (which by 1705 had been divided into two counties, Essex and Richmond) in 1685, because the records document the fact that he filed a law suit against Hugh French in that year. So Mathew's headright was claimed for land in the same county in which Mathew filed suit against Hugh French in 1685. Both of these events taken together -- that is, the headright claim and the lawsuit, both in the same county -- suggest that Mathew originally came to America in this part of Virginia. The date the headright was claimed, 1705, means that Charles must have saved a group of headrights which he accumulated over the years in order to claim a larger piece of property than he would have been able to obtain with only one headright. This was not an uncommon occurrence.

Several other aspects of this citation raise interesting questions -- first, the other people listed in the headright claim include others of the merchant class, the class to which Mathew apparently belonged. In other words, he was not a poor man nor an indentured immigrant. One of others listed on the headright claims list, Captain Symon Miller, was quite prominent. I have records showing that he was in Essex County (Essex, Richmond and Old Rappahanock are the same territory) prior to 1685, the same time as Mathew. In fact, Hugh French married Captain Miller's widow -- Hugh French was the man Mathew Seay sued in Old Rappahanock County in 1685! This means that one of the persons who ostensibly arrived in Virginia with Mathew was dead by at least 1686 so that his widow could remarry.

All of this information suggests that Mathew ASea@ was a free immigrant who came to Virginia prior to 1685 along with other persons who were of the merchant class and that Charles

¹⁷ Recall that the same kind of situation arose regarding Thomas Seag. Cavaliers and Pioneers records the name as ". . . Seag (Seay) . . . ," but on examining the original document on microfilm, it is apparent that the name is Seag.

Taliaferro either paid for Mathew's transportation or bought Mathew's headright from another person who had paid for Mathew's transportation. It also makes one wonder whether the Katherine Seay, whose headright was claimed by Thomas Johnson in 1713 in King and Queen County, right next door, might have been related. Was Katherine Mathew's wife? And was her headright collected and saved to be claimed later, as was Mathew's? Regardless, Charles Taliaferro's claim of Mathew Sea's headright removes any question that Mathew was a free immigrant and the ancestor of our Seay family in Virginia.

Accordingly, one notes the following different spellings of the name from 1685 to 1723:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Spelling</i>	<i>Event</i>
– 1685	See	Old Rapahannock County Court Records -- lawsuit
– 1686	See	Old Rapahannock County Court Records -- lawsuit
– 1704	Sey	Purchase of 200 acres of land from James and Margaret Honey
– 1704	Sea	Sale of 200 acres of land by the Honeys to Isaac Hill
– 1704	See	Payment of the Virginia Quit Rent on 200 acres
– 1705	Sea	Mathew's headright claimed by Charles Taliaferro
– 1723	Seay	Sale of Isaac Hill's 200 acres to Joseph Hail

Conclusions Regarding Mathew See

Now, based on this information, what other facts might one deduce with regard to Mathew. First, let us deal with the date of his birth. I find no document mentioning the birth record of Mathew, but it seems fair to suggest a birth date of about 1660/1665. This would give him enough time to bring suit in Old Rappahanock County in 1685 and then have his children later on in the late 1600's and perhaps early 1700's.

So, if this birth date seems satisfactory, when might one say that he died, and how long did he live? Well, if he were alive in 1721/1722, as I believe, this would suggest that he died sometime after that point. If he lived a normal life span of some 75-80 years (the Seays are long livers), then perhaps he died sometime around 1730-1740, probably closer to 1730 and perhaps even earlier. This date seems reasonable because it is about the time that the later Seays were becoming active in the western part of Amelia County, to the south and west and, if Mathew were alive, one surmises that he might have accompanied his sons and grandsons to Amelia

County, or at least had some business dealings there himself. Since none of those things occurred, or at least none are documented, perhaps he had died as early as 1725-1730. This idea seems even more reasonable given the fact that Isaac and James Seay patented land in Amelia County in 1736. One surmises that if Mathew were alive, he might have patented land there, too.

Thus, we know the following information about Mathew from these early documents:

- His name appears at an early date (1685) in eastern Virginia, at a time when many immigrants were arriving but at a time when it would be less likely, although not impossible, for him to have been born in this country.
- ^ His name does not appear earlier in any other place in Virginia, nor does the name of anyone who reasonably might be his father, leading to the suggestion that he was the first Seay here.
- √ He possessed a modicum of wealth and engaged in land trade. He also had some education in order to do so and, by extension, he must have had some sort of social position. He knew enough about legal matters to initiate a court proceeding and he bought land in the same area of Virginia as other prominent people. So, it seems likely that he possessed some degree of prominence and social standing.
- ↔ Charles Taliferro claimed his headright in 1705, although Mathew had been in Virginia since at least 1685.
- ← His name was spelled a number of different ways but was pronounced in a way which sounded like "See."

The Sons of Mathew See

Naming patterns, proximities and time frames make it virtually certain that Mathew was the father of at least three and probably four sons -- (1) Isaac, (2) James, (3) Jacob and (4) Abraham. Specifically,

- < They all lived in the same county and the same *part* of the county with each other;
- < They all shared the same surname;
- < They shared many of the same Christian names with each other's children (see the listing of the children below);
- < They were all of the same generation and all old enough to be sons of Mathew but not brothers of Mathew;

- < The name *Mathew* (spelled with one or two t's) appears frequently in many family lines;
- < The surviving records do not name any other person who, logically, could have been their father.

These sons represent the second generation of Seays in Virginia. Isaac, James, and Jacob (and their children) were residents of King William County but they bought land and were active in Amelia County by the 1730's.¹⁸ Abraham Seay's name appears for the first time in Fluvanna County where he received a land grant by 1745. I have seen no document which directly connects Abraham to King William County or to any of the Seays in Amelia County, and the names of Abraham's children are a bit different from the others, so it is possible that he is of a different line. However, most researchers who have examined this point seem to believe that he is the brother of these other three Seays and so I will accept that conclusion here. There is a road marker in Fluvanna County naming Abraham Seay as a Huguenot and the land grant which he received records his name as both Say and Seay. Whether this is a clerical error or an accurate rendering of his name is unknown. Utah Genealogical Services suggests that the clerk who recorded the name was familiar with the prominent name of Say but not with the unusual name of Seay and thus made an error when he recorded it. No King William County document exists which lists Abraham's name. No document exists which connects him to King William County. One could make the case that he is of a different family, although the time frames, the geography, and the presence of the name Abraham in other family lines seem to suggest that he was Mathew's son.

Isaac's life is a bit more uncertain. He patented 400 acres of land in Amelia County in 1736¹⁹ and this land is mentioned as "Isaac Seay's corner" in the Amelia County Deed Book.²⁰ The other two sons of Mathew were James and Jacob who both were active in Amelia County from its inception in 1735. It seems that Isaac, James and Jacob still lived in King William County but had extensive dealings in Amelia County; it appears that Abraham moved to and lived in Fluvanna County, at least by 1745.

¹⁸ A variety of Amelia County records including Court Order Books, Deed Books and Will Books document that they bought land, served on juries, witnessed legal documents and were otherwise heavily involved in Amelia County.

¹⁹ "Isaac Seay of King William County was granted 400 acres on both sides of Sandy Creek for the sum of 40 shillings on 8 September 1736." Amelia County Patent Book 17, p.158.

²⁰ Amelia County Deed Book 2, 1742-1747, "Isaac Seay's corner" is mentioned in an entry dated 1745. Isaac was probably alive at this time but dead by 1746, when his son Joseph Seay (1) was ordered to clear a road through Isaac's land and certainly by 1747 when his son Thomas sold 200 of Isaac's 400 acres.

The name Mathew or Matthew is carried down through several generations of this family. The names James, Jacob, Abraham, Isaac, Jesse and others are used over and over again. The geographical evidence for concluding that this is the same family is strong. As an example, the area of King William County where Mathew's land was located is in the same area where James, Jacob and Isaac resided which is the northernmost portion of the County near Herring Creek, close to the Caroline and King and Queen County line. Incidentally, I have visited this part of the country and can testify that this land is wooded, beautiful, green and hilly, and very sparsely populated. It is also very near Old Rappahannock County, where Mathew brought suit against Hugh French in 1685. Here are the approximate dates of birth as well as a listing of the known children of Mathew's four sons:

Isaac Seay

Prior to this research, the constitution of Isaac Seay's family has been largely unknown but newly discovered and newly analyzed documents reveal that Isaac was born approximately 1690 (perhaps few years earlier), that he was Mathew's eldest son and that he died by about 1745. Perhaps Mathew married his neighbor Isaac Hill's daughter and named his eldest son Isaac after his father in law. Isaac's sons were Joseph, Thomas, James, Mathew and probably Hezekiah. The sole mention of Thomas Seay in King William County is the land record of 1748 which documents his sale of 200 acres of land in Amelia County to Nathaniel Ford.²¹ However, Isaac Seay patented 400 acres of land in Amelia County in 1736 -- *the 200 acres sold by Thomas Seay to Nathaniel Ford are part of the 400 acres Isaac patented 12 years earlier.*²² *This fact constitutes virtually conclusive evidence that (1) Isaac was the father of Thomas and (2) that both Isaac and Isaac's wife had died by this time.* But, what happened to the other 200 acres of Isaac's land? In the light of all of this new Seay family research, Utah Genealogical Services revisited an obscure Amelia County land reference of 1746 which ordered a certain Joseph Seay to clear a road from "Stocks Creek to Sandy Creek." This means that an adult male named Joseph Seay who was over age twenty one was legally responsible for a tract of land in Amelia County, although he was not a citizen of Amelia County because his name is nowhere listed on the tax or property roles. If one subtracts twenty one years from 1746, one concludes that this Joseph Seay must have been born no later than 1725 and probably earlier. The fact that this Joseph and not Thomas was responsible for clearing the road suggests that Joseph was the elder. Utah Genealogical Services has analyzed this land in detail and found that it constitutes the

²¹ Virginia Colonial Abstracts, p. 460. "Deed Book 3, p.56, Deed. 29 Dec 1747. Thos Seay of St. Davids Parish, King William Co., sells Nathaniel Ford of Raleigh Parish, Amelia Co., 200 acres in Amelia on both sides of Sandy Creek. Record incomplete -- page missing from record book." The name of Thomas is recorded several times in Amelia County Records.

²² Magazine of Virginia Genealogy, vol. 24, p. 74, 1986. "Isaac Seay, of King William Co., 400a, Amelia Co., both sides of Sandy Cr., bounded by Richard Davis' upper c. on upper side of sd. cr. 8 Sept 1736."

southern 200 acres of Isaac's original 400 acres. Accordingly, Joseph *must* have been the son of Isaac and the brother of Thomas. In addition, Joseph can be none other than the long lost father of Joseph Seay (2) of King William County, born in 1753.

To add to the story and to the family of Isaac, Utah Genealogical Services has discovered a family of Seays in Bertie County, North Carolina, who must be the sons of Isaac and the brothers of Thomas and Joseph.²³ These sons of Isaac are named Matthew (b. est. 1734-37) and James (b. prior to 1734). This Matthew's children were:

Patience
Abraham
Sarah
Mary

The children of this James were:

Isaac Seay b. before 1753
Mary Seay b. before 1753
John Seay b. ?
James Seay, Jr. b. after 1754
Oney (Annie?) Seay b. after 1754

A William Seay appears in the Bertie County records from 1774 through 1790, but he cannot be unaccounted for in this family. One notes that this family was financially quite well off, as illustrated by their land dealings in Bertie County as well as by the fact that James gave his son Isaac some land at the "mouth of Great Branch and up the branch to a springy bottom . . .," and he gave his son James, Jr., the "plantation in which he resided."²⁴ In addition, he gave a third plantation to his son John.

Thus, the known sons of Isaac Seay of King William/Amelia County were:

Joseph b. est 1723
Thomas b. est. 1725
Matthew b. est. 1734-37
James b. before 1734

Now, one other person may also be a son of Isaac Seay. Hezekiah Seay of Hanover County was

²³ Utah Genealogical Services, Research Report March 22, 1993, using a variety of North Carolina documents.

²⁴ Utah Genealogical Services, Research Report, March 22, 1993.

born approximately 1727 which means that he was roughly two years younger than the Thomas Seay mentioned above. The records of Hanover County are a bit sketchy to say the least, even more so than King William County, but it appears as if the son of Hezekiah was John Seay. John apparently had several sons including John, Jr., Thomas, and James. Some of the progeny of these sons moved to Louisa County and established another county full of Seays. Hezekiah and John Seay were men of land and property and many of the children of the family possessed the same names held by the descendants of Mathew See; thus, it seems fair to suggest that Hezekiah was another son of Isaac.

James Seay

James Seay was apparently the second son of Mathew See and was an adult in the 1730's²⁵ when he was active in Amelia County and he was alive as late as 1748²⁶ when he sold land to three of his sons. He must have been born between 1690 and 1700. The children of James Seay were the following ones:²⁷

Jesse Seay	b. est. 1717
James Seay, Jr.	b. est. 1718
Gideon Seay	b. est 1720
Phoebe Seay	b. est 1721
Mary Ann Seay ²⁸	b. est 1724

Interestingly, James Seay, Jr., had a son born in 1763 whom he named Matthew. James, Jr. had another son named James who also named a son Matthew as did James' son Reuben. James' daughter Mary Ann married Col Benjamin Wilson and they also had a son named Matthew. This is a bit confusing but it makes for four Matthews in two generations for this family -- one son and three grandsons. Many of James Seay's descendants eventually migrated to South Carolina and Tennessee.

²⁵ Various Amelia County records including Court Order books, Deed books and Will books document James Seay's presence in Amelia County from 1737 onward.

²⁶ Virginia Colonial Abstracts, p. 460.

²⁷ Utah Genealogical Services, Salt Lake City, Utah, Research Report October 18, 1992. List of children taken from estate settlements and wills. "By adding the dates of known events from records such as marriage records and events where the person must have legally been an adult (such as when they sold land), we can prove that all the Seays belonging to these families...have been accounted for".

²⁸ Mary Ann Seay married Col. Benjamin Wilson in 1754 and became Mary Wilson. Interestingly, the legend of Abraham de Saye declares that his wife was named Mary Wilson. Is this the source of the de Saye legend in so far as the name of Mary Wilson is concerned?

Jacob Seay

Jacob Seay was born about 1710 and his children were these:

James Seay	b. 1735
Moses Seay	b. 1738
Edith Seay	b. 1765
Philby/Phoebe Seay	b.1767
Hannah Seay	b. ?
Agnes Seay	b. ?
Jacob Seay	b. 1752
Abraham Seay	b. ? m. 1782/92
Frances Seay	b. ? m. 1780/88
John Seay	b. 1740
Hezekiah Seay	b. 1742
Sarah Seay	b. ? m. 1762

Jacob was also very active in Amelia County from the late 1730's onward. Many of his descendants eventually migrated to Kentucky. The University of Kentucky has a Seay Hall named after one of Jacob's descendants. I have visited this hall and seen the portrait of our Seay ancestor which hangs there.²⁹ James had two wives whose names were Rachel Wingo and (?) Smith. Jacob live approximately one hundred years and died in Amelia County approximately 1790.

Abraham Seay

Abraham Seay was born about 1720, perhaps earlier. He married Amy Loving and their children were these:

John Seay	b. ? m. 1773
Austin Seay	b. 1758
Abraham Seay	b. ? m. 1768
Stephen Seay	b. ? m. 1770
Ally Seay	b. ?
Anne Seay	b. ?
Susannah Seay	b. 1749

One of Abraham's grandchildren was Matthew Seay, the son of Stephen Seay.

²⁹ Dr. William A. Seay was Dean of the College of Agriculture, Dean of the Kentucky Agricultural Experimentation Station and Director of the Cooperative Extension Service at the University of Kentucky. He died in the late 60's. At this writing, his wife, Lyda Seay, is still alive in Lexington.

Accordingly, we account for the children and grandchildren of Mathew See. In summary, Isaac and his children Joseph and Thomas remained in King William County while sons James and Mathew moved to Bertie County in eastern North Carolina and Hezekiah moved to Hanover County. James and Jacob became active in Amelia County. Elements of the family of James either stayed in Amelia County or eventually migrated west to Knox County, Tennessee, and south to Spartanburg, South Carolina. The children of Jacob remained in central Virginia in Amelia County or moved to Kentucky. The family of Abraham migrated north and west to Fluvanna County and Goochland County and on to Amherst County. Descendants of these families are now, of course, quite numerous and scattered throughout the United States.

Mathew See's Land in King William County

Utah Genealogical Services has done a masterful job of identifying the land of Mathew See in King William County, Virginia. This work is even more remarkable when one considers the fact of how many times the land has changed hands as well as the fact that the names of the rivers and towns have all changed and many of them do not even exist any longer! As an example, the document recording his purchase of the land states that it was located on "Machicomico Swamp." This swamp no longer exists today and on no map can one find a reference to it. In addition, "Herring Creek" is apparently a name given to *any* creek up which the herring swim from the sea. Many "Herring Creeks" exist in Virginia and in other locations.

Now, the creek which used to called "Upper Herring Creek" is now called "Dorrell's Swamp" and one finds it on the map flowing southeasterly from Caroline County.³⁰ "Perry Swamp" is now called "Fork Bridge Creek."³¹ We know that Mathew's land was located near Perry Swamp and on the south side of Machicomico Swamp, but where in the world was Machicomico swamp located? Well, it has no name today that I can find but it sits north of Aylett Creek and about a mile south of Fork Bridge Creek. It runs between where 610 and 608 intersect and empties into what is today called Herring Creek (not the Upper Herring Creek of Mathew's day). It is south of Glenwood, Sloe Grove and Walnut Hill on the enclosed map and a little further south than Milbrook. One notes a boggy or swampy marking in the middle of this short creek, according to the map. This is Machicomico Swamp.

UGS is confident of this location for the following reasons -- the description of the land sold on 25 February, 1807, from John Quarles to John Walker was on the northwest side of Machicomico Swamp adjacent the land of Francis Smith, Robert Hill, John Waide and James Jones. Another deed dated 22 April, 1793, describes the land of Robert Hill, Jr. and John Hill as

³⁰ Ryland, King William County, Virginia, From Old Newspapers and Files, Dietz Press, Richmond, p. 51.

³¹ Harris, Old New Kent County: Some Account of the Planters, Plantations, and Places in King William County, West Point, Va., 1977.

bordering Herring Creek, the corner of Seay's property, the land of Thomas Walker, the Ridge Road, the land of John Quarles, John Waide, Sr. and the land of Henry Quarles. The two transactions have in common John Waide, the Seay land, Robert Hill and the Quarles.

On the map, Millbrook (or Woodroofe) was the residence of Robert Hill and is located south of Fork Bridge Creek. Sloe Grove was the Quarles residence. Accordingly, this has to be the location of Machicomico Swamp. Note the swampy area on the map, the Hill and Quarles residences and, thus, the location of Mathew's land in King William County. I have personally visited this location on several occasions. It is quite rural and rolls gently from east to west. One imagines Mathew walking up and down the fence line in the early morning, stopping by the creek for a fresh drink of water and quickly making his way up over the hills and back to the house. I do not know what became of the land nor to whom it belongs today. I do know that the land was in some sort of dispute during the early 1790's.

In a lawsuit dated 1792, Mary Seay (whose identity and connection is unknown) had owned 200 acres which seems to be the same land which had belonged to Mathew. This means that Mary is most probably a descendent of Mathew. Mary had sold the land to Clifford Breedlove or his daughter Elizabeth but the deed was somehow destroyed. In some way, Henry Madison came into possession of the land and from him it passed to Mildred Madison through his will. Mildred executed a quitclaim deed to James and Elizabeth Jones on November 23, 1794, thus ending the lawsuit.³² The significance of this information, it seems to me, is that the land of Mathew was still in the possession of one of his descendants for some period of time following his death, possibly as far forward as the 1780's.

Today, the children of Mathew Seay help populate virtually every state in America. One gazes back with awe and wonder and reflects that, had Mathew not made the incredible voyage from Europe to America, we would not be here today.

"To those who came before, I honor give;
Without their lives, I'd have no life to live."

-- Sandy Seay

³² *Lineages*, Research Report, October 24, 1991, based on court records of King William County.