

## **Thomas Prater**

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Came to America in 1622 on board the ship Marie Providence

Thomas Prater was born in Eaton Water, Wiltshire, England. When he was a young man, England was expanding its control and development of the Colonies in America. The King of England knew he could not hold control of his distant domain without the allegiance of his subjects that went there. So keeping with the feudal system, he offered property to those "born of Gentry" that would go there to claim it. By doing this he knew that the younger children born to those who held power and/or property by the grace of the King in England would go to the Colonies to claim land for themselves. The younger children of "the gentry" of England generally had very little inheritance, due to the practice of giving the bulk of a father's property to the first born son in the family (along with any titles). Thus, the only way a younger son could gain title, position, or property was by marriage or by the grace of the King. This new offering of the King to give property to anyone born of gentry was well accepted by the young men of England who were looking to improve their chances for success and prosperity.

Thomas Prater, being born of Gentry, was also inticed to come to America. He had relatives which had already made the long trip to America. John Powell was such a person. The name Powell is a variation of the name Powelett (also spelled Paulet) which was an allied family of the Praters for several generations in England (Nunney Castle was purchased from the Paulets by the Praters in the late 1500's; Paulets were cousins of the Praters). Also, the Paulets were intermarried with the Kingstons, Carews, Delamare, and Courtney families who also had marriages with the Prathers.

Thomas Prater, being under age, indentured himself to his cousin, John Powell, and gained passage to America where he worked with John Powell for five years before getting married to Mary (Powell of McKay ?) at which time he received his property (Virginia).

Thomas was the founder of more than 90% of the Prater / Prather family lines in America today. The other 10% were founded by other members of his family that came here at a later time. Most other branches continued with the spelling Prater here in America, while the lines from Thomas have been found to use the spellings Prather / Prater / Prator / Praytor / Prayter / Prayther / Pratter / Prader / Preater / Praeter / Praetor. Most of these spelling variations occurred during the early establishment of and settlement of territories in Colonial times, or shortly after the Revolutionary War. The spelling variations came about mainly as a result of poor levels of education of clerks, census takers, and the public in general.

Thomas Prater was only 18 years old when he came to the Colonies. It must have been a major adventure for such a young man born and raised on a manorial estate in Northern Wiltshire to board a ship to a new land. He must have experienced many hardships. It could be compared today with boarding a rocket ship to fly to a new settlement on the Moon.

He came on board the ship Marie Providence which landed at Elizabeth Citties, Virginia ( near what is now Newport News). His name is recorded in various spellings (Prater, Prether, Prator, Prather), but Prather is used more often in the Colonies, while Prater was used in England. He came to the Colonies in 1622 from the Latton / Eaton Water Estates, on the Cricklade, Wiltshire, England. Thomas was one of three brothers who came to the Colonies between 1620 and 1623.

Researched by Gary Benton Prather