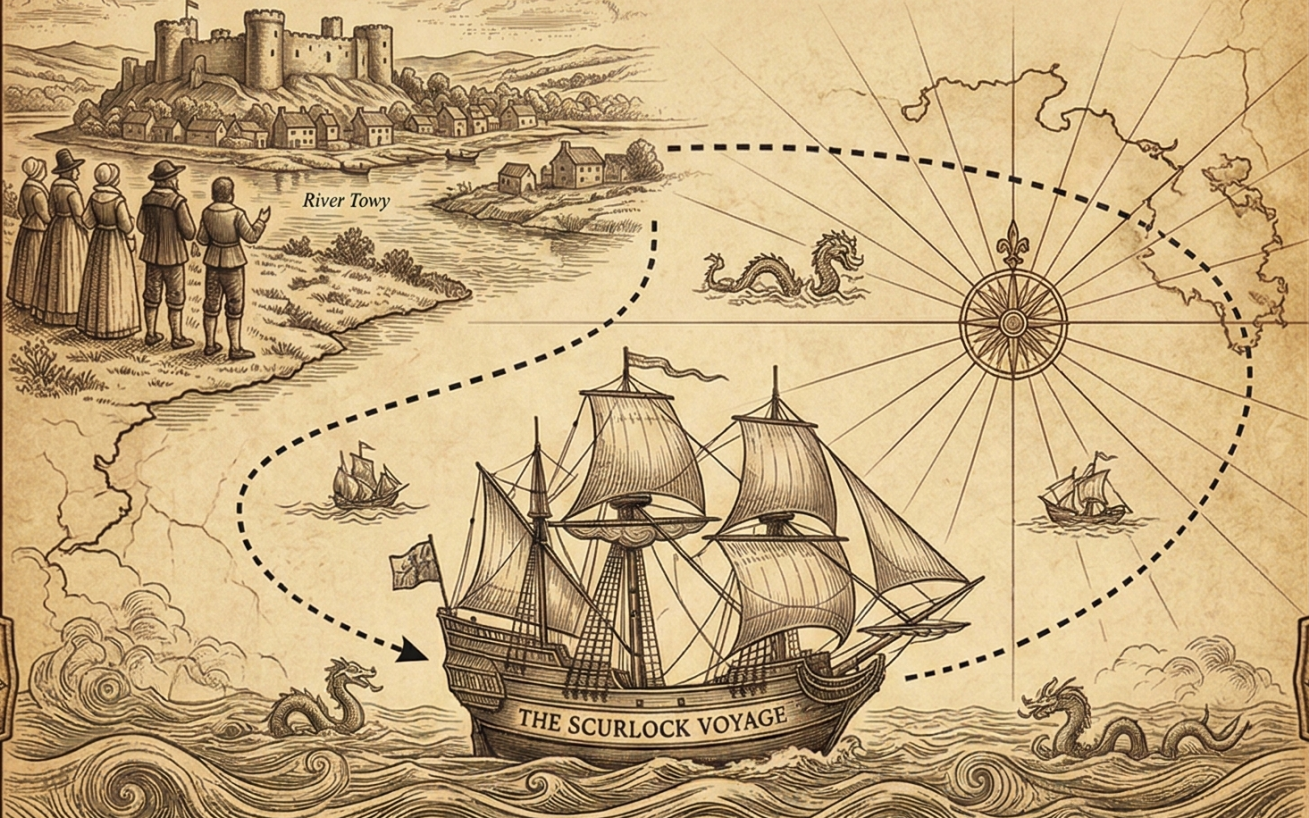


Carmarthen to the New World: The Remarkable Story of the Scurlock Family and Their Transatlantic Legacy



Transatlantic Legacy

A small, local maritime commerce on a new river



SUCCESSES:
[Land, Trade,
Politics]



SCURLOCK FAMILY:
FOUNDERS

From Carmarthen to the New World: The Remarkable Story of the Scurlock Family and Their Transatlantic Legacy

How a Welsh civic family became connected to literary London, colonial Virginia, and the American frontier.

Biography I: Jonathan Scurlock, Esquire

Sheriff of Carmarthen and Patriarch of a Notable Family

c. 1640s – 21 April 1678

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/145458967/john-scurlocke>

Origins and the Scurlock Family in Carmarthenshire

The precise date of Jonathan Scurlock's birth remains unrecorded, as is the case with many men of his social standing in seventeenth-century Wales, where the documentary record, though more substantial than it would be for labourers or tradesmen, is still incomplete by the standards of later centuries. What is clear, from the fragmentary evidence that survives, is that Jonathan Scurlock was a man of considerable standing in Carmarthen and its surrounding district, belonging to a family that had established itself sufficiently in the borough to sustain civic prominence across at least one generation.

The surname Scurlock appearing also in historical records as Scurlocke is not a native Welsh name by origin. It is likely to derive from an English or Anglo-Norman antecedent, consistent with the demographic character of Carmarthen itself. The town was one of the oldest English-chartered boroughs in Wales, founded as a Norman settlement in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, and its merchant and professional class had long included families of English or Anglo-Norman descent who, by the seventeenth century, were thoroughly integrated into Welsh civic life. The Scurlock's of Carmarthen appear to belong precisely to this category of long-established borough families English in their nominal origins, but Welsh in their settled identity and community ties. Published genealogical material from the *West Wales Historical Records* volumes confirms that the Scurlock's of Carmarthen were a recognised family of local significance, appearing in records relating to that town across several generations.

The Office of Sheriff of Carmarthen

Jonathan Scurlock's most important documented public role was that of Sheriff of Carmarthen. This was a position of genuine civic weight in the seventeenth century, not the largely ceremonial honour it would later become. Carmarthen's constitutional position was

unusual among Welsh towns: a charter from James I in 1604 gave the borough the right to appoint its own sheriffs, making it a county corporate, independent from the jurisdiction of the Sheriff of Carmarthenshire. This royal charter, still displayed in the Mayor's Parlour in Carmarthen, raised the status of the Borough to that of a County Borough making Carmarthen a county in its own right, and substituted two sheriffs for the bailiffs appointed under the former charter.

Under this arrangement, the role of Sheriff carried real executive and judicial responsibilities. One of the main duties of the Sheriff was to oversee local and Parliamentary elections, as well as the collection of revenues for the Crown and responsibility for the carrying out of justice and sentencing. Indeed, the office structure was closely integrated with the mayoralty itself: the Carmarthen sheriff generally, but not always, takes office as part of a three-year commitment to serve the town, first as Sheriff, then Deputy Mayor, then Mayor. This progression suggests that Jonathan Scurlock may well have served in all three capacities during his civic career, as the records held at the National Library of Wales specifically the volume known as NLW MS 12366D, which contains the names and autographs of Carmarthen's mayors and sheriffs from 1400 onwards appear to document.

The mid-seventeenth century was an exceptionally turbulent period for a man in Scurlock's position. The English Civil War of the 1640s brought fierce conflict to South Wales, with Carmarthen occupied and reoccupied by Royalist and Parliamentary forces in turn. The Interregnum of the 1650s placed civic officers throughout the country under pressure to demonstrate loyalty to the Cromwellian Commonwealth. The Restoration of Charles II in 1660 reversed those allegiances again, rewarding those who had maintained royalist sympathies and marginalising those associated with the Commonwealth administration. That Jonathan Scurlock maintained his civic position and family respectability across this turbulent era speaks to either considerable political dexterity or a fortunate alignment of allegiances, though the precise details of his political conduct during these decades are not recoverable from surviving documentation.

Family, Property, and the Llangunnor Estate

Jonathan Scurlock married a woman named Elizabeth, whose family name has not been definitively established in surviving records. Together they had at least one child: a daughter, Mary, who was born in November 1678. Mary would prove to be Jonathan's sole heir. The Westminster Abbey record for Mary Steele describes her as the "daughter and sole heiress of Jonathan Scurlock Esq. of the county of Carmarthen."

The family held property in and around Carmarthen, most notably the estate at Llangunnor — the small parish situated on the elevated ground to the east of the town, overlooking the River Tywi. This estate would remain in the Scurlock family and subsequently pass through Mary's line to her husband Sir Richard Steele, who retired there in the final years of his life. British History Online confirms that Sir Richard Steele married the daughter and only child of Jonathan Scurlock, Esq., of Carmarthen, and towards the close of his life retired to a small estate called Tŷ-Gwyn, on the opposite bank of the river, in the parish of Llangunnor.

The Scurlock family vault at St Peter's Church, Carmarthen — the ancient parish church that served as the spiritual and ceremonial heart of the borough — was the traditional resting place of the family's principal members, attesting to their long-standing connection with the town's ecclesiastical and civic establishment.

Death and Legacy



Jonathan Scurlock was buried at St Peter's Church, Carmarthen, on 21 April 1678. Whether he lived to see his daughter's birth that November is a matter of poignancy: the timing of his death suggests he may have died before Mary was born, or that she was born in the weeks following his burial, leaving her effectively an orphan heir from the earliest days of her life.

He left behind him a respected family name, a property estate in Llangunnor, and a daughter whose marriage would connect the Scurlocks of Carmarthenshire with the literary culture of early Georgian London and, through subsequent generations, with the frontier settlements of colonial Virginia.

His legacy, though largely invisible in formal historical records, was nonetheless substantial the foundation upon which a remarkable family history was built across two continents.

Biography II: Mary Scurlock Steele, Lady Steele

Sole Heiress of Carmarthen, Wife of Sir Richard Steele, and the Celebrated "Dear Prue"

November 1678 – 26 December 1718

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/134152011/mary-steele>

Birth and Early Life in Carmarthenshire

Mary Scurlock was born in Carmarthen, Carmarthenshire, in November 1678, the only child of Jonathan Scurlock, Sheriff of Carmarthen, and his wife Elizabeth. Her birth may have coincided closely with her father's death — Jonathan Scurlock was buried at St Peter's Church, Carmarthen, on 21 April 1678 — though the precise relationship between these dates has not been fully resolved by genealogical scholarship. If Mary was indeed born posthumously or within months of her father's burial, she grew up knowing him only through the testimony of others and the civic reputation he had left behind.

As the sole heir of her father's estate, Mary's upbringing would have been shaped by the responsibilities and expectations attached to property. She inherited the Scurlock family's estate at Llangunnor, a rural property on the wooded hillside above Carmarthen overlooking the River Tywi — an inheritance that would prove central to the later stages of her husband's life and career. Her mother, Elizabeth, managed the family's affairs in the years of Mary's minority, preserving the estate for her daughter's future use.

A Fortune-Hunter and a Breach of Promise

Before Mary Scurlock entered the marriage that would define her historical reputation, she was the subject of legal proceedings that reveal something of the social and financial pressures attending a woman of property in early eighteenth-century Wales. In February 1704, she was unsuccessfully sued for breach of promise by a man named Henry Owen. Mary accused Owen of being a fortune-hunter a charge that, given the circumstances, appears to have been believed by the courts. The case was dismissed, and Mary emerged from it with her independence and her estate intact. The episode is a reminder that a wealthy unmarried woman in this period was a target for calculated matrimonial pursuit, and that Mary possessed both the presence of mind and the legal resources to protect herself from it.

Meeting Sir Richard Steele

The circumstances of Mary's first encounter with Richard Steele belong to one of the stranger coincidences of literary biography. They are believed to have met in 1706, at the funeral of his first wife, Margaret. Steele had married his first wife, the widow Margaret Stretch, in 1705 in what was widely understood to be a largely mercenary union on his part: Steele married a widow, Margaret Stretch, who owned considerable property in Barbados, apparently actuated by mercenary motives. Margaret died late in 1706, and at her funeral, the recently widowed Steele encountered the Welsh heiress, Mary Scurlock. The courtship that

followed was rapid, and they married in 1707. Specifically, the marriage took place on 7 September 1707.

Marriage to Sir Richard Steele: "Dear Prue"

The marriage of Mary Scurlock and Richard Steele is one of the most extensively documented private relationships in early eighteenth-century English literary history, thanks primarily to the extraordinary correspondence that Steele maintained with his wife throughout the eleven years of their union.

In the course of their courtship and marriage, he wrote over 400 letters to her. Steele's affectionate nickname for his wife was "Prue" a contraction of Prudence, reportedly bestowed because of Mary's frugality and his letters, which frequently begin "Dear Prue," constitute a vivid and intimate record of their shared life, his professional anxieties, his social ambitions, and his persistent financial difficulties.

Mary Scurlock was completely adored by Steele, however much he might at times neglect her. His hundreds of letters and notes to her provide a vivid revelation of his personality during the 11 years of their marriage. One contemporary account notes that Steele wrote to her on the way to the Kit-Kat Club, in waiting on his Lord Wharton or the Duke of Newcastle, and coaxed her to dress well for the dinner to which he had invited the Mayor of Stockbridge, Lord Halifax, and Mr. Addison.

Yet beneath the tenderness of the correspondence, the marriage was beset by serious practical difficulties. Steele's spending was chronically disordered, and his income, however substantial at times, was perpetually overwhelmed by his expenditure.

Steele's precarious financial position made it difficult for them to keep up the rent and they were forced to move to properties in less fashionable districts or to use houses that belonged to the Scurlock family. For much of the marriage, Steele was in London and Mary in Wales. The separation was both geographical and emotional, and by the time of her death, she was seriously considering a permanent separation because Steele drank heavily and was constantly in debt.

Children and Family

Mary and Richard Steele had four children together, though the family was struck by early losses. Their son Eugene was baptised in 1712. A son Richard had died before his mother. Only Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, survived to maturity. Elizabeth Steele later married John Trevor, 3rd Baron Trevor, through whom the Scurlock family property eventually descended.

The children's names Eugene, Elizabeth, and Mary reflect the cultural and social world in which their parents moved: fashionable, literary, and connected to the upper reaches of Whig society.

Death and Burial at Westminster Abbey



Dame Mary Steele

South Transept, Westminster Abbey

Dame Mary Steele, née Scurlock, was the second wife of the politician and writer Sir Richard Steele (1672–1729). She is buried in the South Transept of Westminster Abbey, near the pillar where the memorial to William Blake is placed. Her gravestone, though now considerably worn, bears the following inscription:

Dame Mary Steele, wife of Sir Richard Steele Knt., daughter and sole heiress of Jonathan Scurlock Esq. of the county of Carmarthen. Died December the 26th 1718 aged 40 years, leaving issue one son and two daughters, Eugene, Elizabeth and Mary.

The stone also displays the family coat of arms *a bend counter-compony between two lions' heads erased, on a chief three billets* together with the crest of a stork.

Mary was born in 1678, the only child of Jonathan Scurlock, Sheriff of Carmarthen, and his wife Elizabeth, of Llangunnor, Carmarthenshire. Richard Steele first encountered her at the funeral of his first wife, and the two married on 7 September 1707. She became the celebrated "Dearest Prue" of his famous correspondence a collection of over four hundred letters that remains one of the most intimate epistolary records of the early eighteenth century.

Together they had several children. Their son Eugene was baptised in 1712; a further son, Richard, did not survive his mother. Of their daughters, Elizabeth alone is known to have reached adulthood.

Mary died on 26 December 1718, aged forty. Sir Richard survived her by just over a decade, dying in 1729 in Carmarthen the town of her own family where he is buried at St Peter's Church.

Mary Scurlock Steele died on 26 December 1718, aged approximately forty years. She did not live to see her husband knighted that honour had been conferred in 1715 but she died as Lady Steele, the wife of one of the most celebrated literary figures of the age. Her burial place is among the most distinguished that could be accorded to a subject of the Crown. She was interred in Westminster Abbey, in the South Transept a remarkable honour for the daughter of a provincial Welsh sheriff, and a testament both to the social elevation she had achieved through marriage and to the genuine esteem in which she was held. The memorial inscription at Westminster Abbey records her as "Dame Mary Steele, wife of Sir Richard Steele Knt., daughter and sole heiress of Jonathan Scurlock Esq. of the county of Carmarthen. Died December the 26th 1718 aged 40 years leaving issue one son and two daughters, Eugene, Elizabeth and Mary."

Legacy

Mary Scurlock Steele occupies an unusual position in the history of early modern Welsh women: she is known primarily through her husband's letters rather than through her own documented voice, and yet those letters reveal a woman of character and substance — frugal where he was extravagant, practical where he was impulsive, rooted in Wales while he navigated the social world of London. The Llangunnor estate she inherited from her father remained her anchor, and it was ultimately to that Welsh hillside that Sir Richard himself retreated in his final years, dying there in 1729 and being buried in her family's church. In a sense, Mary Scurlock had the last word after all: the girl from Carmarthen outlasted her husband's fame, drawing him home to rest in the Scurlock family vault at St Peter's Church.

Biography III: Sir Richard Steele

Soldier, Playwright, Journalist, Parliamentarian, and Co-Founder of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*

c. 1671/1672, Dublin – 1 September 1729, Carmarthen

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/12245060/richard-steele>



Birth, Parentage, and Early Education

Sir Richard Steele was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1671, to Richard Steele, a wealthy attorney, and Elinor Symes. His father died when the boy was approximately four or five years of age, and his mother followed within a year, leaving the young Richard an orphan to be raised by relatives. He was placed under the guardianship of his uncle, Henry Gascoigne, who served as secretary to James Butler, 1st Duke of Ormonde—a position of considerable importance in the social and political fabric of Anglo-Irish life. This connection to the Ormonde household would prove significant in shaping Steele's education, his social networks, and his early career.

In 1684 he began attending Charterhouse School, London, where he met Joseph Addison. This meeting, between two boys in their early teens at one of England's most prestigious

schools, was among the most consequential literary encounters of the eighteenth century. The friendship forged at Charterhouse between Steele and Addison would endure, with varying degrees of warmth and tension, until Addison's death in 1719, and would produce two of the most influential periodicals in the history of English journalism. After Charterhouse, Steele proceeded to Oxford first to Christ Church in 1689 and later to Merton College — but he departed without taking a degree, a common enough outcome for young men of his background and temperament.

Military Career and Early Writings

Steele left Oxford in 1692 and enlisted in military service, initially as a cadet under the command of the Duke of Ormonde. He subsequently served in various capacities, rising eventually to the rank of captain. His military career was not without incident: in 1700, he gravely wounded a fellow officer in a duel, an incident that inspired a lifelong detestation of duelling. The experience appears to have prompted a period of moral reflection, and in 1701 Steele published his first significant work, *The Christian Hero*, a moralistic tract arguing that Christian principles rather than martial honour were the true foundations of virtuous manhood. The tract was met with some derision Steele was criticized for publishing a booklet about morals when he himself enjoyed drinking, occasional duelling, and debauchery around town but it nonetheless established him as a writer of serious moral ambition, and sold well across multiple editions.

His early dramatic work followed in rapid succession. *The Funeral, or Grief à la Mode* (1701) was a comedy that met with considerable success at Drury Lane and brought Steele to the attention of prominent Whig patrons. *The Lying Lover* (1703) was less successful on stage, and *The Tender Husband* (1705), which benefited from contributions by Addison, achieved moderate theatrical recognition. These plays are notable not merely as entertainments but as early expressions of the sentimental, morally improving tone that would come to characterise the best of Steele's later periodical writing.

Marriage and Financial Difficulties

In 1705, Steele married a widow, Margaret Stretch, who owned considerable property in Barbados, apparently actuated by mercenary motives. When Margaret conveniently died in late 1706, she left her husband with a substantial income. Within a year of Margaret's death, Steele had married again this time to Mary Scurlock of Llangunnon, Carmarthenshire, the Welsh heiress who would become the "Dear Prue" of his famous correspondence. The second marriage, contracted on 7 September 1707, was of a wholly different character to the first: Mary Scurlock was completely adored by Steele, however much he might at times neglect her. Nevertheless, Steele's habitual extravagance meant that even Mary's Welsh property and income of approximately £400 per annum could not stabilise his finances for long, and financial precarity remained a defining condition of his adult life.

The Tatler and The Spectator: A Revolution in Journalism

It was through periodical journalism rather than drama or moral philosophy that Steele achieved his most lasting historical significance. The *Tatler*, Steele's first public journal, first came out on 12 April 1709, and appeared three times a week: on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Steele edited the paper under the pseudonym Isaac Bickerstaff a character he borrowed from Jonathan Swift and described his motive in writing *The Tatler* as "to expose

the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour."

The success of *The Tatler* was rapid and substantial. Addison identified the paper's author in the sixth number and began contributing from the eighteenth. By the time *The Tatler* ceased publication in January 1711, after 271 issues, it had established a new model for English literary journalism one that combined entertainment with moral instruction, society observation with political commentary. The exact cause of *The Tatler's* demise is uncertain, but the reasons were mainly political: in 1710 power had shifted to the Tories and Steele, a Whig, had lost his gazetteer ship.

The successor publication, *The Spectator*, launched on 1 March 1711, was in many respects the more famous and enduring achievement. A joint venture between Steele and Addison, *The Spectator* was avowedly non-political and was enormously successful. It appeared six days a week and ran for 555 issues until December 1712. Steele contributed 251 issues, developing memorable characters such as Sir Roger de Coverley. The ambition of the publication was grand: Steele and Addison aspired, as one passage famously put it, to bring philosophy out of libraries and colleges and into the coffee-houses and tea-tables of everyday life. In 1713 the two men also co-founded *The Guardian*, before political pressures intervened once more.

Parliamentary Career and Knighthood

Steele's engagement with politics was never merely theoretical. He became a Whig Member of Parliament in 1713, for Stockbridge, but was soon expelled for issuing a pamphlet in favour of the Hanoverian succession. The pamphlet in question, *The Crisis*, was a forthright argument for the Protestant succession and against any return of the Stuart line a position that aligned Steele with mainstream Whig opinion but brought him into direct conflict with the Tory administration of Robert Harley. His expulsion from Parliament in March 1714 was a significant political humiliation, but the wheel of fortune turned quickly: when the Hanoverian George I came to the throne in 1714, Steele was knighted and given responsibility for the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. He was also returned to Parliament in 1715, this time for Boroughbridge in Yorkshire.

Later Life, The Conscious Lovers, and Retirement to Wales

The later years of Steele's career were marked by a gradual diminishment of creative energy and an acceleration of financial difficulty. His wife Mary died on 26 December 1718, a loss that grieved him despite the tensions that had marked their later years together. His old friend Addison died in 1719, the two men having fallen out over political differences, and their estrangement at the time of Addison's death was a source of lasting regret. In 1719, Steele was temporarily stripped of several offices following his opposition to the Peerage Bill, and his financial schemes including a somewhat quixotic project to transport live salmon from Ireland came to nothing.

His final significant creative achievement was *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), a sentimental comedy generally regarded as among the finest examples of that dramatic form, and one that Steele had been developing for some years. The play was performed at Drury Lane to considerable acclaim.

By 1724, broken in health and overwhelmed by debt, Steele was forced to retire from London and went to live on his wife's estate of Llangunnor in Wales. In 1726 he suffered a paralytic stroke, and his remaining years were spent in the quiet of the Welsh countryside he had come to know through Mary. He died at Carmarthen on 1 September 1729, aged approximately fifty-seven or fifty-eight. He was buried by his own desire in the chancel of St Peter's Church, Carmarthen the same church in which his father-in-law Jonathan Scurlock had been laid to rest more than fifty years before, and in the family vault of the Scurlocks. It is a detail of quiet biographical symmetry: the Irish-born founder of English literary journalism coming to rest in a Welsh market town, united in death with the family whose daughter he had loved.

Assessment and Legacy

Sir Richard Steele's legacy rests upon several distinct achievements. As a dramatist, he helped move English comedy away from the bawdy traditions of Restoration theatre towards the sentimental model that would dominate the eighteenth century. As a journalist, his founding of *The Tatler* and co-founding of *The Spectator* with Addison constituted a genuine revolution in the history of English prose establishing the periodical essay as a major literary form and creating a model of engaged, morally serious, accessible public writing that influenced Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Lamb, and William Hazlitt. As a politician, he was a committed if impractical Whig, whose commitment to the Hanoverian succession, whatever its personal cost, placed him on the right side of constitutional history. And as a correspondent, his hundreds of letters to "Dear Prue" constitute one of the most revealing and humanly immediate epistolary records of the early modern period.

Burial and Memorial at St Peter's Church, Carmarthen

Sir Richard Steele was buried at St Peter's Church, Carmarthen, in accordance with his own wishes and notably, at his own request, without a monument. For well over a century he lay without any visible memorial, his resting place marked only by his connection to the Scurlock family vault. It was not until 1876 that a brass memorial tablet was erected in his honour, fixed to the wall of the Consistory Court in the South Aisle of the church, where it remains to this day.

The story of his burial took an extraordinary turn in October 2000, when archaeologists carrying out restoration work at St Peter's made a remarkable discovery within his tomb: his skull, perfectly preserved, sealed within a lead casket. The casket had been placed there in 1876, when earlier works to the chancel and Consistory Court had disturbed his remains. It is a haunting and unexpectedly intimate footnote to the life of one of the eighteenth century's great literary figures.

Also within the walls of St Peter's, on the South Wall, stands a baroque memorial to Sir John Scurlock, who died in 1682 an elaborate monument featuring twisted columns, skulls, and a broken curved pediment adorned with fruit, commemorating the family into which Steele had married and beside whom he had chosen, in the end, to spend eternity.

Biography IV: David Steele

Colonial Farmer of Augusta County, Virginia

8 June 1708 – 14 September 1747

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/53753375/david-steele>

A Note on Genealogical Uncertainty

Any biography of David Steele must begin with an honest statement of the genealogical controversy that surrounds his origins. According to the family history *The Steeles of Steeles Tavern, Virginia and Related Families*, compiled by Mildred Searson Goeller and dated August 1974, David Steele was the son of Sir Richard Steele, the celebrated Anglo-Irish essayist, and his second wife Lady Mary Scurlock a connection that would make him the grandson of Jonathan Scurlock, Sheriff of Carmarthen, and give the Steeles of Virginia a remarkable literary and Welsh genealogical pedigree.

However, this connection has been seriously questioned by genealogical researchers. Scholars who have examined the documented lives of Sir Richard and Lady Mary Steele have noted that the couple's known children were a son Eugene, baptised in 1712, and a daughter Elizabeth, who alone survived to adulthood. One detailed analysis concludes that "the life of Sir Richard is extensively documented in at least three biographies and there is no record indicating he had a son either by Mary or anyone else," and that "the theory that the Steeles of Steele's Tavern in Augusta County were descendants of Sir Richard has been around for 40-50 years and seems to have a life of its own." The parentage of David Steele therefore remains genealogically uncertain, and this biography presents the Goeller account while acknowledging that it cannot be confirmed by independent biographical evidence relating to Sir Richard Steele.

With that caveat clearly stated, David Steele's own life whatever his parentage is a documented and historically significant story in its own right.

Origins and the Atlantic Crossing

David Steele was born on 8 June 1708, with his birthplace recorded in some genealogical sources as Ireland. According to the Goeller account, he was one of three brothers the others being Andrew, born around 1706, and Samuel, born around 1709 all of whom migrated to the American colonies and settled in Virginia. The brothers' migration route, as documented in the Goeller family history, followed the well-established Scotch-Irish passage of the early eighteenth century: from Ireland or Britain to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and then southward and westward into the Virginia backcountry as the colonial frontier expanded. This migratory corridor was used by tens of thousands of Ulster-Scots and Welsh settlers during the first half of the eighteenth century, drawn by the promise of land grants in the fertile valleys of the Shenandoah and its tributary regions.

The characterisation of the brothers as "Scotch-Irish" in the Goeller account reflects the cultural identity that attached to settlers of Presbyterian background who had passed through Ulster before reaching America a broad designation that encompassed families of Scottish, English, and occasionally Welsh descent who had been part of the Ulster plantation experience.

Settlement in Augusta County, Virginia

Augusta County, Virginia, was formally established in 1738, carved from the western frontier of the existing colonial counties. It was, in the 1730s and 1740s, genuinely new territory: vast, forested, and largely unmapped by European settlers, though long inhabited by indigenous peoples whose prior claims were systematically disregarded by colonial land policy. The colonial government of Virginia offered land grants through mechanisms such as Beverley Manor and Borden's Grant to encourage settlement of this frontier region, and it was under these schemes that many Scotch-Irish families, including the Steeles, established their landholdings.

By 1740, all three Steele brothers David, Andrew, and Samuel were resident in Augusta County, making their homes in the broad valley drained by the upper reaches of the James River and its tributaries. Rockbridge County, later formed from Augusta in 1778, would eventually give its name to Steeles Tavern, the settlement community associated with the Steele family's legacy in this region.

David's chosen vocation was that of farmer. The will he made in September 1747 proved before the Augusta County court on 18 November 1747 describes him plainly as a "farmer" and enumerates the practical assets of a working colonial agricultural household: a plantation assigned to his son Robert, a mare and life estate in the plantation reserved for his wife Jannet, tools, cattle, and modest financial provision for his daughters. This document, preserved in the Augusta County court records and published by Lyman Chalkley in *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia, 1745–1800*, is the most direct and unambiguous documentary record of David Steele's life.

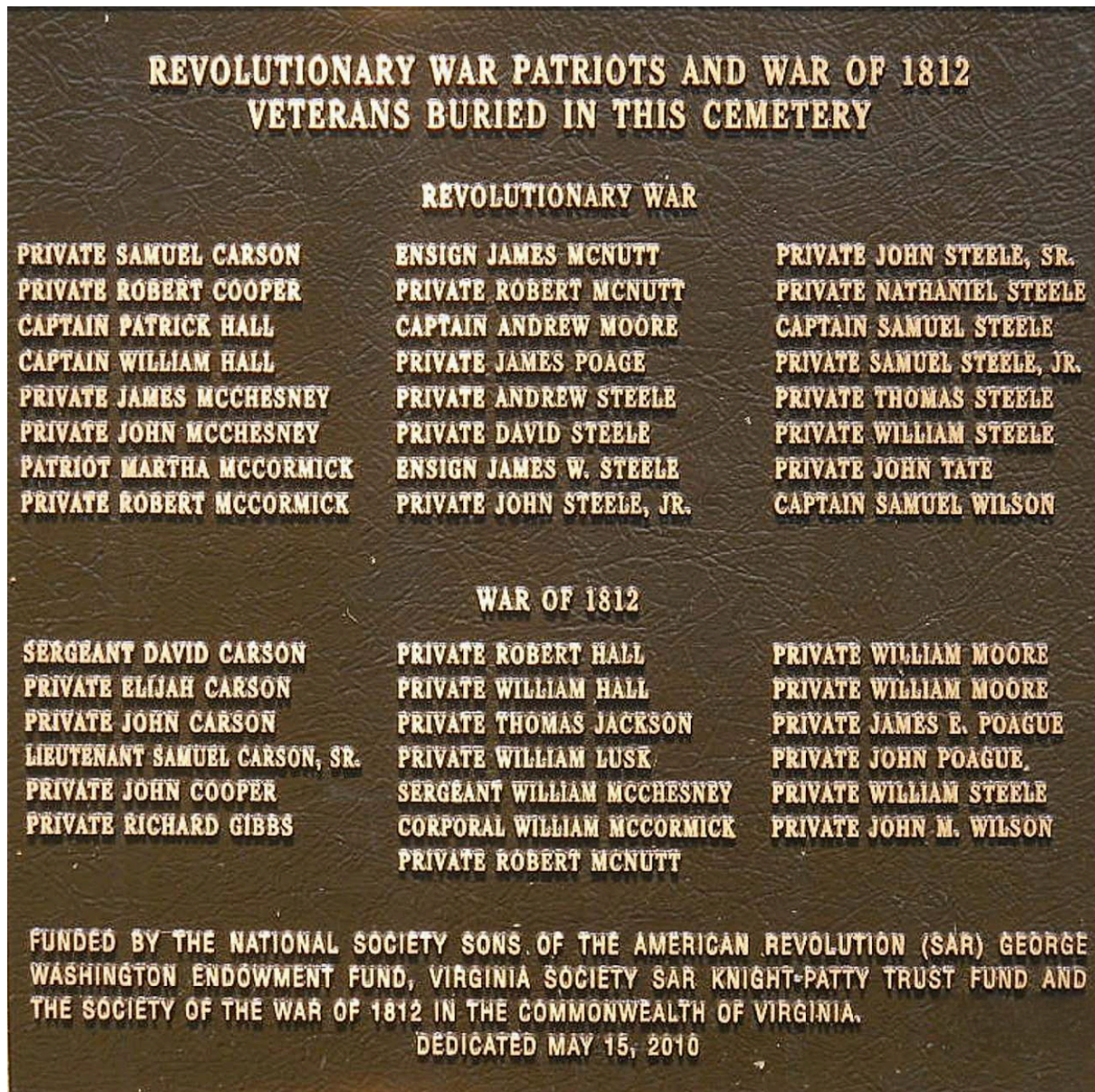
Marriage and Family

David Steele married Jannet Little, and together they had nine known children, all born in Augusta County. The children were Isabella, born around 1720; Nathaniel, born around 1722; Samuel, born around 1724; Martha, born around 1728; Robert, born around 1730; Lydia, born 8 January 1734 (omitted from the Goeller family history but documented in other records); Rebecca, born around 1736; Jannet, born around 1738; and Thomas, born in 1747, the year of his father's death.

The will of September 1747 names his son Robert as the recipient of the plantation the primary family holding while son Nathaniel received half the iron tools (excepting the plough and its tackle), and daughters Martha Teas, Isabella McClure, Rebecca, and Jannet each received livestock. The naming of daughters by their married surnames (Teas and McClure) confirms that at least some of the elder children had already established their own households by the time David made his will, suggesting a family well embedded in the growing Scotch-Irish community of Augusta County.

One daughter, Lydia, was not named in the will, having apparently been overlooked a fact noted by later genealogists. Lydia subsequently married twice: firstly, to George Rankin in July 1755, and secondly to Arthur Forbis in 1764. She is buried at the Buffalo Presbyterian Church Cemetery in Greensboro, Guilford County, North Carolina, indicating that the next generation of the family had already begun the westward dispersal that would carry the Steele name across the American South.

Death and Legacy



The Next Generation: Sons of a Frontier Father

David Steele's death in September 1747 did not diminish the family he had planted in the Virginia backcountry it released it. Within a generation, his sons had become some of the most prominent settler families in Augusta and Rockbridge Counties, and when the American colonies rose in revolution against the Crown in 1775, the Steele name appeared repeatedly among those who answered the call to arms.

The Revolutionary War Patriots memorial at Old Providence ARP Church Cemetery in Spottswood, Augusta County, Virginia, stands as the most tangible collective monument to David Steele's legacy. Dedicated on 15 May 2010, and funded by the National Society Sons of the American Revolution George Washington Endowment Fund, the Virginia Society SAR Knight-Patty Trust Fund, and the Society of the War of 1812 in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the plaque records the names of those buried in that cemetery who served in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

Among the Revolutionary War patriots listed are names that carry the unmistakable stamp of David Steele's household:

Private Nathaniel Steele David's second child, born around 1722, who married Rosanna Wendell on 24 January 1742 and settled in Augusta County. Nathaniel lived until 1796, long enough to see the new nation he had helped forge through two decades of growth and consolidation.

Captain Samuel Steele David's third child, born around 1724, who rose to the rank of Captain during the Revolutionary War — a mark of considerable military standing and community trust in the Virginia frontier. His rank distinguishes him from the ordinary rank-and-file soldiers of the conflict and suggests a man of recognised leadership within his community.

Private Thomas Steele David's youngest child, born in 1747, the very year of his father's death, who married Jane Moore (1750–1826) and died in 1799. Thomas never knew his father, yet he too served the new republic as a soldier, carrying the Steele name into the Revolutionary generation.

Private Andrew Steele Also listed among the Revolutionary War patriots at the cemetery, Andrew appears in the Steele family records as part of this extended settler community, representative of how thoroughly the family had embedded itself in the civic and military fabric of Augusta County by the 1770s.

Also recorded on the plaque among the Revolutionary War patriots are **Private John Steele Sr., Private John Steele Jr., Ensign James W. Steele, Private William Steele, and Private Samuel Steele Jr.** names that collectively confirm the extraordinary depth of Steele family participation in the founding of the American republic. In a single cemetery, in a single Virginia county, the children and grandchildren of one Irish-born colonial farmer who died in 1747 had produced at minimum six named Revolutionary War soldiers, one of them a Captain.

The War of 1812 and the Continuing Line

The Steele family's military service did not end with the Revolution. The same memorial plaque records **Private William Steele** among those who served in the War of 1812 the conflict fought between 1812 and 1815 that consolidated American independence and secured the nation's borders against British incursion from Canada. This third generation of Steele soldiers, grandsons of David Steele (1708–1747), were by this point fully American in identity and allegiance, their Welsh and Irish origins fading into the deep background of family memory even as the Scurlock blood of Carmarthen continued to flow in their veins.

Steeles Tavern and the Enduring Place Name

The most lasting geographical monument to the family is Steeles Tavern, a community in Rockbridge County, Virginia the county formed from Augusta in 1778, the same year the Revolution was transforming the political landscape of the new nation. The community takes its name from David Steele (1756–1840), grandson of our David Steele (1708–1747) and son of Robert Steele, who established the tavern that became the focal point of local commerce and community life in that part of the Shenandoah Valley. Steeles Tavern survives as a named place to this day, a quiet but permanent inscription of the family name upon the American landscape.

Rockbridge County itself is historically significant far beyond the Steele connection. It is the county that gave the world Cyrus McCormick, inventor of the mechanical reaper, and it sits at the heart of the Shenandoah Valley one of the great arteries of American westward migration. That the Steele family was present at the very formation of this county, and gave their name to one of its communities, places them firmly within the mainstream of early American frontier history.

The Westward Dispersal: From Virginia to the American South

From Augusta and Rockbridge Counties, the broader Steele family and the collateral lines descending from David's daughters fanned out across the expanding American frontier in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Lydia Steele, David's overlooked daughter who was absent from his will, married first George Rankin in July 1755 and then Arthur Forbis in 1764, and is buried at Buffalo Presbyterian Church Cemetery in Greensboro, Guilford County, North Carolina confirming that the westward and southward migration of the family was already underway within a decade of David's death.

North Carolina was a natural destination for families moving south and west from the Virginia backcountry along the Great Wagon Road the principal migration route of the eighteenth century that carried tens of thousands of Scotch-Irish and Welsh settlers from Pennsylvania through the Shenandoah Valley and into the Carolinas. From North Carolina, the next logical step was Tennessee, which achieved statehood in 1796 and drew large numbers of settler families from Virginia and the Carolinas throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

It is along this well-worn migratory corridor Virginia to North Carolina to Tennessee that the thread connecting the Tennessee Scurlock family of today to the Carmarthen of John Scurlocke in the 1670s most plausibly runs.

Whether the connection passed through the Steele line directly, or through one of the collateral family branches that dispersed from Augusta County in the generations following David's death, the geographical and chronological logic is sound. Families who left the Virginia frontier in the 1770s and 1780s were precisely the generation that settled Tennessee in the 1790s and early 1800s.

A Family Across Three Centuries and Two Continents: A Summary

The story that began with John Scurlocke, Sheriff of Carmarthen, buried at St Peter's Church on 21 April 1678, traces an arc of remarkable scope and consequence across the following century and a half. His daughter Mary became Lady Steele, buried in Westminster Abbey. His son-in-law Sir Richard Steele helped shape the culture of early Georgian England through *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. His probable grandsons crossed the Atlantic and built a farming community on the Virginia frontier. His great-grandsons fought in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. His great-great-grandsons gave their name to a Virginia community that endures to this day. And his descendants carrying the Scurlock and Steele names through Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee continued to build and settle and serve across the expanding territories of a new nation.

It is a legacy invisible in any single document or archive. It is scattered across parish registers in Carmarthenshire, floor slabs in Westminster Abbey, court records in Augusta County Virginia, cemetery memorials in North Carolina, and family Bibles in Tennessee. But assembled together, as this article has attempted to do, it reveals a family whose journey from a Welsh market town to the American frontier is as remarkable as any in the long and tangled history of the Atlantic world.

For the family in Tennessee who first asked the question yes, your roots in Llangunnor are real, they are deep, and they are extraordinary.

"That the grandsons of a Welsh sheriff should stand among the founding patriots of the United States of America is not coincidence it is the quiet, extraordinary logic of history."

"Nid cyd-ddigwyddiad yw bod ŵyrion siryf o Gymro yn sefyll ymhlith gwladgarwyr sefydlol Unol Daleithiau America; dyma resymeg dawel ac eithriadol hanes."

<https://tinyurl.com/Scurlock-Carmarthen-NewWorld>



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