

Fry Family Summary: Henry Fry

Henry Fry, second son of Joshua and Mary and our ancestor in this generation, was born 19 Oct 1738 probably in Williamsburg, but it could have been Essex County. At age eight Henry had been sent to a boarding school, and at fourteen was taken to Williamsburg by his father to live with and work for his uncle Thomas Hornsby, a prosperous merchant, and his wife Margaret Fry, his father's sister. He spent much of his youth under the tutelage of this aunt, a devout Anglican churchwoman. This aunt's strong admonition for Christian living is credited by Henry for providing the strength he drew on in later years of adversity. There is a good discussion of Henry Fry in "First Settlers of Orange County, Virginia" by Ulysses P Joyner. I have a copy in my library. There are some conflicts between it and George W Frye's book, "Col Joshua Fry", published in 1966. Unable to quote either one directly without error, the following is the best combination I can achieve in particular regard to our ancestor, Henry Fry.

In 1726, Col Joshua Fry had patented 1000 acres in Spotsylvania County on the Robinson River and Crooked Run. In 1734 he was granted another 2000 acres of that description, but saying it "includes" 1000 acres granted to Mrs. Martha Fry in 1732. (Joyner assumes Martha to be Joshua's wife). In 1736 Joshua acquired 400 additional acres adjoining the property. Having been in Essex, Spotsylvania, Orange and Culpeper, it now lies in Madison County. The will of Col. Fry leaves, among other land, his Culpeper plantation to his son Henry, with Joshua's wife Mary retaining right to some of the Culpeper land during her life. Joshua Fry died in 1754 when Henry was only sixteen. In 1761 Henry Fry became deputy to his brother-in-law John Nicholas, Clerk of Albemarle, and on 16 June 1764 Henry married 17-year-old Susan "Sukey" Walker, daughter of Dr. Thomas Walker of Castle Hill. Probably influenced by his new father-in-law Thomas Walker, Henry did not take up his Culpeper land, but relocated instead to a newly purchased home in Albemarle County. But this signaled disaster for the young Fry as he soon developed a fever and ague common to the neighborhood. He turned to alcohol to rid himself of the fever and became an alcoholic.

In his words, "My friends out of great good will, advised me to keep myself warm with spirits during the season, thereby I should escape the disorder, and being favored with a deal of company whose propensity led that way, induced me to fulfil their instructions. It took such fast hold on me, that in a few years I found the remedy to be worse than the disease, a paralytic disorder seized my nerves, rendering me unfit for business, and though never beastly drunk, was never cool." (From the Autobiography of the Rev. Henry Fry as shown in Slaughter).

Henry chose to leave his employment in Albemarle, "from shame of exposing myself," and moved to his lands in Culpeper County devised to him by his late father." (GWF says Henry built his Culpeper home in 1766, which may be challenged by remarks in Henry's obituary.) Here he found no relief from his disability but sank further into the depths of degradation. "I was miserably tormented by my besetting sin for several years, lamenting my imprudence, and making frequent resolutions to break therefrom, but in vain . . . at any time when the heat abated through want of a supply, I was the more miserable, not being able to bear reflection . . . it appearing as impossible to abstain as to change my nature; I was miserable with or without it . . . it seemed like death to quit and as much to continue; what to do I knew not, and others bemoaned my wretched condition. O! that I had never been born . . . could I be annihilated, or had been of the meanest class of reptiles."

Several sources report on this period in Henry's life, although confusion exists on exactly when he and Sukey moved from Albemarle to Culpeper. But, having reached the very depths of mental, emotional and physical despair, Fry was taken in by his family physician and gradually began his search for

salvation. Henry said "I was as a little child learning to walk, which would be more often and longer down than upon its feet." He began attending the meetings of the Baptists who had a meeting house at Crooked Run near his home in Culpeper, but found little solace there. In August 1774 he attended a meeting in nearby Orange County and a Methodist preacher (Robert Williams) was there. He could not recollect that he had "ever heard of such before." He had trouble understanding him, and the same was the case when he spoke again, this time at Mr. Grymes' house where Henry was staying. Nevertheless, Henry prevailed upon the Baptists to invite him to speak at their preaching place near his home. He came, his sermon first pleasing the Baptists but then turning them to anger when he declared "once saved, always saved" to not be a true doctrine. Nevertheless Mr. Williams passed out books among the people and accepted Henry's invitation to preach at his house. This occasion was when Henry was truly converted as described later.

After his conversion Fry saw no more Methodist preachers until 1776, when he attended the Quarterly Meeting at Manikan and met E. Pride and Brother Littlejohn who returned to preach at Fry's home. He also mentions contacts with other Methodist preachers including Glendenning, Stradford, Drumgoole and P. Gatch. From the time of services held in Fry's home in December 1776 conducted by Pride and Littlejohn, the home of Henry Fry became known as a meeting house of the Methodists and preaching was regularly held there. The area was soon included in a new Methodist Circuit and Fry was appointed lay leader of the circuit. He rode about the area securing places for the preachers to speak and encouraged the establishment of new "societies." The presence of the Methodist Church in the area was primarily due to his efforts.

Both Bishops Coke and Asbury describe visits to Fry in their journals of travels in Virginia. Typical are the comments of Bishop Coke on a visit in 1786: "Friday I preached at Bro. Grymes; 24th of May 1786 I preached at a chapel in a forest, and here I was met by our valuable friend, Brother Henry Fry; Sunday, May 22nd, I preached in Mr. Fry's great room, which he had built for a ballroom but I think, before he had used it for a single ball, the Lord caught hold of his heart and turned it into a preaching room. He is a precious man."

From the Journal of the Rev Francis Asbury:

Friday 14. [October, 1780] Rode to Bohannon's, passing the Rapid Dan-River. About two o'clock I arrived, after some difficulties, and found Henry Fry preaching to about eighty people. I spoke after him on Luke xiii. 23, 24, 25 -was fervent; but the people thought I must speak like thunder to be a great preacher. I shall not throw myself into an unnatural heat or overstrained exertions. I rode home about ten miles with brother Fry; he is a serious man. My carriage broke, and his overseer mended it very well; meantime I rested, and read at times the Valley of Lilies of a Kempis—it is much in the style of his Pattern or Imitation . . .

Fry preached in the 'Old Brick Church' near Orange along with the 'Blind Preacher', the Rev. James Waddell, his uncle, during the absence of Anglican clergymen after the Revolution, according to the diary of Colonel Taylor, and was the host of William Wirt, whose writings assured the fame of the Rev. Waddell. According to Mr. P.M. Watts' history of Trinity United Methodist Church in Orange, Rev. Fry preached to the Methodist Society meeting in the home of Joseph Stephens in Orange in 1812. Fry also served as a delegate from Culpeper County to the General Assembly in 1785 and worked for the adoption of Jefferson's Religious Bill passed in that session. He also sponsored the Methodists' General Emancipation Bill, calling for the freeing of all slaves. He was disappointed that the bill did not pass:

“The Methodist’s petition for the gradual abolition of slavery was voted out with contempt, though on all hands agreed to be equitable and what must come to pass, but the time was not yet.”

Despite his accomplishments and the success of his efforts, Fry was humble about his abilities. He did not desire to speak and looked upon it as a burden for which he was unprepared, “This was a cross indeed, and what I little conceived would be laid upon me, one so unfit, naturally bashful and slow of speech, had never prayed in public or without a form. How did I plead . . . but to no purpose.” He described his contributions in modest terms: “My labors as a preacher have been chiefly as a substitute, wherein I have been greatly assisted and comforted; though I have seen but little fruit, being led chiefly to preach to believers, and enforce the doctrine of sanctification.” Fry overlooks the importance of those who tend the crops. The seeds of Methodism were indeed planted in the wilderness by Francis Asbury and his circuit-riding preachers, but the seeds did not sprout and grow into strong healthy Methodist Societies and churches without the dedicated love and labor of men like Henry Fry. It is said he became a Methodist minister but the circumstances of any training or ordination are not known to history.

Henry Fry holds a place of distinction and honor in Methodism and those who call themselves Methodist today in Orange and surrounding Virginia counties join in the testimonial to his faith expressed so well by Dr. Slaughter:

On the blue mountains of my boyhood, whose distance doubtless lends enchantment to the view, I see his patriarchal form, trembling in limbs and tremulous in tone, his head covered with a silken cap, more venerable in the eyes of his neighbors than would have been the triple crown of the Bishop of Rome; and if the voice of Christians of all creeds could cannonize a saint, ‘Old Father Fry’ as he was called, would have had a high place in the calendar.

Other sources give details on Henry’s life. Thomas and Green’s, “Early Churches of Culpeper County, Virginia” gives a slightly different version of Henry’s conversion. It elaborates on the story of the young Methodist minister, Robert Williams, who arrived as a provisional missionary from England in September 1769, and who wrought a great effect on, not only Henry Fry, but others. This source quotes Fry’s description of the impact of William’s preaching at his home in 1774:

He preached from ‘faith is the substance of things hoped for’ --his discourse was adapted to my case, and from the ground and bottom of my heart I cried, ‘Speak Lord thy servant heareth,’ let not the man speak but if Thou wilt, a gracious word of Thine canst make me whole; and so it was all clouds, doubts, and fears were dispelled; the true light, glorious light, life, power, peace and joy, shone in and filled my ravished soul; shame at the same time covered me, and I was humbled for having doubted the power and willingness of God, to save to the outermost, and make clean the inside of the vessel, as well as the outside, and out of the fullness of my heart I could not but speak . . .”

At the time of Henry Fry’s conversion, his son Reuben would have been just eight years old, and it appears that the family already had six very young children, with nine more to come in future years. Such a remarkable transformation must surely have brought a great improvement in the lives of his wife and children. It’s not hard to imagine the suffering and humiliation Henry’s family had been enduring almost from the time of his marriage. His talent was in securing places for real “preachers” to speak, but his people thought of him as much more than that. There are records of many marriages he performed in Culpeper, Orange and Albemarle counties of Virginia. A notice from the Charlottesville (Albemarle Co)

Central Gazette, 8 May 1822, shows that the Rev. Henry Fry performed the marriage of John Mace of Botetourt Co to Catherine Lightfoot (a granddaughter) of Madison Co, just a year before Henry's death.

Henry Fry left many distinguished descendants in Virginia and other states. Among them were his grandson, Philip Slaughter Fry (our ancestor), Clerk of Orange County (1844-1859), and his great-grandson, Philip Henry Fry, Clerk of Orange County (1859-1905). The twenty page autobiography written by the Rev. Henry Fry is quoted by the Rev. Philip Slaughter in his "Memoirs of Col. Joshua Fry". It is quaint and interesting and may be quoted if I expand this summary. Some of the above information comes from this autobiography but it mostly gives us a personal confession of Henry's early trials and conversion in a very humble way. He probably meant to go on with more details but it ends abruptly in 1792 (though Henry lived until 1823) as he relates his remarkable recovery from a "death's door" sickness, saying now at age fifty-four he felt more hearty, active, and strong than an age thirty! It is called an autobiography but it seems the full text is not quoted, for Slaughter occasionally summarizes.



Rev Henry Fry (note below)

Henry tells us that his father placed him in Williamsburg at age 14 to live with his aunt and uncle as an assistant in their store. He says "here were all things convenient for life and godliness, the old gentleman careful for the present, and my aunt for the future life." She lived in "her own country" and recommended to all, whenever possible, that they lay their foundation for the world to come. She conceived that a better appearance might give her more influence, but even in her finery few cared for her subject. This is the aunt whose letter, reread by him many years later, began his road back to life. Henry Fry told his wife, Sukey, he wished he could recall her words, and she brought the letter to him. Sadly the words don't speak to our heart today; we have become so overwhelmed by the "now". But because of the miraculous rebirth it brought to Henry, it is important to search these words:

I wish you and your wife all joy and peace in believing, so as to abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost; in order thereto, let there be prayer in your family at least twice a day--so may you expect others to follow your steps into everlasting happiness, through the strength of the spirit of Christ, which never faileth them

that seek Him. Be sure, both of you to follow my example of "searching the scriptures." Begin the Bible, and before morning and evening prayer, let at least one chapter be read.

The first of our acquaintance with God is fear of everlasting punishment, because of conviction of sin, by the spirit of truth, --showing our lost state by nature, lost in Adam as being flesh of his flesh--, under sentence of death of body, and through our own transgression, become subject to the second death. (Rev. 21). We are brought to see that we have no righteousness of our own. The next thing is Righteousness--even the Lord, our Righteousness, who in the gift of faith hath manifested himself to us. The language of the soul then is: "Thy will be done."

Philip Slaughter remarks that there were once in the possession of the family many letters which Henry Fry had received from Thomas Jefferson, William Wirt (who wrote many comedies while living at Henry's home, before becoming a successful Culpeper lawyer), and numerous Methodist ministers. But unluckily they were burned in the house of Mr. George Clarke, and in the office of William O. Fry, both of which, with many family papers, were consumed by fire. He does quote two friendly letters from Thomas Jefferson related to the religious writings of Dr. Priestly, and solitious of Henry's health:

Washington, May 21, 1804

Dear Sir:

When I had the pleasure of seeing you at your own house you expressed a wish to see (Joseph) Priestly's "Corruptions of Christianity"; finding them in a bookstore here on my return; I was happy in the opportunity of gratifying your wish. I meant on my late journey here to have had the pleasure of asking personally your acceptance of them, but the morning I passed you, was so rainy and the necessity so urgent for my being here the next day, that meeting with Mr. Maury in the road, I was glad to leave them with him, to be presented to you on my behalf. The candor and learning of the author renders everything he writes estimable. At the time of his death he had just finished a work which I am anxious to see printed; it was a comparative view of the morality of Jesus and of the ancient philosophers, but it is not yet committed to the press.

Accept my affectionate salutations and assurance of great esteem.

TH. JEFFERSON

To:

Henry Fry, Esq.

(The Priestly book was entrusted to Mr. Maury whose daughter Milly married Henry's son, Henry.)

Washington, June 17, 1804

Dear Sir:

I received last night your favor of the 9th inst., and perceived in it those liberal sentiments I have ever believed you to entertain. The work of Dr Priestly which I sent you has ever been a favorite of mine. I consider the doctrines of Jesus, as delivered by himself, to contain the outlines of the sublimest system of morality that has ever been taught; but I hold in the most profound detestation and execration the corruptions of it which have been invented by priest-craft and established by king-craft, constituting a conspiracy of church and state against the civil and religious liberties of mankind. At my request Dr. Priestly wrote a comparative view of the moral doctrines of Jesus and the ancient philosophers which he finished just before his death--it is not yet printed nor have I seen it; his history of the Church, I believe, is now printed.

I am sorry to learn that your health now continues declining. I suppose it is from a continuation of the visceral complaint you mentioned to me. I then slightly stated to you what I now do more fully. I was taken with such a complaint, the beginning of 1801, it continued on me with more or less violence near two years. Mentioning it to Dr. Eustis, of Boston, he told me there was but one remedy to be relied on, that which had been discovered by the great Sydenham, which was riding a trotting horse. I immediately recollected that every time I had gone home or returned it had been cured for a time. I got Sydenham's book and observed the numerous instances he mentioned of the radical cure, when everything else had failed by putting his patients on a trotting horse and making them take long journeys. I had not time to take long journeys, but I began to ride regularly 2 or 3 hours every day, it

was some time before the effect was sensible, because it takes time to strengthen the bowels, but in about a year I was completely cured and am now perfectly well. "Go thou and do likewise."

Accept my affectionate salutations and respect.

TH. JEFFERSON

To:

Henry Fry, Esq.

P.S.-- You have time, take therefore a long journey at first.

Thomas Jefferson had three chairs made, each with a large writing arm and, according to tradition, one was presented to Rev. Henry Fry, one to James Monroe (later President), and the third to the Tompkins family of Scottsville Virginia. Henry's chair, as graceful and sturdy as the day it was constructed, remains in possession of direct descendants according to GWF. They are (1966) the Misses Betty Belle, Sarah Margaret, Page and Anna Frye of Springdale Farm, Virginia (descendants of Wesley Thornton Fry).

Henry Fry's wife Sukey Walker Fry was buried in the family cemetery at "Elim" where her tombstone still stands today (GWF), and Henry lies beside her. Philip Slaughter concludes his information on Henry Fry as follows:

In 1808 Feb 19, he lost his wife, who died suddenly of Apoplexy. His record of it is very touching. She breathed out her soul, he says, into the arms of her Beloved without a struggle--the heavenly traces in her face, death could not erase. I had often read of the lovely aspect of death, but regarded it as a poetic effusion--now I realize it. We have lived together almost 44 years, and she always manifested a patient, meek and quiet spirit. We have had fifteen children. We have seen descendants through three generations, and he added a note, saying: I have heard of the fourth generation in Kentucky.

Slaughter does not give his source for this, but goes on to say that Henry now became more infirm and very deaf. A lady who spent much time at his house between 1811 and 1817 told Slaughter she often heard him sing, but never heard him preach. When she told him Episcopal Bishop Moore was to confirm her at his first visitation, Henry expressed much pleasure and rode fourteen miles to Culpeper Court House to be a witness. In 1817 Henry wrote a playful letter to a member of Mr. Glassel's family, and after an exhortation to "press toward the mark for the prize", he spoke of himself as an "old Hermit retired to his cell." His son Thornton Fry had just set out that day for the Kanawha, and Henry had given up his habitation, "my son Wesley having provided a comfortable room for my accommodation in my last days." He signs his letter "Old Father Fry". GWF says Henry Fry's body was "returned to Elim" for burial. He also shows that Wesley Fry, the son with whom Rev. Henry "lived", had six children by a first wife, seven by a second wife, and several were born at "Elim" both before and after Henry's death. However "Elim" is not shown as the birthplace for all thirteen children.

Henry's obituary appeared in the Central Gazette, published in Charlottesville Virginia in 1823:

Departed this life on Thursday, the 7th inst, at the house of his son, Wesley Fry, Esq, of Madison, the Rev. Henry Fry, in the 85th year of his age. If an unvarying practice of all the virtues and charities of the heart ever gave a human being such pre-eminence as that he ought to be held up as an example and model for others, this distinction is due the subject of this notice. He came into the world encumbered with all its frailties, but with a degree of firmness and fortitude unsurpassed among men, he put down in succession all his wayward passions as they rose in rebellion against him, and almost established for himself the character of a saint among men.

Much of his youth was spent in the giddy whirl of fashion and dissipation, but his superior good sense taught him the folly of such a course, and after a series of probation, he assumed, at the age of thirty-seven, the calling of a minister of the Methodist church, which character, distinguished alike for the most devoted piety and for the most disinterested charity and benevolence, he maintained unsullied and irreproachable for forty-eight years, and was emphatically styled 'Father of his Church'.

While dispensing good in his holy calling, his high character brought him into public life. He had previously been a member of the House of Burgesses from Albemarle in the memorable era of 1765, when the first difference arose between that body and the Governor of the Colony. He was afterwards Clerk of Albemarle Co. for eight years, and resigned that office through preference for retirement. He was the delegate to the General Assembly of Virginia from Culpeper in the year 1785, and was a mover of the general Emancipation Bill. In all the relations of husband, father, neighbor and master, his character was of the highest order. He lived in the most rigid conformity to the rules of his church, but was at the same time remarkable for his uniform cheerfulness, vivacity and equanimity of temper. He sunk to rest with the utmost composure and resignation, fully assured that he was exchanging this for a better world.

A note on further research:

A first priority is to search for all possible information on Henry in Culpeper County, especially seeking a will, any estate information, and land transactions. Only our line can be followed in this summary, but all the children of Henry and Sukey will be listed after these brief notices of Henry's remaining siblings: Martha, William and Margaret.

The book of George W. Frye is the most reliable and invaluable source we have, although like all genealogical works, some errors creep in. He gives good information on the fifteen children of the Rev. Henry Fry and Susan "Sukey" Walker: (see GWF, part II, pg 8 for this list and many details that follow).

Margaret Fry; born 29 May 1765; married Philip Lightfoot, 1781; to Kentucky

Reuben Fry; born 9 July 1766; married Anne Coleman Slaughter, 16 Oct 1788; died 24 May 1805

Martha Fry; born 21 Dec 1767; married Goodrich Lightfoot; died 17 Oct 1828; to Kentucky

Joshua Fry; born 17 May 1769; m1. Kitty Walker, 29 Nov 1791; m2. Elizabeth Twyman Willis (widow), 17 Oct 1838

Thomas Walker Fry; born 24 Oct 1770; m1. Elizabeth Bourn Slaughter (widow), 17 Sep 1795; m2. Mary Ann Maury, 20 May 1805; died 1 Jan 1826

Henry Fry; born 24 May 1773; married Mildred Maury, 27 Dec 1796; died 18 Feb 1815

John Fry; born 11 Jun 1775; married Deborah Heywood; 5 Aug 1795; died 10 Apr 1844

William Fry; born 23 Mar 1777; unmarried; died 19 Nov 1854

Wesley Thornton Fry; born 25 Mar 1779; m1. Susannah Walker, 25 June 1798; m2. Sophia Lefflett, 16 Jan 1817; died 15 Mar 1863

Maria S Fry; born 25 August 1782; married Dr Hugh Walker, 1799; died 1856

Francis A Fry; born 7 Sep 1784; unmarried; died 7 Aug 1797

Thornton Fry; born 21 Nov 1786; married Eliza Roots Thompson, 21 Nov 1816; died 20 Nov 1823

Susan Peachy Fry; born 10 Mar 1789; unmarried; died 7 Aug 1790

The Rev. Henry mentioned having had fifteen children so two probably died at birth or in early infancy. Dr. Thomas Walker, father of Henry's wife Sukey, is mentioned earlier in the Albemarle Court Records and the Robert Rose Diary. He is widely researched and GWF gives some brief but interesting facts about his ancestors and connections, especially the Walker's, Crowshaws, Thorntons, and Taliaferros.

By Aubin Clarkson Hutchison

22 February 1999

Updated March 2013 and June 2017, by Pamela Hutchison Garrett

Do you want to know more?

[Link to Henry Fry in the Family Stories Database](#)

[Wills of Joshua Fry and Mary Micou Fry](#)

[Henry Fry in the WikiTree database, managed by Wanda Richards](#)

Sources:

Memoir of Col. Joshua Fry: Sometime Professor in William and Mary College, Virginia, and Washington's Senior in Command of Virginia Forces, 1754 . . . Henry Fry, and a Census of Their Descendants; P Slaughter, 1880.

First Settlers of Orange County, Virginia; Ulysses P Joyner, 1987.

Col Joshua Fry; George W Frye, 1966. GWF

A fine, well-researched 180-page book by George W. Frye (1966) is the best source available

Early churches of Culpeper County, Virginia : colonial and ante-bellum congregations; Arthur D Thomas, Angus M Green, 1987.

The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1771-1786); Francis Asbury, N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1821.

About the Henry Fry Photo:

This photo of Henry Fry appears in several genealogy databases on the internet (June 2017). I am not clear on its original source. At the WikiTree database, researcher Wanda Richards has submitted this photo with the information that it is a "family photo". Thank you Wanda.