My name is Nancy Jo Lawson from Cross Lanes, West Virginia and I am a descendant of William Lawson of Montrose Scotland. My Lawson line is: William (1733), Travis (1766), John (1791), William Banks (1825), George Washington (1865), John Dolan (1904), and Roy Lee (1935).

I started researching my Lawson ancestry after stumbling upon the Lawson Family Heritage Program website in 2007. The LFHP led me to Patti Lawson’s tremendous Lawson Family Database and all the incredible research done by others, especially Bill Porter’s book, William Lawson – A Scottish Rebel (1). Like many descendants of “The Rebel”, I embraced the story of young William of Montrose and his perilous journey to America as a Jacobite prisoner aboard the ship Gildart. And although many more experienced and knowledgeable researchers had already agreed upon this narrative, I wanted to discover the facts for myself. I wanted to experience the excitement of finding those historical records on my own. In 2008 my journey began in earnest by searching in cemeteries and courthouses from Breathitt County, Kentucky to Scott County, Virginia. I wasn’t really looking for anything new; I was just following a trail that many others had traveled before me.

While I have been able to confirm much of what is already known about our William, there are two facts stated by many that I have not been able to reconcile. The first is that his birth year was 1731. In History of the Wood Family in Virginia, by M. B. Wood (2), three items in particular are of great significance:

1) "He was the only son of a widow lady, who lived at Montrose, Scotland, and was born June 26, 1733" (pg. 35)
2) “He married on New River, and a few years thereafter moved to Big Moccasin Creek, where he lived till the time of his death, in 1826, in the ninety-third year of his age” (pg. 37)
3) “William Lawson was born June 26, 1733 (pg. 79); William Lawson, Sr., died April 18, 1826”;
   Transcribed from Henry Wood’s Bible (pg. 81)

M.B. Wood, who was Scott County Clerk in the 1870’s, was William Lawson’s great-grandson. His grandparents were Henry Wood and Sally Lawson, William’s daughter. He was writing and living much closer to the time when people who actually knew our William were still around and telling stories about him. I believe most genealogists would agree that this adds credibility to the details in Wood’s book. He writes that our William died in 1826 in the 93rd year of his age, which makes his birth year 1733, not 1731.

I found another source in the Scott County Public Library entitled, The Quillin (MacQuillin) Family by Milligan Wood Quillen and Mary Kinser Brown (3), which also confirms William’s birth and death dates:

“John Quillin, b. 1793 in NC acquired the land of his father in Scott Co., Va. He m. 1st Rebecca Lawson, eldest daughter of William Lawson, Jr. a Revolutionary War Veteran whose father William Lawson, Sr., was an immigrant from Montrose, Scotland, b. June 26, 1733; d. 1826" (pg. 47)

Given the reliability of these two sources, I believe our William was born in 1733, not 1731. The importance of this 2 year time difference became very clear as my research progressed.
The second source that I question as proof of William’s provenance is *Prisoners of the ’45 – Edited from the State Papers* by Bruce Gordon Seton and Jean Gordon Arnot (4). Volume II, pages 334-337, lists two William Lawson’s; the first one having been identified by many as our William.

No. 1534  
NAME: Lawson, William  
REGIMENT: --- (none listed)  
PRISON CAREER: Clackmannan, 4.5.46 Stirling Castle, Carlisle  
ULTIMATE DISPOSAL: Transported (*we know from David Dobson’s work that the ship was Gildart* (5))  
HOME OR ORIGIN: Durham  
AGE: --- (none listed)  
NOTES AND AUTHORITIES: Soldier (Scots Fusiliers, Capt. Monk’s Co.), a deserter – J.R Stirling; P.R. 3621-3 (*references to Jail Returns of Stirling and Patent Rolls of George II*)

Even though many people jumped on board the claim that this man was our William, I always had my doubts. First, his home is listed as Durham which is a city and county in England over 200 miles from Montrose, Scotland. Also, this William from Durham was a soldier in the British Army; a professionally trained, uniformed, and armed soldier fighting in Captain Monk’s Company of Scots Fusiliers for the Duke of Cumberland against the Jacobite Rebels. He was imprisoned as a deserter in the aftermath of the massacre at Culloden, and transported as punishment for his crimes. This isn’t the poor, teenaged, Scottish Highland boy described by M.B. Wood and others. I really wanted the “William Lawson, Scottish Rebel transported on the Gildart” story to be our William’s story. The firsthand narrative of the Carlisle Prisoners banished on the Gildart by Alexander Stewart in *The Lyon in Mourning* (6) was exciting and romantic and inspiring. And even though the puzzle pieces didn’t exactly fit, like many others I chose to accept it. So much so, that in 2013 I decided to celebrate my 50th birthday by walking in the footsteps of my beloved ancestor in Scotland. I hiked up the hill behind Balquhidder Kirk to Creag an Tuirc, the rallying spot of Clan MacLaren. I wandered the narrow streets of Montrose, and drank a wee dram (or two) at a harbor side pub. I somberly walked the battlefield at Culloden, then laid flowers at our William’s memorial stone in the walkway to the Visitor’s Center (placed there by another descendant, Cary Losson, whom I’ve never met.) I even sat on the cold stone floor of an 18th century prison cell at Stirling Castle, trying to imagine what life must have been like for my 5th great-grandfather. The last few days of my trip were spent researching at the UK National Archives in Kew, England, where I found the original handwritten list of Carlisle Prisoners who drew lots for transportation on 17 Aug 1746. (7) I held the actual document in my hands and found William Lawson’s name right there, listed in the 7th group of prisoners. Amazing! That first trip began my everlasting love affair with Scotland and I return as often as time and my pocketbook will allow. Each visit I discover something new and amazing about our William, and my trip in May 2016 was no exception.

At the UK National Archives again, I uncovered compelling evidence that the “Gildart” William Lawson is not my 5th great-grandfather, the man buried at Lawson Confederate Memorial Cemetery in Snowflake, Virginia. I was devastated.

There are two specific documents that I discovered which corroborate my claim, and finding them was not easy. Most of the UKNA documents concerning the Jacobite Uprising of 1745 are in the numbered record series entitled “State Papers, Domestic George II: SP 36.” This series contains 162 volumes, of which only the first 72 are indexed. So to browse the remaining 90 volumes, I had to visit the archives in person and painstakingly go through them, one by one. The first document I found is SP 36/88 Ext. 6/23. (8) The “Ext” stands for “extracted” meaning the document was too large to fit in
the regular Archive bundles and had to be viewed upstairs in the Large Documents Reading Room. It is a very large chart of several pages listing 140 prisoners in Carlisle chosen for transport, written 26 Oct 1746 by Richard Gildart, the contractor for transporting them. The columns are as follows: Number/Their Names/ Age/ What Trade/ What Religion. #93 is William Lawson (annotated L for large), 25, Naylor (meaning nail maker), England.

The second document, SP 36/88/1/140, (9) was so fragile that it could only be viewed on microfilm. It is another list of the same prisoners at Carlisle, written by Philip Carteret Webb. #48 is William Lawson of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Blacksmith.

These two documents, combined, give a detailed description of the William Lawson who was transported to Maryland aboard the ship Gildart: He was a 25 year old blacksmith, specifically a nail maker, from Newcastle-upon-Tyne in Durham County, England. He was also a member of the Church of England. Most, if not all, of the Jacobites of Angus were Church of Scotland. This man was definitely not the William Lawson described by M.B. Wood:

"At the age of seventeen William Lawson was allured away from home by the reports from America, and after a long and tempestuous voyage he landed in Virginia, and was bound as an apprentice to a planter by the captain of the ship, for which the planter paid him a good sum in tobacco for the expense of the voyage." (pg. 36) (2)

My 5th great-grandfather came from Montrose, Scotland (not Durham, England) to Virginia (not Maryland) when he was 17 years old (not 26). He was allured away from home by reports from America (not banished as a prisoner aboard a convict ship). He was born in 1733 which means he arrived in Virginia around 1750 (not Maryland in 1747). He was bound as an apprentice (not sold as an indentured servant.) The discrepancies are too numerous to disregard.

I was so distraught over what I had discovered because I knew it would invalidate everything we thought we all knew about our William Lawson’s journey to America. I kept my findings to myself for a few weeks, agonizing over what I should do. In August 2016, I decided to share my discoveries with Patti Lawson and Barb Lawson from the LFHP. We had emailed a few times over the years since I began my ancestry journey. I respected and admired their dedication to our Lawson genealogy research, and I knew they would know what to do next. I sent them all of my research to see if they would reach the same conclusions. They were shocked and a little overwhelmed, but their responses were both encouraging and sympathetic.
Patti said, "Hang in there Nancy. I take your research quite seriously. It's not like you are just throwing together random stuff and imagining what you are seeing. I see it too. Your dedication to this research is wonderful."

Barb replied, "We have said for years, that someday a researcher will show up, with the knowledge and know-how to dig in the history of Scotland and know when they find something. I think that is YOU! and we are excited and pleased to have you on board with us."

Their advice and confidence in my research meant EVERYTHING to me. They suggested bringing Fran Harris, one of the original LFHP planners, into the loop because of her keen research skills and knowledge of American Colonial History. Fran is the person who found the earliest record we have of our William – the 1776 Land Deed in Fincastle County, VA. Later, Toni Beard and Julie Miller (two more original LFHP members) were included in the discussions, widening our circle of trust. We all agreed that we needed to get our ducks in a row before presenting my findings to the world. There were many, many lengthy conversations about a plan of action and future research needed. Honestly, the email chain that ensued between us over the past year has been like a Master Class in Genealogy Research for me. These women are incredible! They have encouraged me to “keep digging” and I have.

In May 2017 I returned to Scotland for the sole purpose of finding our true William Lawson. During my visits to the Angus Archives in Forfar, the Montrose Museum and Montrose Public Library in Montrose, and the Scotland's People Centre in Edinburgh, I found many documents and sources for Lawson’s in Angus County in the mid-18th century. All of these new leads require further investigation.

My search elsewhere in Edinburgh, however, was more successful. At the National Library of Scotland I was granted limited access to the original Prison Returns, which contained list after list of all the men imprisoned in Scottish Gaols (Jails) during the 1745 Uprising. (10) I confirmed in these documents all the information for the Gildart William in Seton’s *Prisoners of the ’45*. (4) Seton’s book also lists another William Lawson from Perthshire who was a tenant of Lord Strathallan, and I confirmed him in the Prison Returns, as well.

To also rule out this William as ours, I located the forfeiture records of the Strathallan Estate by the British Government as punishment for Acts of Treason, at the National Records of Scotland. (11) In these records was a deposition given by William Lawson as tenant, explaining that his family had lived on the Perthshire Estate of Lord Strathallan for generations, never in Montrose. I also found this William and other Lawson family members in Lord Strathallan’s rent rolls from the 1730’s. (12) I did not find any other William Lawson concerned in the Jacobite Uprising of 1745 in any other source that I consulted in Scotland.

I don’t believe our William Lawson is either man in *Prisoners of the ’45*. All the evidence I have found during my many trips to Scotland leads me to believe that he was just a boy of 12 or 13 during the Jacobite Uprising and didn’t participate in any of the battles, therefore not imprisoned for treason. I believe that, when he became old enough, he simply left Scotland for a better life in America as hardships in Montrose became unbearable after the Scottish Rebels were defeated at Culloden.

I am sure that the modern-day researchers who discovered the Gildart story in “Lyon”, and the William in “P45”, then loosely connected them to the story from M.B. Wood’s book, had the best intentions. They just didn’t have access to the resources that are available now, and they forced the puzzle pieces to fit. At first I felt horrible about disproving anyone’s hard work, until Barb Lawson put it all into perspective by telling me “when doing any Gen work, you have to be ready to accept changes as additional proof becomes so.” My new evidence proves the Gildart William is not our
ancestor, and the story of William Lawson, the Scottish Rebel who fought at Culloden, is no longer ours to tell.

By unmasking The Rebel, I feel like I have lost a loved one. Even though we aren't kin, I feel a kinship to him. I have prayed in his churches, stood on his battlefields, sat quietly in his prison cells, and retraced his journey from Carlisle Castle to Liverpool Harbor. William Lawson, The Scottish Rebel, had an incredible life; but, through no fault of his own, my 5\textsuperscript{th} great-grandfather buried in Snowflake, Virginia has been given credit for it. I strongly believe that it is now our responsibility to correct the mistakes of the past and make this right. Maybe in the process we can uncover the incredible life led by our own true William Lawson.

\textbf{Works Cited}


8. The National Archives of the UK. List of the Names of the Prisoners in Carlisle as transmitted to Mr. Sharpe by Mr. Gildart the Contractor, 26 Oct 1746. \textit{Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, George II, SP 36/88 Ext 6/23}. Kew, United Kingdom : Copy of document in possession of N. Lawson, July 2016.


