

Casto Family Genealogy – An Update

by Danita Smith
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Fifty years ago, on January 10, 1958 to be precise, my great-grandfather, Isadore C. Casto, wrote an article for the Jackson Herald entitled, “First Casto Came To America in 1696, Historian of Family Has Established”. In commemoration of that article, I would like to write an update to what was written then.

Begging my ancestor’s pardon, I would like to start by correcting the headline of the article. The Castos did not come to America in 1696, as he claimed. The first Casto in America was not Azariah, and he did not have a son, William C., who had two sons who came to present-day West Virginia. I never knew my great-grandfather, as I was born 3 years after he passed, but through my own years of family tree climbing, I have met people who knew him, many more who knew *of* him, and almost everyone who is working on their Casto family ancestry can quote his article without even knowing its’ source. I have been fortunate enough to hear the tale of how the article came to be from one of leading Casto researchers in the country, who just celebrated her 97th birthday this past fall and spend over six decades researching the Casto family and is the author of “The Casto Story and Collections-1985”. Ina Tuft told me the story of how David Leroy Casto, another top Casto researcher, some would even say THE top Casto researcher, contacted Isadore in the late 1950’s and shared with him his working theory *at the time* that the Castos had been from Wales and come to America in 1696,

etc. After Isadore’s death in 1960, David learned he had been in error and that Azariah was the son of William Casto, b. 1717, not the father. It was not William’s descendants who came to West Virginia, but the children of David Casto, b. abt. 1715, and his spouse, Phoebe Gandy.

A tremendous amount of research has been done by researchers like David Casto and Ina Tuft and many more over the years. For more than a decade, I have spearheaded a group of researchers from across America whose goal is to learn, share, and explore more about the Casto family. This past year, I set some goals for the group which including publishing DNA test results to establish the connection between William Casto and David Casto, start a Casto Family Association, and set up a repository of research materials that had been accumulated by various researchers. I am proud to say that these goals were all accomplished and there is much more to be done. This past summer I received over 500 lbs. (!) of genealogical research that had belonged to David Leroy Casto and another Casto researcher, James Casto, both of whom had passed on. David Leroy’s primary area of focus was on the origins of the Casto family. From his research and examination of many early American records, we know that the earliest the Casto family has been found was early in the 1700’s in New Jersey. A 1733 land deed conveyed 63½ acres in Salem Co., NJ to William “Custo” from Edward Lummis. This was too early to have been a transaction involving William Casto, b. 1717, and we have much documentation to support that particular man’s family, including a family bible record and his will from 1778. The first concrete evidence of David Casto, whose descendents populate West Virginia, was a marriage record in August, 1752 to Phoebe Gandy, daughter of Thomas Gandy, in Cape May, New Jersey. The DNA tests which were done in 2006 and published in January, 2007, conclusively concluded that William Casto, b. 1717, and David Casto, b. abt. 1715, were indeed close relatives, either brothers or perhaps even cousins. The problem is that we have been unable to find any documentation linking the two men to each other to establish their relationship, or link either one of them to the William Custo who bought the land in 1733. There is also no documentation whatsoever indicating when the Castos came to America, how they came to be here, or what was their country of origin. I am expanded on each of these concepts in greater detail through the “Casto Connections” newsletters, published from 1995 to 2004, and available for free from my website (www.castoconnections.com).

Going back to Isadore's 1958 article, I can address what we *do* know about the Castos of West Virginia. Although nothing has been found giving us positive proof of David & Phoebe (Gandy) Casto's birth or death dates, his children's lines have been pretty thoroughly traced and written about in several books, including Eileen Vicker's "Casto Cousins", "Summary of the Casto Family" by Richard Provance, and "The Ancestors and Descendants of David D. Casto and Rachel Boice" by Stanley D. Casto, just to name a few. There were three sons –David Casto, Jr., born between 1753 and 1758, who was married to Margaret Provance, and died in 1802 in Upshur Co., WV; John Casto, born about 1758, who married Sarah, and died about 1831 in Jackson Co.; and William Casto, born in 1760, who married Hannah Bonnett and died in 1836 in Jackson County. The names David, John, and William were repeated frequently throughout the generations of Castos and have played havoc with many researchers information. The David Casto who was born around 1715 may have had more than one wife but no valid documentation has been found to support that theory, either. Besides the three sons, David also had six daughters: Martha (married Jonathan Harris, Sr.), Rhoda, Catherine (married Jonathan Harris, Jr.), Elizabeth (married Joseph Y. Provance), Sarah (married Benjamin Wright), and Phoebe (married James McKown, Sr.). It is through these children of David that we find connections to the Cunningham, Westfall, Rollins, Tenney, Shamblin, Staats, Winters, Barnett, Parsons, Rhodes, and many other families.

The Castos from William 1717's line never came to West Virginia but moved to states west after his death in 1778. His descendents lived in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Utah, and were some of the earliest members of the Mormon Church. The West Virginia Castos also eventually moved to other states, sometimes living in the same towns as their distant NJ cousins. Today, there are Castos living in every state in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, as well in many countries such as Germany, England, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, France, and Italy, where there is even a town called Casto. What I most would like to most inform people about is that there has never been an Azariah Casto in West Virginia, we do not descend from anyone named Azariah, and there is no documentation to support what country the family originated in or when they came to America. As a group, we have worked hard to distinguish fact from family legend and have thousands of documented sources to support our decades of research.

[For more information, please contact Danita Smith at Danita@castoconnections.com or visit the website, <http://www.castoconnections.com>. This is a 100% free site, with no commercials or paid advertising, and all work is done by volunteers.]