

Prentts of Williamsburg, Virginia

William Prentis, the son of John and Sarah Prentis, was born 10/10/1699 in St. James Dukes Place London, England, died 8/4/1765 in Williamsburg, Virginia. After the death of his mother in 1708 his father applied to place William, apparently the eldest of his five children, in the school at Christ's Hospital, London, where he remained for six years¹. In 1714 he was discharged from Christ's Hospital and indentured to Archibald Blair of Williamsburg for a period of seven years.

William Prentis, not yet 15 years old, arrived in Williamsburg in early 1715 and went to work in a small frame store on the side of Duke of Gloucester Street in Williamsburg. Dr. Blair had founded the store about 15 years earlier in partnership with his brother, the Rev. James Blair, and their good friend, Col. Philip Ludwell. When Dr. Blair died in 1733 he bequeathed his 1/2 share equally to his three daughters. Elizabeth Blair, married to John Bolling, offered to sell her 1/6 to William Prentis and, upon completion of the sale, the Blair-Prentis-Cary store opened its doors with William Prentis as the store manager. It was later known as Blair & Prentis and finally William Prentis & Co.



From all accounts William Prentis and Co. held stockholders meetings, published results of these meetings, offered incentive compensation to management, and financed the growth of his company from retained earnings. In 1740 a brick store was added to the east side of the frame building.

William Prentis Store (2004)

In the Last Will and Testament of James Blair in April of 1743, he bequeathed his half share in the firm to the five young children of his nephew, John Blair (son of Archibald Blair).. William Prentis died in Williamsburg on 8/4/1765. William and Mary Brooke Prentis are buried under an aisle of the Bruton Church in Williamsburg.

Issue:

- John Prentis born 1/24/1754 in Williamsburg. and died in 1775. He succeeded his father as the manager of the Prentis store. His will was proved on Nov. 20, 1775, at Williamsburg. In the records of Lord Dunmore, the last royal Governor of Virginia, he refers to the fact that he sent his letter to the House of Burgesses by Major John Prentis, whom he speaks of as "my friend". It was John's misfortune to serve during the days of crisis leading to the Revolution. In 1774 he ran afoul of the non-importation agreement: two half chests of tea consigned to his store were tossed into the York River by enraged inhabitants of Yorktown. Public uproar caused John to publish an abject apology in the Virginia Gazette. This tea party and other troubles, including the insanity of his wife, probably caused the early death of John Prentis in 1775.

- Joseph Prentis, born 1/24/1754 in Williamsburg, died 6/18/1809. He was a Member of the Virginia Convention in 1775, of the House of Delegates 1777 to 1788; Speaker in 1788; of the Privy Council from 1779–1781; Judge of the General Court of Virginia from 1788 to 1809. He was married on 12/16/1778 to Margaret Bowdoin (11/27/1758–8/27/1801), daughter of John Bowdoin of Northampton County, Virginia. Issue:
Joseph Prentis, Jr., born 1/24/1783 in Williamsburg, Virginia, died 4/29/1851 in Suffolk, Virginia, married Susan Caroline Riddick on 1/10/1810. Susan was born in Nansemond County, Virginia (now Suffolk, Virginia) and died 10/19/1862. She was a daughter of Colonel Robert Moor Riddick and Elizabeth of Nansemond County. Issue: Margaret Susan Prentis, born 12/29/1810, married Dr. Robert Henning Webb of Suffolk, Virginia.
- Daniel Prentis of Williamsburg.
- William Prentis of Williamsburg was a civil engineer who surveyed Winchester, Virginia in planning for the village and later moved to Petersburg, Virginia where he was a newspaper publisher and four-term mayor of the city.
- Sarah Prentis married William Waters. After his death she married David Meade in 1768. David Meade was a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, who had been born in 1744. In 1744 the Meades built "Maycox" in Prince George County, Virginia. In 1795 they moved to a newly constructed estate, "La Chaumiere du Prairie" near Lexington, Kentucky. David Meade died in 1830.
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- Elizabeth Prentis of Williamsburg.

Ref. Last Will and Testament of William Prentis dated 8/19/1765 in York County; Last Will and Testament of Mary Prentis dated 1768 in York County; Last Will and Testament of William Prentis dated 1773 in York County; Last Will and Testament of John Prentis dated 1775 in York County; Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Prentis dated 1716 in Richmond County, Virginia; Apprentices from Christ Hospital Make Good in America by Harold B. Gill, Jr.; Colonial Williamsburg; The Journal of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Autumn 1988, pp. 15–18; Colonial Williamsburg; The Journal of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Autumn 1988, pp. 7–14.; William and Mary Quarterly, Series 1, Vol 6, pp. 125–6.