

## **Russom genealogy and the Russom name**

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“Russom” comes from Rusholme, a small district of Manchester, England. It’s about one quarter of a mile square. The first element, “rus(s),” is Lancashire dialect for “rush,” in the sense of “water plant.” The second element, “holme,” is from Old Norse, reflecting settlement along the Mersey River in the Viking era (800-1000 AD) by Norwegians moving south from earlier settlements in Scotland. This was an era when Norwegian lords ruled in York and Dublin, with Manchester situated between them. In Old Norse, a “holm” is a piece of land surrounded by water at high tide but connected to the mainland at low tide. Holms were used as natural pens for cattle by agriculturalists in Norway and Iceland, where fertile land is found primarily near fjords and riverbeds. Holms also served as sites for the duels that were sometimes used to resolve legal gridlock at that time. “Rusholme” originally meant something like “Cattail Island.”

The bed of the Mersey River has moved since Rusholme was given its name. The district is now paved over and looks much like other districts around the University of Manchester. Today, the identity of “Rusholme” is marked by a bus stop, a small post office, and the “Rusholme Chippie,” a fish-and-chips shop in the British style. University students pronounce “Rusholme” as “rush” plus “home,” but Professor Richard Hogg, a linguist in the University’s English department, states that long-time residents of Manchester pronounce “Rusholme” identically to our pronunciation of the family name, with no “h” sound and a second syllable like the shorter form of “them” in colloquial usages like “get ‘em.” This pronunciation is probably the same as the one represented by other spellings of the surname such as “Russum” and “Russem.”

While driving from Michigan to Rhode Island, we happened to find a “Rusholme Road” near Welland, Canada. This must have been named after the Manchester district by English immigrants.

During the later middle ages, when surnames of the modern type first came into use people were probably distinguished as “Russom” because they had moved to their current place of residence from Rusholme. In general, English surnames derived from place names indicated a place from which someone had moved, not the place where someone currently lived. “York” and “London” are more common examples of this name type. When our family visited Manchester, we couldn’t find any Russoms listed in the phone book. The rare name “Russom” is used by the English Place Names Society to trace early migration patterns. Much of the information given here comes from this society’s publications.

*The following information has been gleaned and interpreted from various postings on a genealogy forum (<http://genforum.genealogy.com/russom/>).*

Someone on the forum claimed to trace the first occurrence of the last name (spelled Russam/Russum/Russom) to the city of York in the sixteenth century, but there was no

factual authority given. Posting #99 reported ship's passenger records listing an Edward Russam who came from England (no city mentioned) to Maryland in 1677. Three Russoms (probably brothers) moved from Maryland to Greensboro, Guilford County, North Carolina around 1790:

(1) Vincent/Vinson Russom

born in Maryland in 1765; moved to NC with his wife (Rachel Sullivan) and her parents (Solomon and Sarah McComb Sullivan). Vincent died in 1828 or 1829. Vincent, Rachel, and her parents are all buried in Guilford County.

(2) John Price Russom

born in Maryland; married in North Carolina in 1798. He moved to Georgia after his marriage. Many participants in the forum seem to trace their ancestry back to him.

(3) Isaac Russom

born in Maryland; in North Carolina he was a witness on some of Vincent's certificates of indenture [which Ray photocopied from the Guilford County Courthouse records] in 1824 and 1829 and was the executor of Vincent's estate.

*Since we are descended from George Rufus Russom, who was born in Guilford County, NC, I eliminated from consideration the lines of Russoms who moved to Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas (which seems to comprise most of the Russoms who trace their ancestry to the three listed above).*

Three of Vincent's sons are known to have moved away (Azal to Tennessee--but he might have left children with his first wife, who stayed in NC, though I don't know if there were any such children; Jessie to Georgia; Abner to Tennessee). Vincent's son James stayed in North Carolina and died there in 1835. There is a posting from Charles Russom on the genealogy forum tracing his line back to James. It's not clear if any of James's descendants stayed in North Carolina, however.

There is very little information on the genealogy forum about Isaac Russom's children. One of his sons, John Morgan Russom, moved to Tennessee and another, Henry Clay Russom, may have lived in Tennessee or stayed in North Carolina.

*In any case, there has to be at least one generation, and probably two, of Russom males in Greensboro after Vincent and Isaac's sons and before George Rufus Russom, since he was born there in 1853. The missing links will have to be found by a search of Guilford County headstones--there are apparently many Russoms buried there. Another interesting place to search would be the records of Civil War prisoners in Elmira, New York. Here's the information from George Rufus's 1936 (Broken Bow, Nebraska) obituary:*

George Rufus Russom was born in 1853 near Greensboro, North Carolina (Guilford County). His father (name not given) died in a Union prison camp in Elmira, New York in 1861. After the Civil War, in 1866, George Rufus, his mother (name not given), and his

younger sister, Claudia, moved to Huntington County, Indiana. He married Mary Jane Pope in 1873 and in 1879 moved to Vermillion County, Illinois. In 1882 they moved to Broken Bow, Nebraska, and raised 14 children, at first in a sod house, then in a wooden "big house" they built themselves. According to George Raymond Russom, the parlor in the "big house" had a built-in cabinet for every instrument of the orchestra and a family member who could play it. Corinna Russom Taylor, who taught music in Broken Bow for many years, continued the tradition by reserving her living room for a large and diverse selection of instruments that included a marimba and a xylophone. The children living in 1936 (named in George Rufus's obituary) were:

Myrtle E. Brandenburg (Gage, Oklahoma)  
Vaughn W. Russom (McAllister, Oklahoma)  
George Alva Russom (Detroit, Michigan)  
William G. R. Russom (Fallon, Nevada)  
Leota C. Lewis (Decatur, Arkansas)  
Viola M. Clinebell (Colorado Springs, Colorado)  
Fred L. Russom (Ansley, Nebraska)  
Lulu Gift (Anselmo, Nebraska)  
John R. Russom (Broken Bow, Nebraska)  
Corinna E. Taylor (Broken Bow, Nebraska)  
Edna Beal (Broken Bow, Nebraska)  
Ione Pelkey (Broken Bow, Nebraska)

George Alva Russom married Virginia Lamoureux in 1908. They had two children, George Raymond Russom, born 1911, and Richard Russom, born 1916. George Raymond was a pilot for American Airlines during most of his working life; he retired as a 747 captain about 30 years ago and now lives in Portola Valley, California. Richard Russom has maintained a large following during his career as a west-coast jazz pianist, playing many clubs in the Los Angeles area. He now resides in Woodland Hills.