



he name Woolgar emerged in England after the Normans conquered the country in 1066. It comes from the Norman given name Willard. This name is derived from the Germanic roots "will," meaning "desire," and "heard," meaning "strong" or "hard." (Hanks)

Early records of the name Woolgar in the chronicles of England show that the ancestors of the bearers of this name were of the Norman race. Researchers used such ancient manuscripts as the Domesday Book, the Ragman Rolls, the Wace poem, the Honour Roll of the Battel Abbey, the Curia Regis, Pipe Rolls, the Falaise Roll, tax records, baptisms, family genealogies, and local parish and church records to establish that the name Woolgar was first found in east Kent and Sussex where they were Lords of the Manor of Eastbourne. The family were originally named Villiard, or Guillarrt, and were from Caen in Normandy in pre Conquest times. (NP) In the Domesday Book they are recorded variously as Wielardus, Wilardus, and Wlward. (DB) (PB) Further speculation on the origin of this distinguished family name of the U.S.A., can be deduced from the Willard Memoir by Joseph Willard published in Boston Mass. in 1858. (PB) Woollard is a small village on the River Chew in the Chew Valley in East Somerset. Some of the first records of the name include:

Wihelardus de Trophil who was listed in the History of Northumberland in 1168 and Wilard de Pikeeden who was listed in the same source in 1227. The Yorkshire Poll Tax Rolls of 1379 list Emayn Wylard. William Willarde was listed in Kent in 1602 and Nicholas Willard from Kent married Jane Cumber at Canterbury in 1690. (Bardsley)

Your name, Woolgar, occurred in many references, but from time to time, spellings included Willard, Wilard, Viliard, Villiard, Wielard, Willardby, Willardsey, Willardsham, Willardstone, Willardsley, and many others. Scribes recorded and spelled the name as it sounded. It was quite common that a person would be born with one spelling, married with another, and buried with a headstone which showed another spelling.

The Normans were commonly believed to be of French origin but, more accurately, they were of Viking origin. The Vikings, under their Jarl, Thorfinn Rollo, invaded France in about 911 A.D. After Rollo laid siege to Paris, the French King, Charles the Simple, finally conceded defeat, granting northern France to Rollo. Duke William who invaded and defeated England in 1066, was descended from the first Duke Rollo of Normandy.

The surname Woolgar emerged as a notable family name in Sussex where, between the 11th and 16th centuries, they intermarried with the distinguished families of Davies and Southern. They also branched into Kent where the main stem of the family flourished. Meanwhile, in Sussex, Rafe or Ralph Willard's will is recorded at Ilfield in 1617 wherein he shows a very close relationship with the household of Covert of Slaugham, leaving much of his possessions to members of that family. Captain Simon Willard of the Kentish branch departed for the New World in 1630 and settled at Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1634. In Australia, "Wollert" is an Aboriginal word meaning "where possums abound", and today is the name of a town in Melbourne, Victoria.

Outstanding amongst the family at this time was Simon Willard (1605-1676), English settler to Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1634, he was one of the thirteen heads of families in Concord that signed Reverend Peter Bulkeley's 1643 petition to Governor John Endecott in support of Ambrose Martin; John Willard (c. 1672-1692), one of the people executed for witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts, during the Salem witch trials of 1692; and Reverend Samuel Willard (1640-1707) was a Colonial clergyman who strenuously opposed the witchcraft trials, and served as acting president of Harvard from 1701.

The democratic way of life of the New World beckoned many. They sailed aboard the fleet of sailing ships known as the "White Sails."

In North America, settlers bearing your surname or a spelling variation of the name include: John Woolgar, who was on record in the census of Ontario of 1871.

From the port of arrival settlers joined the wagon trains westward. During the American War of Independence some declared their loyalty to the Crown and moved northward into Canada and became known as the United Empire Loyalists.

Distinguished bearers of the family name Woolgar in more recent times include: Jack William Woolgar (1913-1978) British television and film actor, known for Crossroads (1964), Raw Meat (1972) and The Incredible Adventures of Professor Branestawm (1969); Stephen "Steve" Woolgar (b.1950) British Professor of Sociology at Brunel University; Fenella Woolgar (b.1969) English actress, recipient of the Clarence Derwent Award for Best Supporting Actress in the West End 2013 and Stage Performance of the Year – The Sunday Times Culture Awards 2014; Matthew Woolgar (b.1976) retired English footballer who played from 1993 to 1994; and Sarah Jane Woolgar (1824-1909) English stage actress. Notables bearing other spellings of this name include: Brigadier-General Victor-Jean-Edmond Gillard (1878-1968) French General Officer Commanding 51st Infantry Division (1939-1940); Stuart Gillard (b.1950) Canadian film and television director; Doug Gillard (b.1965) American guitarist and songwriter; Reginald "Reg" Gillard (1920-2001) Australian politician; Nick Gillard (b.1959) British stunt man and coordinator; Frank Gillard (1909-1998) British reporter and radio innovator; Ian Terry Gillard (b.1950) English former professional footballer; Matthew Gillard (b.1973) American politician; Ken Gillard, former Irish professional footballer; Brett Gillard, Australian former rugby league footballer; Linda Gillard, British author; Clara H. Gillard, American Republican politician, Alternate Delegate to Republican National Convention from Ohio, 1924; Joseph R. Gillard, American Democrat politician, Candidate in primary for U.S. Representative from Michigan 5th District, 1942; Lynn J. Gillard, American politician, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of California, 1959-60; Julia Eileen Gillard (b.1961) first female prime minister in Australia's history; Tanya D. Gilliard, American Democrat politician, Candidate for New York State Senate 4th District, 2008; Ernest Thomas Gilliard (1912-1965) American ornithologist, museum curator and explorer to South America and New Guinea; Lawrence "Larry" Gilliard Jr. (b.1971) American character actor, best known for his portrayal of D'Angelo Barksdale on the HBO drama series The Wire; Pierre Gilliard (1879-1962) Swiss academic and author, best known as the French language tutor to the five children of Emperor Nicholas II of Russia; Steve Gilliard (1964-2007) American freelance journalist; and Miss Constance Willard, aged 21, American First Class passenger from Duluth, Minnesota who sailed aboard the RMS Titanic and survived the sinking escaping in life boat 8.

