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The May-June 2019 issue is a good example, an issue which features the great state of Colorado with a 25+ page article about Leadville – without once mentioning Baby Doe Tabor I might add! Most genealogy-related articles include stories anyone interested in history and/or genealogy will enjoy.

As a genealogist I believe it is important to have more than a passing knowledge of history. I've found my research and writing for *Digging History Magazine* makes me a better genealogist. Many times I've been able to make historic connections to genealogical records, and I believe you will also find it to be true.

I research, write, edit, design the graphics and publish the magazine. As one might imagine, it takes a tremendous amount of time to get an issue out. If you've previously stopped by the Digging History blog, you will note with the magazine I am able to write as much as I want – most articles are several pages in length, meticulously researched and sourced. My work as a genealogist and a writer/editor/publisher is a business, not a hobby.

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I often write of my own “research adventures” or share stories I've discovered while researching for my clients. History doesn't have to be boring ... some articles are even written a bit tongue-in-cheek! By the way, article submissions are most welcome! Contact me at [seh@digging-history.com](mailto:seh@digging-history.com).

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*Uncovering history one story at a time,*

*Sharon Hall*

*Researcher, Writer, Graphic Designer, Editor and Publisher  
Digging History Magazine*



# DIGGING HISTORY

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2019

A MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND GENEALOGY



**F.O.K.**  
EVERYTHING HAS A HISTORY

**FREE TO ENSLAVE?**

**HELL FOR RENT**  
A Nation Goes Dry

**Edith, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?**

**THE GREAT MOLASSES FLOOD OF 1919**



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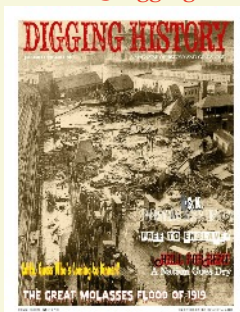
*Researcher, Writer, Graphic Designer, Editor and Publisher  
Digging History Magazine*

# DIGGING HISTORY

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ON THE COVER:  
The Great Molasses Flood

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# but first, a word from the editor...

2019 is here ... Happy New Year to all friends, family and especially subscribers. You are truly a blessing to me!

In case you missed my article last month, entitled “Writing Around Rosie”, I am now publishing bi-monthly as opposed to monthly due to an increase in my responsibilities as the live-in caretaker of aging parents. It was really the best way for me to continue writing without sacrificing quality. In fact, I hope to have time to write more insightful and informative articles. *Digging History Magazine* is now officially a “Magazine of History and Genealogy”.

I so much enjoyed researching and writing this month’s issue. I learned a lot and I hope readers do as well.

1919 was a volatile year in American history. This year the magazine will feature several articles related to a 100-year retrospective of that momentous year. This first issue begins with a sweet, sticky disaster in Boston on January 15, 1919.

Nebraska became the 36<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution the day following the disaster. The nation was going dry!

Teddy Roosevelt had died less than two weeks before. One of the articles covers an incident which occurred in the opening weeks of his unexpected presidency.

February is Black History Month. Lately, I’ve been trying to hone my skills as a genealogist by learning more about how to research African American ancestry for my clients and friends. For this issue, I’ve researched and written articles about free people of color owning slaves, as well as manumission of slaves. Both are of historical as well as genealogical significance, as you will see.

This issue also features a guest article, written by the descendant of a freed slave whose legacy still matters today. See my note at the end of the article, *The Life of James Clemens*, for an explanation of how the article made its way into this issue.

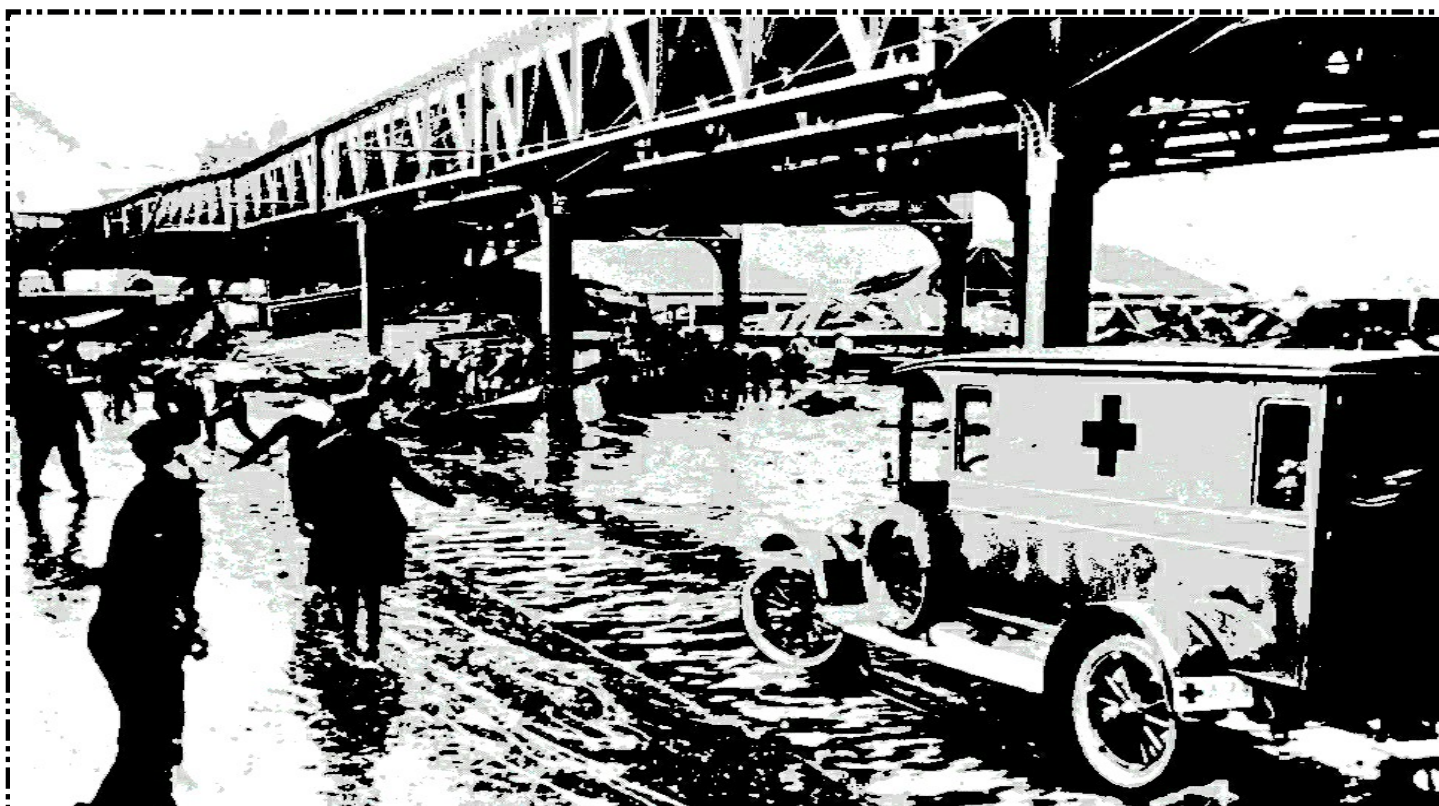
Note: Because quite a bit of this issue’s articles focus on slavery, I want to mention that readers will find a fair amount of vulgar, racially-hateful language. It is not meant to be offensive, but rather to quote verbatim what was said and written in newspapers of eras gone by.

On a brighter note, I’m looking forward to a short respite (just to catch my breath!) before getting on with the business of researching, writing and publishing the next issue (March-April). Stay tuned!

*Blessings,*

*Sharon Hall, Publisher and Editor*





## THE GREAT MOLASSES FLOOD OF 1919

**B**oston, Massachusetts inarguably holds a revered place in American history. The city is home to numerous buildings, locations and historical markers recalling seminal events of our history as a nation. Yet, one plaque commemorating a strange and now mostly forgotten event is the subject of this first article of 2019. Why this story? A century later, in retrospect, it now seems to have portended one of the most volatile years in American history. In an attempt to chronicle the disaster – its causes and consequences – Stephen Puleo, author of *Dark Tide: The Great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919*, posits:

*... the real power of the molasses flood story is what it exemplifies and represents, not just to Boston but to America. Nearly every watershed issue the country was dealing with at the time – immigration, anarchists, World War I, Prohibition, the relationship between labor and Big Business, and between the people and their government – also played a part in the decade-long story of the molasses flood. To understand the flood is to understand America of the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>*

And so, this is the first in a series of 2019 articles recalling the tumultuous year that was 1919 – and how it changed America forever.

### **Boston: January 15, 1919**

A rumble, a hiss .... or was it a boom and a swish? Headlines trumpeting the strange, sticky, deadly disaster initially implied it was an explosion. Lawyers for United States Industrial Alcohol (USIA), parent company of Purity Distilling Company, would incessantly claim it was an explosion set off by “evilily disposed persons”. Explosion or not, the event occurring on January 15, 1919 made sure the word “molasses” remained in Boston newspapers for months

to come – years, actually – as court proceedings would eventually be drawn out into the longest case in Massachusetts history.

One might wonder why over two million gallons of molasses – the sweet, sticky by-product of sugar cane boiled down to extract sugar – was being stored in a tank along the shore of Boston’s North End. There were plenty of uses for molasses:

- Quick Way to Stop a Cough: A 2½ ounce bottle of Pinex (which consisted of chloroform, oil of pine tar, 17% alcohol, among other things) with a little molasses made an effective cough medicine (“tastes pleasant, too – children like it – and it is pure and good”<sup>2</sup>)
- Ginger snaps
- Molasses candy
- Mince meat pie and Black Cake
- Molasses by the gallon or Brer Rabbit Molasses from New Orleans (#2 can for 15 cents).

However, the molasses stored in the giant tank wasn’t for baking or homemade cough remedies. Just three days prior the tank had been topped off, adding six hundred thousand gallons and now it was nearing full capacity (2.3 million gallons and weighing 26 million pounds).

Molasses and Boston shared a long and storied history, harking back to the early days of colonial America when the so-called Triangular Trade routes were plied. With favorable currents and trade winds this particular route was quick, efficient and highly profitable. It also made America a nation of whose economy increasingly depended on slave labor. While slavery was prevalent in the southern and middle colonies, northern colonies, Massachusetts in particular, also benefited.



The entire route would typically take about one year to complete:

1. Leg 1. Begun in England and Europe, taking shipments of cloth, copper, beads, guns and munitions to sell in Africa.
2. Leg 2. European goods were traded for slaves to work on sugar plantations in the Caribbean (which sent sugar and by-products such as molasses to the colonies) or tobacco plantations in the American South.
3. Leg 3. Slaves were traded for sugar, molasses, rum and tobacco which was sent to England where the process repeated.

“Leg 2” became known as the infamous “Middle Passage” where slaves were subjected to sub-human conditions. The route, however, wasn’t always the same, sometimes varying due to political instability or a change in trading partners.

Triangular trade arrived in Boston during the seventeenth century when New England colonies discovered they, rather than England, could be the beneficiaries of goods exchanged for slave labor.

The Boston Tea Party Historical Society explains:

*Ships from Boston carried rum made in New England to Africa to trade for slaves*

*that were then brought to Caribbean plantations, where molasses (liquid sugar) was purchased and brought back to New England to make rum. The New England route was shorter and therefore faster to complete than the traditional European one. . . One of the consequences of this new economic development was a huge growth of rum-making distilleries in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. It also gave a push to other industries, such as shipbuilding to carry goods to longer distances such as Africa.*<sup>3</sup>

This, of course, was precisely why New England, Boston in particular, became flash points of resistance in the years leading up to the American Revolution. John Hancock, whose famous and imposing signature graced the Declaration of Independence in 1776, made his fortune smuggling molasses in and out of Boston.

When USIA made plans to build the massive tank in 1915, it would be the largest facility of its kind in the region at a height of 50 feet, 90 feet in diameter and 240 feet in circumference. The tank was necessary to store molasses arriving from the Caribbean before it was transported by railcars to the company's distillery and manufacturing plant in East Cambridge.

While a certain (small) percentage of the resulting grain alcohol was distilled into rum, over 80 percent of it was used to manufacture explosives like dynamite and smokeless powder. With war raging across the Atlantic, American munitions factories were in sore need of USIA's alcohol to manufacture explosives and munitions as fast as they could, reaping massive profits during those war years. Plus, even though Woodrow Wilson vowed to keep America out of the war, many believed the nation would eventually be drawn into the conflict. All the more reason to keep pumping out alcohol to make munitions – which at some point might benefit America's efforts.

USIA was looking to increase its own profit margins as well. Before building their own tank they had to either store smaller quantities of molasses or lease larger tanks from other entities, which of course decreased profit margins. With the war's beginning in 1914 and slogging on through 1915, USIA needed a tank. It was USIA treasurer Arthur Jell's job to see to it that the project was finished by the end of December 1915.

The project had experienced several delays and missteps. Negotiations with the Boston Elevated Railway Company had dragged on unexpectedly (USIA would be leasing land from the company) until late September. The concrete foundation took one month to complete. Fabricated steel plates didn't arrive until the first week in December.

On December 8 one of the workers fell to his death inside the tank. It was tragic but Jell would lose a half day's production, coupled with overly-cautious workers in the days following. The work pace picked back up just in time for a massive superstorm to roll in on December 13 with 50-mile-an-hour gale winds toppling power lines and trees.

More progress was made between December 15 and Christmas Day (another production day lost), followed by yet another storm on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The race to finish the tank on time was becoming a nail-biter for Jell.

The building contract had stipulated a test for leaks by filling the tank to the top with water upon completion. The pressure test was vitally important, but Jell, a "budget-cruncher", knew the expense of filling the tank with city water would cost the company dearly in both money and time.

Instead he directed that only six inches of water be run into the tank – just above the first angle joint. No leaks occurred and as far as Jell was concerned the tank was safe and ready for storage. On December 31 the tanker arrived with seven hundred thousand



gallons of molasses. Jell had made the deadline, albeit by sidestepping the full pressure test. Three years later it would prove to have been a deadly mistake.

From the outset the tank was guarded by a Boston policeman (USIA paying the expense). The war's detractors were waging a campaign of anarchy across America. Corporations like USIA were particularly vulnerable, given the nature of their business and the use of their products in the war effort. One New Year's Day a night watchman at the Massachusetts State House had discovered a pipe bomb. The following day the New England Manufacturing Company in nearby Woburn was bombed.

Jell was wise to be cautious and approve the added expense of paid police protection. The North End was home to a number of Italian immigrants, some of them anarchists who would find the nearby molasses tank a tempting target. William White served as the on-site supervisor. In February 1916 he hired Isaac Gonzales to oversee tank maintenance and the off-loading and discharge of molasses.

It didn't take long for Isaac to notice the sticky substance seeping between the tank's seams. Despite cold winter temperatures it never froze. He also heard rumblings emanating from the tank as the molasses, despite freezing winter weather, was fermenting or "boiling".

Others working and living nearby noticed the leaks too. Neighborhood children would fill cans with molasses and take them home. Why shouldn't they? Otherwise, the molasses would just go to waste.

Early in June 1916 two boilermakers were hired to caulk the outside of the tank. It was dangerous work and, in the long run, useless. The tank continued to leak. Frank Van Gelder, captain of the ship which periodically brought molasses to Boston,

noticed the leaks as well. He'd never seen any other tanks leak quite like that.

Isaac continued to hear the rumblings within, even as his skepticism about the tank's viability and a creeping paranoia continued to worry him. He complained to Jell, who in turn was becoming increasingly annoyed by the site's general man. Jell was shocked to hear Isaac had been sleeping at night in the pump-pit shack. If he heard something suspicious, Isaac believed he would have time to warn the neighborhood.

Jell didn't want to fire Isaac – workers were becoming more scarce since the United States entered the war and young men were being drafted into service. Isaac continued complaining (and worrying), but neither Jell nor White were about to do anything to jeopardize company profits. In a move seen as the company had finally decided to address some of Isaac's concerns, he arrived one morning in early August 1918 to find a paint crew at work – painting the steel gray tank a rust brown color, essentially a form of camouflage rather than a real solution.

Less than a month later Isaac could take no more, quit his job and joined the Army. He wouldn't return to Boston, and a vastly different North End landscape, until March 1919. With the war's end came a steadily decreasing demand for munitions, and the alcohol supplied by USIA. The company needed a course correction in order to transfer to a peacetime economy.

Liquor production seemed the obvious direction to take the company, but the United States was nearing the threshold for passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Prohibition of alcohol was on the horizon.

Still, the law wouldn't go into effect for another year and there was still time for USIA to wring out what profits it could during the early months of 1919. Another shipment of molasses was due in mid-

January, but not before another round of caulking.

The boilermaker would wash away the rivulets of molasses only to have them reappear within seconds. He persisted, however, and after ten days, and a few days before Christmas, the leaks had ceased.

Anarchists, despite the war's end, were still lurking about and making threats. The tank remained a target, but hiring a security guard would be an extravagant expense given the company's financial position at the time. After all, William White was on-site most of the day and he'd keep an eye out for suspicious characters.

Temperatures hovered in the teens on the day the *Miliero* arrived to off-load six hundred thousand gallons of molasses. Despite cold temperatures the liquid flowed smoothly on January 12. It had taken somewhat less than twenty-four hours to pump with no problems whatsoever. On the 13<sup>th</sup> the ship departed – and the rumbling noises began.

William White heard them, as did firefighters at the nearby station house. The just-delivered warm molasses was beginning to mix with the cold, thick molasses which had been in the tank for weeks. When cold and hot molasses mix a fermentation process begins, producing gas. Now at near capacity, the churning vibrated the tank's walls. 2.3 million gallons of churning molasses, weighing 26 million pounds – a disaster was looming.

The 15<sup>th</sup> was a such a quiet day at the tank that William White decided he would meet his wife Sarah for a lunchtime shopping trip. It was the middle of the week, just after a new shipment. In a few days he would be busy coordinating transfer of molasses into railway cars. He would, of course, be leaving his post (he normally ate at his desk), but he would only be gone an hour. What could go wrong?

Just before noon he grabbed his coat and hurried off to meet his wife. Less than forty-five minutes later, as neighborhood children collected firewood near the tank, IT HAPPENED.

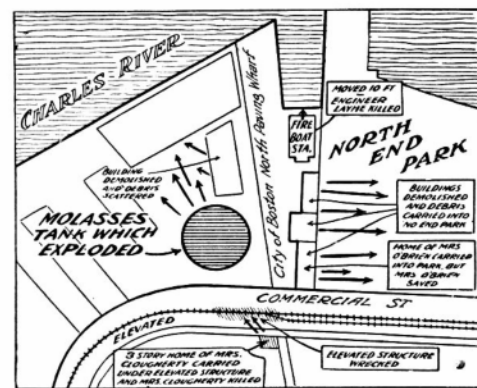
## 15 KILLED, 150 INJURED IN NORTH END EXPLOSION

the *Boston Evening Globe* headline proclaimed that evening (downgraded the following morning to 11 killed and 50 injured). Three people killed had been identified, while several others remained unidentified, “so completely covered with molasses that description is impossible.”<sup>4</sup> Scores of others had been taken to the Relief Hospital.

It hadn't been a blast from some sort of detonation, but rather a low rumbling akin to an earthquake, the newspaper reported. Once the rumbling was heard there was no chance to escape. Rather than collapsing the tank blew apart, hurling huge pieces of tank wall into the air. Nearby buildings crumbled under the weight of the wave of molasses, while one woman's home was carried away into the North End Park (she was saved, however).

*In fact, for radius of some 200 to 250 feet there was a scene of great wreckage, while the shouts and screams of the dying and injured rent the air. For the first quarter of an hour pandemonium reigned.*<sup>5</sup>

### DIAGRAM OF EXPLOSION



The Boston Globe, January 16, 1919, accessed at [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com) on December 30, 2018, 6.



Molasses overflowed street curbs as some estimated the waves to have been as high as 25 feet as it was propelled out of the tank and into the surrounding neighborhood.

Royal Albert Leeman, brakeman for the Boston Elevator Railroad, was in the third car of the 12:35 train headed for the North Station and just coming upon the elevated tracks above Commercial Street. The train had just made the turn when “he saw a black mass bearing down on him, *pushing* toward the elevated track, darkening the sky. As Leeman blinked in disbelief, his ears filled with the scream of tearing steel and, behind him, a thunderclap-like *bang!* Then he felt the overhead trestle buckle and his train start to tip. . .”<sup>6</sup>

The *Globe* reported eyewitness accounts:

*H.H. Palmer, an accountant at the electric freight plant, said that he heard the low rumble caused by the explosion just about 12:30 p.m. He looked out of the window, felt the building which he was in rocking, and at a glance saw that something dreadful had happened. Within a minute huge streams of molasses began to run through the various streets and passageways, filling every section of the area for two blocks. People were impeded from rushing to the aid of the injured or dying, and for the moment there was a hush, followed by such activity as one could scarcely realize, so quickly did every one seem to act in order to render aid.*<sup>7</sup>

Several horses were killed, while others were injured so severely that police had to shoot them.

Bridget Clougherty died in her three-story home which was blown apart from the concussion.

A sailor working on Fiske Wharf was knocked semiconscious, his mouth filled with molasses and his entire body covered with the molasses.

Fireman George Layhe was missing. He would later be found dead.

Others would die at the hospital from their injuries. John M. Seiberlich, a naturalized immigrant from Germany employed as a blacksmith for the city, died as a result of his injuries. His wife had died precisely one year ago that day.

Chemists were already offering opinions as to the cause, most suspecting a buildup of gas. USIA was already in “CYA” mode as its principal attorney, Harry F.R. Dolan, stated the company held “the theory that the explosion was caused by some outside force and not from within the tank.” He also believed molasses couldn’t possibly ferment in winter weather. Dolan insisted “the tank was bigger and stronger than is required by law.” He also stated it had been frequently tested.<sup>8</sup>

Two days later one more body had been discovered and five were still missing and presumed dead. USIA continued to deny an interior explosion. The predominant headline on January 17 trumpeted the news everyone had been anxiously anticipating:

## **VOTE OF 38 STATES MAKES NATION DRY**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> two more states than required had tipped the scales in favor of Prohibition. One year hence the United States would wield the power to permanently shut down all trafficking in liquor. Prohibitionists, teetotalers and anti-saloon organizations had big plans already in the works. See the article following this one, entitled “Hell For Rent: A Nation Goes Dry”.

George Kakavis, a wholesale banana dealer doing business at 538 Commercial Street, was safe, although not particularly anxious about the front of his house being in ruins. He was more worried about a small cigar box buried twelve feet below in the cellar

under collapsed timber and green bananas. The cigar box contained a considerable sum of money – \$4,400. He had thought burying it in the cellar under green bananas was the safest place. Possibly the money was safe, but getting to it would take the efforts of several workmen mucking through the mired cellar.<sup>9</sup>

Speculation and theories aside, it would take several years before either cause or liability would be determined. When all the bodies had been recovered and some had died later as a result of injuries, the death toll stood at 21. Interestingly, the final death attributed to the disaster was that of Bridget Clougherty's mildly retarded son, Stephen, aged 34.

Following the disaster which killed his mother and leveled their home, Stephen has been living with a cousin. Normally quite docile, he began hallucinating and became violent at times. In mid-April 1919 afternoon shadows had enveloped his bedroom and he began screaming in terrified horror, afraid the house was about to crash down upon him, smothering him in molasses. His brother Martin made the difficult choice and had Stephen committed to the Boston State Hospital.

Not long after USIA closed down operations in East Cambridge, Stephen died on December 11, 1919. After being committed to the hospital he had only grown more distraught, losing the will to live. Martin watched helplessly as his brother slipped away:

*Near the end, his brother, Stephen, alternated between quiet sobs and utter silence, a husk of a man, catatonic much of the time. He died without making a sound.*

*His was the twenty-first and final death attributed to the Boston molasses flood.<sup>10</sup>*

By the end of 1919 the outlook across America had grown considerably bleaker.

The nation's economic fortunes had declined following the gangbuster years of a wartime economy. Labor unions had become more militant, anarchists wreaking havoc, racial tensions led to unspeakable acts of violence, and America experienced its first "Red Scare". We'll be exploring that momentous year in the pages of this magazine in a 100-year retrospective study of the year which changed America forever.

## The Proceedings

Throughout 1919 USIA steadfastly claimed the explosion had been caused by sinister "outside forces" – an anarchist had used dynamite to blow up the tank. A grand jury declined to issue indictments against the company, but civil proceedings would begin the following year.

Hugh W. Ogden had been partner in the law firm of Whipple, Sears & Ogden for nearly twenty years before he answered the call of duty and served overseas as judge advocate for the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry "Rainbow" Division. The so-called Rainbow Division has been formed in response to Colonel Douglas MacArthur's vision of mobilizing National Guard units across the nation to fight overseas – "stretch[ing] like a Rainbow from one end of America to the other."<sup>11</sup>



Upon returning home, Ogden was a changed man with a desire to make a difference. He had been a successful corporate attorney, but his outlook changed after seeing the 42<sup>nd</sup> in action. A fresh start was in order – he would strike out on his own. The months he had been away from home had changed America, and not in a good way in his estimation.

Before a civil trial began Superior Court Judge Loranus Eaton Hitchcock asked Ogden to serve as an "auditor" in a sort of "inquest" to hear evidence on potential, possible damages and then issue a report before a civil trial officially convened.



Hitchcock believed the cause of justice would be better served if the case were whittled down, making it less cumbersome for a civil trial jury to sift through evidence and make a fair judgment.

Judge Hitchcock thought six weeks would be sufficient to engage Ogden's services. Although he would receive a nominal fee it would be more akin to *pro bono*. Ogden, eager to serve – to make a difference – agreed to those conditions. These re-trial proceedings were necessitated by the Court's decision to consolidate all legal claims (119) into one monumental claim against USIA. It would be the largest class action suit, to date, filed in Massachusetts.

With the consolidation Ogden well knew it would be somewhat easier for USIA to obtain a favorable ruling. Discredit just one of the plaintiffs' witnesses and it was all over. Otherwise, had the same occurred while examining 119 separate claims the effect would have been minimal.

Of course, plaintiffs would argue the tank was poorly constructed and built hazardously in a bustling commercial and residential neighborhood. USIA would continue to contend some "outside force" had climbed to the top of the tank and dropped a bomb inside causing the explosion. USIA, a large corporation, would have a decided advantage over plaintiffs as they hired witnesses of all stripes: scientists, explosives experts, metallurgists, to name a few.

August 10, 1920 was a day of scheduling and procedural details. The following day plaintiffs' attorney Damon Hall made his opening remarks, carefully laying out the events of January 15, 1919. His remarks were lengthy, sparing no detail, including a comparison of the sheer weight of the molasses stored (13,000 tons) to a locomotive which weighed about 100 tons. The tank had a weight equivalent to 130

hundred-ton locomotives, a staggering number to consider.

Neither were details spared in describing victim suffering. Some had died horrible deaths, while others remained incapacitated in one way or the other as a result of injuries sustained. Hall wasn't assigning blame – yet – but the stage was being set as he called several preliminary witnesses.

USIA attorney Charles Choate wouldn't begin his remarks until September 2. Predictably, his arguments began with a familiar refrain:

*No, Choate argued, the molasses disaster was not due to any accident, or structural defect, and once those causes were eliminated, "your mind is drawn irresistibly to the conclusion that the tank could not have collapsed without the operation of some agency which, in an instant of time, multiplied the pressure on the outside shell hundreds or thousands of times. . . Choate reminded the court that anarchists had placed inflammatory posters along fences near the molasses tank . . . "At the time of the accident no one connected with the defendant was on the premises," Choate argued. "There was a flight of steps that led to the top of the tank which was necessary to permit the gaugers of U.S. Customs to make their measurements and to keep their records... It was an easy thing for a person to go up those stairs, get onto the top of the tank, and drop down an explosive device through one of the four manholes."*<sup>12</sup>

Battle lines had been drawn and strategies laid out. To bolster Choate's assertion of malevolent "outside forces", a bomb had been detonated on Wall Street, likely the work of anarchists. Forty innocent people were killed and more than 200 injured in the blast, which occurred directly across the street from J.P. Morgan's bank. It was a convenient analogy for Choate to make. The

case before Hugh Ogden hinged upon one question – if it was possible for some “outside force” to detonate a bomb in the very heart of New York City’s financial district, couldn’t it be possible much the same thing occurred along Boston’s waterfront on January 15, 1919?

Choate seemed determined to impress Ogden with his retinue of experts, perhaps like W. C. Field’s famous quote: “If you can’t dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bull.” Plaintiffs were asking for more than \$2 million in damages. There was simply no way Choate or USIA would present their case any other way. Of course, all of Defendants’ experts attested to the validity of the company’s claims.

Choate had apparently been able to convince state police chemist Walter Wedger to provide precisely the testimony USIA needed to convince Ogden of the unknown “outside forces”. Choate may have felt rather smug after scoring this particular coup. Wedger was a highly respected expert and usually one of the first experts on scene when an explosion occurred anywhere in the state of Massachusetts.

That euphoria was rather short-lived, however, as Hall sliced and diced through Wedger’s “expert” testimony, getting him to admit he hadn’t found any evidence at the scene which would normally accompany a dynamite blast. Hall used prior testimony (from the grand jury proceedings) against Wedger.

Predictably, Wedger claimed he couldn’t remember exactly what he had said, but Hall reminded him of his supposition that since the temperatures were so cold the molasses may have developed a leathery-like viscosity which trapped gasses from the churning fermentation process. Hall scored yet another important point when he had Wedger admit he hadn’t found any broken

glass near the scene. A massive concussive blast of dynamite would have resulted in broken windows.

Perhaps Choate’s biggest misstep was in calling to the stand a widow named Winnifred McNamara who resided at 548 Commercial Street (across the street). She claimed to have been hanging laundry around 12:30 p.m. and had seen smoke rising, perhaps out of the top of the tank. When Hall cross-examined her as to where the smoke was coming from and what type of pipe, she experienced a cringe-worthy meltdown:

*Three times, McNamara threw her hands into the air, left the witness chair and threatened to do “some damage” if she were compelled to testify further. Nonetheless, she complied immediately when Ogden ordered her to sit back down. Hall continued: “Was it a straight pipe or a crooked pipe” he asked. McNamara replied: “No, sir, I couldn’t say. I didn’t see the pipe, I saw smoke . . . I couldn’t tell you what was on the top of the tank, sir.”<sup>13</sup>*

Hall would later point out that other commercial enterprises (factories and the like) could have produced the billowing smoke. And, really what did smoke emanating from the tank have to do with an explosion. Dynamite would just blow, not smoke and blow. Hall later made light of her testimony and USIA’s decision to rely on her as their only eye witness:

*[Building] “testimony of a woman, who, if not insane, certainly showed evidence in the courtroom of being temperamental . . . as I have read and considered her testimony, I have been driven to think of that other famous woman in Chicago, whose cow is said to have kicked over the lantern. I think, to use the street slang, that those legends both concern plain bull, and not cow.”<sup>14</sup>*



Hall would have his own experts who would testify as to safety concerns and how the tank constantly leaked.

In open court Hall was able to elicit testimony from a clerk of the Boston Building Department which indicated tank wall thickness was actually less than had been presented in building plans filed with the department. Hall had no need of experts when he called “average Joes” to the stand who would testify about the leaks. Their testimony was devastating to USIA’s case.

His case became more convincing after calling Isaac Gonzales and the two men who had patched up the tank with caulking. Hall’s explosive experts were sailors stationed on nearby ships, proclaiming there was no way the explosion had been caused by dynamite. Not with the thunderous roar they had heard.

The proceedings had dragged on longer – much longer – than six weeks. On March 25, 1921 representatives from both sides met at Manhattan’s Belmont Hotel to interview Arthur Jell, who had since been promoted and transferred to the home office. Really all Hall had to do was establish the simple fact that Arthur Jell was a money man – a financial administrator – with absolutely no experience in building or engineering *anything*.

Hall’s line of questioning clearly revealed Jell’s insistence on moving forward without thoroughly testing in order to meet a deadline and save the expense of pumping the tank full of water. The hearings had gone on for seven months at this point. The proceedings would take another two and a half years before Ogden ruled.

July 1921: The liability portion of the hearings was concluded and individual cases for damages would begin. Choate, predictably, argued against such proceedings since it was more than likely to further damage his client’s standing.

Hugh Ogden, however, was determined to hear *all* testimony before making his recommendations. Plaintiffs provided heart-rending testimony as to either their own injuries or the death of loved ones. For two years, until mid-July 1923 when testimony ended. Ogden had listened to the testimony of over 900 witnesses, examining hundreds of exhibits.

After some time off to fulfill a prior commitment, Ogden returned to begin hearing eleven weeks of closing arguments (liability and damages). These would constitute another 4,600 pages of court transcripts he would need to pore over. As Stephen Puleo pointed out in his book, by this time three had been three presidents serving since the molasses disaster – Woodrow Wilson, Warren G. Harding (who had died in office) and Calvin Coolidge. Quite a perspective.

Financial conditions had been steadily improving around the nation after excessive government regulations had been removed. Charles Choate was hoping against all hope that Ogden would rule in favor of his client, since ruling against USIA would be a “step backward” by blaming the disaster on “big business.” In his closing arguments Choate never once mentioned the man truly responsible – Arthur Jell.

In his closing arguments Hall mocked USIA’s defense strategy, its insistence on claiming “outside forces” had caused the explosion:

The plaintiffs’ attorney handled the “anarchist defense” with sarcasm, claiming the anarchist was “an intelligent ghost, I have to admit, because he knew that the January bargain sales were on and, that for the first time in all of history, Mr. White, the [tank’s] caretaker, was to leave at twelve o’clock that day and go up town to meet his wife on a shipping tour, leaving the tank unattended.” Further, Hall said, the lack of

broken glass outside of the windows that were smashed by the molasses wave also meant that, “these ghostly anarchists with their ghostly bombs produced ghostly dynamite explosions what we mortals have never heard of – and that is, the concussion-less explosion.”

Hall said the defense’s claim, argued so ably by Charles Choate, was “a strain upon any man’s credulity.” The real cause of the molasses disaster was the negligence of the company, “inconceivable only in its sordidness and carelessness of human life, but in no other respect – it doesn’t require you to stretch your imagination and to go into the nether world ... it is a claim based on common sense principles.”<sup>15</sup>

The defense had deliberately obfuscated the facts indicating the tank wasn’t constructed properly, nor tested later to ensure its continued structural integrity. *Jell, Jell, Jell.* Hall hammered home the fact that Arthur Jell was no engineering expert, as he had been able to elicit from the financial administrator during the hotel interview.

Damon Hall concluded his closing arguments on September 24, 1923. By the 29<sup>th</sup> Hugh Ogden declared the proceedings concluded after three years and one month and 341 days of testimony. Not surprisingly, it was the longest and most expensive civil suit in Massachusetts history.

Ogden had thousands of pages of testimony and exhibits to review before his opinion was rendered. His opinion was, of course, only advisory, but would carry considerable weight for any future case formally conducted in a court of law. If his opinion favored plaintiffs, USIA would likely seek to settle rather than undertake an expensive trial by jury. Even as rescuers were still recovering bodies on January 16, 1919, the *Boston Globe* had postulated:

*Accident underwriters do not, however, believe that the aggregate claims made on*

*behalf of the dead and injured will be very great, as the persons affected were for the most part of the wage-earning class.*<sup>16</sup>

A considerable amount of time passed. Given the enormity of court records he had to review (and a previously un-scheduled overseas trip), Ogden didn’t render his opinion until April 28, 1925. He had managed to coalesce massive volumes into a fifty-one page report regarding liability.

Given Hall’s aggressive approach in punching massive holes in USIA’s “anarchist defense”, Ogden totally rejected those claims. Just as obvious to Ogden was the fact that the concrete foundation had remained largely intact. A dynamite bomb would have blown it to smithereens along with the rest of the structure. Structural weakness was the obvious and only conclusive reason for the disaster.

He excoriated Arthur Jell in particular for his lack of attention to detail, not to mention how many times he had ignored Isaac Gonzales’ warnings. While Ogden recommended only \$300,000 in damages to be distributed amongst plaintiffs in varying amounts, Hall was disappointed for his clients and insisted on a jury trial.

Predictably, Choate and USIA proffered a private agreement which took only hours to complete. A jury trial would have taken at least six more months at considerable expense. Ultimately, plaintiffs settled for more than twice what Ogden recommended - \$628,000.

The aftermath of an extraordinary disaster had finally been settled more than a decade after Arthur Jell had leased the property and built the tank. Except for a commemorative plaque, the disaster would be largely forgotten.



For more information on sources for this article, see my review of *Dark Tide* on page 25.

# HELL FOR RENT

## A Nation Goes Dry

It finally happened on January 16, 1919. Church bells rang across America as the state of Nebraska voted to seal ratification of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution. The United States, the “first great nation to go dry” was about to enter a new era.

No Prohibitionist was more ecstatic than Evangelist William Ashley “Billy” Sunday.

### **“NOW HELL WILL BE FOR RENT” – BILLY SUNDAY**

By REV W.A. SUNDAY

*Richmond, Va, Jan 16 – The rain of tears is over. The slums will soon be a memory; we will turn our prisons into factories, our jails into storehouses, and corn cribs. Men will walk upright. Now women will smile, children will laugh, Hell will be for rent.*

*If any State fails to ratify the amendment, the star in the flag that represents it should be draped in mourning.*

*Uncle Sam’s knockout blow that sent the Kaiser and his Junker gang of cut-throats and John Barleycorn and all his cohorts to the mat for the count makes me more proud than ever that I am an American and have lived to see this day.<sup>1</sup>*

So sermonized Billy Sunday in newspapers across America as “the last nail was driven into the coffin of King Alcohol.”<sup>2</sup>

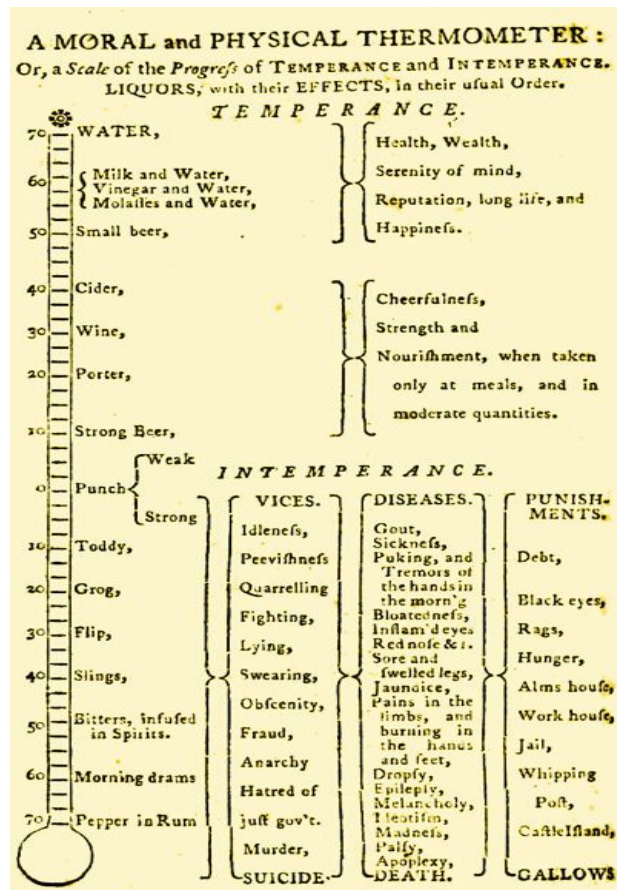
Instead of “heaven on earth”, hell wouldn’t be “for rent” as Sunday proclaimed. Rather, all hell would break loose in the form of bootlegging, moonshine and a level of lawlessness never before seen in America. America’s first political uprising (and the first time military force was ordered to intervene) in 1794, the so-called Whiskey Insurrection, essentially a tax protest, would pale in comparison and consequence.

Alcoholic spirits had been part of the nation’s fabric from the very beginning as Pilgrims brought beer and hard liquor on the Mayflower. The oh so pure Puritans learned how to distill rum. As pointed out in the previous article, rum would become a vital “leg” of the Triangular Trade. General Washington made sure the Continental Army received a daily ration as a morale booster.

Dr. Benjamin Rush may have been one of America’s first advocates for a more temperate society. Not only a preeminent physician and social reformer, Dr. Rush was an ardent patriot who signed the Declaration of Independence.

In a pamphlet published in 1790 Rush examined “the effects of spirituous liquors on the human body”. A diagram of a “Moral and Physical Thermometer” punctuated his concerns by enumerating the various diseases and maladies associated with regular consumption of “spirituous liquors.”





On a scale of temperance to intemperance:

- Partake of water, milk and water, vinegar and water or molasses and water and enjoy health, wealth, serenity of mind, reputation, long life and happiness. A “small beer” wouldn’t hurt once in awhile.
- Cider, wine, porter and an occasional strong beer taken with a meal and in moderation promised cheerfulness, strength and nourishment.

On the down side, consumption of stronger, more “spirituous” liquors like punch, toddy, egg rum, grog, brandy, gin and bitters could lead to:

- Vices: Idleness, gaming, peevishness, quarreling, fighting, horse-racing, lying and swearing, stealing and swindling, perjury, burglary or murder.
- Diseases: Sickness, tremors of the hands in the morning, puking, bloatedness, inflamed eyes, red nose and face, sore and

swelled legs, jaundice, pains in the hands, burning in the hands and feet, dropsy, epilepsy, melancholy, palsy, apoplexy, madness, despair, death.

- Punishments: Debt, black eyes, rags, hunger, alms houses, work houses, jail, whipping post, gallows.<sup>3</sup>

The pamphlet was updated several times during the next twenty years prior to his death in 1813. In a letter written to Jeremy Belknap, a Congregational minister and friend, Rush presciently predicted a time when alcohol was banished from American society:

*In the year 1915 a drunkard I hope will be as infamous in society as a liar or a thief, and the use of spirits as uncommon in families as a drink made of a solution of arsenic.*<sup>4</sup>

America’s first temperance society was organized in Saratoga County, New York in April 1808. The organization’s founding members numbered forty-three, “who bound themselves not to drink ‘rum, gin, whiskey, wine or distilled spirits, except by advice of a physician or in case of actual disease,’ also excepting public dinners, under penalty of 25 cents a drink, provided the compact should not infringe on any religious rites. The society lasted fourteen years, but accomplished little.”<sup>5</sup>

Thereafter, crusading prohibitionists (men and women) formed a number of societies. Boston became home to the American Temperance Society in 1826, followed by the New York State Temperance Society in 1829, which within a year, had enrolled 100,000 members. By 1919, however, New York seems to have lagged behind in anti-saloon fervor – the state not among the 2/3 majority to ratify the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment (but would vote to ratify later in January).

Fraternal societies, similar to Odd Fellows and Masons, sprung up as well. Around the

time of the first wave of crusading, The Sons of Temperance was founded in New York City in 1842, followed by the Independent Order of Good Templars in 1851. The Woman's Crusade led to the formation of what would become the umbrella organization for women crusaders, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.), founded in 1874.

Among the movement's most fervent crusaders:

### Neal Dow

Also known as the "Napoleon of Temperance" or "Father of Prohibition", Neal Dow was raised in a Portland, Maine Quaker home. From a young age, determining alcohol was responsible for many of society's ills, he observed that out of a population of nine thousand there were over two hundred places licensed to sell or serve alcohol. How prevalent was alcohol use in Portland?

*Among the mechanics and laboring men of that day it was much the rule to quit work at eleven in the forenoon and four in the afternoon to drink, as it is now to rest at noon; and in Portland "eleven o'clock" was sounded by the town bell-ringer, to notify all of the hour for drink . . . In every grocer's shop were casks, larger or smaller according to the capital invested, labeled "Rum," "Gin," "Brandy," and in some cases with the names of different varieties of wines. Often in the larger towns, as was the case in Portland, outside the stores on the sidewalks to attract attention to the large business done, were puncheons and casks which had contained these liquors. Many of these places kept rum punch constantly prepared in a tub, sometimes on the sidewalk, just as lemonade is to be seen now on the Fourth of July, or other gala-days. This was a favorite beverage with those who were apprentices at drinking.<sup>6</sup>*

Dow was a founding member of the Maine Temperance Society in 1827, which initially focused only the prohibition of distilled beverages. In 1829 Dow forswore all alcohol drinks and later worked to elect Whig politicians since, generally speaking, their views more closely aligned with his own.

Still, it wasn't always a hard and fast rule – sometimes politicians of different stripes made strange bedfellows. He observed that sometimes "party ties . . . melted in the heat of the strife, and 'liberal' Whigs were to out-democrat Democrats in their support of the Democratic candidate, while 'temperance' Democrats were to out-whig Whigs in their devotion to the Whig nominee."<sup>7</sup>

After plunging into politics himself, Dow got himself in a big pickle not long after he had been re-elected mayor of Portland. In 1850 he was elected president of the Maine Temperance Union and the following year was elected mayor of Portland. Although the state legislature had toyed previously with the idea of statewide prohibition, it had been defeated or vetoed. Not long after taking office as mayor Dow successfully lobbied the legislature to pass such a bill. Personally meeting with the state's new governor sealed the deal.

For such a political novice, the bill's passage was quite a coup. His fame spread across the nation, referred to as the "Napoleon of Temperance":

*With a master spirit he did cut out, in a day, work enough for government – he brought into the battlefield every officer of State; he turned his whole artillery against rum-fortifications, and in less than six months, he has swept every distillery and brew-house, hotel-bar, splendid saloon and vile groggery, clean from the State.<sup>8</sup>*

His strident enforcement did little to ingratiate him to those of either party and he lost the next election. After winning the

office back in 1855, “Napoleon” himself was accused of running afoul of the very law he had championed. The law, strident as it was, did allow for medicinal or industrial use.

A committee had been formed to dispense the alcohol and Dow ordered \$1600 worth of brandy. Since a specific agent hadn’t yet been appointed to oversee the “medicine”, Dow stored it in the cellar of City Hall. Detractors got wind of his actions and demanded that police search the premises for illegal liquor. His name was on the invoice, so technically he was in violation of his own law.

No arrests were made, but on the evening of June 2 Dow’s detractors (anti-prohibitionists) gathered at City Hall, demanding his arrest. He had, after all, been particularly strident in enforcing the law soon after its passage, giving dealers only two weeks with which to dispense of their stock or face punishment. Despite both the mayor and the sheriff reading the riot act to the assembled mob (military forces were also on hand), rioters began throwing stones and “other missiles”, whereupon police and military began returning fire. The Portland Rum Riot, as it came to be called, resulted in one person killed and seven wounded. Napoleon has met his Waterloo as newspapers around the nation decried his actions:

*It appears that Neal Dow, the author of the Maine Law, and present Mayor of Portland, had purchased \$1600 worth of brandy to sell to the town agency, and, like a cute Yankee, turn a penny by the speculation, and at the same time, no doubt, have access to the casks when the state of his health might require such a medicinal stimulant...The liquor was thus held by Dow in direct violation of his own thumb screw enactment, and a complaint was entered by the citizens, and a warrant was issued to seize the liquor. . . Not only*

*are these hipocrites [sic] determined to enjoy a monopoly of the use of liquor, but, beginning with Neal Dow, they are to secure a monopoly of the profits arising from its sale. Persons who attempted to keep or deal in liquors, contrary to the law in Maine, had their property seized and destroyed; Neal Dow, the author of the law, holds a quantity of liquor illegally, and instead of the authorities being called upon to destroy it, they are commanded to shoot down those who would.<sup>9</sup>*

Although acquitted of the charges, Dow declined to run for re-election. Instead, he ran for the state legislature as a Republican in 1858 and won, but his efforts to pass even stricter laws ended in disappointment. Even for fellow prohibitionists, his views were over-the-top. After stepping away from politics his focus turned to abolition of slavery.

After serving in the Union Army he continued to work in the national temperance movement, giving speeches across the nation, Canada and England. To his dying day Neal Dow remained steadfast in his prohibitionist beliefs. He died at the age of ninety-three, and as one biographer pointed out, no other man had worked so diligently during the nineteenth century for the cause.

Of all crusaders, male or female, perhaps none were more famous than Mrs. Carrie Nation, “who in 1900 and 1901 made herself and the cause in Kansas nationally conspicuous by her lone hand raids on saloons with a hatchet for a weapon.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Carrie Nation**

She was a rather stern (and rather statuesque at around six-feet tall), strait-laced woman “with a big cause [who] burst on the American scene like a tornado on the plains of Kansas.”<sup>11</sup> To say she had an aversion to alcohol consumption is putting it rather mildly.



She married Civil War veteran (Union) Charles Gloyd, a young physician who was also an alcoholic. Her parents objected but she married him anyway and left him just before their daughter was born in 1868. He died the following year of alcoholism. His death and the emotional trauma she experienced as the wife of an alcoholic no doubt propelled her toward activism.

After obtaining a teaching degree she married David Nation, a widower nineteen years her senior who was an attorney, minister and newspaper journalist. The Nations purchased land in Brazoria County, Texas, where David intended to practice law. Later, the family moved to Richmond County, site of the so-called “Jaybird-Woodpecker War” (see article on page 52). This “feud” had nothing at all to do with birds; rather, it was an all-out race war which dragged on for years in one form or another.

Forced to leave, the family landed in Medicine Lodge, Kansas where David was a minister and Carrie worked at a hotel. Medicine Lodge would be “temperance-central” as Carrie began her campaign against alcohol.

Self-described as “a bulldog running along at the feet of Jesus, barking at what he doesn’t like”, author Herbert Asbury called her “the most industrious meddler and busybody that even the middle west, hotbed of the bizarre and the fanatical, has ever produced.”<sup>12</sup> Kansas had been one of the first states to constitutionally outlaw alcohol in 1880. However, saloons couldn’t close fast enough to suit Mrs. Nation. Over the years her tactics escalated from serenading saloon patrons with a selection of hymns to hurling rocks to wielding a lead pipe or hatchet.

By 1900 her efforts hadn’t produced much fruit and she felt desperate. On evening she

prostrated herself across the bed and cried out:

*“Oh Lord you see the treason in Kansas, they are going to break the mothers’ hearts, they are going to send the boys to drunkards’ graves and drunkard’s hell. I have exhausted my means, Oh Lord, you have plenty of ways . . . please show me something to do. The next morning I was awakened by a voice which seemed to be speaking in my heart, these words, “GO TO KIOWA,” and my hands were lifted and thrown down and the words “I’LL STAND BY YOU.” The words “Go to Kiowa,” were spoken in a murmuring, musical tone, low and soft, but “I’ll stand by you,” was very clear, positive and emphatic. I was impressed with a great inspiration, the interpretation was very plain, it was this: “Take something in your hands, and throw at those places in Kiowa and smash them.” I was very much relieved and overjoyed and was determined to be, “obedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19).<sup>13</sup>*

Wasting no time she heeded the call to “Go to Kiowa”:

*She went into the saloons armed with brick bats and was ably reinforced after she gained entrance, by billiard balls, cues, etc., etc. Mrs. Nation wasn’t at all particular in choosing her weapons. Anything that was capable of doing the smashing act in reaching distance was called into service . . . Asked for her reason for this bold act, Mrs. Nation said that she deemed it her duty before God and humanity. She says it is impossible to induce the officers of the law to perform their sworn duty and the work remained for her to do. She justifies her action in destroying property, by the Bible.<sup>14</sup>*

Her career as a “saloon smasher” was just beginning. On December 27, 1900 at approximately 9:30 a.m. she walked into the saloon of the Carey Hotel, an establishment

she had visited the night before, demanding its doors be closed. For good measure she had also demanded that an oil painting, entitled “Cleopatra at the Roman Bath” be removed from the wall. The proprietor refused, whereupon she returned the following morning carrying a large bundle. “Not saying a word she drew from the bundle a large stone, which she smashed into the oil painting, breaking the plate glass and damaging the picture.”<sup>15</sup>

She grabbed a pool ball and broke the mirror hanging behind the bar. The few men standing around the saloon at that early hour made a hasty exit. When finished with her “work of destruction” Carrie Nation turned and walked out having never uttered one word to anyone.

She and David parted ways the following year, due in part to her increased notoriety and their disagreements over religious matters. Her sharp tongue had garnered a lawsuit following the Kiowa rampage, brought against her by County Attorney Samuel Griffin for slander. Carrie had accused him of taking \$5 in “hush money” from every saloon in Kiowa to look the other way.<sup>16</sup>



In 1901 she partnered with Nick Chiles, an African American businessman. Ever so ironically, Chiles was a saloon owner and helped her publish a short-lived newspaper, *The Smasher's Mail* (whatever else would she name it?). The newspaper allowed Carrie to freely express her opinions in the thirteen issues which made it to print. Chiles lasted through only three issues, however, as Carrie accused him of changing

her words and withholding advertising revenue.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the issues featured a column publishing the letters of her detractors. Appropriately enough (as far as Carrie was concerned) it was entitled:



These were, for the most part, letters from her detractors who strongly disagreed with her “saloon smashing”:

*Cleveland, O., Feb. 12, 1901*

*Mrs. Carrie Nation,*

*I have taken considerable interest in your crusades and to my belief and knowledge you are insane, for I do not think a real good Christian would act in the manner you do. If I were one of the victims of your crusades I would take you to a lamp post and hang you up by the toes and have an organized gang of gentlemen to riddle you full of holes, as everyone in this city should do. I think every man or woman has a right to make a living. It may be that beer does not agree with you and it may be the cause of your wrong doings and insanity. I think you are an outright criminal. . . So you better reform and be a real good Christian and not a hypocrite as you are. Yours respectfully,*

*A.G.G.D.*

*You may not have the nerve to have this published.*<sup>17</sup>

Some accused of her of being fond of alcohol herself, while others called her a “crank” or worse yet, “a d—n fool”. Some were from men (probably more so) while others were from women. One woman, Bertha from

Hancock County, Tennessee, sermonized at length.

This column was followed by letters from “honest people”, obvious supporters of her tactics:



The Smasher's Mail, 23 Mar 1901, accessed at newspapers.com, 3.

### ***The Hatchet Woman.***

*Dear Mrs. Nation – Yes, some will say she is too aggressive; that she unsexes herself; that she disgraces motherhood. . . Recall, if you will, Florence Nightingale with her little axe chopping down the sentry-guarded doors of hospital supplies on behalf of the wounded and dying in the Crimean war. Did she unsex herself? . . And now a word in behalf of this chosen woman, Mrs. Nation . . . God bless. Aye, He will bless the woman who defies recreant judges, juries, jails and revolvers for her God-given right to protect her home from this monster evil. . . My full faith is that she will outride all legal storms and give a living impetus to the white-ribboned cause, and peace and plenty to the drunkard's wife and suffering children, as has not been seen in the past fifty years. All hail, then to Mrs. Nation. I say lead on, grand soul, the way grows clearer.*

(In other words, “You go girl!”)

One fan was sending her one of his “barrel hatchets” by American express, adding, “May a kind and beneficent Providence nerve and strengthen your arm to wield it in the case of justice, temperance and sobriety.”<sup>18</sup>

She tried again a few years later to publish another newspaper, *The Hatchet*, but nearly ran afoul of federal law when she was

accused of “sending obscene matters through the mails in her temperance publication.” At the time she was lecturing in Texas and federal officers had been directed to arrest her. The most recent issue of *The Hatchet* included a “lecture to young men and boys in which Mrs. Nation used very plain language.”<sup>19</sup>

A candy store owner approached her one day while she was in Topeka. He put in her hands some small pins in the shape of a hatchet and encouraged her to sell them to fund her escapades. How or why he was in possession of the pins in the first place is unclear – perhaps he was a supporter.



Nevertheless, selling the pins and “Home Defender” buttons helped pay her expenses since she was by then a single woman (David had filed for divorce and by November 1901 they were no longer married).

In 1903 she officially changed her name to “Carry A. Nation” – as in “Carry A Nation for Prohibition”. In 1904 she published her autobiography, *The Use and Need for the Life of Carry A. Nation*. From the book's proceeds she built a home in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, naming it “Hatchet Hall.”

She continued to trash saloons far and wide. On the night of December 31, 1905 she interrupted revelers by smashing a Houston, Texas saloon named in her honor. Unless the proprietor pressed charges, police declined to arrest her.<sup>20</sup> Saloons hung signs in their windows:

“All Nations are Welcome Except Carrie”



Her health began declining not long after purchasing “Hatchet Hall”. Carrie died on June 9, 1911 in Leavenworth, Kansas. “She hath done what she could”. She had been thrown in jail 22 times. One Kansas newspaper compared her to Abraham Lincoln:

*What Abraham Lincoln did for the freedom of the slaves of this country, and when he said “this country could not endure permanently half slave and half free – it will become all one thing, or all the other” – so though Carrie Nation, the great apostle of Temperance and Smasher of Saloons – in regard to the Liquor Traffic.<sup>21</sup>*



Crazy as her tactics were, on January 16, 1919 her mission had been fulfilled. Had she lived to see the day, perhaps the headlines would have read: “Carry, A Nation Goes Dry”. Given her propensity for “plain language”, perhaps she would have joined Billy Sunday in proclaiming, “Hell is now for rent”.

Prohibitionists may not have been in possession of the same sort of fire which burned in Carrie Nation’s soul, but they had big plans – perhaps bigger plans than the government of the United States – as they laid out their demands before the National Legislative Conference.

These groups were going after alcohol in any form, including the so-called “patent medicines” (most of these “miracle drugs” routinely contained a good percentage of alcohol). By this time the Prohibition Party, had been around for awhile. Its chairman, Virgil G. Hinshaw, was already planning to conquer the entire world. Plans were already being laid out for similar campaigns in Australia, Scotland and Japan.

As far the government was concerned, now that the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment had been ratified,

a law must be passed to enforce it. One of the first objectives was to define exactly what constituted an “intoxicating beverage”. What would be the penalties for breaking the law?

Andrew Volstead, a Republican member of Congress from Minnesota, led the effort and the bill bore his name. In October 1919 the Volstead Act was passed by both houses of Congress.

Woodrow Wilson, still suffering the effects of a stroke and never a fan of Prohibition, vetoed the bill. Wilson’s rejection “hit Congress like a crack of lightning”<sup>22</sup>, but rallied both houses to action. Within two hours the House marshaled a two-thirds majority vote to override the veto. The Senate did the same the following day.

The “Drys” were no doubt as gleeful, if not more so, than they had been on January 16. Just think what a great place America will be without liquor! Those were the expectations. Reality, as it turned out, was something altogether different.

Legally, the sale and production of liquor had been banned since the summer of 1919, related to a wartime ban on use of grains for producing alcoholic beverages. The law wasn’t strictly enforced, however, but the public knew what was coming in January 1920. Before January 17, 1920 people were seen loading wagons, carts and wheelbarrows with as much liquor as they could hold.

Thus began an era of illegal smuggling of alcohol, bootlegging, and moon-shiners, when the term “bathtub gin” came into usage (tall bottles fit better under the spout of a bathtub).

People who had always been known as decent, law-abiding citizens found ways to skirt the law. The question would be, was America really better off socially and morally?



# Edith, “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?”

Note: This article contains a fair amount of vulgar, racially-hateful language. It is not meant to be offensive, but rather to quote verbatim what was said and written in newspapers of eras gone by.

On January 6, 1919 one of America’s theretofore most charismatic presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, died at his Oyster Bay, New York home. Although failing in health for some time, his death was a shock to his family and friends and the world at large. In ways few others of his generation had lived out their lives, Theodore Roosevelt, variously known as “T.R.” or “The Colonel”, was aptly described as “one of the most vibrant, dominating and picturesque men in American public life for the past quarter of a century.”<sup>1</sup>

Friend and foe alike lauded him as a person of “unqualified courage”, never having “a conviction in his life that he did not have the courage to follow.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Roosevelt’s courage, mannerisms and public persona were embodied in the various catchphrases attributed to him throughout his life:

- Speak softly and carry a big stick.
- My hat’s in the ring.
- I’m for the square deal.
- De-lighted.
- Mollycoddle.
- The strenuous life.
- Bully.
- Pussy footer.
- Muckraker.

Perhaps one of the more courageous and, at the same time, most controversial, things T.R. ever did in his life of public service occurred just weeks after he suddenly

became President of the United States following the shocking assassination of William McKinley at the hands of an anarchist, while attending the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York.

Was it an impulsive act – inviting respected and well-known Negro educator Booker T. Washington to dinner? From the outset of his early political career as a New York State Assemblyman, one of his most noted traits was his “push and energy” (along with his teeth):

*Theodore Roosevelt, of the Twenty-first district, is the admitted leader of the republican forces in the Assembly. He is a young, nervous fellow of much push and energy. He is hardly thirty years old, of slim build and of quick and hasty movements. He has a good set of teeth and clean cut features. He might have great weight in the Assembly but for his impulsiveness. . . A peculiarity of his delivery is that in the rush of his words his teeth suddenly lock together, and the effect is to mar his best efforts.*<sup>3</sup>

It was early in his unexpected presidency when he called upon Washington to meet with him. As Vice President he had been scheduled to travel to Tuskegee to meet with Washington. Instead, he asked when Booker T. might be coming North. Perhaps they could meet.

Their first meeting was a late one (9:00 p.m.) at the White House on September 29, 1901. The children were asleep and only the President and Booker T. were present. Roosevelt had been President for just over

two weeks, having taken office on September 14 immediately following McKinley's death. The nation was still taking measure of the man who would lead the country for the next three years, perhaps beyond.

Southern Democrats, in particular, were concerned as to whom Roosevelt would appoint to various federal offices. Heaven forbid, might he appoint black Republicans? As was the long-standing tradition, most Presidents (really any executive) had filled those positions via a patronage system.

Roosevelt had absolutely no use for the patronage system, however, and Democrats well knew it. His meeting with Booker T. Washington was meant to be carried out in much the same tradition as Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. He wanted Washington to be his trusted advisor.

Southern Democrats needn't have worried quite so much since Roosevelt had no such intentions of nominating large numbers of black Republicans to federal positions in the South. He had a different idea – he would pick the best man for the job regardless of color. No quotas, no payback, no patronage.

One of the first appointments he was considering was a federal judgeship, and hoped to convince former Democratic Governor of Alabama Thomas G. Jones to fill the position.

Might Booker T. speak with him? Of particular interest to Roosevelt was Jones' opposition to lynching, a long-standing, serious issue in the Deep South. After meeting with Washington, Jones accepted the position and served until his death in 1914.

Still, it was unsettling enough for Democrats. The *Boston Post* appeared to be reassuring them the day following that first meeting:

## ROOSEVELT'S LOVE FOR THE SOUTH

### President's Mother Was a Native of Georgia and a "Rebel"<sup>4</sup>

Not nearly as much was made in the press about this meeting, however, as would be made for the one a few weeks hence. Still, newspapers managed to get in a decidedly racial swipe at Washington:

*Mr. Washington came by invitation, as the president wished to consult him in regard to his Southern policy. It was a curious circumstance that the man who had been invited to the national capital for a conference with the President of the United States thought it necessary to go to a cheap "nigger" hotel in an unsavory part of the city. By experience Mr. Washington had learned that the regular hotels of this city would not make him welcome.<sup>5</sup>*

Theodore Roosevelt wanted a lot of things – a bigger navy to ensure the nation would avoid wars like the one he had lately served in and getting the Panama Canal built were among his top priorities. It's doubtful racial controversy was anywhere on his list of "to-do's". Yet, that's exactly where he found himself the following month.

The two men had communicated since their meeting in late September. Clearly, the two had a rapport and Roosevelt intended to continue seeking Washington's advice. Booker T. was once again in Washington on October 16. It wasn't a scheduled meeting, but appears to have been on impulse that Roosevelt directed his secretary to contact Washington to invite him to dinner that evening with not just him, but his entire family. Roosevelt would later relate after doing so he paused wondering if it was the right thing to do – it would also make him feel ashamed he ever had a second thought.

Washington graciously accepted the invitation, despite his own concerns regarding potential consequences. Never



before had a black person – man, woman or child – ever been invited to have dinner with a sitting President and his family (visit, yes, but never to dine). It would be a formal affair and Washington had packed suitable attire for this trip, but overall the meal was uneventful.

After a low-level *Washington Post* reporter happened to glance at the daily summary, jarred that a black man had dined at the White House, the briefest of mentions in his daily column would set off a firestorm across the nation as D.C. telegraph operators tapped out the message:

“Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee, Alabama dined with the President last evening.”

Just one short sentence – innocuous, right? Harmless, more or less, if one was a Northerner, and decidedly toxic for Southerners. Newspapers and their editors clearly delineated between the two factions. For example (please note the following examples are exact quotes, indicative of the state of racial relations at the time; their inclusion is by no means meant to offend):

### ***Roosevelt Dines Booker T. Washington***

*President Roosevelt for the first time in the history of the government entertained a negro at private dinner at the White House. His guest was Booker T. Washington, of the Tuskegee Institute, the great negro educator.*<sup>6</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

### **BOTH POLITICALLY AND SOCIALLY PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT PROPOSES TO CODDLE DESCENDANTS OF HAM**

### **That is What the Family Dinner to Booker Washington Seems to Mean<sup>7</sup>**

Of course, it doesn't take a wild guess to know which was which. The first quote was the only mention on October 17 of the

historic dinner in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, sandwiched between “Girl Somnambulist Impaled on Stake” and “Mme. Wu Brings Three Chinese Belles”, articles characterized as “General News”.

On the other hand, the enormous headlines projected from the front page of *The Atlanta Constitution* left no doubt about how Southerners felt. The accompanying article appeared to moderately scold the President in its opening paragraphs. He really ought not to have been so cozy with Booker T. Washington. After all Southern Democrats had been impressed with his frankness upon informing them he intended to pick the best men for the job regardless of race. Doubts were now being cast in light of the dinner engagement, and it remained to be seen (by Southerners) just what Roosevelt was up to. Could he be trusted?

A handful of Southern congressmen had already openly expressed disappointment in his actions, vowing they “cannot have the same respect for him that they entertained before the Booker Washington dinner incident.”

One “distinguished” (but unnamed) Southern congressman was quoted, rather pointedly, as saying:

*I have no hesitation in saying that I believe I voice the sentiment of every intelligent southern-born white man and white woman when I say that they can never take President Roosevelt or any other public man to their hearts who sits at the table and eats with a ‘nigger.’ I confess, Booker Washington is a smart ‘nigger’ and way above the average, but at the same time he is a ‘nigger’ just the same, and we people of the south have been born and raised so that we cannot accept the negro as our social equal and we cannot respect any man who does. If President Roosevelt expects to build up a respectable white man’s party in the south he can never succeed by inviting ‘niggers’ to the white house for dinner.*<sup>8</sup>

The article continued to malign Roosevelt's actions – how could he!?! Other southern statesmen had been interviewed, declining to be quoted, yet nevertheless expressing their

*surprise and indignation that such an incident should have occurred at this time, when the people of the south were looking to President Roosevelt to curtail, rather than encourage, negro domination in that section of the country.*

*While it is conceded by conservative men from the south that Booker Washington's endorsement of Judge Jones had considerable weight with the president they nevertheless declare that the appointment of all the Joneses, all the Smiths and all the Browns in the south to federal judgeships will not reconcile the white people of the south to the fact that the president of the United States ate at the same table with a 'nigger.'*<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, time had not healed wounds stemming from pre- and post-Civil War eras. Southerners had a rough time of it during Reconstruction, and as the unnamed congressman had admitted: "we people of the south have been born and raised so that we cannot accept the negro as our social equal and we cannot respect any man who does."

Southerners continued to brood, writing hand-wringing, heart-rending opinion columns – in Southern parlance, a good old-fashioned conniption. Their continued disappointment likely had a lot to do with, not just Booker Washington, but T.R. holding steadfastly to his opinions regarding patronage. The man simply could not be cajoled otherwise.

To their even greater consternation, Roosevelt met with Washington again, this time in the company of the president of Yale University as the institution celebrated its bicentennial. The South was so displeased,

so disappointed that it had come to the conclusion: "Republican Party has no sympathy for Southern white man's views on the Negro question."<sup>10</sup>

In North Carolina, Raleigh's *News and Observer* insisted on the President's right to invite whomever he pleased to dine at the White House. The *Henderson Gold Leaf* forcefully disagreed:

*This is simply monstrous. We deny any such right. The White House is and is intended to be, the representative official home of the American people, in its highest, purest sense; not the private home of the person chosen to occupy it. No President has ever invited a negro to "sit down to dinner" with him in his private home, for very obvious reasons, and to do so in the White House in disregard of those reasons is a deliberate insult to the people whose official home it is.*<sup>11</sup>

Dixie snit-fits aside, the controversy was eventually watered down sufficiently and largely forgotten. At some point the whole incident was downgraded to lunch with Roosevelt, not a formal dinner with his family. Predictably, Theodore swept to victory in 1904 without any Deep South electoral votes. Roosevelt never spoke of the incident, although he was no doubt disturbed by the South's vitriolic reaction.

When Booker T. Washington died on November 14, 1915, T.R. was again "Colonel Roosevelt" and he fondly remembered his friend, pointing out that Booker T. "realized that the respect of the southern white man was the greatest asset he possessed in his work. . . His sole purpose was to handle Tuskegee Institute so that it would be an asset to the south and in this he succeeded. . . [He] did justice, loved mercy and walked humbly."<sup>12</sup>

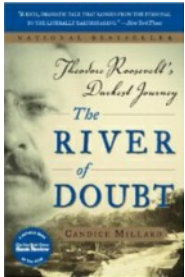


[Race relations, of course, did not improve, even after African Americans ably served during WWI. 1919 was a particularly sad year. More on that topic later this year.]



## May I Recommend . . .

### The River of Doubt: Theodore Roosevelt's Darkest Journey



This book, by Candice Millard, tells more than the story of the harrowing journey Theodore Roosevelt's expedition took down an uncharted Amazonian river in 1914. The book, in many ways, reads more like a biography of Roosevelt's life,

given the amount of background history which is woven throughout the book.

Theodore Roosevelt, born a sickly and asthmatic child, spent his life looking for challenges. The list of his accomplishments is long and impressive, from leading the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American War of 1898 to serving as both Governor of New York and later as President of the United States to his year-long expedition to Africa after leaving office in 1909.

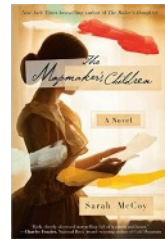
Following a humiliating defeat as a third-party candidate in his quest to challenge Democrat Woodrow Wilson and fellow Republican William Howard Taft, Roosevelt needed something to assuage his wounded pride. After striking a deal with the American Museum of Natural History, plans for an Amazon expedition began to fall into place. Roosevelt would co-lead the expedition with noted Brazilian explorer Colonel Cândido de Silva Rondon. In many ways it would fulfill a life-long dream of Roosevelt's, for he was, above everything else, a naturalist at heart.

This is Millard's debut work, filled with meticulous details, even descriptions of flora, fauna and wildlife (including unfriendly Indians) Roosevelt would have

encountered in the Amazon. Kermit Roosevelt, his second oldest son, accompanied him on the harrowing journey, ostensibly to keep an eye on his father and his well-being, although he himself suffered with bouts of malaria. The Rio da Dúvida, translated River of Doubt, lived up to its name. It would be a journey which Theodore Roosevelt came very close to not surviving.

If you're interested in harrowing tales of adventure and late nineteenth and early twentieth century exploration into unknown and uncharted territory, you will find this book a great read.

### The Mapmaker's Children



I really enjoy books like this one – historical fiction with a goal of writing not only a compelling story but educating the reader about a little-known or long-forgotten historical figure. Such is the case with *The Mapmaker's Children* by Sarah McCoy as she juxtaposes the Civil War era with a strikingly similar modern story set one hundred and fifty years into the future.

The narrative alternates between two women: Sarah Brown and Eden Anderson. Sarah is the daughter of abolitionist John Brown, afflicted with a childhood illness which left her barren. Similarly, Eden is struggling with infertility in the twenty-first century world of hormone injections and the unsuccessful and frustrating attempts to conceive.

As the story unfolds the reader will eventually get a sense as to the direction it's heading as the two women's lives (and their struggles) intersect. Faced with the inability to bear children, both women struggle to find purpose in life. For Sarah, she continues to champion her father's cause by

using her artistic skills to paint maps for slaves traveling along the Underground Railroad.

On the other hand, Eden struggles with her marriage and the failure to conceive. Her husband Jack purchases a puppy for her, and although she regards it initially as insensitivity to her emotional needs, she eventually embraces the pet (named Cricket) and finds a way to move on with her life, and later become an entrepreneur.

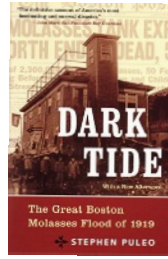
Through a series of clues found in her new home Eden begins to piece together an important historical link to not only the house, but the townspeople who have befriended her. As you might guess, these “clues” are an intricate part of Sarah Brown’s story.

McCoy wrote in her author’s notes about a phrase that kept running through her mind: “a dog is not a child.” After committing the phrase to her journal the first pages of the book outlining the modern setting of New Charlestown, West Virginia began to take shape. A few months later the name John Brown appeared in her notes and she began to research, stumbling across the name of his daughter Sarah.

Eden is a character of fiction while Sarah is a fictionalized historical character, yet Ms. McCoy managed to make both of them come alive. You’ll find yourself cheering both of them on to use their unique gifts and talents and find purpose in life.

The book is meticulously researched, including elements of the country’s mid-nineteenth century struggles with the slavery issue, John Brown’s cause, the Underground Railroad and its use of maps and children’s dolls to smuggle them across enemy lines, and much more. A compelling, well-written story for anyone interested in the Civil War era and the Underground Railroad.

## Dark Tide: The Great Molasses Flood of 1919



January 15, 2019 is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a now mostly obscure event which occurred just weeks following the end of World War I.

The world was still an unsettled place even with peace talks set to begin soon. Anarchists were still active and a beloved ex-President, Theodore Roosevelt had just died unexpectedly less than two weeks before.

Over the years more has been written about this event in the form of children’s books, but never a serious study of not only the disastrous event, but how it introduced 1919, a year of extremes. Author Stephen Puleo was compelled to write this book with that focus in mind.

His careful and well-documented research utilized historical newspaper archives, as well as voluminous court transcripts stemming from the disaster’s aftermath. The book is well written with background on both the events leading up to and following the great flood of molasses. The event certainly deserves more than just a Boston historical marker. The book, based on the premise the disaster was an omen of sorts for the volatile year ahead, is thought-provoking and well-written. Definitely worth a read.



Here are some books I’m reading, or plan to read – you might be interested in checking them out as well:

*American Messiahs: False Prophets of a Damned Nation*

*Mr. President: How Long Must We Wait?*

*Blood and Ivy*

*Asperger’s Children*





# ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL FAMILY RESEARCHER

## For What They May Have Been Worth

Beginning in 1860 census takers (and the government) got a little more nosy – they wanted to know how much your ancestors were worth. In 1860 Column 8 recorded real estate value (farm land, city lot, etc.) and personal estate value (Column 9). One's personal estate would include a number of things: cash on hand, furniture, household goods, tools, farm animals, and slaves. Likewise, in 1870 Columns 8 and 9 recorded the same information.

If your ancestor was a slaveholder, be sure and compare the numbers. This issue includes a story about John Fletcher Pipkin (page 53), a Methodist minister who ran a saw mill on an island in southeast Texas and apparently possessed a number of slaves:

Census Year	Real Estate Value	Personal Estate Value
1860	N/R	30000
1870	500	2650

The most likely reason for this precipitous drop in personal estate value was due to the emancipation of all slaves following the Civil War. You might wonder how do those amounts compare to 21<sup>st</sup> century monetary equivalency? As the saying goes, there's "an app for that" – or rather, a web site: <https://www.measuringworth.com>.

MeasuringWorth.com was founded with these principles:

*There are two missions of this site. The first is to make available to the public the highest quality and most reliable historical data on important economic aggregates, with particular emphasis on nominal (current-price) measures, as well as real (constant-price) measures. The data presented here on the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, have been created using the highest standards of the fields of economics and history, and they were rigorously refereed by the most distinguished researchers in the fields. The second is to provide carefully designed comparators (using these data) that explain the many issues involved in making value comparisons over time.*

### THE COMPARATORS

Annualized Growth Rates  
Relative Values - US \$  
Relative Values - UK £  
Relative Values - Australia £ and \$  
Relative Values - Spain  
Conversion (\$ and £)  
Purchasing Power - US \$  
Purchasing Power - UK £  
Savings Growth - US \$  
401k & IRA Growth - US  
Inflation Rates  
Stock Growth Rates  
(DJIA, SP500 & NASDAQ)

On the left side of the page you will find a number of categories, many of which most "regular people" might be hard pressed to comprehend. For a basic comparison of American ancestors, try selecting "Relative Values - US \$" to advance to page comparing back as far as 1774 to the present (currently utilizing 2014 data).

Enter data as a number without a \$ sign or commas.

Why not current year?

Initial Year:   
Initial Amount: \$   
Desired Year:

Calculate

☐ See the results in a table format.

Enter data as a number without a \$ sign or commas.

Why not current year?

Initial Year:

Initial Amount: \$

Desired Year:

☒ See the results in a table format.

Fill in the value(s) from the 1860 census to compare 1860 to 2018, then press “Calculate” to view various comparisons:

Data for consumer bundle only starts in 1900.

Current data is only available till 2017. In 2017, the relative **price** worth of \$30,000.00 from 1860 is:

\$912,000.00 using the **Consumer Price Index**

\$688,000.00 using the **GDP deflator**

Current data is only available till 2017. In 2017, the relative **amount consumers spend** worth of \$30,000.00 from 1860 is:

Current data is only available till 2017. In 2017, the relative **wage or income** worth of \$30,000.00 from 1860 is:

\$5,890,000.00 using the **unskilled wage**

\$12,600,000.00 using the **Production Worker Compensation**

\$12,900,000.00 using the **nominal GDP per capita**

Current data is only available till 2017. In 2017, the relative **output** worth of \$30,000.00 from 1860 is:

\$133,000,000.00 using the **relative share of GDP**

Using today’s monetary equivalency, John Fletcher Pipkin was LOADED. Ten years later, not so much:

Data for consumer bundle only starts in 1900.

Current data is only available till 2017. In 2017, the relative **price** worth of \$2,650.00 from 1870 is:

\$51,300.00 using the **Consumer Price Index**

\$46,600.00 using the **GDP deflator**

Current data is only available till 2017. In 2017, the relative **amount consumers spend** worth of \$2,650.00 from 1870 is:

Current data is only available till 2017. In 2017, the relative **wage or income** worth of \$2,650.00 from 1870 is:

\$367,000.00 using the **unskilled wage**

\$760,000.00 using the **Production Worker Compensation**

\$809,000.00 using the **nominal GDP per capita**

Current data is only available till 2017. In 2017, the relative **output** worth of \$2,650.00 from 1870 is:

\$6,610,000.00 using the **relative share of GDP**

Scroll down the screen and you’ll find an automatically-generated citation:

Citation

Samuel H. Williamson, “Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to present,” *MeasuringWorth*, 2018.

URL: [www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/](http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/)

This Legacy Tree blog article explains this tool:

<https://www.legacytree.com/blog/what-was-it-worth-calculating-the-historic-value-of-money>

## Frontier Times Magazine

From October 1923 to December 1954 J. Marvin Hunter published *Frontier Times Magazine*, “during a time when early Texas settlers, pioneers, cattlemen and observers of the events of Texas history were still alive and able to tell their stories.” This, of course, makes the archives a potentially valuable resource – a gold mine, really – for genealogists researching Texas ancestors.

Writing a western novel? Writers of history and historical fiction will no doubt find it a valuable resource as well. For instance, ever hear of Dan Arnold and Lapoleon Lemmons (yes that was his name!)? These young men had run away to seek adventure on the frontier – instead, they met misfortune in 1871. A true tale of life on the Texas frontier dealing with Indian depredations.

In 1927 Mary Elizabeth (Vaughn) Winn (identified as Mrs. R.A. Winn) wrote an article for *Frontier Times Magazine*. She was a faithful subscriber who especially enjoyed reading the stories of pioneer hardship and Indian fights and thought the story of her “bridal tour” in the 1860s might be of interest to readers.

Mary’s descendants will find the tale of how her husband-to-be had already courted her and she accepted his proposal of marriage. He had departed to tend to some business elsewhere in the state before settling down, but obtaining a license upon his return proved to be quite a challenge.

Part of the problem was finding a place to get the license. You see, it was during the volatile Reconstruction era following the Civil War and civic affairs were in a bit of disarray. A stop at one county seat (normally, they would have been able to get a license at any county seat in the state) found the county clerk’s office vacated, he having been thrown out of office of late.

So, it was on to the next county seat. On the way, they heard gunfire and feared an Indian attack. Thank goodness it was just her future brother-in-law shooting at some squirrels!

The story is told in an engaging manner and Mary provided some interesting details of not only the marriage license dilemma, but her life with Rufus and where they had resided at various times.

Interestingly, she ended the story lamenting her age at the time:

*I will soon be seventy-five years old, according to nature. I am drawing near the end of my journey. Thank God, I am not troubled over the fact but rather rejoice knowing there is a home prepared for me in a brighter world than this.*

Well, Mary wasn't going anywhere any too soon as it turned out. Her bones may have been weary in 1927, but she lived many more years. On July 29, 1957 she died in Austin at the age of 104.

You may purchase a digital download of the magazines available. You may also be able to purchase selected first editions or reprints of the magazine.

Each magazine includes snippets of articles, plus a list of people or events mentioned in the magazine, so be sure and use the "Search" feature at the top of every page. If you're looking for a person's full name, be sure and use quotes to get a better search result.

Happy searching!

<https://www.frontiertimesmagazine.com/>

## African American Research Resources

Anyone who has ever watched the popular PBS program, *Finding Your Roots*, hosted by Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., knows how challenging African American ancestry can be to research.

February is African American History Month and we are featuring some articles in this issue highlighting this vital part of our nation's history. For good or bad, it is all part of the fabric of our nation and always important to remember.

Newspaper collections are great resources, while others are "hidden" treasures you might stumble across in places like [Google Books](#) or [The Internet Archive](#):

- African American Newspaper Archives. [Genealogy Bank](#) (GB) is perhaps the best resource, even though you will find any number of these historic newspapers at other sites like [Newspapers.com](#). To search specifically in the GB collection, scroll to the bottom of the home page and click the "African-American Newspapers" link. There you may search generally or by state.
- [Newspapers.com](#) by Topic. If you are looking for references to specific events, scroll to the bottom of the home page and click the "Topics in Newspapers" link. On the next page, select "Black History". For instance, advance to the second page and select "Underground Railroad". You will see a number of articles clipped by various users, but also a link in the upper right-hand corner of the page to "View more articles about Underground Railroad". This results in thousands of references (happy researching!).
- *The Red Book of Houston*. This is an example of a real "gem-of-a-resource" found at [The Internet Archive](#). The book was published in 1915 "simply with a desire to give true inspiration through the



medium of a permanent record of achievement to those of the race who appreciate its value and with the knowledge that every man is entitled to due credit, no matter the race, the state or condition.” The book, subtitled “a compendium of social, professional, religious, educational and industrial interests of Houston’s colored population”, contains abbreviated bios of prominent Afro-American citizens of Houston who had notably succeeded in a number of fields. Also included are fraternal organizations, schools and libraries, to name a few. An example of a short bio which names a spouse who was not a native Houstonian, but contains some brief, but vital, information about her life:

*Robinson, Edward W. – 1881; Railway Postal Clerk, 1802 Dowling Street; phone Hadley 3803. Graduate of Prairie View Normal 1904. Member of Antioch Baptist Church, K.P. In railway postal service for nine years, class 4. Married Miss Gertrude Jeter in 1906, who was born at Beaumont in 1887 and graduate of public high school. Owns nice two-story residence. Native Orange, Texas. Came to Houston in 1909.*

If researching African American ancestry don’t give up – keep digging since all kinds of records (and books, journals and so on) are being digitized daily and uploaded to these archival repositories.

Even if you went there once and didn’t find anything, try again (that goes for any kind of research involving digital materials).



## A Bold and Enduring Experiment

by Sharon Hall

*Amid the corn and soybean fields of western Ohio lies a progressive crossroads where black and white isn’t black and white, where the concept of race has been turned upside down, where interracial marriages have been the norm for nearly two centuries. The heavy boots of Jim Crow have never walked here.*

Journalist Kevin Williams penned those words in 2015 in an article for *The Orange County Register* (California), calling the settlement founded by James Clemens a “bold experiment in integration.” Indeed it was, and an especially important example of racial harmony which is much needed in our world today. One wonders if James Clemens, he of tri-racial ancestry (Negro, Caucasian and Native American), had any inkling of the far-reaching consequences of his “bold experiment”.

Even today the descendants of James and Sophia Clemens are working to preserve this vital part of their heritage. In recent years their eighth great grandson, Connor Keiser, has been doing just that. He vows, “as long as I have anything to do with it, Longtown won’t die.”

Connor fondly recalls (as do so many other descendants) a “filled with memories of ‘cousins of all colors’ playing in the pastures at the family farm.”

This part of their story intrigued me the most – how a tri-racial community has managed to live in harmony for what is now two centuries.

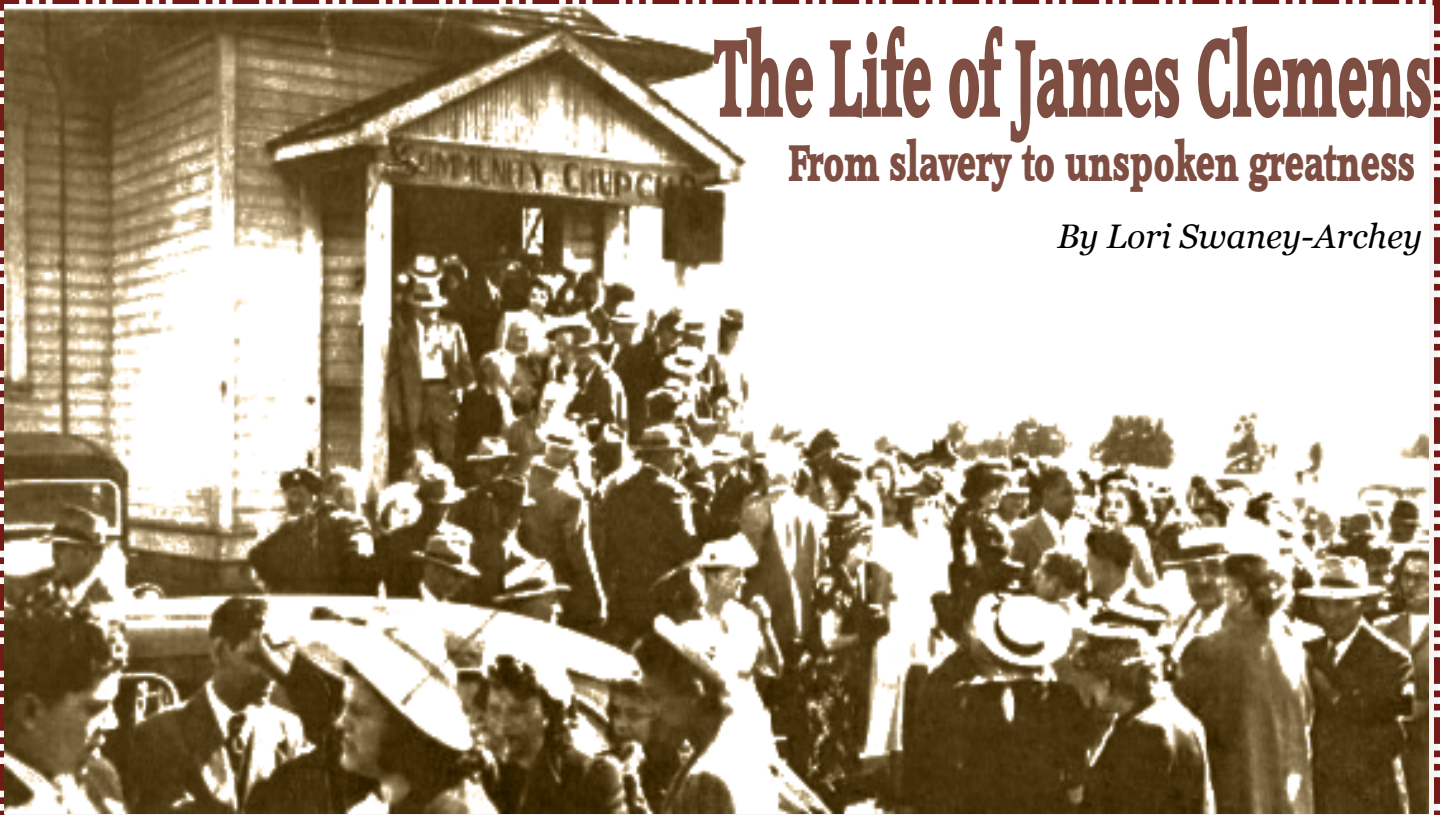
Please turn the page.



# The Life of James Clemens

From slavery to unspoken greatness

By Lori Swaney-Archey



A male child was born to Gasper Clements and his mother's dower slave in October of 1780. The child's mother is said to have been half Native American and half Negro. The boy was named James.

Gasper's father, Christian Clements, was disgraced by his eldest son's affair and took rapid measures to keep him and the mother apart. "Jenny" and James would live with Christian and wife, Catharine, until Christian died. Afterward, James would live with Gasper. "Jenny" would later live with Gasper's younger brother, John.

Small pox hit the Shenandoah Valley hard in 1782. Gasper took James to be inoculated, unheard of for a mixed race child. By doing so, Gasper further enraged his father for failing to report to duty on time in the American Revolution. Christian Clements immediately willed the bulk of his plantation to his youngest son, while Gasper was given a smaller, adjacent parcel of land.

While living with Gasper, James had the freedom to move about. By 1805, he was squatting on land in the Northwest Territory. He dug wells to support himself. It is thought that he made the journey with the Sellers boys of the same Augusta neighborhood.

James had married Sophia Sellers, the beautiful, mulatto daughter of Adam Sellers. They started their family before 1805 in Virginia. Sophia and the children resided with Adam while James lived at Gasper's until he died in 1813. In his Last Will and Testament, Gasper acknowledged James as his son.

*Now I give and bequeath to my son James Clements my whole lot of Smith tools as many be found at my death to the sole benefit of him his heirs forever — Now it is my*

He was also referred to as “my negro man, James” and emancipated.

*the sole benefit of him his house forever — It is my  
direction for my negro man James to have his freedom  
at my death for his extraordinary loyalty and honesty to me  
while I was living, if by accident he should be taken by*

Within a few years, James would relocate to Ohio, obtain land grants and be emancipated a second time by Adam Sellers in Warren County.

The trek to Ohio was chronicled by Adam Sellers’ grandson and namesake, Dr. Adam Sellers in the “Genealogy of the Sellers Family”, Lebanon, Ohio, June 28, 1887:

*My father immigrated, with other families, soon after Wayne’s treaty with the Indians, say 1798, by way of the Monongahela and Ohio rivers, from Brownsville, Penn., known as Red Stone. Their horses were brought through from that point along Indian trails. Their wagons and other effects were floated down in family boats, to Columbia, then known as Round Bottom, five miles above Cincinnati, then called Losantiville. My father remained there one or two years and raised some grain. He was followed about two years after by your grandfather Jacob Sellers, and made the first purchase of land from Sims in that valley. By examining the deed that has been transcribed by order of the Commissioners, from Hamilton County records to Warren County records, my father’s deed is dated January 4, 1799. Their names in the deeds are written “Celler”, and in one of two places, “Sellers”. I recollect when it was very uniformly spelled with a “Z”.*

About 70 years ago, 1817, my grandfather, then living on the Shenandoe [sic] River, Rockingham County, VA. (where all of that branch of the family then lived) being a widower about 72 years of age, and having a desire to free his slaves, wrote to my

brother, William Sellers, to come to Virginia and super-intended the disposal of his property, and pilot them to this wilderness, as it was then considered by them. The trip was made in two four-horse wagons in about thirty days, camping out every night. They stopped one week at our house, one mile north of Lebanon.

*At that time he purchased 206 acres of land of George Harnsbarger, where the old road crossed Clear Creek, on the west side of that road. The creek running from East to West through the center of it, and the road from Ridgeville to Springboro running along the north bank. The house was endwise north of the road. His only daughter, Christine Null, lived one or two miles below. He freed all his slaves, (Negroes) about 16 in number, I think, and purchased land for that in Darke County, Ohio. He had to give security under the then laws of Ohio, for their support. Some of them became distinguished for wealth and morals. One of the sons graduated in one of our colleges and became a preacher in the African Methodist Church. He called to see me some 25 years ago.*

Grandfather Adam Sellers was born in 1742 and died in 1821, 79 years of age. I find a final record of the Administrators’ Wm. Sellers and Christine Null, date June 2, 1823, and amounting to between ten and eleven thousand dollars. I was absent at that time in Virginia with power of attorney from my mother and the heirs of your grandfather by his first wife, looking after their interesting in Grandfather Runkels’ estate.

This imperfectly written sketch is written in great haste, and is about the best I can do at the age of 85. You may find some items of interest to someone, in it.

Yours truly,

A. Sellers<sup>1</sup>



James  
State of Ohio, Warren County  
Page: 15 (bottom) & 16 (all)

Be it remembered that on the twenty-sixth day of May in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred & seventeen, James a black man caused to be filed in the Clerk's office of the Court of Common Pleas in the County of Warren aforesaid the following certificate of his freedom, to wit

Virginia, Augusta County Court Clerks Office to wit  
Extract from the last will and testament of Gasper Clements deceased bearing date the fifth day of May 1813.

Item it is my direction for my negro man James to have his freedom at my death for his industry care and honesty to me while I was living. If by accident the sd [said] James by age or infirmity should come to be a charge I allow him to be supported out of my estate.

I Erasmus Stribling Clerk of the County Court of Augusta do hereby certify that the above extract contains a true copy of an item contained in the last will & Testament of Gasper Clements deceased which will has been duly proven & admitted to record in the Court aforesaid the 27<sup>th</sup> day of February 1815.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand & caused the seal of my office to be affixed this 21<sup>st</sup> day of February 1817 & in the 41<sup>st</sup> year of the Common Wealth.  
[Signed] Erasmus Stribling

I Alexander St. Clair presiding Justice of the County Court of Augusta do hereby certify that the foregoing attestation of Erasmus Stribling Clerk of the said, is in due form & intitled to full faith and credit throughout the United States. Given Under my hand & seal the 21<sup>st</sup> day of February 1817  
[Signed] Alexn St. Claire

CHAMBERS, James  
Page: 17 (top)

Be it remembered that on the fifteenth day of June in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred & eighteen, James Chambers caused to be filed in the Clerks office of the Court of Common within the County of Warren in the State of Ohio the following certificate of freedom to be recorded to wit.

Corporation Fredy Set Martha Chambers the mother of May Chambers the sister of James Chambers personally appeared before me one of the magistrates in and for said corporation and made oath on the Holy Evangelist of Almighty God that the said James Chambers was born the 8<sup>th</sup> day of December Seventeen hundred and ninety five which agrees with the register of the family. Further I do certify that the said family of the Chambers are of free family of Indian decent. Given under my hand this 26<sup>th</sup> day of February  
[Signed] Geo W B Spoons

*Sent May 4<sup>th</sup> 1821 Ex. d. 185*

**JAMES MONROE,** President of the United States of America,  
TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, GREETING:

Know ye, That James Clements (a man of color)  
of Warren county,

having deposited in the General Land Office, a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Cincinnati whereby it appears that full payment has been made for the South West quarter of section five in town five delivery of range one (East of the meridian line, down from the mouth of the Great Miami river, containing one hundred & fifty three acres & fifty hundredths of an acre) of the Lands directed to be sold at Cincinnati by the Act of Congress, entitled "An act providing for the sale of the lands of the United States in the territory north-west of the Ohio, and above the mouth of Kentucky river," and of the acts amendatory of the same: There is granted, by the United States, unto the said James Clements the quarter lot or section of Land above described: Do have and to hold the said quarter lot or section of Land, with the Appurtenances, unto the said James Clements his heirs and assigns forever.

Adam Sellers deposited James and family, along with others in the fertile lands of western Darke County and returned to Warren County. The transplants began creating their own safe haven. Land had to be cleared and homes were erected.

James gave land for a burying ground, Clemens Cemetery and for the Wesleyan Church. The members of the community would help each other plant and harvest crops, build houses, barns, schools and churches. A gravel pit and saw mill were also established.

During this time, Quakers from North Carolina arrived in neighboring Indiana; most notably, Levi Coffin. Members from James' Greenville Settlement would form an alliance with Coffin and take runaway slaves north to Canada or shelter them until they made the journey.

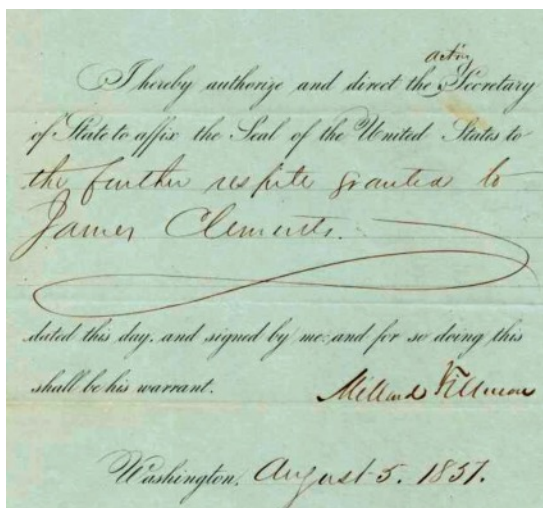
A tunnel was dug from James' cellar to the barn to aid any fugitives from capture or to safely load them into a false bottom wagon. The house still stands, although the tunnel collapsed.

Area residents were tight-lipped regarding their involvement in these activities. Not a soul spoke of it.



James also donated land for the erection of the Union Literary Institute in Randolph County, Indiana, a mile west of the farmstead. This was a school that educated children of all races in exchange for manual labor. There was also a dormitory keeping males and females separated. Senator Hiram Revels and noted runaway fugitive, James Baker, were students.

Before the Civil War, Levi Coffin stopped his work in the local Underground Railroad. The Compromise of 1850 ushered in the Civil War. Sons and grandsons wrote letters to politicians in Columbus asking for assistance in matters of an urgent nature. Less than a year later, a respite from President Millard Fillmore was received!



The attention was now set on helping the Union win the war. Men would enlist in the U.S. Colored Troops, pick up arms and fight for the cause. Some served with the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup>. It was “for God and Country”.

James, now elderly, stayed close to home, tending what he could due to failing health. His sister-in-law, Dorothy, was now living with James and Sophia. The 1870 census lists her as “helping sister”.

Male relatives would help with farm labor and female relatives would help Sophia and Dorothy with heavy lifting and tedious tasks.

James died in 1870. A Mortality Schedule has yet to be located and the location of his grave is not known. The same applies for his wife, Sophia. Though founders of the Clemens Cemetery, they are not interred there. Ground Penetrating Radar has also been used by Ball State University on the farmstead.

His demise was as humble as his beginning, but he achieved much more than the average man. He overcame slavery, educated his children, owned hundreds of acres of land, donated land, helped his fellow man, set examples and was a pillar of the community.

His numerous descendants have long ago moved away but do their best to honor him. The farm remains, as does the Wesleyan Church and former School #4, referred to as the Center.

W.E.B. DuBois visited the quiet farming community and wrote an article entitled “Long in Darke” for *The Colored American Magazine* in 1909.

The Garst Museum in Greenville has a small display, presentations are given by a grandson to area residents and historians, and newspaper articles have been published by *The Washington Post*!

Ball State University filmed an Emmy nominated documentary, “Remembering Freedom: James Clemens and the Longtown Settlement”, inspiring a Facebook page by the same name.

The settlement James helped create is depicted in an image of his farm which is permanently housed in an exhibit at The Smithsonian National Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

**Editor's Note** Thank you, Lori, for sharing the story of your ancestor, James Clemens. What a special heritage you and your family have as descendants!

*Lori and I connected in a unique way through another descendant, Laurie Morgan. Laurie had stopped by the Digging History blog and read a “Surname Saturday” article about the surname Scattergood (Quakers). Long story, short – Laurie mentioned James and Sophia Clemens were Quakers and I was intrigued.*

*Laurie contacted Lori who wrote and submitted this article. You just never know when and where an interesting piece of history will pop up!*

*Have a story you'd like to share? Contact me at [seh@digging-history.com](mailto:seh@digging-history.com).*



# **Manumission:** Free at Last (or perhaps not)

By Sharon Hall

If you've researched Southern slaveholding ancestors, you may be aware of the term "manumission". If not, it simply means the act of freeing one's slave(s). As such, manumission differed from emancipation set forth by government proclamation, Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation being a prime example.

Manumission was not a new concept to American slave owners. It's almost as old as slavery itself. Aristotle thought slavery was quite natural and even necessary. And while there were varying degrees of slavery, all forms limited the Greek slave in one way or another, albeit with a modicum of certain rights extended just for being a human being.

Romulus, the founder and first king of ancient Rome, is thought to have begun the practice in that ancient society by granting parents the right to sell their own children into slavery. Romans would go on to enslave thousands through conquest.

As opposed to Greek slavery, as long as someone was a Roman slave they possessed no rights – none. But, following a slave's manumission full citizenship rights were extended, including the right to vote.

American slavery was, however, racially-based and transcendent of those ancient traditions. For the American slave owner it was a matter of economics, as set forth in actuarial tables – a sort of justification for at least gradual manumission of slaves – published in *The Pennsylvania Packet* on January 17, 1774. A "neighboring province" had been recently considered justification for gradual manumission in the last legislative session.<sup>1</sup>

Virginia passed a law in 1782 following the Revolutionary War allowing slave owners to manumit at will without government approval. In part, perhaps this new law propelled Robert Carter III, one of the state's wealthiest men, to begin freeing his slaves.

Some have surmised Carter underwent a religious conversion. By signing a Deed of Gift on August 1, 1791 and presenting the same in Northumberland District Court on September 5, he set in motion the gradual manumission of his considerable slave holdings. At the time he enumerated – each one by name and age – over 450 slaves. It is an extraordinary document and thought to have been responsible for the greatest number of slaves freed by one man in all of American history.

He began by providing a table of locations (spread over several counties) where his slaves lived, referencing each named slave with a specific location. He seems to have been intent on crossing all T's and dotting all I's.

Normany Hall denoted thus	I
Aries denoted thus	II
Old Ordinary deno <sup>d</sup> thus	III
Taurus denoted thus	IV
Gemini denoted thus	V
Forrest Quarter den <sup>d</sup> thus	VI
Coles Point denoted thus	VII
Cancer in Richm <sup>d</sup> County d <sup>d</sup> thus	VIII
Aquarius denoted thus	IX

N <sup>o</sup> Names of Slaves	Years old	Place of abode
Frederick son Lenny	8.	same
Isaac son Kirziah	8.	X I
Ralph son of Pate	8.	X II
Burkley son of	8.	XVI
Burkley son of great Judith	9.	I
John son of Phillis	9.	same
Anthony son Alice	9.	II
Solomon son Pate	9.	III
James son Giller	9.	VI
Phinnus son Mary	9.	VII
Jesse son Burckley	9.	VIII
Sam Lewis son Judith	9.	X
Joe son of Kate	10.	III

By the time manumission was completed some three decades later, somewhere between 500 and 600 were thought to have been freed, albeit not without a bit of legal wrangling. In 1793 Robert Carter removed to Baltimore and left the measured and deliberate process in the hands of Baptist minister Benjamin Dawson. When Carter died in 1804 his heirs sued Dawson in order to halt manumission, but lost in an 1808 ruling in the Virginia Court of Appeals.<sup>2</sup>

Quaker John Pleasants III had already expressed his own wishes regarding manumission of all his slaves in a will which pre-dated the 1782 law. Once it became legal his son Robert began carrying out his father's wishes. Again, as with Carter's heirs, John Pleasants' family took issue and sued. *Pleasants v. Pleasants* (1799) was ruled in favor of emancipation.<sup>3</sup>

More than a few slave holders would follow suit. Consequently, the number of Virginia freed slaves rose dramatically between 1782 (3,000) to 1790 (12,866). With the law's passage a cultural shift could be seen on the horizon as constituents filed petitions with the 1784-85 General Assembly, "arguing that free blacks helped enslaved African Americans to run away or commit crimes, that black freedom contradicted biblical teachings, and that the British were manipulating the situation to their advantage."<sup>4</sup>

The mention of "biblical teachings" raises an interesting question – how could the founders of America espouse liberty and equality for all without extending it to their African slaves? As Noel Rae pointed out in *The Great Stain: Witnessing American Slavery* (2018), out of the thousands of words in the Bible, slave holders chose to focus on two passages to justify their rights (as Christians) to own slaves. In particular, Genesis 9:18-29 seemed to them to clearly grant the right.

This was a case of a group of wrong-headed men and women taking scripture out (way out) of context in regards to the Genesis account, however. Noah became drunk and lay without covering in his tent. While sprawled out his son Ham (father of Canaan) saw him naked and proceeded to tell brothers Shem and Japheth what he saw. Thus, Shem and Japheth walked into the tent backwards and covered their father's nakedness.

When Noah awoke he became aware of what his younger sons had done, but he cursed Canaan (son of Ham) instead, saying:

*Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.*

The oft-quoted catchphrase "The Curse of Ham" would morph into (twisted) justification for owning someone else as property in colonial America and beyond. They should have noted, however, this so-called curse was not uttered by God, but rather his faithful (yet imperfect) servant Noah. Nevertheless, this was the premise upon which American slavery progressed through the decades until it literally rent the country in two.

The idea of dispensing with the practice of slavery spread as various manumission societies formed to promote the cause of abolition. The "New York Society for promoting the Manumission of Slaves, and protecting such of them as have been, or may be, liberated" was founded in 1785 by John Jay, one of the nation's Founding Fathers. These were some of the first organized American abolitionists whose first priority was seeing that their state, like Virginia, wrote and passed its own manumission law. The gradual process

began in 1799 and the last of New York's slaves were finally freed in 1827.

By 1804 all Northern states had enacted similar laws, but the South would remain entrenched in what John C. Calhoun referred to as that "peculiar domestick institution". Some would argue that Calhoun lit the fuse three decades before the Civil War.

How entrenched was the South? In response to the practice of so-called "deathbed manumissions" South Carolina enacted a law in 1800 stating Negroes could only be emancipated by deed and an appearance before the Justice of the Quorum to provide justification for why a slave deserved freedom and whether he or she "was capable of gaining a livelihood in an honest way."<sup>5</sup> Twenty years later the state took matters of manumission a step further by declaring "that no slave should thereafter be emancipated, but by Act of the Legislature."<sup>6</sup> The Legislature, of course, wasn't about to write any such law; thus, it became illegal in the state of South Carolina for "my last wish" manumissions.

Georgia and Florida – and eventually Maryland, Louisiana and Arkansas – enacted similar restrictive laws. In North Carolina owners could emancipate their slave if they paid for them to leave the state. Tennessee had a similar law but later required owners to ship a slave back to Africa to grant his or her freedom.<sup>7</sup>

While it was a romantic Southern notion for a slave owner to provide freedom for slaves upon his or her death, it was often objected to by the decedent's heirs (as with the above-noted Carter and Pleasants families). Some cases had far-reaching consequences and set legal precedence. Two in particular come to mind.

## **Tempe &c vs Meaux &c**

The story began with John Meaux who left his Botetourt County, Virginia plantation around 1784 and moved to Kentucky. Upon departure John left all his property and slaves in Virginia (except the ones living in Kentucky) to his son John G. Meaux in a deed dated January 24, 1797. Prior to the deed's filing, John G. had also come to Kentucky and was residing in Mercer County.

After going to Kentucky and settling in Mercer County John (Sr.) began acquiring land and, subsequently, more slaves to work the land. By 1796 he had 45 slaves and he was taxed for 522 acres. His wealth (and taxes) continued to increase. By 1810 his taxable property included over 1800 acres of land, 59 slaves and 25 horses.

With land proximally located to the Kentucky River it was easy to transport his crops to markets both near and far, along the Kentucky, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. By the time taxes were due in 1826 John owned over 2400 acres on Salt River, land that had been patented by John Edwards. His estate, valued at 18,352, included 76 slaves and 25 horses.

John made his last will and testament later that year on October 23, 1826. What he did on that day clearly separated him from other plantation owners, a legacy still revered in the annals of Mercer County history:

- *Directed all the slaves he owned when he died "to be forever emancipated and set free being 61 in his possession and the increase of the females, hereafter to be born."*
- *Directed executors, sons John G. Meaux and Nathaniel B. Meaux and his friend, John T. Thompson, to "bound out" the younger slaves to trades. Except for 10 cows and 10 ewes for each of his grandsons, John Woodson Meaux and*

*Richard Meaux, John Meaux ordered the remaining stock, crop, and plantation tools and utensils “to be divided among his negroes hereby emancipated.”*

- *Ordered land Meaux purchased from John Edwards that had not been previously sold and all household and kitchen furniture to be sold with proceeds going to his emancipated slaves.*<sup>8</sup>

After his death in 1828 things didn't go as John had directed, however. The will was first challenged in Mercer Circuit Court (*Black vs Meaux*) and nullified John's wish to emancipate 61 slaves. The decision was later reversed by the Kentucky Supreme Court.

The plaintiff, Humphrey Black, was one of the emancipated slaves and he was suing grandson John Woodson Meaux with whom he had remained as a laborer while the controversy made its way through the legal system. Once the will was established Humphrey sued John Woodson Meaux for the value of the labor he had performed, since he had been promised wages once the will was finally recognized legally.

In the 1836 Supreme Court decision, the last will and testament was ordered to be recorded and also ruled that emancipated slaves could indeed enter into contracts for labor like the one Humphrey Black was claiming he had obtained from John Woodson Meaux. The Supreme Court sent the case back to Circuit Court for payment of services.

Following the Supreme Court's actions the slaves filed another suit, *“Tempe &c vs Meaux &c”*, requesting executors of the Meaux estate to follow through with the original wishes of John Meaux – “to divide and partition the lands purchased from Edwards ‘for the benefit of the heads of the families of the negroes emancipated.’”<sup>9</sup>

Thirteen properties totaling 1357 acres patented by John Edwards was eventually distributed to Grantees in 100 acre (or more) plots of land. On parts of this land and adjoining acreage were built two churches – Meaux Chapel A.M.E. and Dividing Ridge Baptist Church (with nearby cemeteries) – and Mayo Colored School.

Many descendants of both John Meaux and his slaves still reside in Mercer County. This nineteenth century case, which circuitously wound its way through the Kentucky court system, today provides a wealth of records for those tracing their slave ancestry.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John Meaux" followed by a flourish.

### **Mathews v. Springer**

Mississippi Territory, created on April 7, 1798 by an act of Congress, may as well have been named “Messissippi”. In those early years the population consisted of four groups: Indians, whites, slaves and free blacks.

Spain had relinquished control of that part of the world, yet continued to interfere (as did France and England). There were also overlapping land claims with the state of Georgia and tense relations with Indians to contend with.

The territorial act initially provided for a governor, secretary and three judges. Once population reached 5,000 free individuals a legislature and one delegate to Congress could be elected. The United States had utilized this particular structure upon creation of the Northwest Territories in 1787, the only difference being that Mississippi Territory allowed slavery.



As a territory and later a state, Mississippi's economy depended heavily on agriculture, with "King Cotton" as the primary cash crop. The region was well suited for growing cotton and it drew settlers by the thousands – settlers who brought slaves from other parts of the South.

Between 1798 and 1817 Mississippi's slave population grew from 4,000 to 70,000.<sup>10</sup> Prior to 1825 it wasn't uncommon (or illegal) for slaves to either purchase their freedom or be manumitted by their owner. But, things began to change in the mid-1820s (as it did elsewhere across the Deep South) as it became increasingly less common and difficult, even illegal.<sup>11</sup>

Legal avenues to emancipation began narrowing after the 1820s as only children born to free parents (or mothers) or approved by the Mississippi legislature could obtain freedom. Much like South Carolina's 1820s-era law, Mississippi passed a law in 1822 which placed the act of emancipation strictly under the purview of the legislature. Until all slaves were emancipated, the number of free blacks in Mississippi never exceed 1,400.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, as the free black population numbers sank, the laws appeared to presume every Negro was a slave. If indeed a free person of color, he or she had to appear before a local court to be certified as such. Freedom papers were to be renewed every three years at a cost of \$1 (later rising to \$3). What if they couldn't prove free status? It was off to the auction block.<sup>13</sup>

These were the Mississippi laws in place in early 1858 when Robert Mathews, a wealthy plantation and slave owner residing in Warren County, began putting his affairs in order prior his death the following year. One of his priorities seemed to have been the welfare of Isaiah and Caroline Mathews, the children who he had fathered with Harriet, one of his slaves.

First and foremost, Robert wanted Isaiah (about seven years of age) and Caroline (about five) manumitted, yet also remain with him for the remainder of his life. However, this was not going to happen in the state of Mississippi since there was no legal way for that instrument to be executed.

Therefore, he took Isaiah and Caroline out of the state of Mississippi to Ohio, appearing at the Court of Common Pleas in Hamilton County during the May 1858 term. In writing he declared his children free and no longer slaves, whereupon he received a decree from the court declaring them free persons of color. Robert and the children remained in Ohio for several weeks before returning to Carroll County, Mississippi to live together until his death on March 26, 1859.<sup>14</sup>

Not long after Robert's death Benjamin Springer, executor of the estate, had the children taken to Ohio where they were to remain. Whether Robert had arranged for their care in advance is unclear, however. They were still quite young.

On February 20, 1859 Robert Mathews had written and signed his last will and testament. On April 25, 1859 the will was duly proven and admitted into the records of the Probate Court of Warren County. Although Robert had died in Carroll County, Warren was his legal residence. In short, the will provided for the following:

*The testator leaving no widow or legitimate children as the natural objects of his bounty, after providing in his will for a number of specified legacies to his collateral relatives and friends, directed that his executors should sell and convert the residue of his estate, real and personal, into cash and deposit the same in the State Bank of Louisiana, that [Isaiah and Caroline] should be maintained and educated out of said funds until they were twenty-one years of age, when the*

*remainder should be divided between them, the said Isaiah Jefferson receiving two-thirds, and Caroline Josephine one-third, with the further provision that if anything should happen by death or otherwise, that his said children should not receive said bequest, that the same should go to said bank for the use of the stockholders.*<sup>15</sup>

This would set the stage for battle royal amongst the “collateral” kin, like the children of his half-sister Paulina (Mathews) Dwiggin. This is the point where I discovered this fascinating (and precedent-setting) case – while researching these two ancestral lines for one of my clients. The first related record wasn’t Robert’s last will and testament, however.

The first record I came across, triggering this “research adventure”, belonged to Agnes Dwiggin, my client’s great grandmother. The record was filed in Warren County’s Probate Court in regards to the guardianship of Agnes and her younger brothers, Daniel and John William Dwiggin. The record was a bit confusing to me because Agnes was over 18 at the time (her brothers 14 and “over twelve”) and still single (she married David Mason in 1863).

Their older brother James Dwiggin was applying to be their guardian in Mississippi, although at the time Agnes, Daniel and John were living in Smith County, Texas. Their parents had died sometime before 1860, presumably in Smith County (or thereabouts), having previously been residents of Mississippi. Hmm. A little digging was in order (of course!).

As is often the case newspaper research started providing some scattered details. On December 14, 1859 the Probate Court issued an order on behalf of Robert L. Mathews, Jr., by his guardian, G.W. Powell, that representatives of Louisiana State Bank and Isaiah Jefferson Mathews and Caroline

Josephine Mathews were cited to appear in said court on the fourth Monday of January, 1860 in Vicksburg. The notice appeared in *The Vicksburg Whig* on December 28.

It is doubtful this notice was posted in any Ohio newspaper, and unclear as to how or if any attempt was made to contact Isaiah or Caroline (or their guardians) in Ohio. In 1860 Mississippi this may have been deceptively intentional.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of February the Probate Court issued another citation directed not only at Louisiana State Bank, Isaiah and Caroline, but the “collateral relatives”, most of whom were surnamed Dwiggin. Somewhere along the way the Dwiggin family had joined the case. On the first Monday of April they were to appear to show cause why a certain piece of property should or should not be sold (as per Robert’s will).

The proceedings may not have gone the way the family members wanted because in June 1860:

*...the heirs at law and next of kin to said testator filed in the Probate Court of Warren county their petition against Springer, who had qualified as such executor, and had proceeded to the execution of the trusts under the will and also against Downs and Johnson the other two persons nominated in the will as co-executors with said Springer, and against the said bank and naming the complainants as defendants thereto, but taking no other steps against them. The petition alleged that complainants were slaves, and could not take the bequests provided for them in said will, and that the bequest to the bank was void because there was no such corporation in existence, and that the pretended devise and bequest to the bank was intended, not for the benefit of the bank, but for the benefit of complainants, and that this provision in the will, as well as the pretended*

*emancipation of complainants, were both attempted frauds on the laws of the State of Mississippi, and against its policy and void.*<sup>16</sup>

The result was all too predictable. While Springer and the bank answered allegations, the court ruled Isaiah and Caroline had no standing since they were slaves. No way were they getting any of their father's estate. The two co-executors Downs and Johnson were dismissed as unqualified. In addition to declaring the estate's distribution to Isaiah and Caroline void, it also disqualified bequests to the bank. Thus, Springer was free to distribute the bulk of Robert's estate to his "collateral relatives". End of story?

I could find no clear documentation as to exactly what happened between 1860 and 1868 when Isaiah and Caroline became complainants in their own suit, *Mathews v. Springer*, which would eventually be argued before the Circuit Court, Southern District of Mississippi in 1871. However, by this time the Civil War had ended ever so bitterly for the South and all persons of color had been emancipated.

There was, however, this tidbit in the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* on November 4, 1868 which filled in the gaps:

### COLORED CHILDREN IN LUCK.

*A few years ago, Robert L. Mathews, then a planter of Mississippi, manumitted in this city two mulatto slaves, a boy and girl, named Isaiah Jefferson Mathews, now about 17 years old, and Caroline Josephine, 15 years. A short time afterward he died, acknowledging them as his children, and leaving to them, by will, very valuable property, but not being found, other parties claimed the same. About a year ago, the girl ascertained her rights, and through her guardian has entered suit, and has been ever since in search of her brother by advertising, &c., as it is very important that he should appear and claim his share.*

*He has been heard of in Xenia, Ohio, but is now supposed to be West toward Chicago. Any information will be thankfully received by his sister, at 81 East Third, Cincinnati.*<sup>17</sup>

How about that? Young Caroline "ascertained her rights" and demanded her and her brother's rightful inheritance. You go girl!

The only record I could find of Isaiah (possibly) was in 1870 in Greene County, Ohio. This "Isaiah Matthews" was a barber and around the age he would have been were he born around 1850-2. I have not yet been able to find any definitive record of Caroline, despite the item above which provided an address.

Nevertheless, the case was argued during the January 1871 term:

**Case No. 9,277.**  
**MATHEWS v. SPRINGER.**  
[2 Abb. U. S. 283.]<sup>1</sup>  
Circuit Court, S. D. Mississippi. Jan. Term,  
1871.  
SLAVERY—EMANCIPATION—DEVISE TO FREED  
SLAVES.

In December 1868 Isaiah and Caroline had filed "by their next friend" (guardian) filed in court a bill:

*. . . for the purpose of setting up and enforcing the provisions made for them in said will, notwithstanding the proceedings so had in the said Probate Court, and so affirmed by the High Court of Errors and Appeals, alleging that their father, the said R.L. Mathews, took them to the State of Ohio with the purpose of emancipating them, and that he did so emancipate them, and with the purpose that they should remain citizens of that State, and receive an education and the advantages of free persons. That afterward he returned with them to Mississippi, to remain a short time only; and in a short time they were to be returned to the State of Ohio as their permanent home. During their stay in*

*Mississippi, after their emancipation, they occupied the position of citizens and residents of Ohio as far as they were capable of doing so, and were only in Mississippi temporarily. That not having been parties to the proceedings in the probate court and high court of errors and appeals, they were not affected by any of the proceedings therein; and that they are now entitled to all the provisions in their behalf made in said will, so far as said estate can be collected.*<sup>18</sup>

The Court had three questions to consider:

*1st. Did the complainants become free persons of color in the State of Ohio, and if so was their condition changed to a state of slavery when they were brought back to the State of Mississippi, and at the death of the testator?*

*2d. If they were free persons of color at the death of the testator, were they capable of taking the provisions in their favor under the will?*

*3d. If free persons of color, and capable of taking under the will, are they now precluded from the provisions made in their behalf by reason of the proceedings and decree of the courts above referred to?*<sup>19</sup>

The Court was well aware of the gravity of their decision:

*These questions, if raised in this court before the attempted severance of this and other states from the Union, would have been regarded as of peculiar interest. For many long years a heated sectional controversy had been carried on between the people of the states where African slavery was maintained and of those where it was forbidden. This controversy existed before the formation of the Federal Union; and as a compromise, and to avoid more serious results, provision was made in the constitution for the reclamation of*

*persons held to servitude in one state, who might, without the consent of those entitled to their service, flee to those states where such service was forbidden.*

*But the result of the late bloody war has been to emancipate all of the race, so long the bone of contention between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding states; all are now free, and, under the constitution and laws, enjoy equal rights as citizens of the United States, and of the several states, as did the white race before this change in the condition of the other race; so that we approach the consideration of the questions presented as we would any other question involving only pecuniary rights and remedies.*<sup>20</sup>

At the very outset the Court determined “the changed condition of race” had nothing to do with the case at hand, only the laws in existence at the time Robert Mathews died. Robert had found a way to manumit his children utilizing Ohio court proceedings. It was a legal act.

Defendants were arguing the merits of another case, *Hinds v. Brazeale*. However, the slave mentioned in that case had never been free. Isaiah and Caroline were legally free at the time of Robert’s death. Plus, it would have been absurd for the Mississippi legislature to declare these infants capable of committing a crime (in order to exclude them from being free) – they weren’t even yet old enough to attend school.

The Court’s deliberations appear to have been thorough, fair and judicious, as reflected in their published opinion. It was obvious that Isaiah and Caroline had intentionally been excluded from appearing in Mississippi in 1860, therefore they were not bound by any outcomes. Furthermore, Springer was required to make an accounting of the estate placed in his hands. Whatever property remained, real and personal, “must be sold, and the proceeds



loaned at interest, or vested in safe securities until, as provided by the will, the complainants shall become twenty-one years of age; or, if Caroline shall marry, her portion then to be paid to her. However, any legacies which remain unpaid (to the other heirs, perhaps including the Dwiggins family members), they must first be paid.

Isaiah and Caroline had won their case, although I haven't been able to locate any further information as to when and if they ever received any part of the remaining estate. Hopefully, they received something for their efforts.

Still, it was an extraordinary case in regards to manumission. Had it not been for young Caroline's spunk, this injustice would have been swept away into the dustbin of history.

These two acts of manumission which portended protracted legal proceedings are excellent examples of the need for genealogists to dig a little deeper when these types of records are encountered. They can, of course, be hard to read (the Mathews files were quite "scribble-y"), but oh what great stories you may uncover!

That being said, the stories I find hardest to digest are the ones discussed in the article following this one.

Why would someone who had gained their freedom (by purchase or manumission) want to own slaves of their own? Granted, there were unique situations in some cases, but one of these former slaves was cruel, even to the point of offering his slaves to serve the Confederate Army!



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# FREE TO ENSLAVE?

The premise may seem unbelievable, given what our history books have always taught us. It is true – there were free men and women of color who owned slaves. The question is, why would someone previously enslaved choose to enslave others?

In 1790 in the St. Phillip's and St. Michael's Parish of Charleston, South Carolina, a number of free persons of color (male and female) were enumerated as such by "Free" appearing before their given name. A number of these free blacks also owned slaves.

Free Peter Mathews				4	1	5
Free Dick Marziah				8	2	10
Free Will Muller				1	1	2
Free Patty				3	1	4
Seth Yeats	1	2	2		5	10
Free Nancy				4		4

In this particular extracted section, four out of five of the free persons of color owned slaves (next to last column is number of slaves owned), in an aggregate amount equal to the number of slaves owned by Seth Yeats, presumably a white person. According to Larry Koger, author of *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860*, there were 36 black slave masters enumerated in Charleston City in 1790. Furthermore, Koger asserts that Peter Basnett Mathews (enumerated as "Free Peter Mathews") "bought slaves only to emancipate them and asked nothing in return for their acts of benevolence."<sup>1</sup>

The slave owned by Mathews in 1790 is said to have been a black man named Hercules, "who was acquired for humanitarian reasons and later emancipated by the colored man."<sup>2</sup> Mathews, a butcher by trade, was one of a number of free black artisans of Charleston who often challenged the societal status quo. He drew attention to South Carolina's new constitution which provided for Bills of Rights, available to all free citizens, excepting those of the Negro race. Peter, along with another butcher named Matthew Webb and Thomas Cole, a bricklayer and builder, petitioned the South Carolina Senate for redress.

Even though they were free citizens and taxpayers, as well as peaceful contributors to society, they were denied trial by jury and sometimes subjected to "unsworn testimony of slaves."<sup>3</sup> Fifty years after passage of the state's Negro Act of 1740 which made it illegal for slaves to assemble, raise their own food, earn their own money or learn to write, free Negroes were still being discriminated against simply because of the color of their skin. Not surprisingly, the Senate rejected their petition.

In 1793 Peter Mathews' home and papers were searched when state officials feared a black uprising. He certainly had nothing to hide and cooperated fully. What sort of papers might Mathews have possessed?

An extensive account of his ancestry (or, at least it seems to be implied) is provided within the voluminous research presented in a two-volume book entitled, *Free African Americans of North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina, From the Colonial Period to About 1820*, by Paul Heinegg. Peter Mathews is briefly mentioned at the end of the Matthews family history, perhaps because the author was unsure of just where (or if) in the family line he belonged.

Nevertheless, if Peter was indeed part of this line of free Negroes, the family's history is believed to have begun with Katherine Matthews, "born say 1668, was a white servant woman living in Norfolk County [Virginia] in June 1686 when she was presented by the grand jury for having a 'Mulatto' child. She may have been the ancestor of . . ."4 (followed by a long enumeration of possible descendants). If this assumption is correct, it is possible all of Katherine's mulatto children were considered free since laws at the time (passed in 1662) stated that a person of color was either free or slave based on the mother's status.

Peter Basnett Mathews died in 1800 and wrote a will expressing his final wishes in regards to bequeathing what worldly goods he had accumulated to his wife Mary and their children. The opening paragraph indicates his status as a "Man of Colour and Butcher by Trade" There is no mention of slaves, as presumably all he may have ever owned were by then emancipated.

Negro Peter Basnett Mathews (L.S.)

## The Case of John Casor, Slave for Life

This is perhaps the oldest instance of a free Negro (Anthony Johnson) owning another Negro (John Casor). According to Paul Heinegg, Anthony Johnson was probably born around 1600, but freed sometime before January 10, 1647, the date he purchased a calf from James Berry in Northampton County, Virginia. Four years later he patented 250 acres in the same county. 1652 tax records indicate Anthony had been living in Virginia for quite some time:

*... they have been Inhabitants in Virginia above thirty years ... ordered that from the day of the date hearof (during their natural lives) the sd Mary Johnson & two daughters of Anthony Johnson Negro be disengaged and freed from payment of Taxes...*

In Anthony's possession was a "Negro servant" by the name of John Casor (sometimes recorded as Cazara or Corsala). Casor believed he had completed his indentured servitude and should be freed. In 1653 he entreated Captain Samuel Goldsmith to intervene, but Johnson stood firm in his assertion that Casor was his slave for life:

*hee had ye Negro for his life*

Mary Johnson attempted to convince her husband to release John. At some point their neighbor Robert Parker allowed John to live on his property.

A lawsuit ensued wherein Johnson accused Parker of unlawfully lodging his "Negro servant, John Casor". The court ruled in Johnson's favor in 1654.

In 1665 the Anthony and Mary Johnson, their son John and his wife, and slave John Casor moved to Somerset County, Maryland. There he acquired land in both Somerset and Accomack counties.

Anthony died sometime before August 1670 and a jury of white men in Accomack County decided his presence in Maryland had been illegal, since after all, “he was a Negroe and by consequence an alien”. The land was to be escheated and revert back to the county.<sup>5</sup>

This, of course, highlights the fact that free persons of color weren’t much better off status-wise as the rights of white men would take precedence in a judicial setting, in most, if not all, cases. Even though many managed to survive, even thrive in some cases, their situation was tenuous as they were largely excluded from participating in civic matters (as Peter Mathews had argued in 1790).

Despite Mary’s earlier attempts to convince Anthony to free his slave it appears John Casor remained a slave with the family. Somerset County records indicate she “purchased a mare and assigned it to John Corsala (her slave). What became of John Casor is unclear, although he may have been passed on to Mary’s heirs upon her death. Other records indicate John registered his cattle brand in 1672; perhaps at some point he gained a measure of freedom.

The significance of this case was, of course, that John Casor became the first slave via lawsuit, since prior to the lawsuit he was an indentured servant. Indentured servants, generally speaking, were contracted to work for a certain number of years and gain freedom upon completion of their service.

In the words of John C. Calhoun, slavery truly was a “peculiar domestic institution”.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Ellison Family of Sumter County, South Carolina**

This family lived in Sumter County, South Carolina, and as the largest slaveholders in the state, were avid supporters of the Confederate cause. The patriarch of the family, William Holmes “April” Ellison, Jr. was a successful entrepreneur and readily

offered the labor of his sixty-three slaves to the Confederate Army. Born into slavery, William had been freed on June 8, 1816 at the age of twenty-six by his master (and possibly his father) William Ellison.

It is believed that April Ellison was born in April of 1790, this due to the fact that often children born to slave parents were given the month of their birth as their name. Around the age of ten, April was apprenticed to William McCreight, and learned to build and repair cotton gins. He continued to work in McCreight’s shop until 1816 (even though his apprenticeship had ended after six years) and worked as a blacksmith, machinist and carpenter. During that time, April also learned how to read, write and do basic math and bookkeeping.

These were all skills which would help April, who had taken a consort named Matilda in 1811 (slaves weren’t allowed to marry), to provide for his family and make his own way if given the opportunity. That opportunity came in 1816 when William Ellison appeared before a magistrate in the presence of five witnesses and received permission to free April.

Since 1800, when the South Carolina legislature set forth laws and procedures for manumission, it had been required that a slave’s owner must testify under oath to the good character of the slave he was seeking to free, and also present evidence that the slave could provide for himself. April met all those qualifications and was a free man on June 8, 1816.

Soon after gaining his freedom, April moved to Sumter County where he began hiring out slaves as his workers. By 1820 he had purchased two adult male slaves to work in his shop, scarcely four years after he himself had been set free. On June 20, 1820, April took another important step by appearing in the Sumter District courthouse and filing



papers to legally change his name to William Ellison, presumably taking the same name (as a junior) as his former master or possibly father.

Court papers stated that a “freed yellow man of about 29 years of age . . . would greatly advance his interest as a tradesman” by changing his name. The description “yellow man” likely indicates that he was a light-skinned mulatto and, as purported, likely the son of William Ellison, or some other white man (some hypothesize that William’s father Robert Ellison might have been April’s father). A new name would also “save him and his children from degradation and contempt which the minds of some do and will attach to the name April.” The request was granted and on that day April Ellison became known as William Holmes Ellison, Jr.

By that time William was a successful entrepreneur as a master cotton gin builder and repairer. The skills he had learned during his apprenticeship were serving him well. Cotton was becoming a major enterprise and by 1840 William had twelve slaves working in his shop. An ad placed in the Sumter Banner in 1847 touted “Improved Cotton Gins.”

**Improved Cotton Gins.**  
THANKFUL for past favors, the subscriber wishes to inform the Public, that he still Manufactures Cotton Gins, at his establishment in Statesburg on the most improved and approved plan, of the most simple construction, of the finest finish, and of the best materials, to wit: Steel Saws and Steel Plated Ribs, Case hardened; in which he will sell for \$2.00 per saw. He also repairs old Gins, and puts them in complete order, at the shortest notice. All orders for Gins will be promptly and punctually attended to.  
WILLIAM ELLISON.  
Statesburg, March 31, 1847.

In 1850 the Slave Schedule listed William as a black male who owned thirty-seven slaves (twenty-seven males and ten females). William was later supportive of efforts to admit Kansas as a slave state:

*SIGNIFICANT FACT. We deem it worthy of especial notice the fact that William Ellison, a colored man, and a resident of*

*Statesburg, in this district, contributed, the other day, the sum of one hundred dollars to the funds of the Kansas association. Ellison, once a slave, but now a slaveholder, has, entirely by his own industry, attained his present state of prosperity, and we might say, wealth, he being the possessor of a large and productive cotton plantation. We are pleased to see such a manifestation, from such an one, for such a cause. The example too, even from such a source, is worthy the imitation of those whose superior means and intellect render them not only more able to give, but to discern more clearly the necessity of giving liberally to this cause.*<sup>7</sup>

In William Ellison, white slave owners and others who supported the institution had found someone like-minded, albeit the fact he was once a slave himself. There is no doubt that William had become highly successful because he not only owned and operated a cotton gin business but owned a great deal of land which he ran as a cotton plantation. In 1857 a letter to his son Henry, with instructions as to how to manage his business accounts, lends credence to that supposition.

By 1860, and the nation on the brink of civil war, William owned more than sixty slaves who worked on his large cotton plantation. William was the state of South Carolina’s largest black slave owner, and with the use of slave labor, he had driven white competitors out of business.

In 1860 he owned more than nine hundred of acres of land, most of it dedicated to cotton, although a small part was used for growing his own food. His children lived on the property and some of them also owned slaves of their own. William had sent some of his children to Canada to be educated and some returned to the plantation to reside after marrying mulattos from Charleston.

According to an article entitled “Dixie’s Censored Subject: Black Slaveowners”, by Robert M. Grooms, William under-reported his net worth to tax assessors in 1860 as being \$65,000. Grooms went on to write that William’s major source of income was actually that of a “slave breeder.”

Although a successful businessman and cotton farmer, Ellison’s major source of income derived from being a “slave breeder.” Slave breeding was looked upon with disgust throughout the South, and the laws of most southern states forbade the sale of slaves under the age of 12. In several states it was illegal to sell inherited slaves. Nevertheless, in 1840 Ellison secretly began slave breeding.

While there was subsequent return on investment in raising and keeping young males, females were not productive workers in his factory or his cotton fields. As a result, except for a few females he raised to become “breeders,” Ellison sold the female and many of the male children born to his female slaves at an average price of \$400. Ellison had a reputation as a harsh master. His slaves were said to be the district’s worst fed and clothed. On his property was located a small, windowless building where he would chain his problem slaves.

Slaves often ran away and when William’s did so, he employed the use of slave catchers to capture and return them to his plantation. One account reported that Ellison had once paid someone almost eighty dollars in fees and seventy-four dollars in expenses to retrieve one of his slaves.

At the time William had taken Matilda as his consort/wife, she was still enslaved, but by January 1817 it appears he had purchased his family’s freedom. Their children were: Henry, Reuben, Aliza Ann, William, Jr., Maria (unclear, but possibly

an illegitimate daughter he later sold) and Mary Elizabeth.

When the Civil War broke out, William had invested heavily in Confederate bonds, treasury notes and paper currency. It would, of course, eventually become totally worthless. However, William didn’t live to see that happen because he died on December 5, 1861. Matilda had passed away in 1850 and his estate went to his free daughter and two surviving sons.

His family continued to support the Confederacy, and in addition to raising cotton, they also produced food products like corn and bacon for the Confederate Army. William’s oldest grandson, John Wilson Buckner, joined the Confederate Army on March 27, 1863. Although it was illegal at the time for a Negro to formally join the army, the family’s prestige was reason for officials to “look the other way.”

After the war the family fortune quickly dissipated, likely due, at least in part, to their heavy investment in the Confederacy. Ironically, his family reverted to the poverty which William had known as a slave.

William had established a family cemetery on his plantation years earlier. He was buried there along with Matilda, and later some of his children and grandchildren. In contrast to another freed black man, Denmark Vesey, who upon gaining his freedom led a slave revolt in 1822, William “April” Ellison had embraced the cruel institution he had been freed from.

As Michael P. Johnson, author of *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*, wrote in regards to the similarities and ultimately the very different paths these two freed slaves took: “Freedom was a privilege Ellison refused to risk. Vesey wanted to remake his world in the name of freedom; Ellison only wanted to make freedom work for him.”<sup>8</sup>

## Milly Pierce

Perhaps it's just as well that Anthony Johnson and his family left Virginia for Maryland when they did. In 1691 Virginia's ruling white class was looking for ways to dispense with free blacks by making it illegal for masters to manumit their slaves unless they paid for their transport out of the colony. Free blacks were further marginalized in 1723 when they were denied the right to vote, the governor unwilling to allow them to be counted as a white man's equal. Free blacks always lived on the perimeter outside the so-called American dream – called “free” but not really as free as they should have been by definition of the word “freedom”.

And then there was Milly Pierce:

*Often described as shiftless troublemakers, free blacks were suspected of fomenting slave insurrections, although there is little evidence to support this accusation. Any direct threat they posed to the status quo was more imagined than real. Milly Pierce was, however, truly subversive, although in ways that the white slave-owner could never afford to admit: her very existence and especially her economic success undermined the carefully cultivated rationale that slavery was a benevolent institution for benighted people.*<sup>9</sup>

Virginia came around eventually to allowing manumission of slaves who demonstrated “extraordinary merit and general good character and conduct.” Milly was born a slave, as some have estimated, perhaps around 1770. She was the property of a well-to-do Quaker plantation owner by the name of Tucker Woodson who resided in Goochland County, Virginia.

Whether it was an act of conscience or in recognition of “good character and conduct”, Woodson manumitted Milly and three of her children. By the time his will was proven in September 1795 Milly had

two more children and they were also emancipated. Woodson was able to privately manumit these slaves due to years-long lobbying of the state's legislature by Quakers. Another Goochland Quaker and slave owner, Thomas Pleasants, Jr., released 44 of his slaves on October 21, 1782. Why didn't Tucker Woodson immediately follow his fellow Quaker's example?

In Woodson's case, it may have been pragmatic, as well as economic. He wanted to have the benefits of their labors as long as he lived, but perhaps “having enjoyed full benefits of his slaves' labor during his lifetime, could still die with a clear conscience, having finally done the right thing.”<sup>10</sup>

Upon obtaining freedom at around the age of 25 years old, Milly appears to have worked diligently, as less than eight years later she had saved enough money to purchase 23 acres near the Goochland Courthouse. She would become the first free black woman in the county to purchase land, and only one of three other free blacks who could afford to do so.

In 1805 she made her mark on an agreement with Samuel Johnson who agreed to pay her \$33.67 per year to lease the land. Milly made careful provisions in the agreement, ensuring she would be allowed to build a family home and have a garden of her own. Author CeCe Bullard, in her book, *Milly Pierce: A Slave Turned Slave-Owner in Pre-Civil War Virginia*, proposes that Tucker Woodson not only set her free but his son Samuel may have allowed Milly and her family to remain on the plantation, living free and perhaps receiving modest remuneration for their continued service to the family. Ms. Bullard also surmises Milly may have made money by operating a “house of entertainment” (illegal, but she might have done it anyway).

It was also possible she received money from the father of her children, her “husband” John Pierce, who it doesn’t appear that she ever formally married. John was the property of Dr. James Brydin, although it appears the two had a decidedly different relationship than most slaves and slave owners. Instead Dr. Brydin would collect money to hire out John, since John himself was not allowed by law to earn wages. Rather, he was allowed to pay rent to his master and save some of his earnings for himself.

Beginning in 1803 John Pierce began to work for himself, although technically he was still a slave. He was paid indirectly through the Sheriff or other officials for taking care of the Courthouse and tending to occupants of the jail. Why the county decided to forego obedience of the law is unclear, yet John remained employed as the jailer until 1827. In 1807 the county began paying him directly (\$35 per year). Again, Ms. Bullard surmises the Woodson family may have exerted some influence.

In 1807 Samuel Johnson, her reliable source of income, died. However, it doesn’t appear to have caused financial difficulties as Milly purchased a horse in 1809 and in 1810 her household was enumerated with 11 free persons and two slaves. Since she was likely farming the land herself now, she needed laborers and had purchased slaves.

Milly was not the only free black residing in Goochland County to own slaves, although in the instance of two free black households the slaves were family members. Slave labor was so engrained in Southern culture that even a free black (and former slave) owning their own slaves wasn’t considered aberrant.

Milly may have had as many twelve children, all free due to her status. Two of her older children, John and Judy, were still living with her in 1813 and their status as her children and their ages being between

16 and 21 were of special significance that year. Along with their mother they were each levied a poll tax of \$1.50.

The Virginia General Assembly had enacted legislation in 1812 requiring all free blacks above the age of 16 to pay a poll tax. Ostensibly, this punitive tax was placed on the backs of free blacks to replenish the state’s coffers which had been drawn down by the second American revolution, otherwise known as The War of 1812.

Despite the obvious ways in which the state of Virginia appeared to be attempting to rid itself of as many free blacks as possible, Milly always managed to pay her property taxes and other penalties imposed upon her like the poll tax of 1812 and beyond. The state may have hoped many free blacks would just leave, but Milly dug in and paid what had been assessed in taxes – even when the taxes were increased in 1815.

November 20, 1816 was a momentous day for John Pierce as the county clerk entered his manumission into court records. Dr. Brydin had died the previous year and John’s ownership had been passed to John Curd (then the county’s sheriff), who freed him in 1816.

In a strange twist Milly Pierce had sued the administrator of the doctor’s estate, Benjamin Anderson. Brydin had died intestate and she was suing for money he had apparently owed her, although there doesn’t exist any record of any sort of financial agreement.

Still, the court, after hearing her case, ruled in Milly’s favor. She was to receive \$225 with 6% interest per annum assessed from the first day of July 1813 until paid in full. Anderson was ordered to pay damages “from the goods and chattels of the Brydin estate which included his only slave, John Pierce.”<sup>11</sup> She had found a way to free her “husband” although she may have been financially able to purchase his freedom. It



was her right to seek redress; she did so and won.

In 1810 Mildred Pierce had been enumerated head of household. In 1820 John Pierce was head of a household of 15 persons, three of which were slaves. By this time at least two of their children had married and had homes of their own.

When John was emancipated there was by no means a guarantee he could remain in the county. In 1806 the General Assembly had passed a law requiring emancipated slaves to leave the state or face re-enslavement. In January 1817 the court ruled that, because of his good character “and extraordinary merit as a slave acting as jailor [sic] of this Court,”<sup>12</sup> John Pierce would be allowed to remain in Goochland County.

The two them, father and mother to twelve children, could have married at this point, yet Milly remained single. She would have gained little, if anything, from marrying John. After all, she was the one who owned property. Obviously, her independence all those years had paid off. She was in charge of her destiny. At the time it wasn't at all uncommon for free women of color to remain single. Had she married John she would have relinquished more than she gained, including the right to enter into business agreements, file suit in a court of law or execute a will in order to dispose of her worldly goods as she desired.

By 1821 both Milly and John were landowners as he purchased one acre of land for \$50 from Benjamin Anderson. The property was next to the courthouse and John continued to work for the county and as they both grew older their priorities shifted. By 1826 John's salary had more than doubled and Milly sold some of her property. John has also for some years been engaged in a business transporting goods up and down the James River. Most of their

children had married and had homes of their own.

Milly was enumerated as head of household in 1830, although it's unclear as to when John died. An 1833 record refers to him as deceased. After his death Milly was allowed to take his courthouse job and a salary of her own (\$70 per year). Again, this was not the norm, but likely owing to her good character and standing in the community. In 1842 her salary increased to \$75 and she continued to work at the courthouse until her death.

The favor extended to other members of her family, and later one of her slaves, Franklin, was allowed to work at the courthouse. In her will she freed him and he later “inherited” her job after she died.

Milly died in 1851 and left to her heirs a 21 acre farm valued at \$600 and a personal estate of more than \$230. While that doesn't seem like much, Milly Pierce had actually done quite well for herself. She bought property, paid all the punitive taxes levied upon her simply because she was a free black, yet found ways to prosper and continue doing so until her death in 1851.

She may not have been formally educated, but she was whip-smart and plenty savvy.

*Milly Pierce's rise from the severe limitations of slavery and the dependency it fostered was a rare journey without a road map. Empowered by her freedom, she made her way with purpose and self-sufficiency, until she and her family were securely established. In a quiet and distinctly feminine way, yet with steady determination, Milly had bent the system to her will and made herself indispensable to the white patriarchy. As a nation, America had subverted the oppression of the English monarchy; as an individual, Milly subverted a legal system designed to crush her.*<sup>13</sup>

# DID YOU KNOW?

by Sharon Hall

While researching the preceding article, I ran across a story about a free black man in Mississippi:

*William Johnson, a respectable colored barber, living on Main St. Natchez, was riding homeward from a place he owns in the country, in company with his son and a boy named Edward Hoggatt, and when about three and a half miles distant from Natchez, his carriage was suddenly fired into from the road side, mortally wounding him, and it is supposed also Hoggatt. Johnson died at his residence in Natchez, soon after he was brought to it, not, we understand, however, before having had his dying declaration taken to the person who was his murderer. Baylor Winn has been arrested on the charge.*<sup>1</sup>

The following year the case against Baylor Winn for the murder of William Johnson was to be tried in Natchez. Before the trial began, however, the state had been attempting to prove whether Winn possessed Negro blood.

What caught my eye was a reference to William Johnson, “f.m.c. of Natchez.”<sup>2</sup> What did “f.m.c.” mean?

Apparently, for some time this abbreviation had been used especially in the South. Louisiana, in particular used the term extensively as early as the 1820s, and it referred to certain Negroes as either “free men of color”, or in the case of females, “f.w.c.” or “free women of color.”

In 1824, Rosette Vivant, f.w.c., died and on August 17 her estate was up for sale: two houses and five slaves. The names and a general description of each slave is provided

in the notice. It wasn’t at all common for free women of color in Louisiana to own slaves.

Louisiana, unlike other Southern states, was more hospitable to free persons of color, although that would change as the Civil War approached. As was the case in other Southern states their rights were curtailed, yet free men and women of color worked alongside the white population as artisans or in other professions and prospered.

Some were the free children of emancipated parents, while some had fled various Caribbean slave revolts. This particular influence, of course, can be still be seen today in New Orleans architecture, as well as regional cuisine. “By 1855, nearly 85% of black Creoles were classified as doctors, clerks, teachers and skilled workers. They also thrived in trades like carpentry, masonry and cigar-making.”<sup>3</sup>

In regards to denoting someone’s status in pre-Civil War years, one might think the practice wouldn’t be necessary after the war since all persons of color were free. In 1872 Travis County, Texas deed records still referred to African Americans as “f.m.c.”

James A. Daugherty	Apr. 11, 1870
George Davis f. m. c.	Aug. 3, 1872
Amelia Brichta	Sept. 12, 1871

For white Southerners, it was a hard pill to swallow. The next article is a prime example, a feud (actually a race war) in Fort Bend County, Texas.

Seeing the use of these abbreviations made me think of another story on page 55 – that’s how we roll around here!

“OK: Everything Has a History” is a look at something I like to call “Historical Pre-Text”.

## Feuding & Fighting

### **The Jaybird-Woodpecker War**

This little war fought in Fort Bend County, Texas had nothing to do with birds, but everything to do with race.

#### Background

In the early 1820s, the area which comprised Fort Bend County was settled as a so-called “plantation district”. By 1861 when it was time to decide whether to secede from the Union this Texas county was one of the largest slaveholding counties in Texas. Not surprisingly, the slave holders voted 100 percent in favor of secession.

What became pure irony was after the Confederacy was defeated, the strong 80 percent black population of the county became the dominant political force. Post-Civil War Reconstruction was a hard pill for white Southerners to swallow. For years, the South had been dominated by the Democratic Party. Newly freed blacks in the South, however, had joined the Republican Party and teamed up with so-called “carpetbaggers” and “scalawags, Northerners who came down to the South and white Republicans) to form a coalition which, in many cases, left white Southern Democrats out of power.

Out of the white Southern Democrat resistance movement came groups like the White League and Red Shirts (paramilitary) and eventually the Ku Klux Klan. One group of white terrorists tried to prevent Republicans from winning in Louisiana in the 1868 fall election, literally by eliminating the competition – in one parish alone, almost two hundred freedmen were killed. In Louisiana, between 1868 and 1876 every election season included widespread violence against blacks (as well as fraud).

On April 13, 1873, the Colfax Massacre (or Colfax Riot) occurred in Colfax, Louisiana in Grant Parish. According to the historical marker, 153 were killed that day, 150 of them being black. The marker proudly proclaims that day was the end of carpetbagger misrule in the South.



Photo by Billy Hathorn

Now back to Fort Bend County, Texas circa 1888. The so-called Jaybird-Woodpecker War is thought to have been so named from a local “half-crazy” black man who would sing a song about jaybirds and woodpeckers – that may be more lore than fact, however. For certain there were two political factions in the county – one composed of white Democrats calling themselves “Jaybirds” and the other faction referred to themselves as “Woodpeckers”. Now you would think it must be Jaybirds equals Democrats and Woodpeckers equals Republicans. Not so fast, however – Woodpeckers also referred to themselves as Democrats who had previously been elected as Republicans in the early years of Reconstruction.

As the election season heated up so did the rhetoric and violence. On August 2, 1888, J.M. Shamblin, a Jaybird leader, was killed and the next month another Jaybird leader, Henry Frost, was shot and wounded. On the September 6 Jaybirds held a meeting in Richmond, the county seat, and afterwards blacks were warned to leave the county. Eventually it became necessary to have Texas Rangers stationed in Richmond to keep the peace and supervise the November election.

On November 6, the election was held and all Woodpeckers were either elected or

re-elected with the heaviest voter turnout in county history. As you can imagine, that did not sit well with the other faction and hostilities continued. In the spring of 1889, two more Jaybirds were killed.

On August 16, 1889, everything came to a head in Richmond in what became to be known as the “Battle of Richmond”. It began near the courthouse when two Woodpeckers took shots at two Jaybirds. Pandemonium ensued as more members of each faction converged on the scene and joined the shootout. After about twenty minutes with several dead scattered around the area, Woodpeckers withdrew, leaving the town in control of the Jaybirds.

When word of the conflict reached the office of Governor Lawrence S. Ross, he dispatched troops (the Houston and Brenham Light Guard) to institute martial law and restore peace. The governor came as a mediator to negotiate a peaceful resolution – the result being that all elected Woodpecker and Jaybird officials resigned their offices, or at least were replaced by those generally acceptable to everyone.

In October, Jaybirds made their group official by organizing under the name of “Jaybird Democratic Organization of Fort Bend County”. Its main purpose would be to maintain white political control in the county and deny blacks entry into their organization.

The Jaybirds were successful for many years in maintaining tight political control, but in 1953 the Supreme Court in *Terry v. Adams* ruled the group had violated the 15th Amendment of the Constitution which guarantees the rights of all citizens to vote, regardless of race or previous enslavement.

“Jaybird-Woodpecker” race war over.



## What's in a Name?

by Sharon Hall

### Seawillow

Seawillow is a rather lyrical and poetic sounding name isn't it? I ran across this name while researching a friend's African American ancestry. Where in the world did this name come from? Wouldn't you just know it – there's a story behind it!

A search for the name at any newspaper archive site reveals the name appears to have been used most often by Texans – and rightly so, since the story from which the name evolved occurred around Beaumont in 1855. She was the very first baby girl given this special name.

October 22, 1855 must have been a stormy day to be born along the Neches River, which meanders southeast over 400 miles from eastern Van Zandt County, emptying into the Gulf of Mexico below Beaumont. Today, the area averages well over 40 inches of rain per year and flooding occurs on average every five years.

The day Reverend John Fletcher and Amelia (Rabb) Pipkin's daughter came into the world was a perilous one as flood waters trapped them on a raft, along with several family slaves, the situation dramatically heightened since Amelia was about to give birth. The oft-told story is related at the Find-A-Grave page for Seawillow Margaret Ann Pipkin Wells [edited]:

*The day Seawillow was born there was a disastrous flood on the Neches River in Beaumont, Texas. The Rev. John F. Pipkin and his pregnant second wife, Amelia Rabb, and some of the family slaves were swept along on a raft. Just before the birth of his daughter, a human chain was formed*



*by the slaves to fasten the raft to a willow tree. The Reverend looked up through the branches of the Willow tree and gave thanks to God for the safe delivery of his daughter in the midst of the flood water. Thus, the name Seawillow.<sup>1</sup>*

In 1942 one of John's sons, Stephen Walker Pipkin, was interviewed and related how he was born in the family home "maintained on Briar Island"<sup>2</sup>, located in the southwest part of Orange County. S.W. had just purchased his father's former ranch property.

John Pipkin had a significant influence all those years ago, earning the sobriquet "father of Beaumont churches."<sup>3</sup> For some time following his arrival from Arkansas in the early 1850s, he was the only preacher in those parts. Despite his staunch Methodist faith, he "was not guided by denominational fetters, but extended to all who needed wise counsel or humane help in sorrow, sickness or death, and who served at baptisms, marriages or funerals as the general ministrant of Beaumont."<sup>4</sup> Like many other preachers of the day John was bi-vocational, operating a saw mill and also served three terms as County Judge for Jefferson County.



John, the son of Reverend Lewis and Mary Pheraby (Beasley) Pipkin, was born in Sparrow Swamp, Darlington District, South Carolina on August 14, 1809. After his first wife died he married Amelia Rabb, a widow, in 1844 in Conecuh County, Alabama. By 1850 the family was living in Ouachita County, Arkansas.

After Amelia died on January 23, 1867 of pneumonia John's married daughter, Nora Lee Holtom, wrote a letter to Stephen Warner Pipkin asking whether he could take Seawillow (or board her for a year) so she could attend school with her cousin Mary. John would gladly compensate for her care.

However, by 1870 Seawillow was living with John and his new wife Mattie.

Seawillow grew up in Beaumont and later taught school in Caldwell County (Luling and Lockhart). On November 22, 1883 she married Littleberry Walker Wells. On February 22, 1886 their first daughter was born – Seawillow Lemon – and the first of several descendants named Seawillow.

The farming community where they lived continued to grow and by 1899 required a post office. It was named "Seawillow". Littleberry died on January 30, 1900 and Seawillow on May 30, 1912, both buried in the Wells Cemetery in Seawillow.

My friend's great grandmother, Seawillow Hubert, was born on December 14, 1880 in Orange County. Although I haven't been able to find a direct connection to the Pipkin family, it's certain possible one of her ancestors was either a slave of John Pipkin's or the story of how his slaves had helped save his daughter's life became legend among slaves and former slaves.

Through the years, Seawillow Hubert's name was spelled (or transcribed) variously as "Serilla", "Suvilla", "See William" or "Seawillow". It was a bit difficult to discern what her actual name was, but this Seawillow's Find-A-Grave entry clearly records her name. I had to know where that name came from, so thus the little "side adventure".

Not only did I learn the likely origins of her name, I learned quite a bit of history about the Beaumont area and the Pipkin family.

While I usually write these types of articles about surnames, this turned out to be quite interesting learning the history of someone's forename.

As I always like to say, keep digging!



## O.K. EVERYTHING HAS A HISTORY

### It Was Oll Korrekt

It is a word spoken millions of times a day around the world, but what are its origins? A book by Allen Metcalf, entitled *OK: The Improbable Story of America's Greatest Word*, believes the word can be traced back to a *Boston Morning Post* newsroom. On March 23, 1839 these words appeared:

*The "Chairman of the Committee on Charity Lecture Bells," is one of the deputation, and perhaps if he should return to Boston, via Providence, he of the Journal, and his train-band, would have the "contribution box," et ceteras, o.k. —all correct—and cause the corks to fly, like sparks, upward.*<sup>1</sup>

However, if it meant "all correct", why wasn't the abbreviation "a.c." instead of "o.k."? Ah well, that would be due to a so-called "abbreviation fad" which occurred in the 1830s. We might think our modern-day texting is a way-cool method of communicating "shorthand" messages, but in that day it was all the rage especially among newspaper editors. It was their version of our "LOLs" and "OMGs".

In the 1940s etymologist Allen Walker Read conducted some serious research and discovered that in many instances the abbreviations were sort of "tongue-in-cheek" and purposely misspelled. For instance, "oll korrekt" would render "o.k."

During that period of time, some newspapers used abbreviations so extensively that it made news almost unintelligible. According to the *Kansas City Times*:

*This elliptical telegraphy became so exaggerated that newspapers were barely understandable. "It shall be done" became*

*"I.S.B.D." "O.K.K.B.W.P." Meant "one kind kiss before we part."*

*But things got even worse. The Boston papers of the day decided to use incorrect first letters to make their esoteric shorthand even less intelligible. "O.W." was used for "oll wright." "N.S.M.J." was the symbol for "Nuff said 'mong gentlemen." The innocent "O.K." came in to outlast them all, standing for "oll korrekt."*<sup>2</sup>

The fad started in the summer of 1838 and was seen in New York in summer 1839 and New Orleans in the fall of 1839. How did it spread? There were no wire services at that time and many newspapers, especially small-town ones, would get their news from other newspapers. Browse through newspaper archives today and you'll see it – word for word, the same article was printed across the country, **right or wrong**.

(The above sentence was not composed in a hurry. Even when it was written she was dissatisfied with it. She thought the expression "costs" might remind him inopportunely of her money.) "It is not usual for ladies to write to gentlemen upon such a topic; my very house-maid would hesitate to give to the young man with whom she 'keeps company' that fateful ring (with O.K.K.B. W.P. on it), which she accepts from him with such alacrity; it is a woman's province to wait for her wooer.

Excerpted from "Thicker Than Water"  
by James Payn, 1883, p. 35

Nineteenth century newspapers were known for the inclusion of not just news but humor, poetry, satire, fiction series and even Sunday School lessons and sermons. As *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories* points out:

*"[M]any American humorists from the 1820s on adopted as public personas uneducated bumpkins who communicated their observations in dialect made more dense by pointless misspelling. It is this tradition that turns no go into know go and no use into know yuse."*<sup>3</sup>

So, not only was it fashionable to use abbreviations it was also acceptable to create them with misspelled terminology.

“All Right” (A.R.) Became “O.W.” or “oll wright” and “N.G.” For “no go” would have been rendered “K.G.” (“know go”). Humorously, “K.K.K.” wasn’t the early rendition for “Ku Klux Klan”, but rather was a fanciful abbreviation for “commit no nuisance”.

Metcalf has a humorous example in his book from the June 12, 1838 edition of the Boston Morning Post. The excerpt is extracted from Allen Read’s research (with abbreviation translations):

*Melancholy -- We understand that J. Eliot Brown, Esq., Secretary of the Boston Young Men's Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Indians, F.A.H. (fell at Hoboken, N.J.) on Saturday last at 4 o'clock, P.M. in a duel with W.O.O.O.F.C. (with one of our first citizens). What measures will be taken by the Society in consequence of this heart rending event, R.T.B.S. (remains to be seen).<sup>4</sup>*

Metcalf continued, citing Boston editor Charles Green’s propensity to vary between small and capital letters: “S.P” (small potatoes); “n.g.” (no go); “G.C.” (gin cocktail); “M.J.” (mint julep) and “G.T.” (gone to Texas, presumably because Texas wasn’t yet a state, fleeing U.S. jurisdiction). What in the world did “g.t.d.h.d.” mean – “give the devil his due” (of course!).<sup>5</sup>

Greene was a loyal Democrat and there was no love lost on the Whigs (as Republicans were known before Lincoln). It wasn’t uncommon for editors who politically leaned one way or the other to take pot shots at the other side. This may have been the case for Greene’s *Morning Post*. In 1971 this item appeared in a question and answer column in the *Akron Beacon Journal*:

***How did the term “O.K.” Originate? – S.D., Akron.***

*Many scholars trace the term to the 1840 presidential contest between Martin Van*

*Buren and William Henry Harrison. Van Buren supporters were known as the “Democratic O.K. Club” because Van Buren was born in Old Kinderhook, N.Y. Others say the term started at a Harrison political rally in Urbana. A farmer drove a wagon into town with the sign “THE FARMERS IS OLL KORRECT.” The Democrats’ newspaper seized on the bad spelling of the inscription, and used it to display the ignorance of the Whig supporters.<sup>6</sup>*

Etymologists and historians also attribute the phenomenon to the 1840 presidential election. The political machine of New York City called themselves the Tammany Society and to support Van Buren they established a Democratic O.K. Club (or “Old Kinderhook”). That was a clever move on their part because they were able to use a word that was becoming increasingly more common, at least among everyday folks (and newspaper editors) – and perhaps they were hoping voters would assume that Van Buren was “oll korrekt”.

Political machines of that day tended to be of the bullying sort, and these club members began to harass and disrupt Whig meetings, making headlines all over the country. Apparently, those tactics weren’t “O.K.” with voters as they sent Van Buren packing back to “Old Kinderhook”. Following the election, Whigs boasted that now “O.K.” Meant “Off to Kinderhook”. William Henry Harrison’s “Tippicanoe and Tyler Too” strategy had worked.

Some historians have also speculated that contributing to Van Buren’s defeat was a story which Whig journalists started passing around in 1828, saying Andrew Jackson had used the term “OK” to stand for “Ole Korrek”, perhaps implying Jackson was a bad speller. For years following the 1840 election, ordinary citizens came up with their own theories as to the origin of the phrase. In letters to editors they would

expound on the origins they believed came from Latin, Greek, French, and more.

One language theory stemmed from the Choctaw word “okeh”. Apparently, Woodrow Wilson bought that one because he wrote “okeh” on documents he approved. When asked why he didn’t use “O.K.” he stated he believed it was wrong.<sup>7</sup>

It was a craze, but how did the literary world respond? Apparently, it wasn’t widely accepted, at least at first. Mark Twain and Bret Harte did not use the new-fangled word; Louisa May Alcott used it once in *Little Women*, but in the next edition “OK” became “cozy” instead, perhaps signaling she was not comfortable with the term.

We all know fads eventually pass, so how did this one, especially the term “OK” manage to endure, even become universal? A 1986 Ann Landers column (via a reader by the name of Mrs. J.H.R., RENTON, WA.) offered:

*“OK” freely punctuates the conversations of people who do not know another word of English. During a World War II soccer match, a team comprised of Poles, Czechs, Danes and Norwegians was hamstrung by their language differences until a Polish player shouted “OK!” Everyone on the team knew what that meant and from then on the play proceeded smoothly.*

Metcalf pointed out in an NPR interview he believes “OK” owes its endurance to its embodiment as a symbol of “America’s can-do philosophy in just two letters. If something’s OK, that’s OK, it’ll work, maybe it’s not perfect but it’ll work, and that’s an American attitude.” As he concluded, “it may be the most important American word.”<sup>8</sup>



## America Waldo Bogle



America Waldo was born in Missouri on June 2, 1844, the offspring of an enslaved black woman and a white slave owner. For years family members assumed America’s father was

Daniel Waldo who left Missouri for Oregon Territory, America traveling with his family across the Oregon Trail.

However, Oregon historians have taken a closer look and found that Daniel left for Oregon in 1843, about a year before America’s birth. In recent years a more likely candidate for America’s father is thought to have been Daniel’s bachelor brother, Joseph. While Daniel proceeded West, Joseph remained in Missouri until 1846.



Daniel was enumerated as a slave owner in 1830, yet by 1840 he had either freed his slaves or sold them. Census records indicate Joseph and one other brother owned slaves, thus it seems all the more likely Joseph was America’s father.

Although some have estimated America’s arrival in Oregon to have been as late as 1856, it would also seem more likely – if Joseph was indeed her father – she went to Oregon at the same time he did in 1846. Nevertheless, upon arrival in Oregon Territory, America made her home with Daniel and his family on their farm near Salem.



Daniel is said to have left Missouri for health reasons, riding most of the way West reclining in a buggy. Even before reaching Oregon his health had improved, and he



would later relate to Oregon historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, “I would rather cross the plains on such a trip than to hoe corn.”<sup>1</sup>

Daniel, highly esteemed by early Oregonian contemporaries, “had a reputation for an acid disposition and an irritable temper.” His opinions of persons and events were often of a critical nature, especially of Methodist missionaries who came to convert the Indians. In his opinion they had done more harm than good, most he believed to be “schemers”.<sup>2</sup>

After the territory’s provisional government was established, Daniel served a member of the legislative committee in 1844 and later as a district judge in what would become Marion County. He was known as “Uncle Dan” by his family and friends.

If America arrived in Oregon Territory with Joseph she did so with the slaves he brought with him from Missouri. Whether America’s mother was among them is unclear.

Historian Brian Johnson, a descendant of the Waldo family, has come to the conclusion that Daniel, as head of the family at large and having already settled in the area which would become synonymous with the family name, probably assumed responsibility for raising America. From acting as a “father figure” it was assumed for years he must have indeed been her father. Johnson believes, nevertheless, that America, although black, was treated as a part of the Waldo family.<sup>3</sup>

Persons of color, be they free or slave, who made their way to Oregon, were faced with any number of obstacles. Many white settlers brought slaves with them, even though early on the Oregon Territorial Legislature passed a bill in 1844 meant to prevent the practice of slavery. Anyone bringing slaves into the Territory was to remove them within three years or the

government would free them. Even after being freed the bill stipulated all free black males had to depart within two years, females within three.

Should a freed slave remain in Oregon longer than permitted by the legislation, the law prescribed they would “receive upon his or her back not less than 20 nor more than 39 stripes.”<sup>4</sup> The punishment was extreme and was later stricken from the law. To skirt the law, these just-freed slaves would again be temporarily enslaved via public auction – “hired out”. Thereafter, it was up to their employers to ensure they left following completion of their service.

It appears the law had actually only been fully enforced one time when Jacob Vanderpool, a Salem entrepreneur, was turned in by a neighbor for the so-called crime of being black. A judge gave him only thirty days to leave. The laws were generally ignored by African Americans, who although few in number, continued to steadily migrate to Oregon.

Still, “African Americans were essentially illegal aliens in Oregon, without citizenship without legal rights. The prevailing sentiment was clearly expressed over and over again: ‘The object is to keep clear of this most troublesome class of population. We are in a new world . . . and we wish to avoid most of these great evils.’” Thus far, their numbers were few, “but quite as many of that class as we wish ever to see.”<sup>5</sup>

The question of whether to bar African Americans from living in Oregon continued to rage. Newspapers regularly used the “N-Word” in referring to persons of color. In March of 1857 the topic inspired an vicious and vulgar tirade in the editorials of *The Weekly Oregon Statesman* about Black Republicans attempting to participate in the political process (Note: please excuse the inclusion of such vulgar language, as this is quoted verbatim):

*Who cares for Black Republican resolutions? They are nothing but a little gas odorous with niggerism. . . I confess Mr. Editor that I am tired and sick of this eternal din about "niggers." Some men are crazy to have "niggers" to work for them, and others are crazy to work for "niggers." Some men think that nigger slavery is the next thing to heaven and others think again that it is nearly hell. Go to the church or the grocery; talk with your friends or read the newspapers, and it is all the same thing. Niggers – niggers – niggers. Indeed the very cod-fish of the country begins to smell of "niggers". I hope that the people of Oregon when they come to set upon this subject will vote down nigger philosophy, nigger philanthropy, and teetotally dry up the whole nigger business.*

#### ANTI NIGGERPHOBIA 6

While America lived with the well-respected Waldo family, she perhaps was shielded from these types of attacks. However, six years later America would experience a measure of racism directed at her.

As a teenager she made the acquaintance of Richard Bogle, a Jamaican immigrant who was a barber in Salem. Richard was born in 1835 and fled the island in 1847. His first stop was New York, then Tennessee and then on to California in 1851 to seek his fortune as a gold miner.

When the gold didn't "pan out" he moved north to the Oregon Territory where he apprenticed as a barber in Roseburg. He later moved to Salem where he met America.

Richard and America were married on January 1, 1863, the same day President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Those of African American descent who had hoped to come to Oregon for a better life and less racial strife must have been disappointed when Oregon's constitution, adopted in 1859 before admission to the Union, had an "exclusion

clause" banning African Americans from living in the state.

So it wasn't surprising their wedding was met with controversy in Salem. The local press, the *Weekly Oregon Statesman*, mocked the wedding ceremony which was held at the First Congregational Church, (predictably) referring to it as a "n---wedding".<sup>7</sup> Daniel, then a prominent citizen of Oregon and a politician, gave his blessing to the marriage and presented them with several gifts of great value with which to start their new home.

The *Morning Oregonian* (Portland) was more supportive – sort of, in a back-handed way:

*It appears that some ladies and gentlemen attended the marriage of a colored girl who had long been a servant and a great favorite in a family at Salem . . . We see no impropriety in any white person who may have a favorite – even if she were as black as the ace of spades – in attending the wedding of such a person. . . We fully agree with our correspondent that, the heart of a man who could be guilty of making light even of a poor mulatto girl's feelings is blacker than the skin of any African.*<sup>8</sup>

Richard and America were married by Obed Dickinson, a Congregational minister (and ardent abolitionist) who had been sent to Oregon by the American Home Missionary Society in 1852.

*This is to certify that the undersigned  
a Minister of the Gospel, did, in the City  
of Salem, on the first day of Jan. 1863 unite  
in lawful wedlock Richard Bogle of  
Walla Walla W.T. and America Waldo of  
the City of Salem. of which marriage  
J. B. Wilson city and Wm. Johnson are  
witnesses*

Dickinson was a supporter of Abraham Lincoln and hopeful his efforts in Salem might bring about some sort of racial healing. Of the approximately twenty or so African Americans in Marion County, three had joined his congregation. However, when he chose the sermon topic on Christian equality, he was predictably excoriated by the press.

Perhaps it shouldn't have been surprising that more than a few Oregonians shared the opinions of these newspaper editors. After all, so many of them had arrived from Missouri, a state sharply divided when it came to the issue of slavery. Nathaniel Ford, a prosperous landowner (and slave owner) and four-term sheriff of Fayette, Missouri, came to the territory in 1844 with six of his slaves.

Besides an adult male named Scott, Ford took Robin and Polly Holmes and three of their children. The other three remained in Missouri, sold off to another slaveholder. Ford promised to free his slaves if only they would help him cultivate his new property situated west of Salem in Polk County. He followed through (sort of) by freeing Robin and Polly in 1850 (Scott had since died). By then Robin and Polly had two more children, one an infant.

While Ford freed the couple and their small infant he kept the other four children for himself. When Robin demanded all his children be free, Ford threatened to send the entire family back to Missouri where they would be forced back into slavery. Robin filed suit against Ford, as one of his children had already died and he feared for the safety of his other children.

While the Oregon Supreme Court initially declined to rule on the case, the appointment George H. Williams by President Rutherford B. Hayes, was a turning point in the case. Williams wasted no time by decisively ruling on July 13, 1853

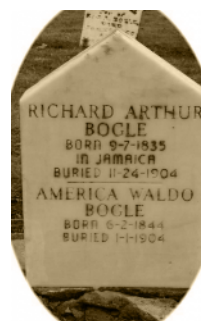
that because Oregon had no provision for slavery Ford must return the children to their parents.<sup>9</sup>

The racially charged atmosphere in Oregon, Salem in particular, likely fueled Richard's decision to take his new bride to Walla Walla, Washington. According to marriage records he had already established a residence there. Richard opened a barbershop and farmed after trying mining (unsuccessfully) one more time.



He also co-founded the Walla Walla Savings and Loans Association. The couple had several children, five of which lived to adulthood. Cemetery records indicate three of their children died before 1878: John, Jennie and Charles. Their other children were Arthur, Belle, Warren, Kate and Waldo. Two of his sons followed Richard into professions as barbers.<sup>10</sup>

America and Richard died less than a year apart, she probably in late 1903 since her grave stone records she was buried on January 1, 1904, their forty-first wedding anniversary. Richard died later that year and was buried on November 24, 1904.





## That's a Wrap!

The first 2019 bi-monthly issue of Digging History Magazine!

I enjoyed writing this issue and putting it together. I learned so much, and I hope you did as well.

I'm looking forward to writing more articles about 1919, a 100-year retrospective on a volatile year in American history – some good, and unfortunately much that was really bad. Hang in there! After that comes the “Roaring 20’s”!

Wishing everyone a prosperous and Happy New Year!

Best,

Sharon Hall, Publisher and Editor



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