

First Landing

Newsletter

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Arkansas State Senator Reuben Reid Adams Takes Bribe, and Other Secrets

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The definition of boodler is a slang term for a person, usually a politician, who takes a bribe or boodle. That was a term I had never heard before, but the newspaper articles about my great-grandfather, Reuben Reid Adams, used the term consistently about his actions. To start from the beginning, Reuben was quite good at keeping secrets. When I started doing genealogy, the family was proud to have an Arkansas State Senator in their family tree. But then the leaves began to fall.

Background

Reuben was born in 1852 in Reidsville, Rockingham County, North Carolina to Samuel Finney Adams, Sr. and his wife, Frances E. Reid. Frances' family were prominent in Reidsville as the town was founded and named after her father. Samuel was a farmer but also was a slave trader on the side. When the Civil War was over, Samuel was nearly bankrupt as a large portion of his wealth had been in slave inventory. Reuben is listed in the 1870 Census as living with his father in Rockingham County, but with little property or wealth. His mother had died before the Civil War and Samuel dies at the end of 1870. The family believes that Reuben and his brother, Frank, left for Arkansas to find their way in the world. There certainly wasn't anything left in North Carolina. Reuben was given a Book of Common Prayer by his older sister, Fannie Adams Thompson. The inscription is dated April 12, 1874. We believe that is when Reuben and Frank left North Carolina for Arkansas. Oral family history says that Reuben and Frank left for Arkansas because their older brother, Hugh Kearns Adams, had moved to Arkansas in 1871 to try his hand at farming. Reuben found a job as a schoolteacher in Prattsville, Arkansas, and began his new life.

First Secret

I discovered that he had been married before. A marriage license for a R. R. Adams in Prattsville, Arkansas came up as a hint on Ancestry.com. I was not sure this was my great-grandfather as the dates did not match with the marriage to my great-grandmother. With more digging, I found *The Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern*

Arkansas, written in 1890. The article was about his brother, Hugh Kearns Adams, but mentioned that his younger brother, Reuben, was a schoolteacher in Prattsville. Bingo! as a hint on Ancestry.com. I was not sure this was my great-grandfather as the dates did not match with the Once I added Laura Glover to my Ancestry tree, more hints came up, especially cemetery records.

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VBGS is a member of these societies



Federation of Genealogical Societies was founded in 1976 and represents the members of hundreds of genealogical societies. <https://fgs.org/>



The National Genealogy Society is more than a century old! NGS was organized in Washington, DC, in 1903. <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/>



The Virginia Genealogical Society was organized in 1960. <https://www.vgs.org/>

Leadership Notes..... President's Message, August 2020

I am sure everyone is tired being inside, but we must do that to stay safe. That is why our meetings for Fall 2020 will stay on ZOOM. Duane Harding is leading a committee to discuss having a VBGS Members Directory. If you would like to help with this, send an email to the VBGS Administrator. We also need some of you savy younger members to help with the VBGS Computer User Group. Linda Brown needs some help now, email the Administrator if you are available. I want to expecially thank the Chairs of our new Social Committee and Writer's Group - Debby Christian and Carol Johnson. Debby has kept us busy all summer with the coffee hours which we all enjoy tremendously. Carol has spent many hours working with our article writers. We have learned so much from her, she is truly an expert in the art of writing.



The VBGS November Newsletter will focus on the funny things that happened in our ancestors lives. We encourage you to submit articles even if they are just a couple of paragraphs.

Wendy Bransom

Publicity Committee - Barbara Murray, Chair

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE: We are very active committee. We are committed to attracting new members to VBGS and keeping members informed about the Society. The Webmaster functions under the Publicity Committee Chair, designs and maintains all elements of the Society website and updating contents. Teaching genealogy related classes at Marian Manor was a welcomed success. In the future, we hope to have oral interviews of assisted living residents with questions pertaining to life experiences.

Scholarship Written by Jo Given

The VBGS Board has established a scholarship for our members and future members in this time of financial need for so many people. If you are a member or would like to become a member and have a need for assistance with the annual dues consider applying for the scholarship. It covers one individual or a household of two for one year (\$25/\$35). The application process is confidential. Your application should be sent to the Treasurer who will share it with one other VBGS member who will be appointed by the President. These two members will review the applications and notify individuals if they are selected. There are a limited number of scholarships – five for this year (2020-2021). Any applicant can only receive two scholarships in a five-year period.

The Scholarship Application can be found on the VBGS website under the Membership tab. Please send your application to the Administrator (it will not be opened; it will be forwarded to the Treasurer) and include a new or renewal application. Please send any general questions to firstlanding.vbgs@gmail.com

*Welcome
To our new members*

Kathy Hessmer
Diana Quinn
Madelyn Reass



Membership: \$25 Individual and \$35 Family: <https://vbgsva.net/membership/> Mail applications, questions and address changes to: VBGS P.O. Box 62901 Virginia Beach, VA 23466-2901, *Check out our updated website:* <https://www.vbgsva.net/>

The Virginia Beach Genealogical Society

VBGS was founded 1983. VBGS is organized for educational purposes

The objectives of this society are:

- To help individuals conduct their genealogical research and compile their family histories
- To aid individuals by educational means, including lectures, discussions, and workshops
- To create and foster an interest in genealogy
- To gather and preserve genealogical and historical data.

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Upcoming Events

2020 Meetings

Email the VBGS Administrator to attend VBGS Zoom meetings: vbglady@gmail.com, respond to each meeting in separate e-mail, state in subject: line name of event, waiting room opens 30 minutes before each event.

13 AUG: VBGS Coffee Hour via Zoom at 7:00 pm, Topic: "DNA Forum Discussion."

10 SEP: VBGS Monthly Meeting via Zoom at 7:00 pm, Topic: "Put Your Family History on the Map: Using Maps and Geography for Genealogy," Speaker: Sara J. Kidd, MS, GISP

15 SEP: VBGS Computer User Group via Zoom 6:00 pm, "Using Family Search for Genealogical Research," Speaker: Beth Zondler, Director of Family History Center.

24 SEP: VBGS Writer's Group via Zoom, at 7:00 pm Topic: "Telling Your Generation Your Story."

1 OCT: VBGS Social Hour via Zoom at 7:00 pm, Topic: Show and Tell. Email vbglady@gmail.com, also state item you want to show and how long you need to speak.

8 OCT: VBGS Monthly Meeting via Zoom at 7:00 pm, Topic: "Your Ancestors on 'Judge Judy': Using Chancery Records in Virginia," Speaker: W. Samuel Williams, The Orthodox Genealogist.

20 OCT: VBGS Computer User Group via Zoom 6:00 pm, Topic: "Spotlight on Software," Heather Wright will demonstrate "Legacy Family Tree" and Wendy Bransom will demonstrate "Rootsmagic."

22 OCT: VBGS Writer's Group via Zoom, at 7:00 pm Topic: Discussion TBD.

5 NOV: VBGS Social Hour via Zoom at 7:00 pm, Topic: Show and Tell. Email vbglady@gmail.com, state item you want to show and how long you need to speak.

12 NOV: VBGS Monthly Meeting via Zoom at 7:00 pm, Topic: "Merging History and Genealogy," Speaker: Peg Niedholdt.

17 NOV: VBGS Computer User Group via Zoom 6:00 pm, Topic: "Converting VHS Tapes, Slides, Home Movies, and other media to Digital Format," Speakers: April Owens working with Joan Schlegelmilch.

23 NOV: VBGS Writer's Group via Zoom, at 7:00 pm Topic: Discussion TBD

10 DEC: VBGS Monthly Meeting via Zoom at 7:00 pm, Speaker: Lisa Louise Cooke Video on "Institutional Records Research Methods." This is limited to VBGS paid members only.

Meetings continued

- 17 DEC: VBGS Writer's Group via Zoom, at 7:00 pm Topic: Discussion TBD.

2020 Conferences

2 September, FGS 2020 Conference Virtual, Kansas City, Missouri, "Blazing Trails in the Heart of America," Registration is available, go to the conference home page <https://fgs.org/annual-conference/> for more information. Early bird ends August 15, 2020. On September 2, live sessions begin that include CeCe Moore, Thomas W. Jones, Ari Wilkins, Judy G. Russell, and Lisa Louise Cooke. They will also have special presentations and the latest from Ancestry and FamilySearch.

Special Offerings

Check out Lighting the Path to Local History, Virginia Beach Public Library's Digital Archives. You'll find thousands of postcards, photographs, local maps, family papers, yearbooks and other materials. <http://cdm16450.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm>

Virginia Beach is opening up some of their library branches. Safety is their top priority, so they have implemented some new practices. Here is a list of current openings:

- Virginia Beach Bayside, Central, Kempsville, Princess Anne hours: Monday to Thursday, 10 a.m. to 6 pm. Friday & Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Wahab Public Law Library hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Great Neck, Joint-Use, Oceanfront, Pungo-Blackwater and Windsor Woods are offering lobby service for holds pickup.

The "Ancestor Hunt" is a website run by Kenneth R Marks. It is a free resource with tons of information.

<https://www.theancestorhunt.com/>. Barbara Murray, a VBGS member, brought this wonderful resource to the attention of the VBGS Newsletter Editor. Kenneth also has a youtube channel where he has free classes.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/KennethRMarks>



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(757)756-4861, www.ilrvb.org, office@ilrvb.org

Go online to ILR www.ilrvb.org to view available ILR Zoom classes.

Arkansas State Senator Reuben Reid Adams Takes Bribe, and Other Secrets (continued from page 1)

Then I found not only had he married, but he had a child, a child that was still living when he married my great-grandmother and started another family.

He married his first wife, Laura Glover, in 1886. She gave birth to a child in 1888 and they named her Jewel. Unfortunately, Laura died a month later, most likely from childbirth complications. No one in the family had ever heard of Laura Glover or Jewel. I started digging. Yes, he moved to the same town where Laura Glover lived and he taught school there. Laura was 17 years younger than Reuben and we believe he may have been her teacher. The 1900 Federal Census lists Jewel as living with her Glover grandparents. Reuben moved to Sheridan, Arkansas and began to farm. In 1896, he marries my great-grandmother, Belle Slaughter, and their first child is born in 1898. A second child is born in 1903. The family wonders why Reuben and Belle did not take Jewel in to live with them at the time. We will never know. Jewel dies in 1905, so she may not have been a healthy child. That was shocking enough. Then the family begins to hang their head in shame.

Second Secret

I began to collect articles about Reuben's political career. In 1890, he enters Arkansas State politics. He is elected to the Arkansas State House of Representatives in 1891 and is re-elected for a second term in 1893. He introduces several bills regarding the boll weevil that was attacking cotton in Arkansas. From 1895-1899, he serves as the Grant County Examiner and receives several commendations for his fine work. The County Examiner was charged with the licensing of schoolteachers. In 1900, he is elected to the Arkansas State Senate. His district is large and covers Saline, Hot Springs and Grant Counties. He is re-elected in 1904.



*Arkansas State
Senate Campaign
photo, June 1928*

Sometime in 1905, Senator Festus O. Butt (I didn't make this up.) offered Reuben Reid Adams a \$100.00 bribe to change his vote on an appropriations bill to improve the State Capitol. If the bill passed, he would get \$400.00 more. Reuben initially did not want to vote for the bill as the money was not itemized so there was no way to know where it all would go. He voted for the bill. The bill did not pass, but Reuben pocketed the \$100.00 and went on his way. Rumors of corruption began to circulate in 1906 and an investigation was started. By January 1907, it was clear that bribes had been offered but only one senator had taken one. When Reuben realized he was going to be arrested, he offered to return the bribe to Senator Butt and testify against him. The Arkansas Senate was having none of it. Festus Butt was convicted of bribery and sentenced to two years in the penitentiary.

As was typical of the day, the papers printed Reuben's entire testimony word-for-word, including how he held his head in his hands several times. Reuben Adams was not tried for taking a bribe because he turned state's evidence and his testimony could not be used against him. Even though he seemed remorseful on the stand, he did not want to resign as Senator. The Senate voted to expel him instead. He officially was removed from office February 25, 1907. Further investigation found four other senators who had also taken bribes and over several different bills. Most were fined and/or served several weeks in jail. The investigation revealed the contractor who was supplying the money for the bribes. He was also punished.

Reuben had purchased a newspaper, the Sheridan Headlight, in 1902, and after the expulsion, he went back to his paper as editor. He never served a day in jail or paid any kind of penalty besides the shame of it all. In 1928, he runs for his same senate seat again. Arkansas did not have any legislation in place to prevent this. Reuben loses this election. In later news articles, I found that Festus Butt served 5 months in prison, but was pardoned by the governor after a "tearful appeal by his wife" that he had suffered enough. The suffering did not prevent him for running for his Senate seat again and winning!

The Aftermath

My 90-year-old mother was 9 years old when her Grandfather Adams died, but she has several memories of him. No one ever said anything about his first family or his expulsion from the State Senate. She still does not understand why her grandfather would have taken a bribe. My research did reveal that the first New York Stock Exchange market crash happened in 1901 when the tycoons of the day struggled for control of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

(continued on page 5)

Arkansas State Senator Reuben Reid Adams Takes Bribe, and Other Secrets (continued from page 4)



Reuben Reid Adams

Many small investors were ruined. This is speculation, but maybe money was tight in the Adams household. One hundred dollars was a lot of money in 1905.

Most of the family wonders more about their Grandmother Belle Adams. She was 20 years younger than Reuben and my mother and her siblings knew her well. Belle was well-known in the small town of Sheridan, Arkansas. Grandfather was the editor of the town paper, and Belle wrote the Society Column. She also played the organ for the town's silent movie theater. She was on the first female jury in the county. Did she hide her head in shame? Ignore it as politics was a man's world? Since no one ever talked about it, we will never know. Strangely, Reuben's obituary ignores his first marriage and child. It mentions that he was a county examiner in 1902. There is one sentence that he was a State Senator and nothing more. No wonder none of us had a clue about his past until the 21st century.

Try WikiTree
By Craig Fenton
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We are always looking for more cousins, who know more than we do. Record research, by itself, will only take us so far. We need to find people who know a part of our family history we don't know. Most of us have taken one or more DNA tests. The shared matches are a big help to our research. When researching my Fenton line, I met a 5th cousin, who recommend I check out the WikiTree site.

WikiTree ([WikiTree.com](https://www.wikitree.com)) community defines its purpose to grow the Free Wiki Family Tree into one accurate, shared tree that connects us all, and is accessible to all of us for free, FOREVER. Besides the Family Tree, you will find the community honor code, a genealogist-to-genealogist (G2G) forum, WikiTree Team pages with bios and contact information, and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section to help new users navigate the site. The G2G Section has old photos, ancestor profiles, and stories of about the challenges faced by our ancestors.

Some of the statics of the site are:

- 24 million profiles
- 7 million DNA connections from all DNA testing companies
- 725,000 genealogists

The site has a weekly newsletter informing the reader of past and future activities. In the July 22 Newsletter, the notes included an announcement on site improvements, 60,000 relatives added, G2G features, next weeks focus and Member-of-the-Week.

I have found WikiTree to be a site that can be of benefit to all levels of genealogists. The site is free, so give WikiTree a look, poke around, and you may just find a lead or a new cousin.



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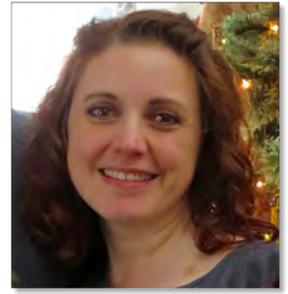
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Not-So-Smooth Sailing

By Heather Wright

heatherwrightvb@gmail.com

Alexander, who goes by Sandie, is my 2nd cousin 6 times removed and a hot mess. He is born on October 12, 1842 into a much respected family in Washington, Pennsylvania. He is the fourth of Alexander Acheson and Jane Wishart's eleven children. His father is a lawyer, a judge, and a lifeline. Sandie has big aspirations but can't seem to find his footing and becomes plagued by financial troubles. He eventually lands on his feet, but it's a bumpy ride.



Alexander, aka Sandie
photo credit:

Find a Grave user Lisa Mac

Much of Sandie's journey comes to life in family letters. A trunk was found while clearing the old Acheson house in Washington. Luckily for descendants they were transcribed and shared. (Excerpts included here are in italics.)

Sandie's childhood is, as far as I know, pleasant. He is in school (likely Washington College) when the Civil War begins in April 1861. In May, he tries to enlist in the regiment two elder brothers are in but there is no room. He waits until late summer 1862 to join the 140th Pennsylvania Volunteers. (He has not graduated yet.) His affection for his family shines during his time in service.

He writes home every Sunday, mostly to his mother, even if there is nothing to say. He shares where he is and includes drawings of the camps or little items he's collected, like pins or shells. He speaks of supply shortages, the weather, what they do in camp and general pleasantries. He asks for books to be sent, writing paper, clothing or money for clothing (he's in constant need of socks). He's always pleased to hear from his family, and his sense of humor comes through too. One of my favorites: *As this is small paper you sent me, I suppose you want small letters in return.*



Sandie in service
photo shared on Rootsweb

In May 1863, as a (very) late Christmas gift for his parents, he asks for pictures of his parents and siblings to be arranged in the shape of a heart and placed in a *large oval gift frame*. He knew some siblings would need photos taken but he didn't care how much it cost. *Get it done—and done nicely and charge it to my account. If it ain't a good one, I'll fix up a better one when I come home. Goodbye.*

Sandie emerges from the war in one piece but is taken sick at times. In July 1863 he is sent by ambulance to a hospital in Alexandria. During his recovery, he learns brother David dies at Gettysburg. Not surprisingly, he takes the news pretty hard.

He marries Sarah M. Cooke, who goes by Sadie, on June 20, 1864 in Washington. He completes his service in early December and, I believe, goes directly to medical school. (He may study in Philadelphia; they are there in 1866.)

Trouble begins

Financial troubles seem to begin immediately. By July 1867, they are in Beaver, Pennsylvania and Sandie is trying to establish himself as a doctor. December comes and nothing is happening. He ponders purchasing a house and functioning practice in Darlington (about 13 miles away) but Sarah does not want to go. He becomes the jail doctor but even that doesn't help. He has 40 calls in February 1868, half are charity and he earns a whole \$1.25.

It must be a breaking point, as it's first time I see him ask for financial help. He closes a letter to his mother, *If father could spare a little money I would like to have some.* In July he asks for rent money. He tries to become the poor house doctor. I don't think he does and, I don't think it would have helped much either, paying \$225 a year, but he supplies the medicine. They leave Beaver about August 1868 for Manhattan in New York City.

They have two little girls by now (about ages 1 and 2) and both of their fathers are helping with expenses. *We like New York pretty well and think we can get along all right in time. I do not intend giving up medicine unless I have to. I will try it long enough to see if I can succeed, and I believe I can if I hold to it, but I do not wish to be a burden to father.*

(continued on page 7)

Not-So-Smooth Sailing (continued from 6)

In the new year his father sends money and a maternal uncle, a doctor, sends letters of introduction and recommendation in hopes of Sandie gaining an appointment with one of them. [I don't know that he visits the doctors, it is not mentioned again.]

In May 1869 they move to Brooklyn. *We are (we think) in a good location. [...] At first there is trouble to get a foothold, until I get acquainted and they have confidence in me. Time and trial alone will accomplish that.* He sends his mother a sketch of their portion of the shared home and a piece of mica, telling her how it's used as a window in the oven. Sandie asks for more money and we learn he has debt with a Mr. Hice. It must be a significant amount as Sandie says he has part of the money after his father sold a horse and buggy.

In addition to their financial struggles, Sarah and one of the girls has been sick. He mentions they do not plan on having more children for at least ten years. [Their situation must have played into that decision heavily.]

Come September things are still not looking up and Sandie practically begs his parents to come visit, *I believe your visit would do me good, not only from the pleasure of seeing you, but it would let the neighborhood know that --- You understand how squeamish some people are, and don't like others because they don't know their pedigree.* [I do not know if they visit.]

Sarah's mother spends the winter of 1869-1870 with them, it does not go well. The subjects of him depending on Sarah's father and needing to seek other employment are brought up. *For my part I do not care if she never crosses the threshold [sic] again. She has been writing some awful letters home, for Mr. C. wrote back that such was the case, and I so will not be surprised if Mr. C. is influenced to quit helping us. [Mr. C is John Cooke, Sarah's father.]* She is out of their home at the end of January. Sandie and Sarah, hoping to cut expenses, plan to move again shortly.

Sandie goes missing

On March 13, 1870 Sandie writes his mother, as he often does. He speaks of the weather, what the children are doing, and the upcoming St. Patrick's holiday in the city. A perfectly normal letter. Just five days later, on March 18th, he goes missing. The only sign of distress was a February 12th letter where he rants about his mother-in-law.

Paternal uncle Marcus Acheson has a theory: *Sandie - acting from good motives - had left home to seek employment or a new location and to avoid opposition had inconsiderately gone without apprising his wife of his intention. I never entertained a suspicion that he was guilty of aught save an error of judgment. [...] The whole thing is a great mystery.*

Months pass. By September the family fears he is dead. His father writes his mother, *Alas, how much greater the satisfaction, with all the sad and sorrowful recollections we have in the contemplation of his fate, than in the distracting doubts and uncertainty that surrounds our other lost son. [...] No, there are but two ways of it - death by accident or violence by the hand of another; or voluntary absence. I cling to the last.*

In October there is a rumor he is in Egypt or China, they do not believe this.

Sandie reappears

It's mid-November [eight months later!] when Sandie suddenly writes from Meridian, Nebraska. The family is relieved, mad, and worried. Sarah and the girls are in Washington with Sandie's family at the time.

His mother writes, *Sadie [Sarah] did not sleep last night and is very sensitive about what is said of Sandie. I have said little, but of course the subject has occupied my mind. [...] She has not talked much [...] and will not think of going to him till he is ready for her. I said yesterday to her he had put us through a cruel ordeal and [she] said if she could forgive him, others might. [...] I do not feel disposed to [write] until we hear further from him.*



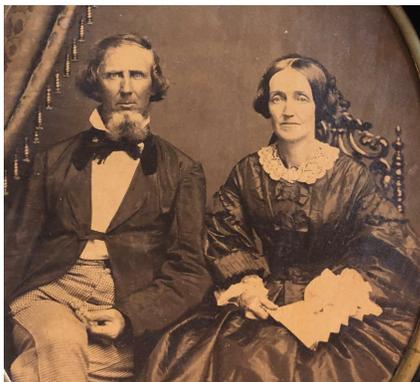
Sarah Cooke Acheson
(public domain photo)

(continued on page 8)

Not-So-Smooth Sailing (continued from 7)

He must have been a wretched man, but he has not suffered more than he has caused us to do. [...] Sadie looks like a different woman.

His father writes, *His letter is very unsatisfactory. My belief is that his explanation will make him more the object of our compassion than our censure. [...] My opinion is that mental depression was the cause, and a sense of shame prevented an earlier disclosure. [...] The brief line from him is significant of repentance, of suffering [sic] more than we wot of; and I have no fears that he will not be to her again a loving, faithful husband.*



Sandie's parents Judge Alexander Acheson and Jane Wishart
Photo credit: Joshua Braley

1871 arrives and Sandie is still in Nebraska. He asks his father to decide if he should settle in Fairbury or Hebron. He does not want Sarah and the children to join him yet. Of Fairbury he says, *One Dr. now in the place has a house, which I can think of nothing in Washington to compare it to, unless it be a horseshed [sic] in the Fairground. [I don't think his father chooses.]*

Sarah wants to join her husband but he refuses, *If she persists, as in following to Philadelphia, and comes to me before I am ready, then don't be surprised at hearing of any course I may pursue. I threaten nothing. In the past I have kept silent and borne reproach when it was not my fault. [...] I want to try once more to get up. I know I can if not weighted down. [...] Only one thing I fear and that is a never ceasing stream of letters begging, beseeching, urging, worrying until unnerved and out of patience I am compelled to yield. I will try though, and hope to have courage enough to stand out until the end.*

It's March 1871, a year since he disappeared. He is now with a cousin in Kansas City, Missouri trying again to begin a practice. His family still worries; the circumstances seem to have created a rift between Sarah and his parents, apparently she has treated them quite badly. David McKnight, the cousin, tells Sandie's father, *His domestic trials have evidently been a burden to him, a source of discouragement, and even of despair.*

In October, on top of all everything, their eldest daughter Catherine dies of scarlet fever. Sandie does not make his way home. Sarah again asks to join him, he refuses. A few cousins and uncles have been helping him out in addition to his father. He's becoming more involved with the YMCA and his church but business remains unprofitable.

Sandie's situation hasn't changed but Sarah and daughter Jennie join him at the end of May 1872, after her father passes. [Over two years later!] They continue to rely on family but are running out of options. Sandie asks his parents for money in September. An uncle will only give him \$100 every three months and a cousin sent \$100 but told him there would be no more. His father wants them to return to Washington but Sandie refuses. He defends having Sarah and Jennie with him even though it has increased expenses. They want to borrow \$4,000 against her upcoming inheritance. *This sum now will relieve us of all further necessity to borrow, and of course put an end to this writing a begging letter at the beginning of every month, which I always look forward to with dread.* His father offers \$500.

Sandie has hit bottom. At the end of October, he accepts an offer from cousin David. He leaves medicine to be a building supply merchant, his cousin will supply stock until Sandie grows his business. This turns out to be the best decision Sandie makes.

Finding a Home in Texas

Sandie moves to Denison, Texas in December 1872; he expects Sadie and Jennie to join him in about 2 weeks. The following February he says, *This new town of Dennison is one of the strangest places you ever got into. We have a grand mixture of all nationalities, peoples, and statesmen—Gentlemen and cowboys strangely mixed.*

Not So Smooth Sailing (continued from 8)

The couple seem to settle nicely into the community. Sandie becomes a local councilman within the year, they help organize two churches, and Sarah becomes involved in literary and musical societies, as well as a large voice in the temperance movement. By 1885, Sandie ventures back into medicine, initially with his brother Henry, who has joined him in Texas. This is short lived however, as Henry returns north within a year after becoming addicted to drugs. The other siblings bring him home to get help. [I suspect it was the medicines but I don't know.] Sandie continues the practice until 1929.

Sandie and Sarah purchase a house. It's a grand one too, the first one in Denison to have electric lights, water service, and telephones. When this happens, I'm not sure. Sandie said they were trying to get an advance on Sarah's inheritance to help pay for it. They seem to flourish in Texas but it isn't without heartache. They have three more children here. The first, a little girl, dies in 1874 at about a year old. The second, a son, passes in 1880, about age 4. The third, another daughter, thankfully survives.



Sandie at age 90
photo credit, *Family Letters*
in a *Civil War Century*

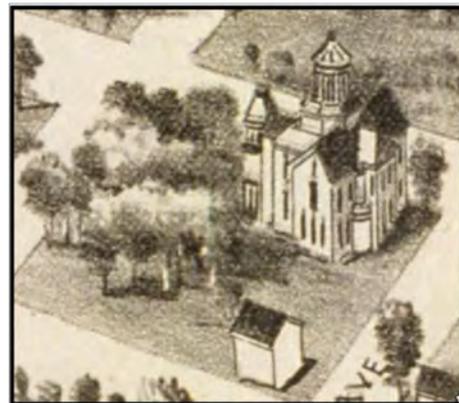
After 25 years of ups and downs together, Sandie loses Sarah in January 1889. She is only 55 and had been sick for two years. Fortunately, she was able to enjoy a few happy years with him before passing.

Also fortunate, his parents see him succeed before they pass. His mother dies in 1887 and his father in 1890. They seem to have made amends too. Not only are the letters more pleasant, but his father keeps amending his will to leave Sandie more. The initial \$3,000 bequest is first increased to \$4,000 and then \$6,000.

Sandie becomes mayor of Denison in 1905, he serves four terms. He tries for Governor of Texas in 1906 and a U. S. Senate seat in 1916 but both are unsuccessful. After all he's been through though, I hope he felt successful. It took a long time and a lot of help, but he made it. He passes on September 7, 1934. at age 91.

sources:

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Sandie and Sarah's home in Denison

What's New

New Member Surname List - By Heather Wright

Sometimes we have closer ties to those around than we realize. To help find connections within the VBGS, a surname list has been started on the members only Facebook page. Find it under files or search for surname list on the page. Add your surnames and see what lines others are working on too. Make sure you put them in alphabetical order with the other surnames.

If you are not on Facebook but want to participate, you can submit your surnames and locations to the VBGS Administrator email (vbgslady@gmail.com) and your surnames will be added to the list. You can also request the current list be sent to you for review. We are not posting it on the webpage at this time due to privacy concerns.

VBGS Member Surnames List

Ever wonder if fellow VBGS members are working on the same surname line? Let's find out.

Add your surnames (in alphabetical order if you can) as follows:

Surname - Location - your name or FB profile name

[See More](#)

THE GOOD, the SAD, and the UGLY... and UGLIEST!

By Bob Bruce
rebiv@outlook.com



We make fascinating genealogical discoveries through various methods. Some of mine have come the old-fashioned way, such as searching in the county courthouse, and finding a suit against my ancestor by a distant cousin who didn't agree with the will. Others have been aided by the more recent tool of DNA, and finding my wife has an unknown cousin from an aunt who put their child up for adoption. But certainly the computer, using databases such as Ancestry and Google, has made it quicker and easier to be directed to distant ancestors who have a place in history. This was the case for me recently, since Covid-19 had closed libraries and courthouses.



Timothy Ruggles
(1711-1795)

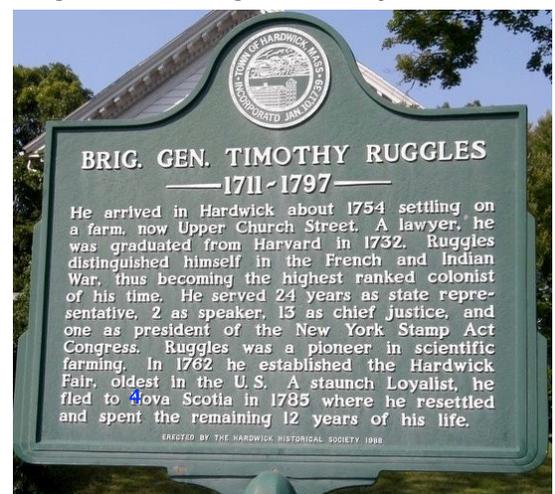
THE GENEALOGY

I had not explored my wife Cindy's lines in a long while, and doing computer genealogy seemed a productive way to spend the quarantine. Paul Dean (1746-1828), Cindy's fourth great-grandfather, a Revolutionary War minuteman, married Elizabeth Ruggles (1752-1810), whose parents were Edward Ruggles (1723-1778), also a minuteman, and Lucy Spooner (1729-1821). This was as far as I had gone on this family. Using Ancestry, I found Edward Ruggles' father, Reverend Timothy Ruggles (1685-1768).¹ Entering the name of Timothy Ruggles into Ancestry and Google brought forth fireworks, illuminating both the famous and INFAMOUS.

The Rev. Timothy's mother's line took me through Mercy Dudley to her father, Thomas Dudley (1576-1653), second Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, founder of Cambridge, and signer of the Harvard College charter. His first wife, Dorothy Yorke (1582-1643), and Dudley, have royal pedigrees for further exploration.² After spending time with the famous, I went back to Rev. Timothy's family.

He had twelve children with his first wife, Mary White (1688-1749). The oldest was Brig. Gen. Timothy Ruggles (1711-1795), brother of Edward, the minuteman. He studied law, and graduated from Harvard in 1732. He became a leading lawyer in Massachusetts, representing the Crown in his hometown of Rochester. He went on to be a representative in the Assembly in Boston for twenty-four years, was speaker for two years, and Chief Justice of the Worcester Superior Court for thirteen years. He moved his family to Hardwick, outside of Worcester, in 1753. Here, in addition to his legal and political affairs, he established a scientifically managed farm using methods years ahead of the time.³

When the French and Indian War broke out, Timothy raised a regiment of volunteers from Worcester County, and was appointed its head as Colonel. He rose to be Brigadier General in charge of Provincial forces from Massachusetts and Rhode Island. He was the highest-ranking colonist in this conflict. He received grants from the Crown for his service, and was one of the most respected men in New England. John Adams, who admired the haughty judge, wrote in his journal, "Ruggles' grandeur consists in the quickness of his apprehension, steadiness of attention, the boldness and strength of his thoughts and expressions, his strict honor, conscious superiority, and contempt of meanness." He went on to describe the effect of such an imposing presence: "People approach him with dread and terror."⁴



Ruggles historical marker

But Gen. Timothy was a Loyalist, and all of his accolades came to a sudden end as unrest with the Crown rose. In August 1774, he was run out of Hardwick by the townsmen, and escaped to the safety of Boston. He evacuated with the British when they left for New York and remained on Staten Island, and later Long Island, for the duration of the war. In 1784, he left with other loyalists for Nova Scotia, where he received 10,000 acres in Wilmot on the Bay of Fundy. His two loyalist sons went with him, and a third son, who had fought for the colonists, joined him later.⁵

(continued on page 11)

THE GOOD, the SAD, and the UGLY... and UGLIEST! (continued from page 10)



The Homestead of General Timothy Ruggles, Hardwick, Massachusetts, circa 1770-1775, by Winthrop Chandler (1747-1790) - Worcester Art Museum

Sad as it was for a gifted leader who could not bring himself to separate from the government he had served his whole life, the fate of his favorite daughter was just plain ugly. Bathsheba Ruggles (1746-1778) was “beautiful, intelligent, high-spirited, and witty, though not wise.”⁶ On July 2, 1778, she became the first woman executed in the United States after the Declaration of Independence for “the most extraordinary crime ever perpetrated in New England.”⁷

THE BACKGROUND

Bathsheba Ruggles and Joshua Spooner (1741-1778), “scions of prominent families of colonial aristocracy,”⁸ were married on January 15, 1766. They were the parents of two sons and two daughters, although the second son died weeks after birth. Although Joshua was not the oldest son, he had inherited a sizable sum upon the death of his father, a wealthy Boston merchant. The couple was among the affluent, living in a two-story house in the small farming community of Brookfield, Massachusetts.

This was not a happy marriage. “Records indicate that Joshua was frequently drunk and sometimes abusive of his wife, and was also a weak manager of his household and affairs.” Whatever the reason, Bathsheba developed “an utter aversion” toward her husband.⁹

In early 1777, a sixteen-year old American soldier, Ezra Ross, was making his way to his family in Ipswich, after completing his enlistment. He had experienced all the hardships of 1776 in following Washington from Boston to New York to Trenton, New Jersey. Travelling the 300-mile journey by foot he fell ill, and passing through Brookfield, he was taken into the home of Bathsheba, who nursed him back to health. He stopped again in Brookfield two other times in 1777 – on his way to Fort Ticonderoga, and returning in December, after the Battle of Saratoga. This last stop extended into 1778. By then, Joshua had become fond of Ezra, and invited him on business trips.

However, also during this period, Ezra and Bathsheba became intimate which led to her pregnancy by mid-January 1778. This pushed Bathsheba into a state of panicked desperation. She first tried to persuade Ezra to poison her husband. When he could not follow through with this, Bathsheba then coaxed two British deserters or escapees into her scheming. Through offering “one thousand dollars, clothing, and the alluring prospect of sex,”¹⁰ she ultimately got them to agree to murder her husband.

THE MURDER

The British soldiers, Sergeant James Buchanan and Private William Brooks, were kept in the barn, hidden from Joshua. Ezra Ross, coming to his senses while on a business trip with Joshua, and realizing he could not poison him, had gone directly home to Ipswich without seeing Bathsheba. In the intervening time, she wrote him about developments with the two soldiers. Either by accident, or drawn by his desire to stay close to Bathsheba, Ezra Ross returned to Brookfield the day before the murder.

On the evening of March 1, 1778, Joshua had gone to a local tavern with some friends. It was a moonless night, perfect for an ambush. William Brooks, the murderer, crouched in wait for the husband to return. As Joshua entered the kitchen garden, Brooks struck him down, and then proceeded to strike, beat and kick him. Brooks also partly strangled Joshua to make sure he was dead. The other two conspirators finally joined Brooks to put the body head first into the well.

(continued on page 12)

THE GOOD, the SAD, and the UGLY... and UGLIEST! (continued from page 11)

THE TRIAL AND EXECUTION

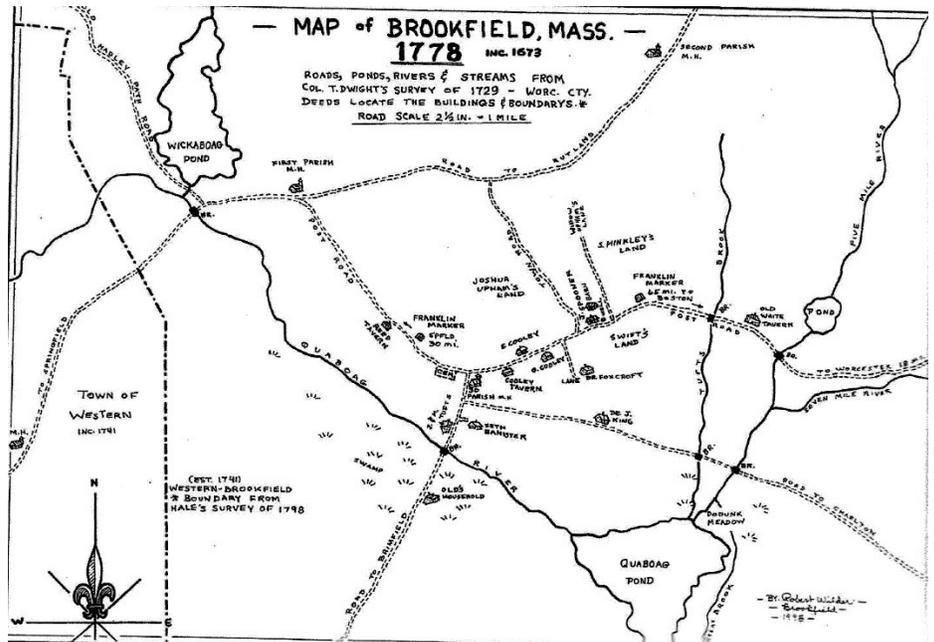
Obviously, the plan for this crime was fraught from the beginning. There was no thought of the escape. The following day, after the body was discovered, all three were apprehended in the next town wearing Joshua's clothes, which included silver shoe buckles with his initials on them. They implicated Bathsheba, and all four confessed to the murder, although she never made a formal statement

Justice came swiftly in the days during the Revolution. The trial took place on April 27, and was over in sixteen hours. The sentence was handed down immediately: death by hanging with execution set for June 4.



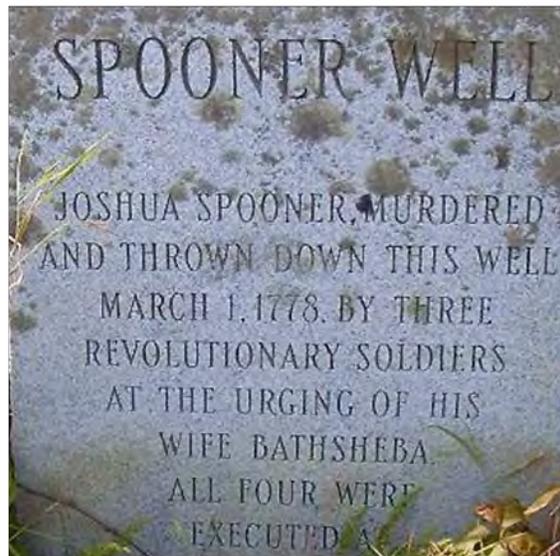
Hanging of Bathsheba Ruggles Spooner by Sante Graziani

On the new appointed day, July 2, a crowd of 5,000 people gathered to witness the hangings. A post mortem was conducted at Bathsheba's request, and as reported by the minister "a perfect male foetus of the growth of five months or near it ... was taken from her."¹²



Brookfield 1778

Ezra Ross's family made an appeal to save his life to no avail. Bathsheba did not try to save herself, but she asked for a delay of her execution to give time for her child to be delivered. A postponement was granted to allow a group of twelve matrons and two male midwives to examine Bathsheba. They concluded she "was not quick with child."¹¹ A second examination was performed at the request of a minister, and four of the six examiners found that she was pregnant. However, the council was intransigent, and the execution proceeded.



Spooner Well: Joshua Spooner, Murdered and thrown down this well March 1, 1778 by three Revolutionary Soldiers at the urging of his wife Bathsheba. All four were executed.



Joshua Spooner tombstone

(continued on page 13)

THE GOOD, the SAD, and the UGLY... and UGLIEST! (continued from page 12)

AFTERTHOUGHTS

On the surface this is a story of four murderers who were justly tried, convicted, and executed. But there are so many other aspects that raise questions, and have kept the public interest alive. In killing the guilty, did Massachusetts, in fact, commit murder of the unborn child? Some say this ended execution of women in Massachusetts. Abortions were legal in Puritan New England (though not always successful), but not after quickening. What other options did Bathsheba have? Women had few rights at this time, and were stripped and flogged if guilty of adultery. Divorce hardly existed. Was mental capacity a factor? The defense attorney did try to make a case of insanity. In fact, Bathsheba, the youngest daughter of the Spooners, died at eighty-three after “many years hopelessly insane.” And then, as time and historic research have revealed, conflict of interest existed with the Massachusetts Council overseeing the trial. John Avery Jr., deputy secretary, whose signature authorized the final warrant of execution, was Joshua Spooner’s stepbrother. In addition, “he was a member of the Loyal Nine, the innermost circle of the Sons of Liberty, who all nurtured a vendetta against Brig. Gen. Timothy Ruggles.”¹³

I imagine tongues were wagging, at least in New England, these almost 250 years ago. But time has erased most memories, even for descendants and ancillary relations. My wife’s first reaction upon hearing my discovery was “I’m sure glad I wasn’t born back then!” That was her way of saying that women have come a long way in establishing their rightful place as equal to men. She could also be saying “If I was born back then, I WOULD HAVE KILLED HIM TOO!”

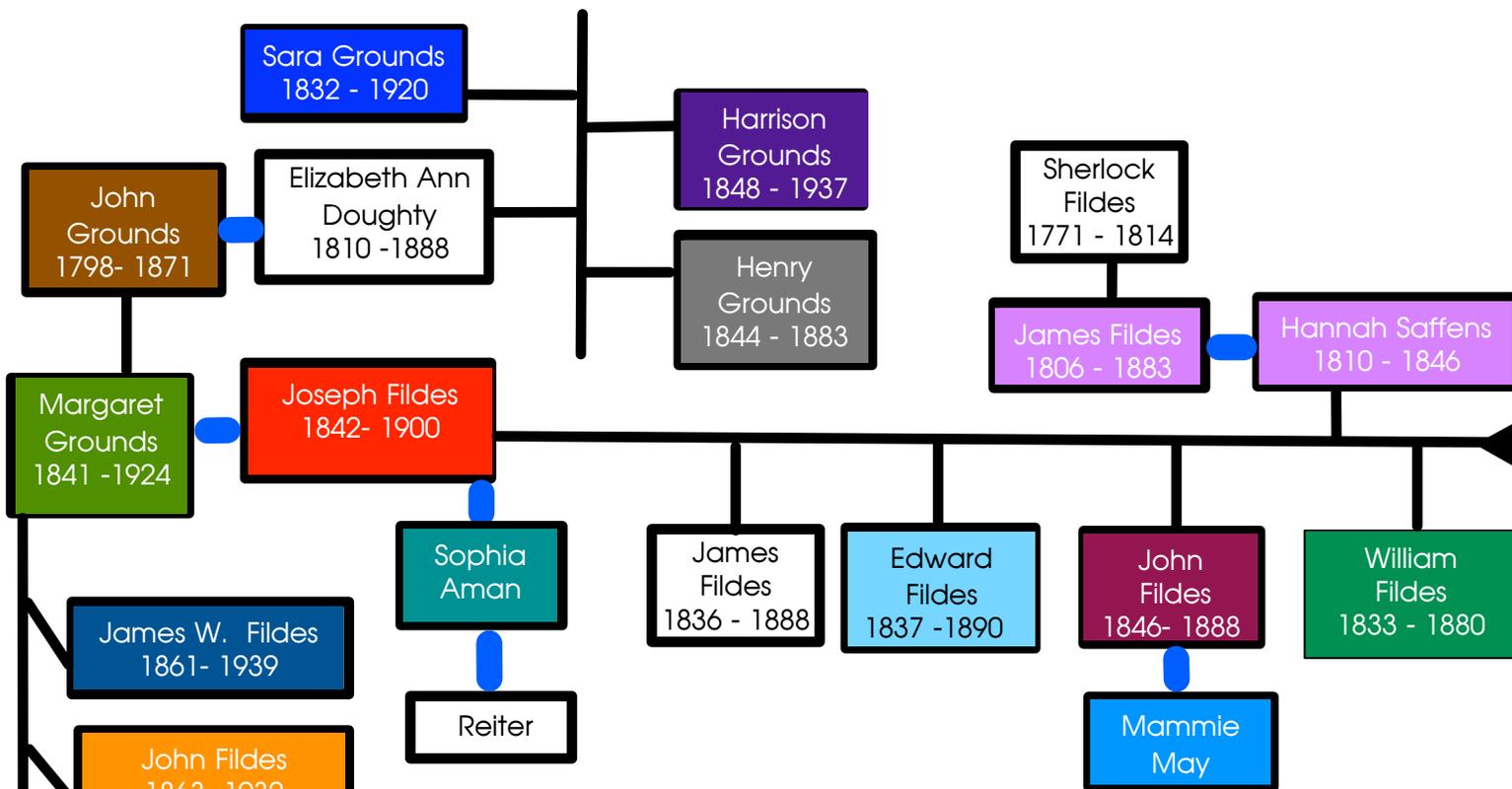
We can read about the big events of the ages in history books, but sometimes it takes genealogical research to uncover the fascinating stories of local lore that have been lost or forgotten. I wonder if my next discovery will be witches in the family closet!

Notes

1. Ancestry.com, The Ruggles family, England and America [database online], Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2005.
Original data: Ruggles, Henry Stoddard, The Ruggles family, England and America, Wakefield, Mass.: unknown, 1917.
2. Ancestry.com, Fifty New England colonists and five Virginia families [database online]. Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2004. Original data: Weiland, Florence Black, Fifty New England colonists and five Virginia families, Boothbay Harbor, Me.: Printed by the Boothbay Register, 1966.
3. Bill Daley, “Timothy Ruggles (1711-1795), The Rise and fall of a Massachusetts Loyalist,” Sandwich History, December 2008, <http://sandwichhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Timothy-Ruggles.pdf>.
4. Deborah Navas, *Murdered By His Wife*, “A history with documentation of the Joshua Spooner murder and execution of his wife, Bathsheba, who was hanged in Worcester, Massachusetts, 2 July 1778,” (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).
5. Ibid.
6. Deborah Navas, “New Light on the Bathsheba Spooner Execution,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Third Series, Vol. 108 (1996), pp. 115-122, Published by: [Massachusetts Historical Society](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25081116), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25081116>.
7. Chaim M. Rosenberg, “The Most Extraordinary Murder,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, September 20, 2018, <https://allthingsliberty.com/author/chaim-m-rosenberg/>.
8. “History of American Women, Women in the American Revolution, Bathsheba Spooner,” <https://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2011/06/bathsheba-spooner-murderer.html>.
9. “Trial of Bathsheba Spooner: 1778,” <https://law.jrank.org/pages/2374/trial-bathsheba-spooner-et-al-1778.html>.
10. Rosenberg, “The Most Extraordinary Murder,” 2018.
11. Ibid.
12. Navas, *Murdered By His Wife*, 1999.
13. Navas, “New Light on the Bathsheba Spooner Execution,” 1996.



How Checking Pension Records Allowed Me To Find A Bigamist



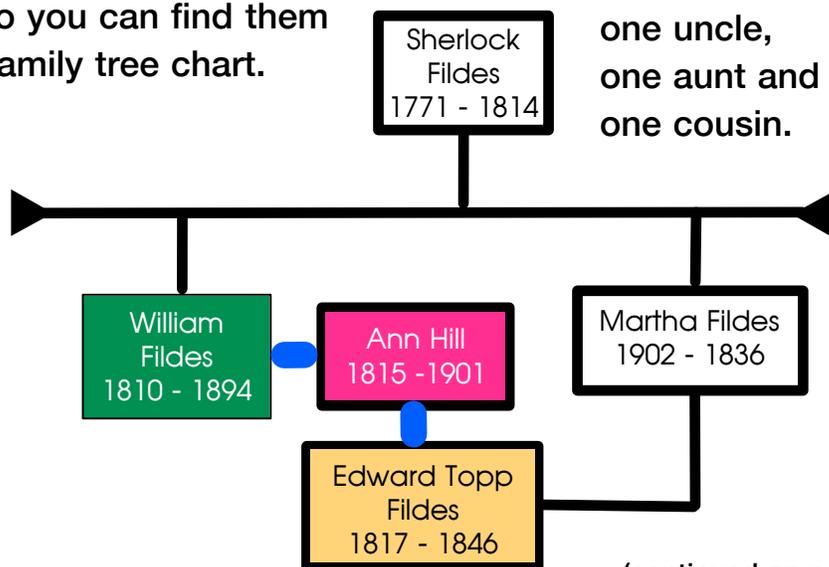
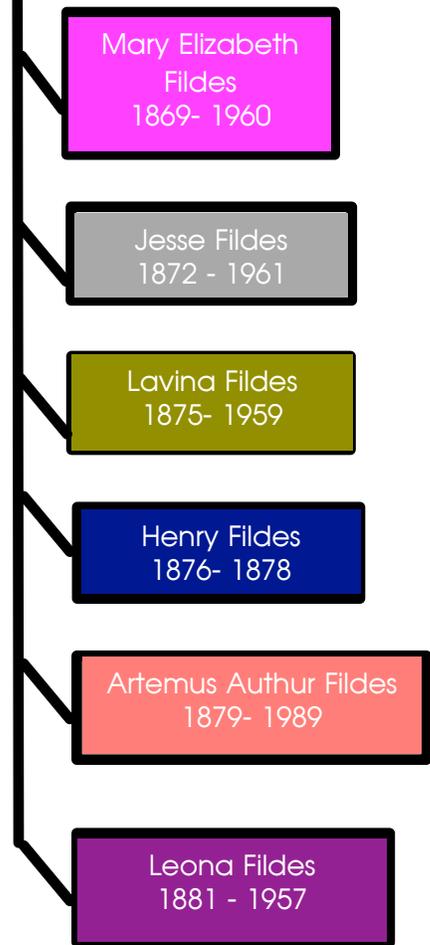
Joseph Fildes

Family Tree

A blue line indicates marriage between two persons.

Use this family tree chart as you read the article "How Checking Pension Records Allow Me To Find A Bigamist." Most names in the article will be in a specific color so you can find them in the family tree chart.

Joseph's grandfather is below with some of his one uncle, one aunt and one cousin.



How Checking Pension Records Allowed Me To Find A Bigamist

By Wendy Bransom
wbranfildes@gmail.com



Back in the early 90s, I lived in Centreville, Virginia. Being so close to Washington D.C., I took advantage of all the wonderful buildings full of genealogical information. One weekend, I spent the day at the National Archives. The purpose of this trip was to gather as many pension records as I could for my ancestors. One of the surnames I was looking for was Fildes. I had ancestors in the Civil War. As I was looking for Fildes, I came across several Fields. Many people pronounce and spell my maiden surname Fildes wrong. The "d" is silent. You pronounce it as "files." Left is

NAME OF SOLDIER: <i>Fields, Joseph</i> (3-25-5)				
NAME OF DEPENDENT: <i>Widow, Fields, Margaret</i> <i>Widow, Fields, Sophia</i>				
SERVICE: <i>F. 152 Ill Inf.</i>				
DATE OF FILING.	CLASS.	APPLICATION NO.	CERTIFICATE NO.	STATE FROM WHICH FILED.
<i>1898 Oct 21</i>	<i>Invalid.</i>	<i>1211013</i>	<i>283966</i>	<i>Del.</i>
<i>1902 May 13</i>	<i>Widow.</i>	<i>550025</i>	<i>564575</i>	<i>Kans.</i>
<i>1900 Dec 10</i>	<i>Widow.</i>	<i>740555</i>		<i>Del.</i>
ATTORNEY: <i>John M. Wright</i>				
REMARKS: <i>H. B. 1-12 0-1-2-3</i>				

the pension index card that caught my attention. Could this be one of my ancestors? I quickly checked my research binder. Yes, this could be the son of **James Fildes** who came to the United States in the 1830s. Why were there two women dependents on the card? I requested the pension file be brought down. I then proceeded to make copies of a very full record. As I glanced through it quickly, it looked like **Joseph Fildes** had two wives. I had more records to look for, so I set this copied pension record aside. Being full duty in the United States Navy, I had to grab as much information as I could when researching. I planned to get back to this record, but it has taken me about 30 years to do so.

When it was suggested to have the next focus for the VBGS Newsletter be about the black sheep in our families, this record came to my thoughts. I first needed to go back to my family tree information and review the information I had on **Joseph Fildes**. **Joseph** is my first cousin five times removed. I needed to gather more information about him and his family so that the pension record would make sense to me. So I set off to gather digital census, land, military and vital records on **Joseph Fildes's** family.

Joseph Fildes was born March 30, 1842, in Upper Providence, Delaware, PA. His parents were **James Fildes** and **Hannah Saffens**, both born in England. In August 1850, he lived with his father and siblings in Middletown Township, Delaware, Pennsylvania.¹ I found **Joseph** next in Edwards County, Illinois. **Joseph** married **Margaret Grounds** July 19, 1860, in Edwards County.² I found online information on his Civil War record. **Joseph** mustered as a Private with Company "F" 152nd Illinois Infantry on February 10, 1865, from Shelby, Edwards County, Illinois.³ At that time, **Margaret** with sons **James W** and **John** went to live with her father, **John M. Grounds**. The 152nd "garrisoned the line of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad and later Memphis, Tennessee."⁴ **Joseph** mustered out September 11, 1865.³ After the war, **Joseph** stayed in Shelby Precinct, Edwards County, Illinois. According to the 1860 census, he was a farmer and lived with wife **Margaret** next door to her brother, **Harrison Grounds**, who was also a farmer. Daughter **Mary Elizabeth "Lizzie"** was born in March 28, 1869.⁵ Five years later they moved to Olney, Edwards County, Illinois, where son **Jesse** was born on July 7, 1872. In the 1870 census, the family were still in Edwards County but living in Albion, where their daughter **Lavina** was born, September 15, 1875.⁶ Around 1876, they probably moved by wagon to Caneyville, Chautauqua County, Kansas. Chautauqua had recently been established March 24, 1875.⁷ They must have been excited to live in a new community. Their sons **Henry** and **Artemus** were born there. Daughter **Leona** was born December 21, 1881.⁸ To my surprise, the only item I found in 1890s was a marriage certificate for **Joseph Fildes**, who married **Sophia Aman** October 27, 1894 in Wilmington, Delaware. The marriage certificate shows **Sophia's** maiden name as Reiter. She is a widow with the surname of Aman. **Joseph** lists himself as single when he is actually still married to **Margaret**.⁹ The morals of **Joseph** were not looking good at this point.

I did find 1900 census data for **Margaret** and **Joseph**, but they were living in two different states apart. **Margaret** was living in Wichita, Sedgwick, Kansas, with son **James W.** and daughter **Leona**.¹⁰ **Joseph** was living in New Castle, Delaware, as head with wife **Sophia** and four boarders.¹¹ Now I needed to go through the pension record. I am missing quite a lot of history for **Joseph**. Hopefully, the pension record will fill in the holes.

(continued on page 16)

How Checking Pension Records Allowed Me To Find A Bigamist (continued from page 15)

The first Deposition Case I started with was for **Margaret Fildes** #550,555, dated November 14, 1897. Special Examiner of the pension office F. M. Taylor interviewed **Margaret** at Leeds, County of Chautauquai, Kansas. It showed she was 56 and a widow of **Joseph Fildes** (he was still alive at this time).¹² She had been married at the home of her father, **John Grounds**, in Edward County, Illinois. She had seven children by **Joseph** and never married again. Most of the information in the interview I already knew. She did state she was living at the Noel Farm when **Joseph** left her. **Joseph** told her he was going west to hunt and work. He would be gone twelve days. He did not state where he was going. He had never left home before and not returned. He had no money or property. He was in bad health, subject to cramps. He had a stroke the January before he left. Nobody has seen him since then. He had relatives living near Samsville, Edwards County, Illinois, by the name of Fildes. Mrs. **Ann Fildes**, my third great-grandmother and **Joseph's** cousin, lived there. **Ann** had not recently seen **Joseph** in Samsville. **Margaret** stated her husband had a light complexion, blue eyes, 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighed about 145 pounds. **Joseph** would have been gone thirteen years the next March.

F. M. Taylor interviewed **Margaret** again on November 19, 1897. He had to clear up some information from the first interview. Here are some of her answers to his questions: "My husband **Joseph** was gone 2 yrs 3 mos when he went to Pennsylvania to settle his father's estate. When **Joseph** returned he received a letter from **Mamie May**, the wife of his brother **John**. **Joseph** let me read the letter. **Mamie May** lived in Rockdale, Delaware County, Pennsylvania. **Joseph's** brother **Edward** is dead. His brother **William** lives in Wayne County Illinois. I got a letter from **John Fildes** two months after my husband left. He wrote that **Joseph** had been with him working on the railroad but did not stay long. **John** did not know what became of his brother **Joseph**. This is the last time I heard from **John**." This was getting very interesting. It was like an old fashioned soap opera.

The next interview I read was for my third great-grandmother, **Ann Fildes**. C.B. Robbins, Special Examiner, interviewed her on February 11, 1898. I think she was being interviewed due to **Margaret** mentioning **Ann** in her interview. **Ann** stated she was 81 and lived in Samsville, Illinois. **Joseph Fildes** was a cousin of her husband, **Edward Topp Fildes**. **Joseph Fildes'** father was **James Fildes**, a dyer, living in Rockdale, Delaware County, Pennsylvania. **Ann** recalled **Joseph** lived in Kansas. She had heard that **Joseph** settled his father's estate. He got power of attorney from **William** and **Edward**, his brothers. **John Fildes** was a younger brother living in Rockdale, Pennsylvania. In the last account **Ann** heard, **Joseph** was living with **John's** wife in Rockdale. There was some trouble between **Joseph** and **John** over **John's** wife. **William** and **Edward Fildes**, **Joseph's** brothers, were dead. They had tried to find **Joseph** to collect their part of their father's estate, but had no money to pay expenses.

Joseph was looking more like a "bad boy." It is as if he did not care for anyone but himself. The next day, on February 12, C. B. Robbins sent a letter to the Hon. H. Clay Evans, Commissioner of Pensions, Washington, D.C. This was sent to help the Special Examination Division determine the facts and circumstances connected with the alleged disappearance of the soldier **Joseph Fildes** in 1886 or 1887. The facts he sent were mostly hearsay evidence. I won't go into detail because most of what he wrote was in the previous interviews. I will note one statement he must have felt important: "**Joseph** robbed two of his brothers of their shares in his father's estate and the other brother of his wife." He also stated that none of **Joseph's** relatives that had been interviewed thought **Joseph** was dead. He recommended finding **John Fildes** at Rockdale, Pennsylvania. He did not think there was any merit to this case, but he felt it was important to find out if **Joseph** procured a divorce or died.

I read, that **Margaret Fildes** tried two times to get her husband's pension. Shortly after C.P. Robbins's letter was sent, **Margaret** was informed that her first claim had been denied. Nothing new happened for close to five years.

On December 24, 1902, R.P. Fletcher, Special Examiner, interviewed **Sophia Fildes** about her pension claim #740.555. **Sophia** stated she was 49 and lived in Wilmington, Delaware. She claimed she was a widow, of **Joseph Fildes**, who was a soldier during the Civil War, and that she was married to **Joseph** seven years and seven months before he died. She stated she was married previously to Joseph Aman in the "Old Country," but he was dead. She knew **Joseph Fildes** for six months before she married him. She met him while he was boarding with a Mrs. Hubbard. According to Sophia, he told her he was born in Pennsylvania but had lived out west. **Joseph** had lived in Wilmington eighteen years before **Sophia** met him.

(continued on page 17)

How Checking Pension Records Allowed Me To Find A Bigamist (continued from page 16)

Sophia said **Joseph** told her he had never married. **Joseph** had been in love with a girl but she had died. **Joseph Fildes** had mentioned 2 brothers out west and another, **John Fildes**, who died in Cluster, Delaware County, Pennsylvania. **Joseph** had told **Sophia** **John's** wife kept house for him in Wilmington. **Joseph** had been a car inspector but had died with no trade or occupation. Apparently **Joseph** had told her that he had made plenty of money when he lived out west but spent it. **Sophia** stated she had never heard of a former wife of **Joseph Fildes**. Had **Sophia** known he had a wife, she would not have married him. It seemed **Sophia** was an innocent of any wrongdoing!

Three days later, on December 27, 1902, Fletcher interviewed Martha M. McFadden. She stated she was 58 and lived in Wilmington, Delaware. She had met **Joseph Fildes** when he came to her house to board on Fatnall Street for 7 years. She had known him until his death. She stated **Joseph** left her house when he married the claimant who is a widow, **Sophia Aman**. Martha did not know whether **Joseph** was a bachelor or not until his sister-in-law, **Mamie May**, came to visit him. **Mamie May** told Martha that **Joseph** was a married man. Martha asked **Joseph** if this was true, and he said yes. He had a wife and seven children in Kansas. He told Martha he had lived with his first wife many years. One time when he had been absent from home, he returned home and found things were not as he liked. Martha had never asked **Joseph** after he married **Sophia** if he had gotten a divorce from his first wife. Martha did not tell **Sophia** anything about **Joseph's** first wife. She never said a word until **Sophia** applied for a pension. Martha McFadden's daughter, Mrs. Hubbard, told Martha that **Sophia** wanted Martha to sign her pension papers. Martha was glad she had not been home when **Sophia** came by. She would not have signed the pension papers and informed her daughter the reason. Martha McFadden stated the description **Margaret Fildes** gave in her interview of her husband to be true. She also knew the history **Margaret Fildes** and **Ann Fildes** had given of **Joseph Fildes** during their interviews.

Summing Up So Far, and What was Still Needed

On January 20, 1903, S. A. Cuddy, Chief of Law Division, sent a letter to the Chief of the Special Examination Division, Bureau of Pensions, Washington, D.C. He enclosed the papers in the claims concerning **Joseph Fildes**, deceased, Company F, 152 IL Infantry, certificate #983,966, by **Margaret Fildes** #550,555 and by **Sophia Fildes** #740,555, each contesting as the widow of the same soldier. He requested the papers be sent to a Special Examiner in Wichita, Sedgwick County, Kansas, for further investigation. The papers showed that the soldier deserted **Margaret**, then lived for a time with his brother **John**, and later with **John's** wife. He also married **Sophia** under representation he was a bachelor. It appeared that claimant **Sophia** had acted in good faith. He then requested an investigation be conducted proving the identity of the husband of **Margaret** with the soldier of record and of **Sophia Fildes**. He also sent a picture of **Joseph Fildes** with the papers. He recommended the gathering of information of where **Joseph** went after deserting **Margaret**. Needed were **Joseph's** places of residence and the possible seat of record of divorce.

Who "WAS" in all the photographs?

Now we move to March 21, 1903, in Wichita County, Kansas when **Margaret Fildes's** son **James W.** was sworn in by Special Examiner J.H. Jenks. **James W.** stated he was 42. His mother was his housekeeper, and he supported her. **James W.** examined three photos and couldn't identify who was in them. He then looked at a tintype and identified his father, **Joseph Fildes**, his uncle **Henry Grounds** and also **James W.** himself. The photo was taken in July 4, 1878, in Grenola, Kansas, when they came out of a hayfield. **James W.** explained that his father left that day to settle his own's father's estate. Letters were sent back and forth, one stating **Joseph** would be detained longer than expected, two years. His father did return and remained home until the next spring. His father left to go work in a nursery in Winfield, Kansas, and gave the impression to **James W.** he that would be gone around 10 days. His father never returned, so it was the last time **James W.** saw him. **James W.'s** family did try to locate **Joseph**. His mother wrote to her husband's uncle **William Fildes** in Samsville, IL. **William** had raised **Joseph** but did not know where he was. **James W.** confirmed his mother never remarried and had made an application for a pension several years earlier. This claim was rejected. His mother applied again the previous July through an **Ella Shields** in Wichita, Kansas.

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At the time of this interview, the claim had not been settled. The only person to have seen **Joseph** since he left was his brother **John Fildes**.

Summer of 1903 - Interviews Continue

The next paper I read was written by Special Examiner Charles B. Dilley. On July 30, he sent a letter to the Commissioner of Pensions summing up his interview with **Harrison Grounds** done in March. He stated **Harrison Grounds** had viewed two pictures. The picture taken in Wilmington, Delaware, had showed **Joseph Fildes**, the husband of his sister **Margaret**. **Margaret Fildes** and her son **James W.** were present at this interview. They both agreed with **Harrison**, that this was indeed **Joseph Fildes** in the picture. They had previously in another interview stated they did not know who was in the picture. Mr. Dilley recommended interviews be held with John Anderson and Francis Huffman for further identification of the pictures of **Joseph Fildes'** family.

Fall of 1903 - Two More Interviews for Identification of Pictures

Mr. John Anderson of West Salem, Edwards County, Illinois was the next interviewee. Special Examiner H.F. Bonordon, interviewed him on September 29. John was 72 and a farmer living in Samsville, Illinois. His second wife was **Sara Grounds**, a sister of **Margaret Fildes**. John examined the tintype picture and identified a young **James W.** with his father **Joseph Fildes** who had a beard. Mr. John Anderson had met **Joseph** when he stayed overnight before he continued his trip to Pennsylvania to settle his father's estate. Mr. Anderson could not identify any other pictures. The rest of the interview was hearsay but did back up the information in the previous interviews.

Mr. Francis Huffman of Collinsville, Cherokee Nation, Indiana was the second interviewee. Special Examiner Geo W. McKean interviewed him on December 2. Francis was 58. He had been raised in Edwards County, Illinois. He had lived there before and during the War of the Rebellion until 1881. In one of the pictures, he recognized **James W.** with his father **Joseph Fildes** and his uncle Henry Grounds. He also identified a picture of **Joseph Fildes** standing. He also stated he was present at the marriage of **Joseph Fildes** and **Margaret Fildes** in July of 1860. **Margaret** and Francis Huffman's mothers were half-sisters. Nobody else living at the time of the interview had attended the marriage. The last time Francis had seen **Joseph** was in 1883 when he was living with his wife **Margaret** in Grenola, Kansas. After **Joseph** left home, Francis and **Margaret** corresponded back and forth. **Margaret** never wrote about a divorce. Francis had not heard of **Joseph Fildes** getting married again. **Joseph** was a farmer and worked in the coal mines in the winter.

On December 3, Geo W. McKean sent a report to the Hon. Commissioner of Pensions, Washington D.C. He summarized the information he had received from Francis Huffman. He asked that the information be reviewed for further action.

On to 1904

There was no further information in the pension record of **Joseph Fildes**. I did an extensive search on Ancestry. To my delight, I found two newspaper articles with "Big Time" news on **Margaret Fildes**. The Topeka State Journal on January 5 announced **Margaret** had been granted a widow's pension of \$8.00 per month.¹³ I checked online and \$8.00 was worth 231.73 in 1904. I am sure that helped **James W.** and his mother very much! That article was fun to read; it was like watching a movie! They caught the readers' attention back then by using colorful descriptions and bold, multi-titled articles. The Saturday Evening Commoner on January 7 gave pretty much the same information as the other article. The one addition was that "the second wife was excluded from the right to draw a pension."¹⁴

Summing Up My Thoughts on **Joseph**

I truly believe **Joseph Fildes** did not care about anyone but himself. He was a good husband until July 4, 1878, when he left Grenola, Kansas, supposedly to settle his father's estate. However, his father **James Fildes** did not die until 1883.¹⁵ So where did he actually go? **Joseph** did work with his brother **John** on the railroad, but got bored and left.

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He also shacked up with **John's** wife, **Mamie May**. Did he do that because he knew **John** was far away working on the railroad? He did start to settle his father's estate in 1883, but did not finish for over two years. He returned home, but left again by the next spring for good.

The day **Joseph** left home for good, his son **James W.** was 22. He took over his father's place as head of the family. **James W.** took care of his mother until she died. I guess **James W.** got his good qualities from his mother **Margaret**. Did **Joseph** choose that time to leave because he knew his family could take care of themselves? We have to think, too, about the persons that **Joseph** disappointed. He left a trail behind him. I am sure his family had hardships after he left. His brothers were not happy with his performance. And what about **Sophia**? To be married for over seven years and be left with nothing upon her husband's death had to be devastating. Apparently, **Joseph** did not care whom he hurt. Did he go through a midlife crisis in his 40s? To lead such a good life for around 40 years, what happened to turn him into a very bad man? Did a stroke and bad health convince **Joseph** he needed a new life? Was the stress at home too much for **Joseph** to handle?

In the end, these pieces of the story don't all fit together. Many of the interviewees stated they weren't sure of the years for certain events. However, we do have two solid facts. The estate of **Joseph's** father was settled by him. He kept all the money from the estate except for \$10.00 he gave to his son **James W.** He married **Sophia** while he was still married to **Margaret**. We have a lot of hearsay about other bad deeds done by **Joseph**, so we can sum up that he did not live the most upright life. I am sure the men in the pension offices had to be frustrated, they never found answers to all of their questions. The only person who really knows what happened during **Joseph's** life is himself.



I wanted to show you some of persons mentioned in this article. Searching the Family Tree Maker application on my laptop, I found pictures of **Margaret Fildes** and her family. There are many more than the two I have in this article. I found them on Tanner Hollister's family tree on Ancestry. He posted the ones shown here on April 4, 2012. Tanner must have been busy because he put a lot of information with each picture he posted. The six people above are: top left to right - **Mary Elizabeth "Lizzie"**, **Margaret Grounds Fildes** and **Lavina**; bottom left to right - **James W.**, **Leona** and **John**.



The picture above is **Margaret Grounds Fildes** and her daughters. This was taken late 1890s in Leeds, Chautauqua, Kansas. Seated is **Margaret Grounds Fildes**; top left to right - **Mary Elizabeth "Lizzie"**, **Leona** and **Lavina**.

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13. The Topeka State Journal (Topeka, Kansas) Tuesday, January 5, 1904, Page 2: Pension Records Unearth a Case of Bigamy [Digital copy in possession of author].
14. The Saturday Evening Kansas Commoner (Wichita, Kansas) Thursday January 7, 1904, Page 1: Husband Was a Bigamist, [Digital copy in possession of author].
15. Record of Burial for James Fildes 12 June 1883, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Church and Town Records, 1669-1999, page 550 [Digital copy of this record in possession of author]

Query

From: Cindy Meier
cameier17@verizon.net

I am looking for someone who can read/translate German.

I have baptismal and marriage records from churches in Germany from the 1800s. The baptismal records have about 8 columns and the marriage records have about 10 columns. The sample below is for my 3rd great uncle, Anton Theodor Cornelius Dreyer (1848-1879). In Indiana, he was known as Tony. He was the son of my 3rd great-grandmother (Maria Elisabeth Francisca Paulina Kocks Niemer Dreyer) who was married, widowed and remarried for a total of 16 children.

From the Editor: If you help Cindy, contact her with her email above. VBGS Members can post questions in the Society's Newsletter for free. We ask non-members to make a donation to the Society if they want to post a question. Contact the VBGS Newsletter Editor.

Geborne und Getaufte				im Jahre 1848				
Nr.	Zauf - Name der Kinder.	Zug und Stand der Geburt in Dogden und Differ.	Ob er ehelich oder unehelich.	Der- und Brautname der Eltern auch Stand beider.	Der- und Brautname der Mutter.	Wohort der Eltern.	Zug der Zaufe oder Name des Pfarrers der es geleist.	Wann der Zauf gefahren.
5.	Anton Theodor Lorenz Dreyer	unehelich geboren, Margarete Kocks Dreyer	unehelich	Anton Theodor Dreyer Kocks	Maria Elisabeth Francisca Paulina Kocks	Leipzig	Leipzig Lorenz Dreyer	Anton Theodor Dreyer Kocks