
FAMILY *Reunion*

News for Descendants of Henry Hodge, Joseph Mobley, Burl Mason & Albert McAfee

In This Issue: *Digging for Masons*

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Errata

Ok, so will you buy that I deliberately make mistakes to see if you're paying attention? I didn't think so.

A couple of our readers embarked on part of the road trip from the previous issue and quickly discovered that some of my directions were written from memory, a commodity I'm getting shorter on every day. Specifically, I included the directions to Grandma Mason's old homeplace as a last-minute thought and did not have time to redrive the route.

So, the *new and improved* directions to the homeplace are as follows: from Highway 20, heading south out of Red Rock to Bateman, look for an abandoned grocery store on the right. Take the dirt road that leads to the right for .5 mile to the old Bateman School building. Keep to the right and continue to a fork in the road. Take the left fork

(there's a sign that indicates the way as a dead end) for another .3 mile. On the right you should see a gate and a sign for the *Alexander Ranch & Cattle Company*. There will be two gates directly across the road. With your back to the Alexander sign, the gate on the left is to Grandma Mason's place.

Several years ago when Mother and I visited there with Lucy Mason Hodge there were still stones from the fireplace to mark the location of the house. A large tree stands where the mules would often rest in its shade.

One of Mother's early memories involves being sent down to the sandy end of the nearby field to play with cousin Bobby Joe Kunkel and sister Bettye Kathryn while awaiting the birth of Horace Grady. A lot of frog houses were built before he made his appearance.

Grandma Mason sold the property, 167 acres, in June 1948 to the Alexander family.

Birthday Bash

Nettie Hodge West

The Birthday Celebration and Roast for H. Grady Hodge, as plotted by wife Gail and fellow conspirators, went much as planned. Relatives, former co-workers, fox-hunter pals and numerous offspring enjoyed music and barbecue. Games were played and a display of family photos from the years past was examined by many.

A number of those present took part in the roasting of the honored guest. They all seemed to arrive at a consensus: he was one mean little boy critter who has not much improved with the passage of time.

As his eldest sister, I have perhaps earlier memories of him than his other siblings, but I have to admit not re-

membering ever hearing words like “sweet”, “angelic” and “adorable” bandied about as happened several years later when another brother arrived to join the ranks. (Take a bow, Larry!) However, I do not think H.G. was any worse than are most little brothers.

I remember him as the little boy who became my charge when I was nine years old. I was the one who rocked him to sleep for his daily nap. After lunch he and I would head for the rocking chair in the long, cool hallway, and I would sing him to sleep. He would start yawning as soon as I began his favorite, the old ballad of the “ship that never returned”.

I remember him looking through my freshman year’s college annual with increasing bewilderment because he couldn’t locate his sister’s picture in the campus beauties section. Bless his sincere little heart.

Until I went away to school, we two had regular wrestling matches, often at Mother’s instigation and always with her approval. She liked how well-behaved he’d be for a week or so after having his face rubbed in the dirt.

On my first return visit, he challenged me to a tussle, and that time *he* rubbed *my* nose in the sand. It was our last match.

Probably all of us share one of the most poignant memories, known as the Great Dewberry Disaster. Each spring we looked forward to the first crop of ripe berries. We spotted the best picking spots by noting where the white blossoms were most abundant along roadways, fields, and pastures. We watched the little hard berries form and slowly turn from green to red and finally to a luscious, black ripeness. We picked enough of them to make a big cobbler and carried them home to our mother, an inspired cook of berry cobbler fame.

We waited with mouths watering for suppertime to come. H.G. was the first to finish supper, and reached for the big cobbler dish. Somehow in his eagerness, he managed to dump the entire pie in his lap, on the floor, and all down the kitchen wall. We were too shocked and disappointed to even cry. Not only was the pie lost to us, but we had to clean up the mess it made as well.

Happy Birthday, little brother, and many more to come! We promise not to do this to you again. This year.

Hodge Family Population Increases by 1

Congratulation to parents Robert & Erica Ging on the birth of Robert Eric Ging on September 3, 1999. The newcomer weighed in at 7lbs. 12 oz. and was 20.5 inches. PawPaw & Nanny are strutting proudly!

Family Calendar

Anniversaries

November

24th – Jeffrey & Kristi Ging

December

22nd – Glenn & Amy Ging

Birthdays

October

12th – Kacie Lynn Ging

16th – Mike Hodge

26th – Jeffrey Pekar

November

4th – Richard Patton

18th – Nettie Hodge West

December

1st – Karen LeFevre

12th – Josh Milburn

19th – Jo Branton Butler

20th – Mike Ging

Looking for Needles in Haystacks - or How I Built a Mason Tree from Scratch

Genealogy is often compared to jigsaw puzzles in the way you have to piece things together to get the whole picture. Never has this been more true than in my experience in uncovering the ancestry of Burl Mason. In this particular case, it was more like one of those mind-bending jigsaws where every piece is the same shape and each one is solid white.

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, I have recently zeroed in on the couple I feel sure are Burl's parents. It has been a long torturous journey to Monroe Township, Pike County, Indiana. I decided this would be a good case study to share with you as an example of how a genealogist inches backwards in time.

Rule number one in genealogy is to interview the eldest members of the family for as much information as you can pry from them before you lose that source to death or dementia. To that end, I had numerous conversations with my grandmother Lucy Mason Hodge over a period of

years, making notes each time of any references she made to her father Burl or her grandmother Mary. She did not know a great deal about her father's family, but what she did know were invaluable pieces of the puzzle when it started coming together.

From my grandmother I learned that the Mason family came to Texas from either Indiana or Kentucky and that her father was still a baby when the move was made.

According to her, Burl's father died just prior to the family's move. A cholera epidemic had claimed the lives of all of a family in their community. Burl's father was one of those chosen to clean out the affected house. Shortly thereafter he fell sick and died. Mary chose to go through with the planned move and travelled to Texas with other family. (This story I have been unable to verify. My first attempt to hire a researcher to look for an obituary met with no success.)

My grandmother also told me that Burl's mother Mary was married seven times and that Burl had a brother John and a sister Hulda

Ellen. She knew there were other children, but whether full siblings, half siblings or step-children was unknown. Some of Mary's marriages ended in divorce.

Prior to one of her marriages, Burl and Mary became estranged for a period of time when Burl was about 16 years of age. Burl opposed the marriage because of information he had received about his potential step-father from the man's own brother. Mary became enraged and cornered Burl against a fence, whipping him because of his opposition to her plans. As a result, Burl went to live and work with the stepfather's brother. Whether he ever returned to his mother's home is unknown.

Lucy Mason met her Aunt Hulda at Burl's funeral. Hulda had married a man named Ashley and they owned either a grocery store or a lumberyard (maybe both) in either Elgin or Taylor. Burl's daughter Ellen was supposedly named for his sister and Hulda supposedly named a son Burl for her brother.

Mary lived with Burl's family twice, the last time until her death. At one time she had held property in

Smithville, but it was sold by one of her husbands. Possibly the same husband who later deserted her. After he left, some of her neighbors discovered her half-starved and contacted Burl. Nettie Mason and son Charlie made the trip to Smithville to bring her back to live with them.

In her elder years, Mary became blind, but she had made her living by weaving rugs. Lucy Hodge did not know any of her married names except that she died as Mary Smith when Lucy was about seven.

This odd assortment of facts did not give me a lot to work with, but I went on to the next step. I began to check local records for Masons in the Bastrop area. I quickly uncovered Burl's death certificate but it listed no information for his parents and did not even include his date of birth. So I began looking for an obituary. The *Bastrop Advertiser* did not run an official obituary, but did include a news item recounting the details of Burl's death by hanging.

Next I looked for and located a death certificate for Mary Smith. Mary Smith died in Cedar Creek on December 18, 1917. The birth-

date furnished by informant B. W. Mason was August 17, 1825, and her birthplace was listed as Indiana. A quick check of the *Bastrop Advertiser* for an obituary yielded only a brief mention of her death in a Cedar Creek personals column. A check of the Bastrop County marriage index was inconclusive. (Nothing like a last name of Smith to make things frustrating.)

Having somewhat exhausted research efforts using the clues provided by my grandmother, I tabled my Mason research for a while. My next inspiration for this family came by way of a distant cousin on my father's side of the family. He mentioned one day that I should talk to Nita B. Mason, a Frankum cousin who just happened to be married to Burl's nephew by his brother John. So in 1986, I made my first contact with Nita B. She provided me with some invaluable family data that put me back on the Mason research track.

Nita B. told me that her father-in-law was born in *Clay Bank*, Indiana. She provided me with John's approximate birth and death dates and a list of John's

children and their spouses. John's eldest son, by his first wife, was Dock Mason. The remainder of his children were born to his second wife. One other piece of information she included was that there was some family connection to the *Yeagers*.

About this same time, the Bastrop Public Library obtained microfilm of all of the census records of Bastrop County. No indexes, however, so I proceeded to read each reel. I figured that with all the family I had centered in Bastrop County, I was bound to run into somebody I knew. In 1900, amongst all the Mobleys, Lentzes and Frankums I was cataloguing, out popped Mrs. Mary A. Cox, living with her grandson, Dock Mason. Voila! Thanks to Nita B., I now knew one of Mary's married names. This census record showed her as divorced.

So I backed up a census and started scanning the 1880 reel for Mary Cox. That's how I found my first record for Burl Mason prior to his marriage. In 1880, Mary and Axley Cox are living in Smithville, with John, Birl (*sic*), and Henry Mason, all shown as stepsons of Axley. This is the

first indication that there was another brother who had come to Texas.

I wondered why my grandmother did not know about Henry, but this was quickly resolved when I found him in the cemetery indexes of Bastrop County. He died in 1889, aged 21, and is buried at Thompson Hill Cemetery in Smithville. He was probably never mentioned to her.

I am a little frustrated because I have not been able to find any record of Axley Cox after 1880. I don't know if he died, or if the marriage ended in divorce. I did find a Bastrop County marriage record for Mary Cox to Henderson Massey on November 1, 1885. Since the 1900 census refers to Mary Cox, divorced, I assume that the divorce pertains to her marriage to Massey and that she resumed her prior married name. (I suspect that Massey was the husband who came between Mary and her son Burl.) I also found a Bastrop County marriage record for Mary Cox to J. T. Smith on August 22, 1901. I feel fairly confident that this was the last marriage, since she is

still Mrs. Mary Smith on her death certificate.

Remember the name *Axley Cox*. It becomes important later on.

Now, back to the clues from Nita B. I just knew I was going to find my Masons by locating Clay Bank, Indiana. Wrong. No such place is listed in any of the gazetteers or atlases, even the older ones. Lots of Clays, but nothing close to Clay Bank. Foiled again.

I decided to concentrate on locating Burl's sister, Hulda Ellen. Operating on the Taylor clue, I spun my wheels for awhile looking around Williamson County. No record of a Hulda or Ellen Ashley anywhere.

When I finally found her, in the 1880 census, she was in Smithville with her husband William F. Ashley. Both were shown born in Indiana. I have located a couple of their children in 1900 and 1910 living in Milam County, and I've found William in a death index for Milam County for 1904, but I've found no later mention of Hulda. I know she was still alive in 1925 (she attended Burl's funeral). She's not in the Texas death indexes, so I'm

guessing she remarried at some point. I'm still looking.

From the 1880 census, I knew that Hulda was born in or around 1855. Brothers John and Burl were born in 1863 and 1865, respectively, so the earliest census they will be listed is 1870. But Hulda should be with Mary in 1860, about age 5.

My available sources did not have an index for Indiana for 1860, so I waited. And waited.

And in early 1999, Family Treemaker released a CD containing the 1860 census index for Indiana. I quickly rationalized the price of the CD (I have Wilcoxon kin there, too) and as soon as it arrived, I was off and running.

There was one Hulda Mason listed in Indiana and one Huldy Mason. Hulda Mason was way too old. But Huldy Mason, in Pike County, was 6 years old and her mother was *MARY*. And her father was *JOHN*. Since my Hulda had a brother named John, I figured I was on the right track. I compiled a list from the CD index of all Masons living in Pike County, Indiana. A few doors down was a couple, William and "Hutty" Mason, who were the right age to

be possible grandparents. All around these two families were Mason family groups who were the right ages to be Huldy's uncles. And all around the Mason families were *Yeagers*. (Remember them?) Another rule of genealogy is to always pay attention to the neighbors.

My next step was to start poking around the Internet. I headed to the US Genweb site, a nationwide volunteer effort to post records of genealogical interest to the Internet. Under the Pike County division of the Indiana group, I hit the mother lode.

Pike County volunteers have outdone themselves in posting information to the Internet. I first discovered that all of their cemetery indexes are available online. It wasn't very long before I discovered a cluster of Mason graves in the Blackfoot Cemetery, including one for John Mason, who died on October 9, 1866, aged 41 years. I knew that Burl's father had died when he was still a baby. Burl would have been 14 months old. Good fit, but I continued to poke.

Buried next to John are William and *HULDAH* Mason. Very likely John's parents,

so I moved back to the 1850 census and started looking for John in the same household as his parents.

Again, thanks to the Pike County volunteers, all the Pike County census images are online via the Internet. I quickly located William and "Huldy" Mason, whose household included John, aged 24. Working back and forth between the cemetery indexes and the census records, I roughed out logical family connections and then set out to prove my theories.

Both online and through printed indexes at the State Library in Austin, I found the marriage record of William Mason to Huldah Ann Almon in Posey County, Indiana, on December 17, 1821. With a little help from some friends with Family Treemaker CDs, I also located the marriage of John Mason to Mary *HARWORTH*, in nearby Warrick County, Indiana, on July 28, 1852.

Coincidentally, an Axley Cox married a Susannah Abshear in Warrick County in 1851. And also in Warrick County I found William Ashley, a little boy exactly the right age to be the same William Ashley who married Burl's sister Hulda. As the

real estate people like to say, it's all location, location, location.

And for the final clincher, a history of Pike County that was posted online speaks briefly of a small community named *Clay Banks*. It must have been one of those little spots in the road that never merited a notation on maps.

By this time, I decided that a preponderance of the evidence was enough to conclude that John Mason and Mary Harworth were the parents of my Burl Mason.

I continued to extract census records through 1870 when I came across something interesting. I was lucky enough to find a complete, printed extract of the 1870 Pike County census. There is no John or Burl Mason of the right ages listed in Pike County. But surprisingly, Axley Cox and his wife Susan are then living in Pike County.

Remember that Axley and Mary are married and living in Bastrop County in 1880. So one could presume that Mary is not too far away in 1870 if she's getting married within a few years to Axley. I have not been able to find an index for the 1870 Indiana census, but I feel sure that when I do, I'll

find Mary with one of her many husbands, and with Hulda, John and Burl in the household. That will be the ultimate proof for me that I've nailed this family down.

To find Mary's maiden name in a marriage record was almost as satisfying as locating my Masons. I did not find any Harworths on the 1860 census CD or in the 1850 Indiana printed index, so on a hunch I checked in Kentucky (there had to be some reason my grandmother connected Kentucky with the family). Through online sources, I quickly found an index entry for Mary Harworth in Jefferson County, Kentucky, in 1850. Elated, I headed to the Library to read the census record, confident that she would either be living with her parents or another one of her numerous husbands.

I can't tell you how disappointing it was to discover Mary Harworth enumerated as a resident of the *Cedar Grove Academy, a Roman Catholic Female Seminary*, supervised by the Sisters of Loretto. I could find no other Harworths in Kentucky in 1850 or 1840. Mary is shown in 1850 as born in Massachusetts.

There are no Harworths in 1850, 1840 or 1830 listed in the Massachusetts indexes. Since other censuses have shown her birth in New York, I checked there as well. No Harworths. Her birth certificate shows her birth in Indiana. I checked there. No Harworths. And to compound the problem, all census records indicate her birth year as 1832 while her death certificate indicates 1825. I feel sure Burl was guessing when he filled out the records at her death, but I have to look in both time periods as a result.

My theory at this point is that Mary was an orphan at the time of the 1850 census. The Sisters of Loretto were known for establishing homes for orphaned or impoverished children. Was she Catholic? Uncertain. Could she have been a teacher? At age 16, not impossible given the time period, but not likely either.

Nita B. mentioned that the family came from Manchester, England. One of the census records shows Mary's birthplace as England. At this point, I know that the Masons had been in America for several generations. Could this bit of information apply to Mary's

family? Lots of Harworths are listed in England, some in Manchester. I'm still looking into that one.

Now that I was centered on a particular group of Masons, I posted some queries on the Internet. Very quickly I received large data files from two distant Mason cousins, one descended from one of Burl's uncles, and another descended from his great-aunt Nancy. Both gave me lots of information on the prior generations, but neither had much information on Burl's parents. Another distant cousin replied who descended from Burl's Grandmother Almon's family. So I now have a good deal of information on the Almons. Both the Almons and Masons have Revolutionary War veterans in our direct line.

One interesting, not necessarily related, piece of information I uncovered was that some of the Almon girls were weavers. Could Mary have learned her craft from her mother-in-law? Or did she learn it from the good Sisters?

I am still sorting information and trying to get my records updated. It is very overwhelming to go from zero to overload in such a

short time period. But, oh how satisfying to batter down one of my brick walls. My biggest regret is that my grandmother is no longer here to share in the discoveries. I know she would have eaten this up. Of course, in the back of my mind is the possibility that I'm getting a lot of help from a certain guardian angel who keeps nudging me in the right direction. I surely hope she tackles the McAfees next!

Losing my census

Working with census records is a challenge at best. As pointed out in the previous article, I have located Mary Harworth Mason Cox Massey Smith in four different censuses and none of them agree with regard to her birthplace.

Most of us have filled out a census return or two, but the modern census is a world removed from those conducted *b.c.* (before computers).

The first official census for the United States was taken in 1790. That year, as well as the years 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830 and 1840, only the head of household is listed along

with a categorical count of the other residents in that home. That is, how many males and how many females, broken down by age and ethnic brackets.

The 1850 census is the first one to list each resident of the household with their ages and birthplace. Each census adds a little more information, but it is not until 1880 that you are also given the relationship of each person to the head of household.

The 1890 census was unfortunately destroyed. The most recent census available, due to privacy issues, is 1920.

Census information in the early days was collected by a group of individuals who would visit each home in their assigned districts. Therefore, census data is shown in the order of homes visited. Usually the census taker interviewed whoever he could catch at home. Which may or may not have been the person who had the correct answers. If no one was at home, he quite often grabbed a handy neighbor. This alone goes a long way toward explaining the variation in answers from census to census. Not to

mention that many people distrusted the government and might have doctored the information themselves.

Some census takers were very conscientious, with beautiful penmanship. Others produced work that looks like a hen was turned loose with a piece of paper and a paint can. My family was usually visited by the latter.

Thanks to the WPA and the introduction of Social Security, the 1880, 1900, and 1910 censuses have been somewhat indexed.

To qualify for Social Security, a person had to prove his approximate birthdate. Since the first group to reach the qualifying age were born prior to the issuance of birth certificates, locating them in the 1880 census could prove their age to the satisfaction of the federal government. For this reason, the WPA was assigned the task of creating an index to help the government locate the individual.

To offset the problem of census takers or family members who couldn't spell, a special indexing was created which grouped the names of all persons with similarly sounding names.

Thus the Soundex system was born. For instance, Masons, Maisons, Maysons and Measons would all be grouped together in one index location under the index heading of M250 (there is a little formula for puzzling out the index codes). Access to this index greatly accelerates the ability of a genealogist to locate his missing ancestor from 1880 forward.

For the prior years, it is necessary to depend on the printed indexes that have been compiled by various people or organizations. Most of the census records have been indexed, but availability varies widely from library to library.

Finding your relatives in a census can sometimes give you an odd feeling of stepping back in time. To find your grandmother listed as a 9-year-old in 1920, surrounded by her parents and siblings can suddenly bring the period and the people alive in a way that is hard to describe. After working with census records awhile, the names and dates cease to be just entries on a piece of paper. For a moment I am able to feel them as living, breath-

ing people and briefly touch them across time.

Humor Corner

This little poem recently floated my way via the Internet. It so aptly points out my basic distrust of spell checking software. No doubt you've noticed I don't use any.

*Eye halve a spelling chequer
It came with my pea sea.
It plane lea marques for my
revue
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.*

*Eye strike a key and type a
word
And weight four it two say
Weather eye am wrong oar
write.
It shows me strait a weigh.*

*As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee four two long.
And eye kin put the error rite.
Its rare lea ever wrong.*

*Eye halve run this poem
threw it,
Eye am shore your pleased
two no.
Its letter perfect all the weigh.
My chequer tolled me sew.*

Quarterly Bonus

Included with this issue of the newsletter you will find a pedigree chart for the children of Horace and Lucy Mason Hodge. Pedigree charts show direct ancestry with no attempt to include collateral line information. (Rest assured, I have plenty of information on collateral lines. My policy is to collect everything that connects to my family, because you never know when a distant cousin may surface and need a little help.)

Pedigree charts are basic skeletal information, but I find them handy to keep around for reference. With all the names, dates and locations floating around in my head, it sometimes helps to have a little roadmap along.

I hope you enjoy seeing where you came from!

If there are other members in your family who would like to be added to my mailing list, I will be glad to do so. You can reach me by phone at (512) 303-0638, by mail at 803 Jefferson, Bastrop, TX 78602, or by e-mail at LWilcoxn@onr.com.