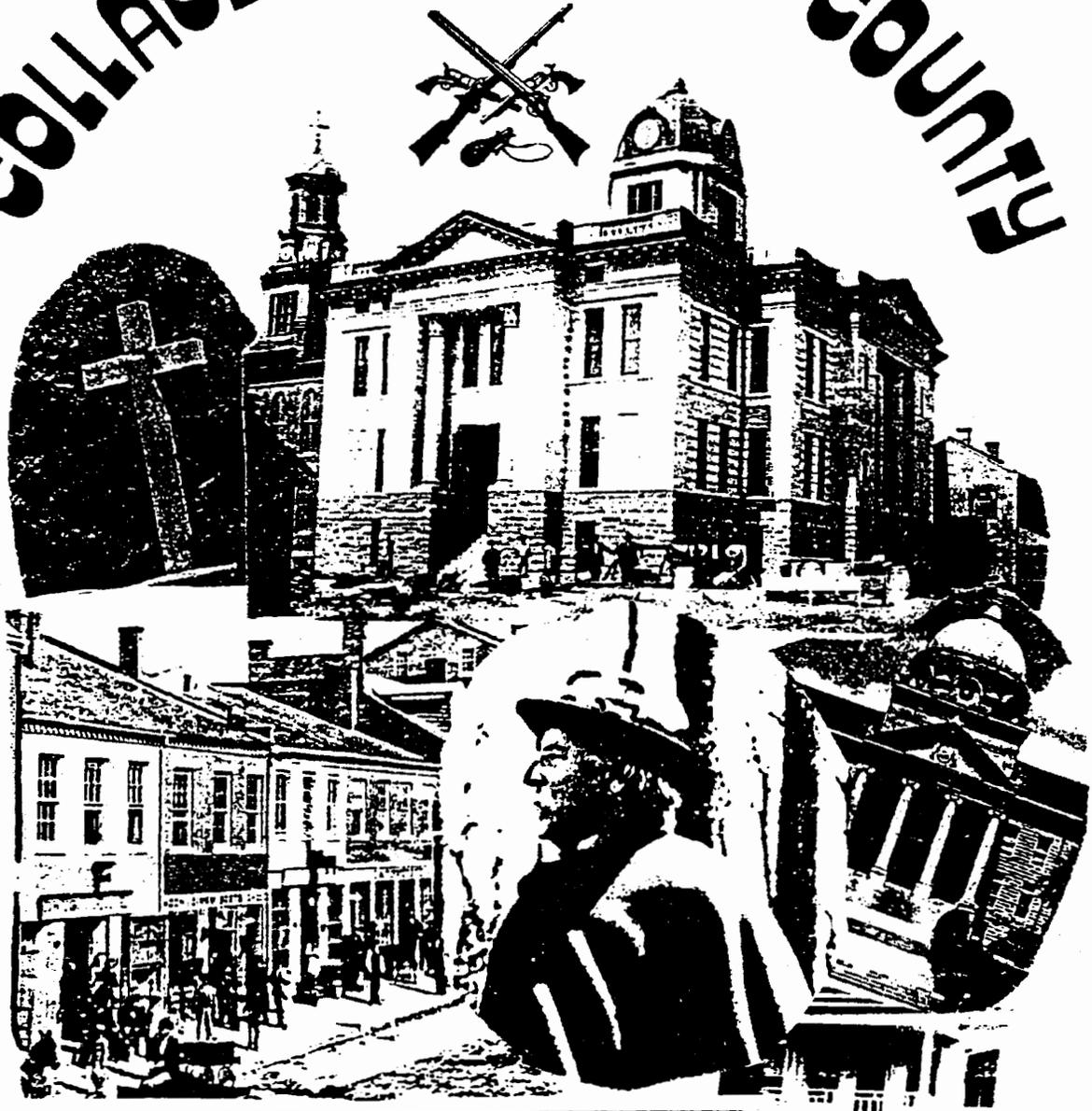


# COLLAGE OF CAPE COUNTY



CAPE GIRARDEAU EXPORTS 1874

Item	Amount	Price	Value
flour	120,000 bbls	\$ 6.00	\$720,000
lime	38,000 bbls	1.15	43,000
bacon	300,000 lbs	.07	21,000
lard	50,000 lbs	.07	3,500
hogs, dressed	150,000 lbs	.05	7,500





CAPE GIRARDEAU COUNTY  
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY



P. O. Box 571

Jackson, MO 63755

Volume 32 Number 2

September 2012

The Cape Girardeau County Genealogical Society was organized in May 1970, a non-profit organization, its primary purpose is education in the field of genealogy. Membership is open to individuals upon payment of the annual dues of \$10, or a couple for \$15, per year, beginning in May. Life membership is available for a one-time payment of \$250. Web site: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~mocgcs/index.htm>

The CGCGS Library is located in the Research Room at the Cape Girardeau County Archive Center, 112 East Washington, Jackson, MO and is open during regular Archive Center hours. Our meetings are held at The Cape Girardeau County Archive Center, 112 East Washington in Jackson, MO, bi-monthly in January, March, May, July, September, and November on the fourth Tuesday at 7:30 p.m., unless announced otherwise.

CGCGS publishes this quarterly, *THE COLLAGE OF CAPE COUNTY*, in March, June, September, and December, sent free to members. All members are encouraged to submit articles for publication. Submissions on disk (MS Word, rich text, or text files) or by email (text or rich text format) are encouraged, but not essential. Mail to **Bill Eddleman, 1831 Ricardo Drive Cape Girardeau, MO 63701 (email: eddlemanw@sbcglobal.net)**.

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JOHN H. FILBRUN.

JOHN IVERS.

*Cape Girardeau, Mo., Mar 1 1873*

*Me Mrs. H. Moore for  
Thomas H. Walker*  
**To FILBRUN & IVERS, Dr.**

**WHOLESALE GROCERS AND COMMISSION MERCHANTS,**

CORNER OF THEMIS AND WATER STREETS.

LIBERAL  
CASH ADVANCES  
— ON —  
CONSIGNMENTS  
— OF —  
On all Bills not promptly  
paid, 10 per cent. will  
invariably be charged.

## From the President

Dear Cape Girardeau County Genealogical Society Members,

Fall is in the air as I write this, and I could not appreciate it more after the long, hot, dry summer we have had. Soon, the prime time for visiting those old family cemeteries will be upon us, as the critters lay low and the poison ivy dies back. In fact, if you live locally and have a free Saturday now and then, consider helping out the County Archive Center staff with their Cape Girardeau County Cemetery resurvey project. Lots of good finds still remain to be made, and the data they collect add to the permanent record of gravestones recorded and stored at the archive center.

I've had some occasion recently to work with some records of the First Missouri Engineers (Bissell's Engineers of the West, First U. S. Engineers) in the Civil War. The subscription site [fold3.com](http://fold3.com) (formerly [footnote.com](http://footnote.com)) has literally hundreds of pages of records on this unit available as scanned original documents. This is great—at one time the only way to get this information would be several days and many dollars-worth of copies at the National Archives in Washington, D. C. Fold3 is adding thousands of documents per month of (mostly) military records, so a subscription is well worth the price. I've found a ton of detail on the service of my Civil War ancestors and collateral branch relatives on this site, and I will no doubt find a lot more as documents are added.

The news media has surprised me the last few days, in that they have devoted some time to the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Antietam. In contrast to the dozens of 150<sup>th</sup> commemorations across the eastern part of the country which have received very little public notice, the media appear to have embraced this one. More locally, we have 150-year commemorations coming up for the Battle of Raymond (MS), Prairie Grove (AR), and a host of smaller ones. Few seem to have captured the public eye in a big way, though, even though most folks in our region had ancestors who fought in these battles. Most disappointing of all, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Cape Girardeau is coming up next April, with absolutely NO local commemorations planned. Too bad the city fathers have so little regard for this key event in the town's history! The next local event planned is Fort D Days next Memorial Day weekend.

I much appreciate the great contributions to this quarterly from our membership! Thanks very much to Dave Niswonger, Celeste Stanton, and Mary Lee Rasmussen for their contributions to this *Collage*. As always, your article will be front and center in the next issue—if I receive it! Otherwise, prepare to hear about one of my ancestral families, and a research problem solved.

Sincerely,





## REFLECTIONS ON WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

By O. David “Dave” Niswonger



The Niswonger family came with George Frederick Bollinger along with nineteen other families from Lincolnton, N. C. in the fall of 1799. They crossed the Mississippi River on ice on New Years' Day 1800 and settled along the Whitewater River in Cape Girardeau County.

The Niswonger family consisted of Joseph, the head of the family, and his wife, Katherina Statler. They had two daughters, Elizabeth and Catherine, a twelve-year-old son, Joseph Jr., fourteen slaves and an old man. This old man was around 108 yrs. old and weighed over 400 pounds. He was so large that he couldn't walk so they made a special rocking chair for him and he rode in the wagon all the way from North Carolina. This information was given to me as an eleven-year-old boy by my grandfather, David Benton Niswonger. I was writing this information down and I asked, “Grandpa, what was the old man's name?” He replied, “We just called him the old man.” I remember asking him three times, “Now grandpa, think real hard—what was the old man's name?” He replied with the same answer.

One day, the family left him all alone. They went to town or church and when they returned, there was a stench in the air—like something burning—and when they opened the door, grease was running across the floor and the old man was smoldering in the fireplace. It was known that the slaves didn't like him but they didn't know whether they had thrown him in the fireplace or whether he tried to get up and fell in the fireplace. At any rate, the slaves were valuable so they sold them to the Estes family who lived on an adjoining farm. Except, they kept Bill and possibly his wife Sal (they may not have owned her at the time). As an aside, Bill was given his freedom upon the death of Joseph in 1833 along with a heifer, a sow, some horse gearing, and was to be given one-half of the crops he raised on land that he cleared and it Joseph Jr. didn't see to it that Bill got those things, he was to be left out of the inheritance.

Some time ago, I related this story to Rev. Don Estes, a Baptist preacher in Jackson, Missouri, since it was his family that bought the slaves. A few years ago, two slave houses were still standing on the old Estes farm near the Niswonger Church on Highway 72. About a year ago, Rev. Estes came by my house and told me he had heard the same story of an old man dying in a fireplace from one of his parishioners, Mr. Everett Yamnitz, who lives in the northern part of Cape County. The man who died was Mr. Berryman Roe (his name is spelled differently in some accounts, such as “Bixman”). The account was essentially the same—Mr. Roe was a slave dealer and the slaves did not like him. He died March 8, 1818 at the age of 53 and is buried in the Dickman-Roe Cemetery on the south side of Sandy Creek between Old Appleton and Biehle in Cape County.

Mr. Roe was a very interesting man. Several accounts have been written about him. Some of these stories were written in the *Jackson Cash Book* by J. W. and Reginald Gerhardt and Mr. J. H. Cochran. Mrs. Cochran wrote a very interesting story about “Bixman Roe Mansion in the Wilderness” on May 24, 1972 [see below]. She states that the mansion he built was a huge house forty feet across, and at the time with a large chimney and fireplace that would hold five-foot logs with a wooden mantle the height of a man's shoulders. The house was built on the north side of Sandy Creek.

He married Diana Miller. The story goes that she went to town and when she got home Mr. Roe was in the fireplace dead. She asked the slaves about it and they said he must have fallen into the fireplace. However, at his age it seems very unlikely. Apparently, she never got over her loss. She was pregnant at the time and had a son. She named him "Grief."

When Rev. Estes told me the story, I was shocked. I had never heard this story before. My grandpa never mentioned it, but in those days, the news didn't travel very far. I first thought, was this just an interesting story that had been passed around, or did both incidents actually happen? I called Mr. Yamnitz on the phone and he related the story just as Rev. Estes had told it. He mentioned that David Keesee and his wife, Wanda Roe, of Cape Girardeau, had researched the Roe family. I called them and was told the same story. I then recalled that when I lived in Poplar Bluff, while writing the story of the Niswonger family, I interviewed Bill Niswonger, whose father was a brother to my Great-Grandfather. I was about 27 years old at the time and he was 85. He began to tell me the story of the old man dying in the fireplace. When he finished, it was exactly as my grandpa had told it. Even when I asked him, "What was the old man's name?" he said, "They just called him the old man." I think he could have been a "Miller" but that's another story. After contemplating all this, I felt it could not be a made-up story—the rocking chair, his weight, dying at 110 years old in about 1802, etc.

Another thought I had was to call Delores Gerhardt, the wife of Reginald. I asked her if she had ever heard her husband mention anything about an old man dying in the fireplace. She said, "Yes." He told her that the slaves said, "Massa done fell in da fireplace."

As I have reflected on these stories, is it possible that Mr. Roe, being a slave dealer, could have bought the Niswonger slaves from the Estes family who killed the old man and had gotten away with it—who then killed him to in the same manner?

**Part One – Birxman Roe the wilderness May 24, 1972 issue of the *Jackson Cash Book***

By J. H. Cochran

"Birxman Roe Mansion in the Wilderness"

Note: Appreciation is expressed to J W and Reginald Gerhard who enabled this story to be written and shared material.

The old Spanish records list a land transaction to an early settler in the Cape Girardeau District named Birxman Roe. Whether the name was originally spelled in that manner is not known, since Roe came from Ste. Genevieve. It may have been spelled Reau or any of a dozen spellings. Roe's tombstone used the spelling as used above and that is the one that will be followed. Birxman Roe resided in Ste. Genevieve in 1790. Later he established a home in the district south the same year. The location of his land was at the point where the Shawnee Path crossed the Virginia Warrior's Path. Both were old Indian trails. In research done several years ago by J W Gerhart on Roe, facts about him are presented with Gerhart's permission and included with some of the writer's.

Birxman Roe's bones have now become part of eternity. His name has been forgotten by almost everyone in the country except those who are interested in the land he once owned. A house he built still stands and from it may be observed facts about the man. He was educated and could read and write, unusual accomplishments for most of the early settlers. He was artistic with an appreciation for comfort and beauty. He was adventurous and erected his home and developed his farm in the wilderness, when the closest neighbor was many miles away. The season of the year when Roe made his first trip south from Ste. Genevieve is not known, but it must have been when the countryside was clear of leafy vegetation, because he

scouted the country before making a decision where he wanted to locate. The natural resources of the land he selected were a prime consideration. The land he decided on was rolling, with some meadow and abundant growth of virgin timber, a creek, a spring of good drinking water, and a field of mineral deposits with geodes. The geodes lay strewn over the surface of the ground as though tossed by hand. From what I know about them they might have been by the mighty force of volcanic action that formed the country. The iridescent covering of the stones show in the sunlight like millions of diamonds, while the geodes that were open revealed a cameo inner structure of many colors, formed from blending of minerals and precious stone ingredients.

Impressed by what he found, Roe returned to Ste. Genevieve to seek title to the land. When he returned a short time later he had a Spanish grant under his arm and title to many acres that numbered in the hundreds. After amassing the supplies he would need to construct a house, Roe had set forth from the district south of Ste. Genevieve, bringing with him a small crew of workmen. The home site selected was on a large flat hogback, later called the 50-acre field. A log house 20 x 20 feet was built by hand-hewn timbers west of where the house stands today, and a distance of approximately ¼ mile from the second building site. The first house was plain with no extra trimming; a lean-to was added to the back side. Apple trees were planted at the same time the house was built, and for a hundred years some of the bent and broken trees stood on the place—a variety called “Horseapples” or “Rustycore,” a hardy variety like those Johnny Appleseed distributed to the settlers in the Wilderness.

It was to this log house that Roe brought his bride. Here the first of their family was born. Roe prospered and became a slave trader. With extra hands at his command, the farm grew and became self-sustaining. Holding fast to his dream of a mansion in the Wilderness, that would contain features he desired, he decided to erect a new house of larger proportions. The building site selected was on the north bank of Sandy Creek. Another log pin the same size as the original dwelling was started. When it was nearing completion the old pin was rolled eastward and incorporated with the new, thus providing a dwelling twice the size of the first one. The floor of the house was elevated about 3 feet above ground and a cellar was dug under a part of the building. When the houses were in position, a roof was placed over the buildings, forming one large house of rectangular shape and approximately 40 feet on the front side. A long porch was extended across the front and a sloping roof gave the house the appearance of the old French House in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri.

A large stone chimney was built on the east side of the house that served as a fireplace with a wooden mantle shelf the height of a man’s shoulders and an opening large enough to hold 5-foot logs. Straw, mud, clay, and sticks were used for mortar to hold the chimney stones in place. The stones were hauled to the building site from the creek or picked up on the land as it was cleared. “Muddaubers,” wasps, and bees used the mud packing as the basis for their hives, and Gerhart recalls the humming sounds they made on warm sunny days. A lean-to was extended on the north side. A kitchen and dining room were added on the east end. A narrow stairway extended from the dining room to a large attic which was used for sleeping quarters. Because of the thickness of the log walls the house was cool inside during hot summer days, and warm in winter when snow and ice covered the land outside. Some unusual features for the times were added to the inside furnishing—wainscoting and plate rail in the dining room; a cabinet for the storage of dishes; a pantry in the kitchen; and notches in the walls and for the books and pieces of brick-a-brac, which Roe evidently purchased and acquired when he made trips to Ste. Genevieve or elsewhere.

The house was indeed a “mansion in the wilderness.” It stands today desolate and deserted, but with an air of grandeur veiling the dwelling. Roe’s workmen constructed the house to last a long time. It has outlasted the family and their descendants, who like buried on the south side of Sandy Creek in a private graveyard.

## LEGEND AND FACT IN GENEALOGY

by Bill Eddleman

As Mr. Niswonger so ably points out, all families have legends about their history and ancestors. Every one of our families has legends about ancestry and about the personalities of these people in our past. My dictionary defines legend as: A story coming down from the past; one popularly accepted as historical although not verifiable. Are these legends true or false? There are several possibilities. First, the legends may have been faithfully handed down to the present, although not really true. That is, the legend may be true insofar as the teller heard it, but may not be the way things actually happened. Second, many of these legends have been handed down by people with a rich lifetime's *worth of memories*. Some of these memories may mingle with time, so that parts of several stories may be handed down as a single story. Third, there may be a grain of truth in the story. The remainder may be details the teller includes to make the story more interesting. Lastly, the legend may be perfectly true! In the case of the old man dying in the fireplace, there are instances of slaves murdering their masters, and then trying to dispose of the body in the fireplace. (For one Missouri example, see "Celia, A Slave, Trial (1855): An Account" by Douglas O. Linder (2011). Accessed September 4, 2012 at: <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/celia/celiaaccount.html>)

Many families have a rich tradition of legends from a number of sources. First of all, most legends are handed down by word of mouth. Word of mouth is subject to the influence of memory, and we've learned in recent years that even those with the best memories can sometimes be influenced by experience or similar stories. In cases where a grain of truth underlies the legend, we can often use these legends as a base for our research. In family history research, new records become available all the time that can shed light on these legends. That is, they become verifiable. Let me give you an example. My ancestor John Link had a granddaughter Nancy Mariah who married a Proffer. She lived to be very old, and was quoted in a newspaper article in the 1930s as being told that her grandfather left with the team and wagon to go to town one day. The team returned, and the grandfather was never found. The family assumed he was murdered by Indians. A number of descendants have "made the leap" to think this meant John Link was killed by Indians. However, there is a physician's bill in his estate file in Cape Girardeau Co. that clearly infers that he was treated by the doctor for over a week, two and a half weeks before his son took out letters of administration on his estate. John Link died in bed, not driving a wagon! What these descendants failed to realize is that Mrs. Proffer had TWO grandfathers (as all of us do). Her other grandfather, presumed to be one William Keepers, is referred to in genealogies, but I have found no local Southeast Missouri records for him. He was purported to be from South Carolina, and, lo and behold, some of his other descendants tell the same "killed by Indians" story about him. Searching for probate records in South Carolina might clear up whether the tale is plausible. So, in this case, it is possible a story got grafted onto the wrong side of the family tree!

So what do we do with legends? First of all, I would suggest we not make more! When writing about family history, always cite or refer to the source for your information. Don't accept the legend as the end point--always search for the source. Where legends and facts disagree, try and understand the origin of the legend. Sometimes it may become clear why they were passed down as they were. Finally, for some aspects of family history, report them as legend, and enjoy them! These legends help to make our ancestors real human beings, and provide insight into the way things were in the past.

I'll end with some wise words from *The Eddleman-Fulbright Families* by Riley R. Eddleman about family history: *No family history is ever complete. Each day sees new members being added and each new day will find new material being made available... I hope that someone will continue this search from where I have ended this story. Furthermore, I hope that someone will correct any mistakes I may have made so that eventually we will know the full story of the[se families] and their kin.*



**Jesse Stanton**  
**Ex-slave**  
**The Man Who Gave Us Our Name**  
by Celeste Stanton



Sometime between 1810 and 1820, a very light-skinned baby boy was born in South Carolina to a presently unnamed slave mother. Because of his color, it is quite possible that he was the son or grandson of a slave-holder or other white man. We do not know if he was born in western South Carolina or in the “Low-Country” of that state – an area known for some of the most horrific slave conditions in the country. We do not even know what original last name he was given, if any, or if the name he carried was by his own choice. We only know that his name of record is Jesse Stanton.

Jesse’s year of birth is uncertain. When we first find him on the US Federal Census records (*Commerce, Scott County Missouri 1870*) he has already lived approximately 50 years of his life! At that time, he was head of the household with a young wife of 22, America, and an infant son of 6 months of age, Richard. Jesse is listed as mulatto, a carpenter by trade, and owns \$1000 in real estate property. We do not know how Jesse came to Missouri or why he settled in Commerce, a tiny village on the Mississippi River.

How did Jesse get from South Carolina to Missouri? There are many possibilities. He may have been sold to one, or several, slave-holders over the years. Historically, there was a great westward movement among white settlers from the east seeking farmland. A look at census records shows that many of Missouri’s settlers came from North and South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. And, many brought their slaves with them. Probably most came by land, but others took ships to ports like New Orleans in Louisiana. With the Mississippi River as a major avenue for travel and commerce, the river provided access to sparsely populated areas where land was abundant. (***We must never forget that all the land that was settled was taken from the original inhabitants, our first occupants, the Native Americans!***) The Ohio River, which flows from as far east as Pennsylvania, passes through six states and joins the Mississippi River at Cairo, Illinois. Along those two major waterways came thousands of would-be settlers and it is possible that somehow Jesse arrived in Missouri from a river source.

However he arrived, by 1867 Jesse was resident in Scott County, Missouri. We know this now because of court records where he began purchasing land. On January 10, 1867 -only 2 years after the end of the Civil War - he purchased the west half of Lot #73 in Commerce, Missouri, from David J. and Elizabeth Allen for \$150.00.

If the plat of the town of Commerce has not significantly changed since then, the map below shows lot #73 on the corner of Washington Street and Cape Girardeau Street in Commerce which Jesse bought from the Allens. It is from the Scott County courthouse records that we can show that the information on the 1870 census was correct. This ex-slave did own approximately \$1000 in property.

Astute as a budding businessman at the time, Jesse turned around and sold that \$150 lot to George W. Fricke on May 28, 1867 for \$675.00 – showing a profit of \$525.00. (*Scott County Deed Book 17, Page 6*). If the map is correct, lot #73 sits on the square in Commerce, and it was common back then to have clusters of businesses situated around a courthouse square. This may be why Jesse was able to realize such a profit for one-half of a lot.

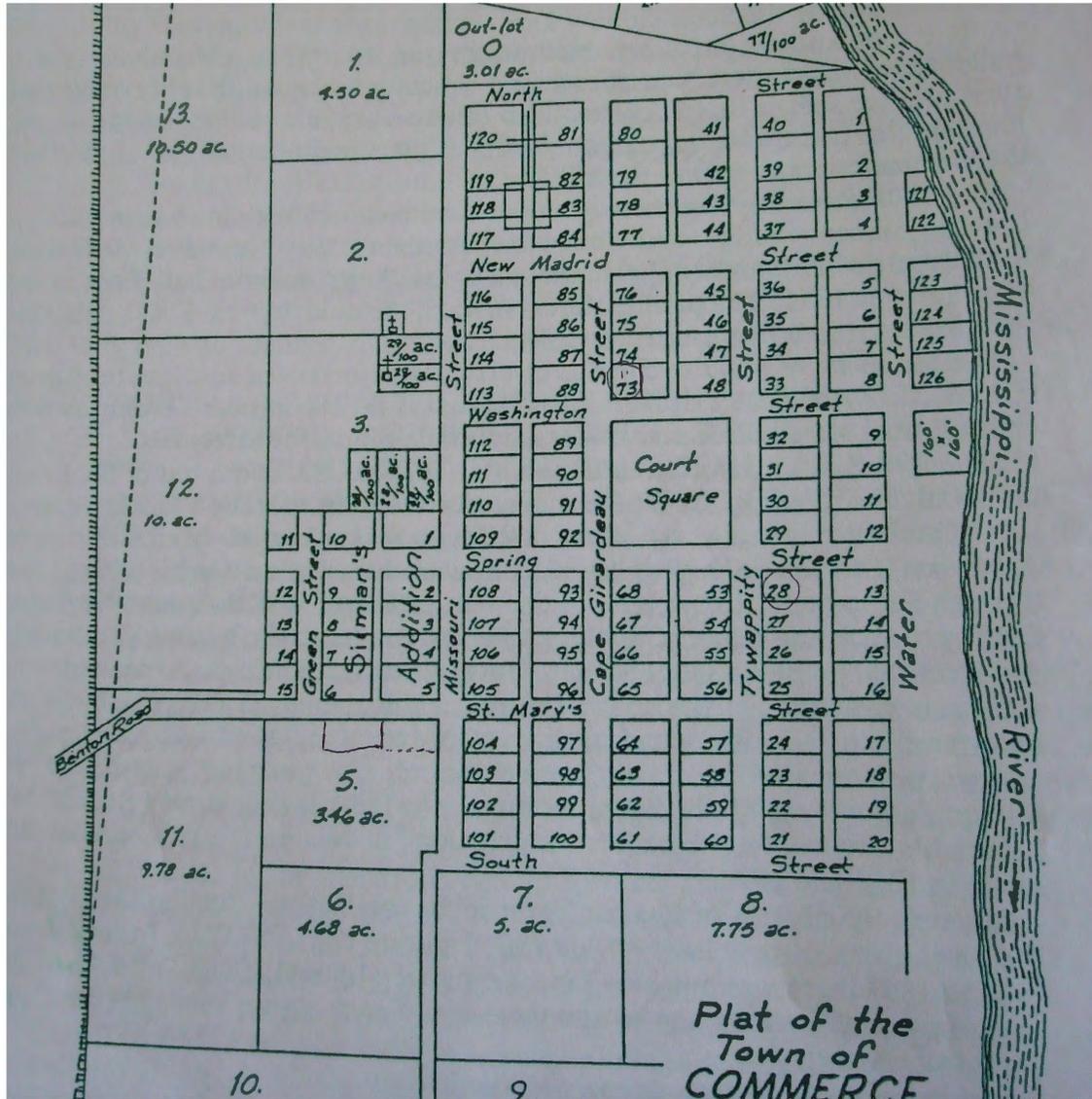
Book  
 Page 277  
 Now all men by these presents that we David  
 Allen and Elizabeth Allen wife of the said David Allen  
 in the town of Commerce and the County of Scott and  
 State of Missouri have this day for and in consideration  
 of the sum of one hundred and fifty Dollars to the said  
 David Allen in hand paid by Jesse Stanton of the  
 aforesaid town and County and State of Missouri  
 has bargained and sold and by these presents do grant  
 bargain and sell unto the said Jesse Stanton the fol-  
 lowing described tract or parcel of land situate in  
 the aforesaid town of Commerce and County of Scott  
 and State of Missouri that is to say the west half of  
 lot number seventy three in the town of Commerce  
 and County and State aforesaid to have and to hold  
 the premises hereby conveyed with all the rights pri-  
 vileges appurtenances thereto belonging or in any way  
 appertaining unto the said Jesse Stanton his heirs  
 and assigns forever  
 In witness whereof we have hereto  
 subscribed our name and affixed our seal this the  
 tenth day of January in the year of our lords one  
 thousand eight hundred and sixty seven  
 David J. Allen Seal  
 Elizabeth Allen Seal

(Scott County Missouri Deed Book #16, Page 277).

In June of 1867, Jesse purchased another parcel of land for \$125.00 from George Fricke and Thomas Rhoades. This was a portion of an "Out" lot in section eleven (11) there in Commerce. (Scott County Deed Book 17, Page 90). Then in October 1867, Jesse sold a portion of Out Lot Eleven to Charles Billings for the sum of \$50.00. (Scott County Deed Book #17, Page 91).

During 1868, Jesse continued to acquire more property in Commerce. Charles Billings Quit Claimed to Jesse a 150 foot portion of Out Lot 11 for \$80 on January 31, 1868. (Scott County Deed Book #17, Pages 240 & 241). Then on June 30, of that same year, Jesse with his wife, America Stanton, sold a portion of Out Lot 11 to Joseph N. Moore for \$25.00. (Scott County Deed Book #18, Page 52).

We must make the assumption here that it was about this time that Jesse married America. If she was 22 years of age on the 1870 census, then we must guess that his new wife was approximately 20



Lot #73 – Corner of Cape Girardeau and Washington Streets.

(Plat of the Town of Commerce with 1857 Silman’s Addition.  
Prepared by J.B. Hirtz – 12/83)

in 1868. After reading numerous deeds and legal documents, it is apparent that the wife of a man selling property had to be included on the instrument if for no other reason than to protect her dower rights. Of Joseph N. Moore’s wife, Levisa, who was a party to the sale to Jesse and America, the sale document states:

“...And the said Levisa being by me made acquainted with the contents of said deed and examined separate and apart from her said husband acknowledged that she executed the same and relinquished her dower in the real estate therein mentioned and described voluntarily, freely, and without compulsion or undue influence of her said husband.”

In December 1873, Jesse purchased Lot #28 in Commerce from Carroll Moye, his wife Pauline and Patrick Kelley for the sum of \$200.00. Lot #28 appears to be at the corner of Tywappity Street and Spring Street, again a lot facing onto the courthouse square.

For the next few years Jesse went about his life working more at his profession as an engineer and carpenter, than at his real estate pursuits. And, by 1876, he is now married to Sophia Hunter. I do not know what happened to America or his son, Richard. If she moved away, she may have taken another man's name. With a high child mortality rate back then, Richard may not have survived until adulthood. Whatever happened, they seem to have disappeared from time.

In the Missouri State Census of 1876 (*Tw'p, Cape Girardeau County Missouri*) Jesse is shown as a "colored" male in the category of "age 45 and upward." Sopha Stanton, "colored" female is listed in the category of "21 and under 45 years" right below him. The *Missouri Marriage Records-1805-2002* show that he and Sophia Hunter were married on October 4, 1874 by a Justice of the Peace in Commerce, Missouri.

G. W. Chamberlin & Co., Printers and Binders, St. Louis.

## Certificate of Marriage.

(Under Act of 1874.)

---

Mr. *Jesse Stanton*.....

— TO —

Miss *Sophia Hunter*.....

DATE OF MARRIAGE:

*Oct 4<sup>th</sup>*..... A. D. 187*4*

---

State of Missouri, } Recorder's  
 County of *Scott* } Office,

Filed for record on this *11<sup>th</sup>*.....  
 day of *October*..... A. D. 187*4*

and recorded in Marriage Record *A*.....  
 at Page *41*.....

*George Thomas* Recorder.

By *Jos. H. McPherson* Deputy.

We see Jesse and his new family next on the *1880 US Federal Census-Scott County Missouri*. Jesse is listed as 63 years of age; Sophia is 24 and there are two children in the household – William, age 3, mulatto, son – and Annie, age 1, daughter, mulatto; and a Mary Sides, age 28, mulatto and she is a servant. We do not know if she was a servant in Jesse's home or elsewhere. Here again we mention the issue of Jesse's age. On the 1870 Census he was allegedly 50 years old. Ten years later he is 13 years older!

Jesse is listed as an "engineer in mill" in Commerce on the 1880 census. A search of mills and factories at that time and in that city leads us to the Wathen Flour Mill. A historical source of information from the *Scott County Missouri Genealogy Trails* taken from the *History of Southeast Missouri by Robert Sidney Douglas, c1912, Lewis Publishing Company, NY*, discusses the creation of Commerce, Missouri as a town and the influential merchants who built businesses there. As a place, it was laid out in 1823 and incorporated in 1834.

***"...In 1844 Benjamin B. Gaither began the operation of a tan yard. In 1856 a large mill was built by Ignatius R. Wathen, who was at that time a resident of Cape Girardeau."***

***The article goes on to say about Commerce: "It has several business establishments, the principal one being a flouring mill and a plant for the manufacture of tile."***

This is the flour mill at which Jesse worked as an engineer. I have often wondered how he learned the intricacies of complicated machinery and his other craft as a carpenter. Somewhere back in South Carolina, was he apprenticed out to a plantation owner? Was he given special training because of his biological parent? Did he work on a river boat keeping the engines running? Did he just have an ability to learn his trades by observation and practice? How did Jesse develop these critical and valuable skills?

Further evidence of his skill comes from one of those "if walls could talk" incidents. The following article was provided to me by Mr. Charles Bain of Scott County in the winter of 2010. He acquired it from a lady who attended a meeting of the Scott County Historical Society and read from a "diary" she had found prior to the meeting. Knowing of my ancestral search, Mr. Bain asked the lady to let him have a copy of the article for me. According to Mr. Bain, this lady recently purchased an old home in Commerce, Missouri and found a diary of a former owner in it, and within that diary was this story about my great-grandfather, Jess Stanton. I have asked Mr. Bain to contact the lady who has the article so I can obtain written permission to use this article in my research and publishing. So far, I have no name nor a way to contact her, and I have lost contact with Mr. Bain despite many attempts. I have no date when this was written nor the name of the author.

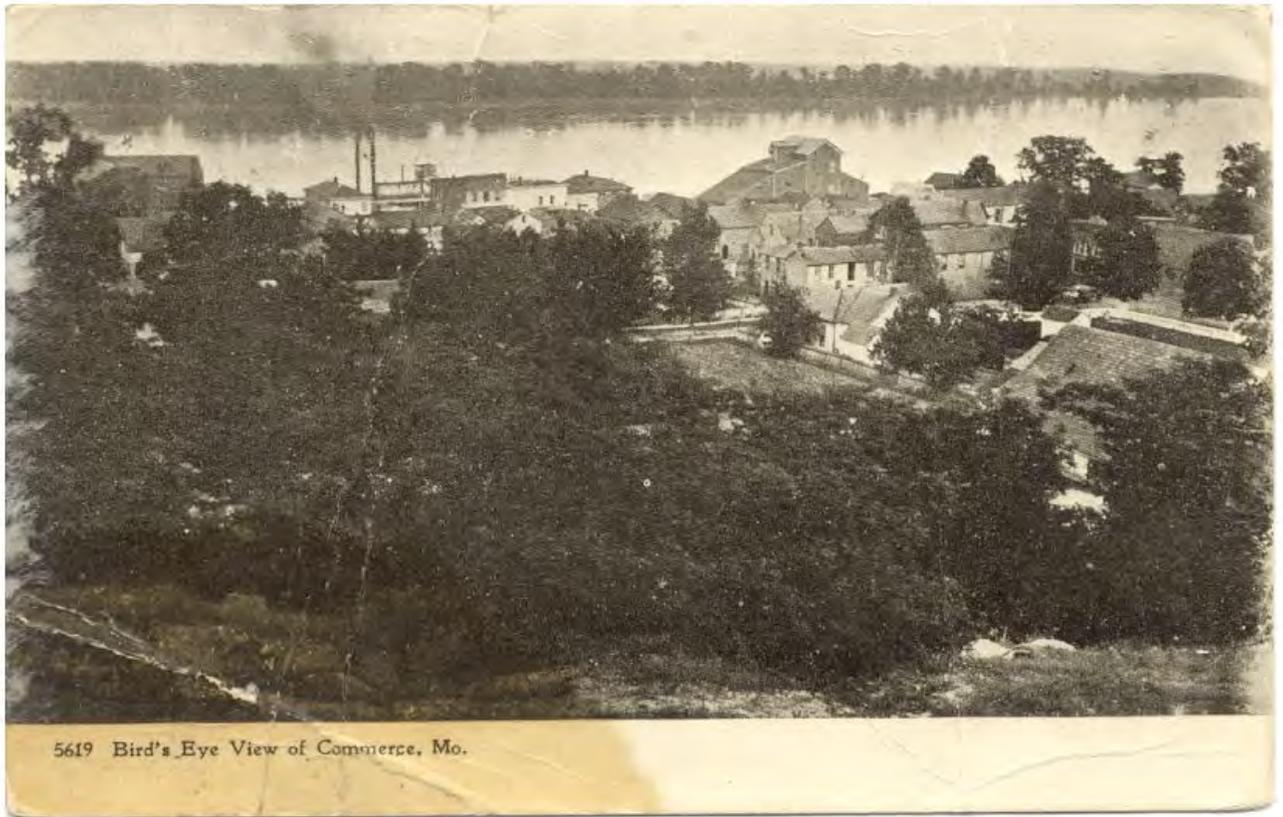
### **Jesse Stanton**

**"Jess Stanton (a free slave) was the engineer. He was a tall yellow or red Negro, and was looked upon by those of his own race as a conjurer. He believed he could put the curse upon the people of his own race.**

**This was before the days of local banks, though there was much talk of them. So, Jess decided to open a bank for the local people of his own race, accept deposits etc. Much in the manner of a regular bank. He carried the money of course, in his pocket, keeping close account of the transactions in his head. As the story goes, things got tight, and Jess got his money mixed with his depositors and they made a demand on Jess for their money. Jess was supposed to have met them with this excuse, "White folks bank bust, well nigger's bank bust too. Get on away from here. I have no money." And that was the end of that bank.**

**This old mill was kept in tact for grinding of meal, hops, etc. for many years after the War. It had 150,000 storage capacity and was used for this purpose in later years in conjunction with the new mill. More about the new mill later.**

**Jess Stanton moved his family to Cape Girardeau in 1890. He never returned to Commerce. When I was a boy, after dark came, you could not get a boy inside the old mill, for Jess Stanton had it haunted. I continued to feel that way about it as long as it stood. I was born just across the street from the old mill, so naturally I was either in or around it every day of the early part of my life. That is why every detail is so plain in my mind. It had a slate floor that was a wonderful foundation. It stood for over a half century without repair. When the mill was torn down, Hy Sanders put the slate on a house he was building.” *Author Unknown.***



View of Commerce, Missouri possibly around the mid-1880s according to the *Scott County Historical Society's web page*. It is possible that the multi-story building near the Mississippi River is the Wathen Flour Mill where Jesse worked as an engineer.

Five years after Jesse purchased Lot #28, he was again attempting to purchase land. In a *Quit Claim Deed* from Simeon Jones and his wife, Jesse paid \$1.00 for "part of Lot #5" situated near the intersection of St. Mary's and Missouri Streets. (*Quit Claim Deed Book #1, Scott County, Missouri*). We do not know if he had an intention to build on that lot, if it already had a structure on it, or if the purchase was for speculation.

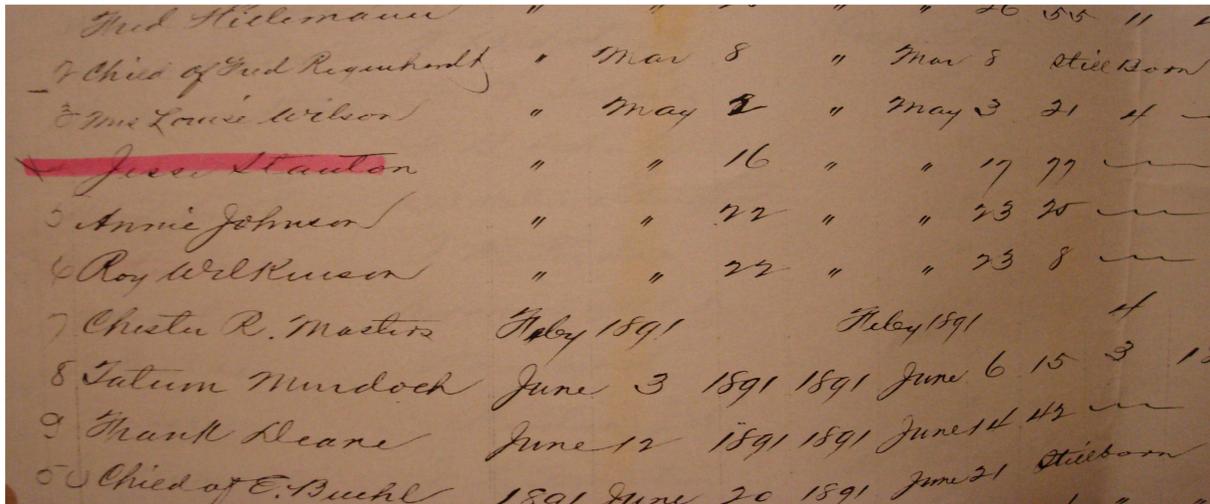
Though it is said that Jesse had plenty of employment over the years, maybe his age, health or other situation created a need for him to liquidate his land holdings. In December of 1882 Jesse and Sophia sold Benjamin Gaither of Scott County, Part of Out Lot

#5 on St. Mary's and Missouri Streets for \$300.00. (*Scott County Deed Book 26, Page 562*). It is from here that we see Jesse losing his fortune. One year after that sale, Jesse sold another part of Out Lot #5 also to Benjamin Gaither for the small sum of \$150.00. (*Scott County Deed Book #29, Page 190-notarized on December 7, 1883*). At the time of this second sale, Jesse and his family had moved permanently to Cape Girardeau.

I do not have any other documents that would indicate what happened to Jesse's other pieces of property.

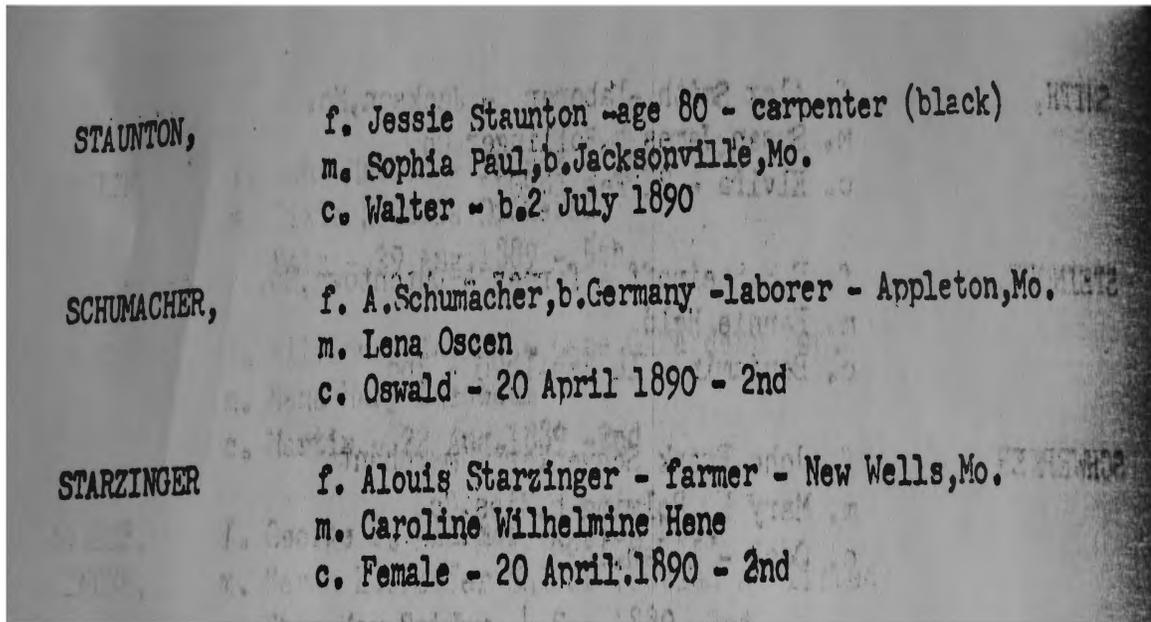
With the loss of the 1890 US Federal Census, we have nothing to go on as to where Jesse's family lived in Cape Girardeau. But he continued to father children with his wife, Sophia. To their marriage was born the following children: William, Annie, Hezekiah, Olivia (Arlevia), Isaak and Walter. We will meet the children in the next chapter. Interestingly, Walter was born when Jesse was age 80 – one year before he died according to the *Cape Girardeau County Birth Records*.

Here again, we have a discrepancy with his alleged age. On the official cemetery record, it shows that he died on May 16, 1891 at the **age of 77**. But the birth record of Walter, clearly the son of Jesse and Sophia, lists Jesse as age 80 in 1890!



**Official Written Death Record showing Jesse Stanton's date of death and age.**

The end of this big, strong man's remarkable life came by accident – he fell off a roof while working on a building in 1891 somewhere in Cape Girardeau. What is particularly sad is that no building in Cape Girardeau bears his name. No architect included his name on the historical documents which we find on certain Cape Girardeau City building plans. Yet, most assuredly, he helped create many of the structures in this city, some of which probably still stand today. Was he just a simple workman – or a skilled and trained craftsman? It is clear from his obituary that he was the latter. What many people fail to understand is that with the back-breaking labor of blacks we find the underpinnings of a developing society. But, though the product of that labor is evident, blacks continued to be "invisible," - given no recognition for so much work.



**Cape Girardeau County Birth Record showing Jesse, father of Walter, at age 80**

In trying to piece together Jesse's complicated life, we have no answers to who were his parents, exactly where in South Carolina he was born, and how he managed to wind up in southeast Missouri. Who freed him? How much did he pay for his freedom? I guess the better question is *how much was his life worth to another human being?* And why, after acquiring choice pieces of property in Commerce did he lose or have to sell his land? Was his limited financial knowledge taken advantage of by whites? Did he get cocky and over-extend himself making it impossible for him to pay his bills? Was he a gambler? Why did this man, who was clearly a hard worker, lose everything?

In May of 2011, Mario Stanton and I drove from Cape Girardeau toward Commerce. We wanted to visit the places that Jesse had owned; to see where the old mill had been located and get a sense of what he saw in Commerce. At that time, the Mississippi River was raging from excessive rains and spring snow melt up north. The river was so high at Commerce that the road was completely blocked off by barriers about a mile outside the town. We were not able to get to Commerce. Maybe next time.

**Obituary of Jesse Stanton Published in the *Cape Girardeau Democrat* Newspaper 23 May 1891:  
 "Fell and Killed Himself"**

**Jesse Stanton, the old colored man who has been a resident of this city for more than fifty years, and who claimed to be one hundred and one years old, fell from the roof of a building last Saturday evening and received injuries from which he died in about two hours after the fall.**

**Jesse Stanton was a splendid mechanic and we have many houses in this city that were built by him. He was born a slave, but he saved money that he earned by working over time and ten years before the breaking out the civil war he purchased his own freedom.**

**At the close of the war Stanton located in Commerce, Missouri, and he remained in that town working at his trade, that of a carpenter, till a few years ago, when he returned to this city. He was an industrious, hard working man, but after purchasing his freedom he never accumulated any wealth. He always had work at fair wages, but money would not stay with**



## QUERIES ??? QUERIES ??? QUERIES ??? QUERIES ???

QUERIES are FREE to members of the Cape Girardeau County Genealogical Society, and should be sent to: Bill Eddleman, 1831 Ricardo Drive, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701. (email: eddlemanw@sbcglobal.net). **Please include mailing address** if submitting by email.

**RANNEY** Interested in any information on Stephen RANNEY (1761-1827). I am trying to trace my descent from him with greater detail. Contact: **Kathryn E. Creswell, 719 North Scott St., Wheaton, IL 60187-4225**. Phone: **(630) 699-7246**. Email: [kathryncreswell@yahoo.com](mailto:kathryncreswell@yahoo.com)

**ABLE** Looking for Mollie ABLE's parents:

1850 Federal Census, Cape Girardeau, MO

ABLE, Martha	58	
DAUGHERTY, E.	77	
ALLE, Ballever B.	25	
ABLE, Mary Elizabeth	19	[m. Norbert GRENIER 10/5/1853, Cape Girardeau]
ABLE, Sarah V.	17	[m. Anthony ARNOLD 1862]
ABLE, E. V.	10	
ABLE, Geo. W.	5	
ABLE, Clariss B.	5	[m. John BROWN 2/13/1866, Cape Girardeau]

**Assumption:** Ballever B. ALLE is the same as R. B. ABLE in the 1860 Cape Girardeau census as shown below. It is possible that the family called him by his middle name and he later chose to go by R. B. I have also found records that indicate his name could be Ralph Bolivar ABLE.

1850 Federal Census, Scott County, MO

WILBURN, Charles P.	50
WILBURN, Amelia	48
WILBURN, Nancy I.	9
BYRA, Marion	20
BYRNE, Mary E.	18
BYRNE, Catharine M.	16

**Assumptions:** (1) Mary E. BYRNE is the same as R. B.'s wife Mariah in the 1860 Cape Girardeau census below. The ages are only 7 years different from 1850 to 1860 instead of 9 or 10, but I have found other instances where the same person's age was not the expected 9 or 10 years different in successive censuses. (2) Marion BYRA is Marion BYRNE in the 1870 Scott County census. (3) This is Amelia Wilburn's 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage based on the age of Nancy.

1860 Federal Census, Cape Girardeau, MO

ABLE, R. B.	33
ABLE, Mariah	25
ABLE, Charles	6
MIFFLIN, Henry	16
ABLE, Clarissa	16

**Assumptions:** (1) Charles is Mollie's brother. This is the first record of Charles (Charley). My aunt, who lived with Mollie several times, told me that Mollie had a brother Charley. See the LDS marriage record [Editor's note: Probably Scott County Marriage Records] for Ralph ABLE and Maria BYNSE, married May 1, 1853, Scott County, MO. (2) Clarissa is the same as in the 1850 census listed with Ballever B. ALLE. In both censuses Clarissa's birthplace is listed as Arkansas.

1870 Federal Census, Scott County, MO. (This is the first record I've found for Mollie.)

WILBURN, Amelia	68
BYRNE, Marion	40
BYRNE, Genevieve [Genevieve]	32
BYRNE, Jefferson	9
BYRNE, Dora	7

BYRNE, Lillian	3	
BYRNE, Ada	8/12	[Addie Lenorah BYRNE m. James W. JOHNSON]
REYNOLDS, Elisabeth	14	
ABLE, Mollie	8	

**Assumption:** Mollie is living with her Uncle Marion, who is brother of Mary (Mariah) BYRNE, R. B. ABLE's wife. I have not been able to find any census records for Charley in 1870.

1880 Federal Census, Cape Girardeau, MO

CLODFELTER, Geo. C.	40
CLODFELTER, Clara	29
CLODFELTER, Nellie	4
CLODFELTER, Maggie	2
ABLE, Mollie	17
ABLE, Charley	27
ABLE, Nellie	19
FRICKEY, John W.	20

**Assumptions:** Charley is married and living in the same household as Mollie. Clara CLODFELTER and Nellie ABLE appear to be sisters. Marriage records for both show last name as BRAY.

My aunt told me that Mollie came from Ireland with her brother Charley but without their parents. I have not been able to find any records to support that idea. Since R. B. and Mary (Mariah) do not show up in any census records after 1860, my assumption is that they died after Mollie was born in 1861 and before 1870. This would explain why Mollie is living with her Uncle Marion in 1870. Mollie names her second son Ralph Celestine. If in fact Ralph B. (R. B.) is her father, then her son would be named after her father and her husband's father.

Mollie (b. September 13, 1861) married Charles R. GROJEAN on April 19, 1885 in Scott County. He was born to Celestine and Mary JEFFORDS GROJEAN in Scott County on May 26, 1860. Charles and Mollie lived in Stoddard County in the 1900 census. They were living in Craighead County, AR for the 1910 census and Poinsett County, AR for the 1920 census. Mollie died on March 24, 1924 in Poinsett County, AR.

I have not been able to find any other records on Charley ABLE except for a 1930 census. [Editor's note: Death Certificate No. 7764 for Charley Able from Stoddard Co., MO lists his death date as Feb 17, 1935, marital status as widowed, mother and father as unknown.] This Charles Able was the correct age and living alone in Stoddard County. I don't know if this is Mollie's brother or not.

I have also found a marriage license for Nellie S. ABLE who married a Henry C. BRONEAU in Cape Girardeau on November 2, 1887. This could have been Charlie's wife. Charley may have died between the 1880 census above and 1887, or they may have divorced. I found in the 1900 Cape Girardeau Co., Randol Township census that Henry BRONEAU and his wife, Nellie, married for 12 years, had a daughter living with them. Her name was Kattie (Kathie) ABLE, age 17. This fits with the above paragraph.

Contact: **Alan Grojean, 38450 Shana Dr., Clinton Twp., MI 48036.** Phone: **(586) 463-7332.** Email: [trainsareok52@gmail.com](mailto:trainsareok52@gmail.com)

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