

# MIDWEST COMPUTER GENEALOGISTS

## NEWSLETTER

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### APRIL WEBINAR RECOMMENDATION: “THE IMPERFECT GENEALOGIST”

Saturday, April 3, 2021, 12:30 CDT (1:30 EDT).  
Green County Chapter, Ohio Genealogical Society  
Presented by Janine Adams  
View free (no registration required) through the  
Zoom link on Janine’s blog:  
<https://organizeyourfamilyhistory.com/another-chance-to-hear-the-imperfect-genealogist-on-zoom/>  
For those of you who miss the monthly presentations that MCG formerly offered, the Internet gives us the opportunity to visit similar presentations from experts around the world!

Janine’s April 3 webinar will be a revival of a presentation she made at the international 2020 RootsTech Conference in Salt Lake City (just before the pandemic hit in full force).

She says of this presentation: “I’ll be talking about ways perfectionism can get in the way of enjoyable and productive genealogy research, along with some areas in genealogy where, in my opinion, good enough isn’t good enough. I’ll also be discussing some strategies for letting go of perfectionism.”

Janine regularly explores the theme of “good enough” with co-host Shannon Wilkinson on their podcast “Getting to Good Enough” ([gettingtogoodenough.com](http://gettingtogoodenough.com)). Their discussions aim to help listeners learn to let go of perfectionistic tendencies that get in the way of doing what they love.

If you would like a preview of Janine’s approach to genealogy productivity by letting go of perfectionism (or a deeper dive afterward), you can listen in on the “Getting to Good Enough” Episode #20 on “Genealogy,” in which Janine steps Shannon through her own case example of getting past

genealogy overwhelm :  
<http://gettingtogoodenough.com/episode-20-geip-genealogy/>.

Janine is a professional organizer who combines her career skills with her passion for genealogy on her blog, “Organize Your Family History” ([organizeyourfamilyhistory.com](http://organizeyourfamilyhistory.com)) (Submitted by Julia Morse.)

### THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Al Morse

I have been putting books together for my sons of my family and my wife, Dorothy's, family. Included in the books are pictures, stories, and family trees. Well, I began thinking about when each of our families came to America. I used Family Search.org for the information. Not all of the information in these trees was inserted by me, but some was contributed by others. I cannot guarantee that all of the information is accurate, but it gave me some interesting names and numbers.

The first one is easy. David Janssens , my mother, Mildred Catherine (Janssens Morse’s, father, was born March 8, 1854 in Zandvliet, Belgium. He came to America in the 1880's. He married Laura Jessie Mooney on April 23, 1889 in Kansas City, Missouri. Laura Mooney's father was Joseph Mooney. From Joseph, we go back to John Mooney, to Hans Jacob Mauney, to Hans Jacob “Mani” Mauney II who was born February 20, 1717 in Alsace, France and died July, 1795 in North Carolina. Joseph's wife was Rachel Farnsworth. My cousin, Laura Frances (Seals) Scott, did a lot of research on the Farnsworth family. Thomas Farnsworth was born February 7, 1648 in England. He arrived in New Jersey in 1677.

For my father, Albert Frank Morse, Sr., the line goes from his father, Clark Frank Morse, to Peter Young Morse, to Ephraim Morse, to Artimas Morse, to Isaac Morse, to Joseph Morse, to Capt. Joseph Morse I, to Samuel Morse who was born January 12, 1585 in Essex, England. He was married in England, but died in 1654 in Medford, Massachusetts. For my father's mother, Alma Dona (Miller) Morse, we follow the Miller family. From Alma Dona's father, William Barton Miller, to Oliver Hazard Perry Miller, to Phillip Miller, to Stephen Miller, to Jeremias Mueller who was born June 24, 1717 in Prussia, Germany and died July 19, 1802 in Cumberland, Pennsylvania. On Alma Dona's mothers side we have Mary Elizabeth Woodfin to John Woodfin, to Thomas Woodfin, to Samuel Woodfin, to John Woodfin who was born about 1700 in England and died in 1767. They did not show a location of his death, but his son, Samuel, was born December 21, 1722 in Virginia.

On Dorothy's father, Herbert Edgar Newcomb's Newcomb and Gaston families and her mother, Dorothy McDaniel Newcomb's, McDaniel and Burke family lines, we do not have information that can be traced back far enough to show when the immigrant families arrived in America.

I have written about a grandfather, Thomas Newcomen, who was born on February 24, 1664 in Dartmouth, England. Two of his grandchildren, Thomas and Samuel Newcome, who came to America about the time of the Revolutionary War, but no one seems to know which of these two were the father of William Newcomb, who was born June 8, 1777 in Pennsylvania.

I am not sure that all of this information is correct. For example, I wrote earlier about Dorothy's great grandparents Isaac and Martha Ellen (Wilson) Gaston. Isaac was born March 23, 1854 in Morgan County, Missouri. In the 1850 United States Census in Morgan County, Missouri, Joseph and Margaret Gaston were living there with 4 children. Something terrible must have happened between 1850 and 1860 because there is no Joseph Gaston Family living in Morgan County in 1860. Isaac is living with the family of Elijah and Betty Combs. He is

still living with them in the 1870 census. In the 1880 census, he is married to Martha Ellen Wilson. Martha Ellen Wilson was born October 27, 1859. In the 1860 census there is a Martha Wilson, age 1, living with a Claib and Mary Vaught family. There were several Vaught children and some Wilson children in the census. In the 1850 census, Mary Vaught was married to Wm. W. Wilson in Morgan County and there were 4 children ranging from 1 to 20. Mary was 29 and Wm. W. Wilson was 50. So something terrible must have happened between 1850 and 1860. In the 1870 census, Martha Ellen Wilson is living with the Zurr and Susan Combs family in Morgan County. The two Combs families were probably neighbors. So Isaac Gaston and Martha Ellen Wilson, sometimes spelled Willson, became acquainted and were married by the 1880 census. What is more unusual are the death certificates of each of them. On Isaac Gaston's death certificate it lists his father as Joseph Gaston, but his mother as Martha Ellen Wilson, who was actually his wife. On Martha Ellen Gaston's death certificate, it lists her father as Geo. Brown and her mother as unknown. So in Familysearch.org, it shows those pieces of information which were incorrectly given on the death certificates.

This was still an interesting search. On the Morse family lines, my cousin, Julia Morse, may have some corrections to make. If so, that would be great. We are always learning as we pursue our genealogies.

## **FINDING CITIZENSHIP RECORDS FOR U.S. IMMIGRANT ANCESTORS (PRE-1906)**

Julia Morse

Last week, one of mother's cousins emailed, asking if we knew if our German immigrant ancestors' obtained citizenship. It was a question I had never really thought much about. Herman "Sea" Harms and his wife, Catherina (Meyer) Harms, immigrated with their children from northern Germany to the United States in the 1840's, establishing a farm home in Illinois before ultimately settling in Benton County, Missouri in 1853. They were busy making a living farming and pleased to enjoy home comfort, enough food, community church and schools.

Children born into the family after the immigration were citizens. Was it a priority for them to apply for citizenship?

If you already know where I looked first to answer this question, gold star for you!: There is citizenship information in most of the U.S. Censuses from 1820 to 1930—records most of us have already accessed.

Use the U.S. Census to find starting information about citizenship, possibly the year of immigration:

- 1820, 1830, and 1870 censuses report whether the individual is a citizen.

- The 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 censuses report the year of arrival and whether naturalization papers had been filed or the naturalization process completed.

- The 1920 census reports the year of naturalization. For all these, you generally have to dig into the census image to get this information; it is not currently fully transcribed.

While the censuses give self-reported information which may be prone to error, chances are good that it provides information that is fairly accurate. It is also usually information that the family researcher already has at hand—easily accessible. (If you haven't already found free access to the U.S. Census, try FamilySearch.org.) This information can help direct a further search for legal naturalization records, or, if citizenship is not reported, affirm that citizenship may not have been established.

Up to 1870, the question of citizenship will be for males only. Although the 1870 census does list the names of females, the citizenship question is only for males who would be eligible to vote.

By looking at the 1870 Census records, we saw that Herman and his grown son, Peter, were both listed as voting citizens. They were naturalized.

Herman and his wife had passed away before the 1900 census, but we have the record of his son, Peter, who had immigrated with them. Peter Harms' record reports that he immigrated to the U.S. in 1846, and there is a note "Na" in the column for

"Naturalization." This confirms that he was a naturalized citizen.

The record of Peter's wife, Dorathea, shows that she immigrated in 1845, but the naturalization field is blank. We initially hypothesized that, as a woman without the right to vote, there was no perceived need for her to apply for citizenship. However, further research suggests that she had what is considered "derivative citizenship." According to the FamilySearch wiki on Naturalization, "From 1855 to 1922, women became citizens if they married a U.S. citizen, or her husband naturalized while they were married." [1] So, she would have derived naturalization through her marriage to Peter. Apparently, the census enumerator felt no need to indicate this.

There are other codes that can be designated in the naturalization box of the 1900 census. One of Peter's neighbors is designated further down on the page lists "al," which means the individual is still an alien who has not begun any citizenship paperwork—not naturalized. "PA" would be used to indicate that the immigrant had paperwork on file and was therefore in the process of obtaining citizenship. "NR" means the census taker made "no report." [1, 2]

The 1910 through 1930 censuses also report on year of immigration and naturalization status.

The 1920 census is the only census that additionally reports the year of naturalization. If one of the children of Herman "Sea" Harms lived to that census year, we would have a report of their naturalization year—perhaps helpful in finding the official naturalization record. Since 1790, children of immigrants have always obtained their naturalization when their father or mother becomes naturalized. A naturalization year when they were still children would almost certainly be an indication of the father's naturalization year. Unfortunately, none of these Harms children lived to see 1920.

I reviewed additional census records from Peter and his siblings to corroborate their reports of the family's immigration year:

| Son      | Census | Immigration Year |
|----------|--------|------------------|
| Peter    | 1900   | 1846             |
| Peter    | 1910   | 1848             |
| Henry C. | 1900   | 1847             |
| Henry C. | 1910   | blank            |
| John     | 1900   | 1847             |
| John     | 1910   | 1847             |

We can see that Peter’s report of immigration year is inconsistent with the year reported by his younger brothers, Henry and John. This highlights the unreliability of self-reported immigration dates in the census. However, the range of dates from 1846 to 1848 does narrow down the immigration dates, with repetition suggesting a best guess of 1847. (For more discussion on reconciling conflicting records, see the Paul Chiddicks’ article “Fact or Fiction,” also in this newsletter.)

Searching for legal naturalization records prior to 1906 can be challenging. 1906 marked the creation of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, which is what we now know as Immigration and Naturalization Services or INS. Before that time, naturalization was handled by local and regional courts.

Some U.S. Naturalization records are indexed and found online, such as through FamilySearch (free), Ancestry, and MyHeritage. However, these are far from complete—only sporadically available, just as birth, and death records are not completely available.

FamilySearch has an excellent page with links to resources of naturalization records from various states:

[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Naturalization\\_and\\_Citizenship\\_Online\\_Genealogy\\_Records](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Naturalization_and_Citizenship_Online_Genealogy_Records) Ancestry’s paid subscription provides regional naturalization records that are often not yet available from free resources. There are some records available from MyHeritage and FamilySearch.

There are some cases where FamilySearch provides access to microfilm image collections that have not

been indexed. It is worth checking for images for your county of interest. Although they are not indexed, you can often explore the record order, which may be alphabetized by name.

I checked the FamilySearch image collections for Washington County, Illinois and Benton County, Missouri, but found no records available on naturalization.

Other records indicating citizenship include homestead records and some military records.

In some locations, such as California, voter registration records are available. This would be another way of affirming citizenship.

How helpful is it to find the naturalization records for our ancestor?

In our case, obtaining the specific legal citizenship records may provide little new information on our immigrant Harms family. Other records and connections have provided us with a link to German families and villages where they were born, christened, and married. The census records enrich the story we know, giving us the satisfaction that these families had the opportunity to enjoy being voting citizens in their communities.

For those who know little about their immigrant ancestor’s pre-immigration life, there may be hope for some additional information from the naturalization legal records, though it may be very little. Most pre-1906 naturalization records contain the name of immigrant, current residence, and country of origin or allegiance. Much less common, but possible is to find record of port and date of arrival, age of immigration, or birthplace of immigrant.

If your ancestor applied for a passport, you may be blessed with an especially rich set of details: place of birth, date of immigration, ship name, naturalization date and place, place of permanent address in the U.S., and occupation, as well as description of the applicant (height, eye color, hair color, and facial features).

For more information on researching immigrant ancestors, see the Family Search wiki “United States Naturalization and Citizenship” ([https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Naturalization\\_and\\_Citizenship](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Naturalization_and_Citizenship)).

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Sources:

[1] FamilySearch Research Wiki, “Naturalization Terms and Acronyms,” [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Naturalization\\_Terms\\_and\\_Acronyms](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Naturalization_Terms_and_Acronyms)

[2] FamilySearch Research Wiki, “United States Naturalization and Citizenship,” [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Naturalization\\_and\\_Citizenship](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Naturalization_and_Citizenship).

### **HOW DO WE DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN “FACT AND FICTION” IN FAMILY DOCUMENTS?**

Paul Chiddicks, [chiddicksfamilytree.com](http://chiddicksfamilytree.com),  
Cheshire, England  
Guest Author to the MCG Newsletter

A father’s name on a birth certificate, is that a fact?

The birth certificate itself is the ‘evidence,’ anything stated on the certificate is then normally classed as a ‘fact,’ including the birth date and the father’s name. But what if that information is, in fact, incorrect?

How can we determine what is a fact, against what is fiction, against what is unknown, or what is a deliberate lie!

As genealogists, we search for the truth, we look for evidence to prove and disprove a theory, and we look at all the evidence before we reach a reasoned conclusion. But what if the facts are not correct? What happens if the facts that have been recorded are wrong?

Here are two examples:

We could find a gap in the records themselves. In the UK, a fact recorded in the local civil registration office, that is ‘missed off’ the returns to the General Register Office. We sometimes forget that there are two sets of BMD indexes. The first is the one created and kept at local level by the register office where your ancestor’s birth marriage or death was registered and the second is the national index, the General Register Office Index. The GRO Index is prone to copying errors and omissions. The records held at district register offices are more accurate than those held by the GRO because they have not been repeatedly copied. If a birth took place towards the end of a quarter, it could take it over in to the next quarter’s registration and even into the following year if the birth was in December! So was Grandma born in 1908 or 1909?

We could find individuals incorrectly named and listed on Census returns. From 1841 to 1901 a pre-printed UK census schedule was left to be completed by each household. It was then collected by the enumerator who copied the information into an enumeration book. It is these enumeration books that we consult today online and on microfilm. If there was no one in the house who could read or write, the enumerator helped to record the information. Unfortunately, there can be mistakes in the records, as the enumerator would be transcribing the information from the original schedules and could be recording incorrect information from illiterate households, or the households themselves could, of course, be deliberately misleading the enumerator!

So how do we decide which facts are true and which facts are fiction? Sometimes it’s not that easy. For many different reasons, some of our Victorian ancestors deliberately tried to avoid being found amongst the records. From bigamous marriages to brushes with the law, avoiding records was a way of life for some of our ancestors. When one of our ancestors intentionally wants to avoid being found, it becomes very difficult, 150 years later, to try and trace their steps, but not impossible.

Sometimes the ‘fact’ is only a ‘fact’ based on the balance of probability. Sometimes we can only find the person that we are looking for by ruling out all

the other potential candidates and therefore only leaving us with one possible solution.

Is the name on a headstone, or the dates a fact? These can be notoriously incorrect. Remember the details on a lot of the certificates that we are familiar with, as genealogists is only as good as the informant who is passing those details to the Registrar. The chances are the informant will know the date of death, because it is likely to have been quite recent, but is the birth date necessarily correct on the death certificate?

From 1 April 1969, the UK form of the death certificate was changed with the addition of the date and place of birth of the deceased and, for married or widowed women, the maiden surname. These details can be enormously helpful, but only if they are correct!

Establishing a fact as being correct, is the essence of what we do, as genealogists. Great Grandad's stories, that have been handed down, from generation to generation, will always have an element of truth to them; it's our job to pick out and decipher the truth from the records. Yes, Great-Grandad did serve in WW1 and yes he did fight at the Somme, we have his Army records, medal cards, regiment diaries, so we can prove all this. Is his birth date on his attestation papers correct? Probably not; this date conflicts with all the other records that we have for him, so very likely, he lied about his age so that he could join the Army and serve his country. If we only had his Army Attestation papers and nothing else, we could have easily been looking for somebody who was indeed three years older and followed the wrong man entirely, easily done with common names.

It's a question of evaluating all the facts together. A person is far more likely to remember the day they were born, it's their birthday after all and something that they celebrate every year! They are far more likely to get the year of birth wrong and therefore their age wrong, especially on Census returns. Therefore we might assemble a birth certificate, marriage certificate, death certificate, 1939 Register, numerous Census returns, plus Army papers, all for one individual, all with slightly different dates or

ages. By placing all these documents together and looking at the evidence as a whole, we are far more likely to reach the correct conclusion.

As genealogists we have a lot of 'tools' at our disposal to help us to reach our conclusions, we have the records that I have already spoken about, but we also potentially have physical objects at home that can help us to determine the facts. We might have Great Grandad's war medals, Grandma's Bible, or maybe some written notes and memoirs. Again, if we add these to the documentary evidence that we have gathered, we are far more likely to reach the correct conclusion.

So examine ALL the evidence before reaching your 'reasoned conclusion' and record your findings. That way you will ensure that you are following the correct person and just as importantly, those that follow you will be able to see the evidence of why you reached the conclusion that you did.

Going right back to the beginning, remember the first question that I asked? "A father's name on a birth certificate, is that a fact?" You distinguish fact from fiction with:

- analysis of sources and informants
- correlation of evidence
- resolution of conflicts.

If you have a father's name on a birth certificate, that is some evidence, but could be wrong. If you have another source that provides the same father's name to the same person, that is correlation, and it makes a stronger case.

However, if the second source is, say, a family Bible entry probably created around the same time as birth, it is hard to know if this is *an independent informant*, since often the person providing information in a family bible would be the same person who might provide information to put on the birth certificate.

If you can correlate information from independent sources, that makes it more certain that your hypothesis (e.g. about the father's name) is correct.

The more such sources, the stronger case.

The other things to consider are:

- the position/condition of the informant
- the nature of the sources.

If the informant is known, and witnessed the event, but they were recounting when they were 90+ years old and the father had been dead many decades, you might worry that the informant's memory has lapsed over the years.

If what you have is a *transcription* of a birth record, you might worry that someone had miscopied the name or misread the original handwriting.

In summary: the strongest case is made using multiple, correlating original records made by known, independent informants.

We can now of course, use DNA to prove this as a fact, but that's a whole different story entirely!

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*This article originally appeared in Paul Chiddicks' blog, [The Chiddicks Family Tree](http://TheChiddicksFamilyTree.com), which you can find at <https://chiddicksfamilytree.com/>. He has graciously allowed MCG to share the article.*

Paul Chiddicks is a regular columnist and blogger for Family Tree Magazine's UK edition. You can access his Family Tree Magazine blogs here: <https://chiddicksfamilytree.com/2017/09/30/latest-family-tree-magazine-blog/>. He also is a regular host of Twitter's Tuesday night "Genealogy Feast" known as #AncestryHour, and a moderator on the very welcoming Forum called "Family Tree Forum" (<https://www.familytreeforum.com/>).

Paul is a volunteer "Genie" on @\_walkmypast\_ and a member of a number of local Family History Societies. He likes to get involved as much as he can within The Family History Community, consciously trying to "put something back" into the hobby that we all love. Find him on Twitter @chiddickstree

Thanks, Paul, for sharing with us at MCG!

## **MORE CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF HARMONY MISSION FAMILIES, 1845**

Excerpts from *the Autobiography of John Milton Morris\**

(Editorial Notes:

In January's newsletter, we presented some memories from a grandson of Harmony Mission founder Rev. Nathaniel Brown Dodge, Jr. Here he continues discussing his stay with his uncle and aunt, Dr. Leonard Dodge and Mary Coates Dodge of Balltown (Little Osage), south of present-day Rich Hill. The Mission had closed in 1836, but families associated with the mission remained in the area. The writer was ten years old at the time of these events, about 1845.)

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The doctor [Leonard Dodge, son of Rev. Nathaniel Dodge], educated and studying medicine under Dr. Belcher (afterwards principal of Sing-Sing, N.Y.), was thoroughly Eastern in every phase of life. The doctor was always ahead of his brothers in his profession. The doctor used to say, "When Dodge talks, all listen."

He was the most systematic doctor we ever remember being acquainted with. Generally leaving home at six a.m., he as universally returned at six p.m. If anyone hurried him up by telling him of the urgency of the case, he would remark blandly, "If they are so bad that they will die before I get there, I could do them no good if I was there." If anyone asked what he was giving, he was just as likely to remark, "Medicine." as anything else. And if anyone asked what ailed the patient, he would frequently say, "I don't know." Unpretending, he got all the practice of all this country.

One peculiarity was he always rode a hard-trotting horse, and was nearly always away from home in the daytime, but if away of nights, someone must be dying, or else very bad. . . .

Dry, quaint, and always seemed in a deep study about his business or something, yet a fine conversationalist. Quite a joker. Well, and more

than favourably, liked. He died during the Civil War, lamented by all who knew him.

He married Miss Choat, who volunteered her services as a teacher to the Osage Indians at old Harmony Mission. She was a teacher of infant classes of children in Massachussets before coming west. Some three or four years the senior of my uncle. One of the best cooks and neatest housekeeper we ever met. Very systematic. The first child, Leonard, died when one or two years old. They had two daughters afterwards that always called me their brother. They were younger than myself. And the mother took the greatest care of them, teaching them herself, at home. She done all her housework, and besides teaching these two daughters, braided palm-leaf hats three or four hours each day.

Here we saw the first cook stove and thermometer, the first apothecary shop, filled up with cinnamon, all-spice, cloves, ginger, and nutmeg; and this may have been helpful in my aunt's making the best pies and cakes ever eaten in that borderland. But the cook stove was more of an ornament than useful nature, for my aunt used her oven and skillet in the old cabin, where it was my privelage to sleep by the old fashioned fireplace in a bed in a corner of the kitchen, covered with the huge buffalo robe and mackinaw blankets of the cold winter nights. And the cook stove sat in one of the parlors in the frame building adjoining the old log cabin, only to be used when company came. . . .

A more benevolent woman, how many times (though no blood relation) has she helped us. A wise counsellor. A good mother. An accomplished lady. It was a benediction to dwell under her roof, and I only think of her to love and respect her.

The old colored woman, a slave, who the doctor hired to do nearly all the farm work when there, belonged to Mrs. Merchant, an old widow lady, and was Mrs. Merchant's only support. This colored lady dressed in men's clothes, plowed, husked corn, hauled hay, and stacked corn fodder, and cut up in the air (and many times that I fell off the wagon or

cart, all the load on top. One is incredible and [*sic.*] be alive).

The two girls of the doctor, my cousins, were very bright, and had a romp every night, after the doctor came home, on the carpet in the parlor. He was fond of music, but neither he nor wife sang often. Though the latter was a good singer, she was always too busy to sing at home. . . .

One more patient sufferer we wish to call to mind before we leave Little Osage: My uncle, Thomas Morris, who attended Ball's grist mill at Balltown. To conceive in the mold a man, a pattern of more native simplicity, more patient, persistent endurance, and kindly affectionate to all, so tall, lean, and people looking, yet so faithful in labours and care, having charge of this water mill for years. Whose business it was to carry every boy's grist brought to this mill, grind it, and carry it up and down a flight of stairs to and from the mill to the horse, and divide this two-bushel sack into two parts to keep it from falling off of the saddle horse as the boy went home. The idea entertained in this age was that two bushel of corn meal was as much as would keep good until an ordinary-sized family used it up. Hence, two bushel of corn, among the more wealthy, was all taken to mill at one time. And corn was the principal bread of all classes.

The time spent at this mill by my uncle no one knew but my uncle himself. For The Governor, as we called him, was a hard task-master (this name, Governor, was given by Cecil Ball to my uncle Dodge when interpreter for him). At any rate, uncle Thomas lost his wife just after coming west from East Tennessee to Balltown, and these six motherless children had to be taken care of, the oldest daughter being only thirteen years old when her mother died. My uncle tending the mill day and night, he managed to raise the children, and keep them together until they were large enough to care for themselves. We will not dwell upon this saint. To think of his hardships makes us sad. And my wife never allows me to read the deaths of martyrs to her. If he misses a crown in that better country, we cannot now see why it was.

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\*Source: John Milton Morris' manuscript is housed in the microfilm collection of the University of California Berkeley Library as *John M. Morris Diary and Autobiography, 1885-1906*. It was transcribed and published online by his grandson Chaumont Devin, circa 2005, as *The Autobiography of John Milton Morris*. (Submitted by Julia Morse.)

## HISTORY AND MYTH

### Marjorie Slavens

As we do our genealogy research, we are often faced with the conflict between what we really know and what we would like to believe that we know. The story of my paternal great grandmother, Laura Martin Hesler Slavens Hesler (1863-1946), is a good example of this conflict. She was the daughter of Susan Hill McFarland (1846-1928) of Henry County and Martin T. Hesler (1841-1862) of Kentucky, who came to Henry County just before the Civil War began and served in the Iowa Cavalry for about a year. He died in a hospital in Springfield, Missouri. My mother, Mildred Welty Slavens, updated our information in a McFarland book and she had started a book on the Hesler family. I have had some contact with Hesler family researchers, but there are still more questions than answers in that family line.

“Laura Martin Hesler, daughter of Susan Hill McFarland and Martin T. Hesler, was born April 1, 1863 in Henry County, Missouri. After her father’s death in 1862, Laura Hesler received a Civil War pension until she was 16 years old.

She married John Reuben Slavens on October 12, 1881. John Reuben Slavens and Laura Martin Hesler sold their equipment and animals on March 2, 1887, and they traveled by train with his sisters, Mary Calista Ballard and Susan E. Crews, and their families, to California where they planned to farm. Shortly after their arrival, John Reuben

died of tetanus on May 23, 1887. He was buried at Huron, Fresno County, California.

After the death of John Reuben Slavens, Laura Hesler Slavens returned with her two small sons to Henry County, Missouri from California. Although her father-in-law, George Washington Slavens, offered to help her, she wanted to establish contact with her father's family in Kentucky. She married David William (Will) Hesler, her cousin, in Indiana. In 1900, the Hesler family lived in Columbus, Indiana. Will Hesler worked for the railroad and they moved to Oklahoma and later to Asbury, Missouri, where she bought a small farm. Will Hesler died in January, 1929 and was buried at Waco, Missouri. Laura Hesler died July 28, 1946 at Pittsburg, Kansas at the age of 83 and is buried in Mt. Olive Cemetery there.” (Mildred Welty Slavens, McFarland Family manuscript)

Laura Hesler believed her father and one brother served in the Union Army, and that her grandfather, Jacob Hesler, and one other son served in the Confederate Army. She believed as long as she lived, no matter what evidence she should have had, that her father’s family had large tobacco land holdings in Kentucky and all of the slaves necessary to care for the land. Her grandfather was born in Pennsylvania and probably had more land in the first part of the century, but he was 71 years old when he married her grandmother in 1838, and there was not much land left at that time.

“Jacob Hesler (1767?-1851) was born in Pennsylvania around 1766. In the 1820 census, he lived in Owen County, Kentucky. He served in the War of 1812. His marriage license in Owen County, Kentucky was dated September 22, 1838. He married Mahala Murray October 1, 1838 by Cornelius Duvall. In the 1840 census, he also lived in Owen County. In the 1850 census, Jacob was 84 years old, and his wife, Mahala was 35. Franklin was 11, Martin T. was 9, Sarah was 8, and George was 2 years old. In the 1860 census, Mahala still lived in Owen County. She reported that Martin T. was there, but he had already left Kentucky and was in the census of Henry County, Missouri. George, 12, was living with his mother.

November 28, 1828, land was sold adjoining the farm then occupied by Jacob Hesler in Owen county, Kentucky. July 12, 1829, Thomas Brian to Obediah, a signee of Jacob Hesler for \$100.00, 200 acres on Savern Creek” (Mildred Welty Slavens, Jacob Hesler Family manuscript)

Jacob had other older children, and some of his original land had been given to some of his earlier children. When my father and grandparents visited Kentucky in the late 1920s, the Hesler family had very little land. The 1860 Census indicated that Mahala Murray Hesler had one slave, her housekeeper.

My great grandmother obviously created her own family history about her father’s family. She went to Kentucky and met members of the family. She married her first cousin, David William Hesler in

1893 in Indiana. However, she continued to tell the same story about her father’s family as long as she lived. She never told us that she had received a pension after her father’s death from the government; we found that information at the National Archives. Her three sons, William Howard Slavens (1883-1940), Frank Hardiman Slavens (1887-1908), and Clyde David Hesler (1895-1902) preceded her in death. She had a large framed picture of her first husband, John Reuben Slavens, on her living room wall as long as she lived.

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