

## THE WRIGHT FAMILY

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GEORGE WRIGHT M ELIZABETH (MCGEHEE)  
 c1682 - c 1770        \_\_\_\_\_ - 1775

George Wright of South Farnham Parish, Essex County, Virginia bought some 125 acres for 55 pounds in 1726. To position these early purchases, the deed would usually mention all the adjoining neighbors. This is very tantalizing



would usually mention all the adjoining neighbors. This is very tantalizing because another branch of my family, the Meadors, also lived in Essex county and the neighbors of one, sometimes turn up being mentioned in the others' dealings. They very probably knew one another, but there is no certain way of knowing. It would be interesting however for the two families to have been close in the 1600's, then drifting elsewhere, only to come together in the 1900's with the marriage of my father and mother.

More land was involved two years later, obviously a poorer property as 179 acres went for only 16 pounds this time. The interesting thing about a land deal in 1733 was the one with Massey Yarrington, as the Massey family was akin to some of our Lancashire forefathers in England; was he named for "our" Massey branch? Who knows. It's just fun to speculate.

A change of location occurs in 1756 when George sells 400 acres in Cumberland county to three of his sons. Even if George had a lot of land of his own, he also had 14 children with Elizabeth, and they all had to be provided for. The obvious solution was for the young men to go west away from Tidewater and nearer the Blue Ridge where there was land to be had. The next year, George bought 1200 acres more in Cumberland. Sure enough some of this land went to sons as well.

In choosing land there were three very important considerations: water availability not only for drinking but for transportation as that meant fewer roads must be constructed, timber for building and fuel, and the quality of the land itself.

The first dwelling was often a temporary open-faced lean-to with one side open to the fire. After the land was cleared and a corn crop planted, there came a log cabin which involved the help of neighbors unless the place was too isolated. After the walls were raised, the owner put on a roof of thatch, shingles or whatever was available. It was usually about 10 by 16 feet with a door and a window, and a fireplace chinked with clay like the log house itself. Most everything besides a rifle, ax, knife, cooking pots and needles could be made on the spot. Gourds were very important for "soup, soap and sap." Experienced settlers or persons of some wealth could bring more things to ease life.

A cow and chickens were obtained as soon as possible, and orchards and a vegetable patch were planted. Until then there was game, wild berries, nuts, herbs and roots and honey. Bees were not native but went in advance of the frontier due to swarming habits.

There is a curious comment standing by itself and not related to anything I can find out: George mentions "old William Cox" (the father of a son-in-law) in the matter of whether or not he is "giving away all his negroes." Maybe the family thought that the old man was losing his mind or diminishing his estate by this action, and sought the thoughts of a close neighbor. But we have no idea



what George felt about it all!

At a very ripe old age for the 1700's, the 79 year old George died. In his will he gave 1600 more acres of Cumberland land to the four sons to whom he had already given land. The rest of the estate went to his wife Elizabeth, after whose death it would be divided among his ten other children, the tenth of whom was Richard.

Richard Wright, Sr. m Mary\_\_\_\_\_

- 1773

There were a great many Wrights in colonial Virginia, but it is thought although not proven that the next five transactions were those of the above Richard Wright.

In 1728, there was the sale of 250 acres in the Great Fork of the Rapidan in Spottsylvania, five years later 50 more acres there, and later an attachment against the estate of a man who had married one of George Proctor's daughters and the granting therefrom of 1 pound 15 shillings, as well as being a witness in another suit. If there was anything that colonial Virginians enjoyed as much as buying land it was in suing one another.

After the 1740's, his dealings are registered in Louisa County with the purchase of 133 acres on Little Rocky Creek. There was also a suit brought against him for debt by Cochran and Company. This might very well have been the London company which undertook to sell his tobacco and in turn to purchase goods for shipment to him. This should be researched.

He was appointed Surveyor of Roads in 1769, being replaced the following year. Usually these appointments were for one year only as the hard-working planters could rarely spare time for longer service.

The Tax List of 1770 shows Richard Wright, Sr. with three tithables and 205 acres.

Three years later his will was probated leaving all land and estate to his wife Mary. After her death all nine of their living children, with the exception of the two eldest who had already been provided for, were remembered with land, cattle and a featherbed.

Richard Wright, Jr. m Judeth\_\_\_\_\_

c1735 - 1805

\_\_\_\_\_ - after 1805

It is probable that Richard Wright and Judeth were married about 1757 when his father deeded 130 acres on Little Rocky Creek in Louisa County. Later on he was named in the suit which Cochran and Company brought against his father. In 1770 he and his brother William jointly sold their land to their



brother-in-law, Nathaniel Snelson who had married their sister Clorender.

The next month, he bought 168 acres for 42 pounds but this time in Charlotte County. He also acquired some more land and a negro named Cyrus but didn't pay for it then. Apparently he could not make the payments later as a suit was brought against him. There are no records for the sale or purchase of further Virginia lands.

In any case, in 1779 He received a 180 acre land grant on Hyco Creek in Caswell County, North Carolina. Two of his sisters, Nancy and Elizabeth had married brothers Edmund and Owen Lea, sons of John Lea, and they too are seen in Caswell County at the same time. Probably they all journeyed down together as was common in those days. Owen had been left quite a bit of land and a negro woman in brother John Lea's will the year before and Edmund bought a similar amount on a different but nearby creek. So here were numerous Leas and Wrights living next to one another or just across Hico (sometimes Hyco) Creek.

There was plentiful game and fowl which with farm produce provided a good, inexpensive diet. Forests provided for the building of log cabins. A note from that period remarks that the farmers around Hillsborough were better husbandmen than the general run of North Carolinians. This was perhaps owing to the nearby Moravian farmers who were careful farmers. It was said that around this little town of 30 or 40 people there was a "genteel society".

In 1781, Richard was awarded 50 pounds for 378 days of militia service in the militia . I haven't found which companies or campaigns he was involved in. The uniform for these soldiers was a hunting shirt,, leggings or "splatter-dashes". and black gaiters. For the outfitting of this each man was allowed 25 shillings. The militia had a mixed press. While the enterprise and marksmanship were praised by some officers, others condemned them as a shiftless and even cowardly lot.

In 1786, Richard Wright was appointed Overseer of Roads with four relatives as helpers. Even though a lot of commerce went by way of rivers and creeks, the roads were crucial and responsible people were required when the roads needed inspection and maintenance. In two years, Richard and other Wrights and Leas sold their holdings and they were off once again.

1790 found them in Camden District of Chester County, South Carolina as shown in the census. With Richard and Judeth there were three of their grown children - the two girls married to Leas and their eldest son John who had married Phoebe Lea. Again they were all settled close to one another.

In 1805, the old wanderer's will was probated in Rutherford County back in North Carolina. His personal estate was bequeathed to Judith. On her death his property was to be divided amongst his six offspring, and the ubiquitous



featherbed went to daughter Nancy.

John Wright m Phoebe (Lea)

1761 - 1839      1754 - 1826

At the beginning of the Civil War, all the records of Hanover County were taken for safekeeping to the capitol in Richmond. However in the course of the war, Richmond's State Court House was burnt, and all the records were lost.

For his birthdate, we and the government have to rely on other evidence. Many years later in a petition for a pension he offered as proof of his 1761 birth the records written in the family Bible by his father. The whereabouts of that Bible as well as all subsequent ones is unknown.

He accompanied his father Richard, first to Charlotte County and then down to Caswell County in North Carolina.

There, the Leas and the Wrights again were neighbors; in the early to mid-1700's the families had lived close by in St. George's Parish in Spottsylvania. Two of his sisters and an aunt were married to Leas, and it was not surprising that John Wright should also marry into the clan.

We now run into a problem. Because of those burnt records or the laxity of record-keeping in the Carolinas, we have been unable to find proof of the marriage of John and Phoebe. All of the deeds and other documents simply record her as "Feeby Wright". Family recollections have always assumed "our" Phoebe to be John Lea's daughter. In addition to her brothers who were married to Wrights, her parents were also part of the trek of the families to South Carolina later on.

John Wright had volunteered for duty in the Revolutionary War in Hillsborough, the county seat. When he was 17 he became a private in the militia. After a given campaign, he would be discharged, and almost immediately re-enlist. This happened three times and he frankly admits in his pension petition that it was much safer to be in the militia than to be caught at home by the Tories. It was the era of the British Tarleton's depredations against both civilians and captured enemies.

So in one way and another he stayed in the ranks for nearly three years; first under General Sumter, who was defeated at Big Fishing Creek in South Carolina. Next there was a relatively quiet period of six weeks, and finally he fought in the defeat of the Tories at Deep River, North Carolina, the decisive battle of Guilford Courthouse near his home (in which the notoriously unreliable North Carolina militia played an inglorious role by breaking almost immediately!). From there he marched to 96, South Carolina and was discharged following the surrender of Cornwallis.

When John was 26 years old he sold his Caswell land of 180 acres for 150



pounds. There is no record of when he bought it. The buyer was a Richard Duty and when I was in Caswell County, this land, known as Duty's farm, was directly across Hico Creek from that of John Lea. There remained no structure from that earlier time.

Manners in the back country were rustic. Most settlers engaged in foot and horse racing, cockfighting, house and barn raising, corn shucking, and shooting matches. Leading pioneers attempted to emulate the more civilized tidewater customs. There were many lawyers and ministers, but very few doctors. On the whole, there were fewer slaves here than elsewhere in the South, and these tended to be raw, unseasoned and straight from Africa.

Whatever the reason, restlessness was again stirring Richard and he looked to South Carolina with interest. We don't know what kind of man he was, but those on the frontier tended to have certain characteristics in common. There was a self selection by those who sought new horizons. They were first and foremost individualists facing an all-powerful nature which required guts, strength and brains. But along with this was an equally important requirement - that of dependence on neighbors. They tended to be known for materialism, inventiveness, optimism, and wastefulness of land and natural resources.

Whether they knew it or not, the family migration into South Carolina was to lead them into an equally unregulated area. Amongst those going there were Richard Wright Sr, his sister Lucinda and Elliott Lea, his brothers Bartelott and Clayburn, Richard Wright, Jr., his sisters Elizabeth and Nancy with their husbands Owen and Edmond Lea.

By 1790, there was a double listing for John Wright when the census put him in the Camden/Chester districts of South Carolina. He is listed as having a household with two men over 16 years of age, three boys under 16 and a female of unspecified age plus 8 slaves. Since this data could include hired help or visiting relatives as well as family members, it is not of conclusive help in ascertaining birth dates of his children. Probably however, the second man over 16 was either a hired hand or a relative, the female was Phoebe and the three children their young sons. The eight slaves puts John Wright in the 30% of the Piedmont farmers who at that time owned slaves, so he was presumably relatively prosperous. Here, their seven children were born, the second-born being Allen. None of this generation however married into the Lea clan.

A letter of twenty years previous to this time, but probably still at least somewhat relevant, reported that "the inhabitants of the interior were bold and intrepid in the art of war as well as hospitable to strangers, dirty, impertinent and vain...Usually eschewing slavery, the settlers lived as ranchers and farmers and in word and deed were rugged individualists."

Because of the invention of the Whitney cotton gin, short staple cotton, which could be grown upcountry, was feasible. 10 acres could be cultivated by



one hand, from which favorable weather produced 500 pounds of cotton per acre. When ginned this gave 1 1/2 bales. Picking took place from late August to early January. This was probably the crop most grown on the Wright plantation.

Because cotton growing tends to deplete the soil, or for some other reason, there now occurred another move. In the two years before 1805, John and "Feeby" sold their land. Phoebe relinquishing her dower rights in all cases and signing with a "U", so presumably she was illiterate. Considering the lack of schooling in the upcountry Carolinas, this is not surprising.

The Carolinas were depleted in the early part of the 1800's by the emigration of its most vigorous citizens. By 1820 the frontier aspect had mostly passed. Kentucky and Tennessee flourished. It was Kentucky which attracted John.

Most Carolinians took the Wilderness Road to Kentucky. Following the Revolution there was a large migration from the Carolinas, Virginia and Maryland. Excluding slaves, most were pure English, Scots or Scotch-Irish bringing Virginia customs, manners and traditions. The same rivalry existed between slave owners and poor whites as between tidewater planters and mountaineers.

For this migration, the group consisted of neighbors, into which families two of the Wright children were to marry. They went by oxen and wagon. It was customary for the names of the travelers to be painted on the sides of the wagon. In this procession were the Wright, Blessit and Peeble families, and people who saw the caravan punned about the coming to Kentucky of the "right blessed people."

In 1845 the following items were what were suggested for wagon train treks, but no doubt much the same was needed earlier: specified per person amounts of flour, bacon, rice, coffee, tea, sugar, dried peas and fruit, baking soda, salt and pepper, corn meal, and vinegar. For men, 2 wool shirts and 2 wool under shirts. For women, 2 wool dresses and for both, 2 pairs drawers, 4 of wool socks, 2 of cotton socks, 4 colored handkerchiefs, 1 pair boots or shoes, poncho and broad-brimmed hat. Additionally there were pots, churns, and table ware of tin. After that came a rifle with balls and powder, water keg, 2 ropes, matches and the sturdy tools needed for clearing new land and building a house and barn. Less bulky but important items were for sewing and grooming, and medical supplies. Lastly there was bedding and a tent. Those oxen had better be strong.

They were headed for Hart and Hardin Counties and had arrived by 1806, when it is recorded that John Wright homesteaded 200 acres on Bacon Creek. This as a Revolutionary War veteran he could buy for 10 cents an acre. It was quite a bargain. The following year he paid \$2,000 for 800 adjacent acres - \$2.50 per acre. A couple of years later he sold 150 acres of this land.



Corn or wheat were probably the main crops as these could be ground or converted into whiskey and easily transported. Tobacco, cotton and wheat were too bulky and therefore were grown mainly in the eastern part of the state. Hogsheads of tobacco weighed about 1,000 pounds and therefore needed to be shipped by water instead of being transported by land.

Nearby was a camp site for early settlers passing through on their way further West. But it was also used for camp meeting. Itinerant evangelists and Methodist circuit riders would erect a brush arbor and have great revival meetings for two or three days.

As usual the Wrights and the Peebles lived quite close to one another in Hart and Hardin counties. After their arrival, son Allen married Hannah Peebles.

In 1826 Phoebe, seven years older than her husband died, having borne 7 children. By 1833, John had applied for a Revolutionary War pension which was later granted. At the age of 76, John Wright died. He and Phoebe are buried in what is known known as the Dorsey/Walden cemetery situated on his original 200 acre homestead.

Allen Wright m 1810 Hannah Peebles\*  
1789 - 1855          1793 - 1854

\*N.B. the Peebles History will be shown at the end of this section as it is quite long.

When Allen was 21 and Hannah 17, they married at her father's farm on Barton's Run on the west side of the Nolin River in Hardin County, Kentucky. She with her family had moved to this state in 1806, as had Allen's family and some other neighbors from South Carolina. The Wright family's home was on Bacon Creek on the east side of the Nolin, so they were still neighbors.

It was five years more before Allen bought his own place a mile west of Bacon Creek, in an area later called Bonnieville. It was ten miles from his father's home. After their fathers' many moves, Allen and Hannah had other ideas. They lived on their homeplace forty years until their deaths.

Starting with 1812, money was scarce; the Panic of that year dropped the price of cotton from 23 cents a pound to 7 cents. The high prices had allowed the previous generation to make the move to Kentucky, because one needed cash to buy even cheap public domain lands, money for the trip and food until a crop was grown and sold. But the low prices for crops later on probably kept the younger ones from buying a place as early as they may have wished.

Hospitality was legendary. There was not only a lack of public accomodation and a sense of loneliness on the frontier, but also a sense of pride and kinship with any relatives, no matter how distant.



A new little relative was Allen and Hannah's first child, John, born in 1811 and later on Blatchley arriving in 1824, who were both antecedents of ours! It does get confusing, but that can be dealt with later. All in all there were eight brothers and three sisters coming in a span of 24 years.

The issue of slavery split the family as it did so many of those in the border states. A great-grand-daughter of one of the children said "There was such a family disturbance that the separation never healed. Great-grandfather freed his slaves and left Kentucky I have always been told, but his father, Allen, never forgave him, for his wealth was in slaves and he felt this was a betrayal on the part of his son. They never saw one another again."

It was fortunate that neither Allen, who died in 1855, nor Hannah who had died a year earlier, lived to experience the Civil War. Although Kentucky voted to come in on the side of the Union after the state was invaded by Confederate troops, the section where the family lived was adjacent to the Green River, below which sentiments were strongly Confederate.

John Wright m Lucinda Walden  
1811 - 1869      1810 - 1891

He was one of the Wright brothers who with his brother Preston moved to Illinois from Kentucky, breaking relations with his father, Allen.

Before he moved away, he married Lucinda Walden in 1833. Lucinda had been born in the eastern part of Kentucky. It is logical to conclude that her brother was Elijah Walden, who had been born in Hart county in 1812 and also moved to Illinois. Elijah's son James Isaac Walden married a daughter of John's brother. It is nearly impossible to trace Lucinda's and Elijah's parentage as the courthouse in Munfordville, Kentucky burned down in 1928, destroying the pertinent records.

Of John and Lucinda's ten children, we know that most of them were born in Hart County so that the family was still in Kentucky until at least 1849. But it was shortly thereafter that they made the move to Illinois.

The prairie land was rich, but there were problems especially in virgin prairie. The roots of the grass were very thick and deep and unless properly rooted out at the right season, would re-sprout and choke out a planted area. It was estimated that the cost to break the sod was one to three times the cost of the land itself. Five to ten yokes of oxen were required to pull a sod plow which had to cut very deeply with a special cutting blade. Then the turf had to be given about a year to rot. In the second year it was cross-plowed and after that expensive fencing was needed in order to keep out animals.

Four of the children were boys of an age to help their father with the farming. The first-born was Mary Ann who was born in 1834 and our direct



ancestor. Her sister Sarah Elizabeth was a future wife of her uncle Blatchley, but that will be taken up when we turn our attention to him. Two of the sons served and died in the Civil War.

I have a poignant letter from one of them. Charles was 5'10", with blue eyes and dark brown hair as we know from pension records. He was only 19 years old when he wrote this letter to his brother-in-law, Jonathan Wilson:

Dear brother

I seat my self to rite to you to let you know that I am well at preasant and all of the boys except Will Holt he is a little sick I have not heard from him for two or three days I am in good helth I weigh 194 pounds Well Jony I received your letter dated the 7 yesterday I was glad to here from you you said you was at mothers I wish I was thare today I think I could enjoy my self very well I fell very sad and lonsome sinse my der brother death (this was Elijah who died in Trenton, Tennessee) but I think sertain he has gone to a beter world than this he would sing when he was awake he sung oh dont be dis Couraged for geses is your friend and he sung I have some friends in glory I hope some time to see oh if you had all been there to see him I would [have] liked it much beter he had the ersiplus in the face it swelled his eyse shut so he was blind about ssix hours befor he died he had his rite mind all the time he called me to his bed told me to be religous he said thare was nothing like dear old mother to talk to him and he knew my voice he had me to ciss him he wanted us to sing all the time if popy has not rote tell him to rite you said you wanted me to get a furlo and come home I cant get a furlo but I dont want any untill I can stay for it would be fresh trouble for me to leave home I will stop for this time rite soon som more

goodby

C.I.W.

This was written just three months after he and Elijah had enlisted and by February Charles also had died of typhoid fever in Corinth, Mississippi.

We are fortunate in that we have a photograph of John and Lucinda. They are both stern-looking, lean and tough. I expect those were the qualities which they needed a lot of!

John died when he was only 58 in McCoupin County, Illinois.

Lucinda lived to the ripe age of 81, dying in Bourbon County, Kansas. We don't know with which of her children she made the journey but she had a lot of company not only with her own children, but several in-laws and friends. She endowed a chapel near Bronson, Kansas reportedly with the funds from a

pension her husband had received in the Spanish American War, but I have been unable to find any such thing in the Army records. One recurring family recollection is that she smoked a clay pipe. How that must have scandalized the good people of the Methodist Church!

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TheWright's story will continue after that of Jonathan Wilsons'



## THE WILSON FAMILY

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The Bronson Pilot excerpts

Census of 1830, 1840, 1850 & 1860 Hart Co., Ky.

1836-1838 Partial Tax List for Hart Co, Ky.

Jocelin Wilson m (1) Elizabeth (Butler)

C1802 - c1860            \_\_\_\_\_ - between 1850-1860

(2) Margaret Winstead

Jocelin, surely a most unusual name for the times, was born in Augusta, county, Virginia. While we have names and dates from the 1830's on, we really know almost nothing about this man. I have been unable to find his parents in the Augusta records.

But it is interesting to see what we can glean from census records - just about our only source. In 1830 Jocelin Wilson was 28, owned 5 slaves and had a son Jonathan who was one year old.

Ten years later, "Josedrix" and Elizabeth had increased the family with two more children. Significantly he now owned no slaves and no free colored or "unnaturalized foreigners" lived on his plantation. Had he had a change of mind about owning slaves or were there economic reasons? In the household there is now an older female who was un-named.

By 1850 there were five children, and the eldest son Jonathan was a teacher at age 19. The census also furnished the information that Jocelin was born in Virginia and Elizabeth in South Carolina. Living with them was Bethlehem Butler, a female of 76 years born in Virginia; this presumably was Elizabeth's mother. And again and from here on there were no slaves. His farm is worth \$1300.

In 1858 there appears in the marriage records, the note that Jocelin, now 58 has married Margaret, 38. Additionally included is the data that he was born in Augusta county, Virginia, and Margaret was born in Hart county, Kentucky. So now, obviously Elizabeth has died and his children need a mother.

The 1860 census is the last one for Jocelin. By now the farm is reckoned at \$1700. Three of his children are still at home, including an old maid daughter of 27 years, but there are also three Winstead children. Therefore we can know that Margaret was a widow and probably delighted to find an eligible widower. Frontier living almost demanded such a marriage and very few people waited



very long after the death of a spouse to re-marry. Existence was just too difficult otherwise.

From the family Bible we do learn that he also had a younger brother William who had married Sarah Wright, one of John Wright's daughters. They also lived in Hart County, Kentucky.

Jonathan Columbus Wilson m Mary Ann Wright  
1830 - 1926                                      1834 - 1908

Mary Ann Wright, the daughter of John Wright married neighboring Jonathan Wilson in Hart County Kentucky in 1854.

In Kentucky Jonathan had been a farmer and a schoolteacher, For four terms he had taught school for a salary of \$10 and then \$14 a month. But when the various families set off for Illinois, Jonathan and Mary Ann were part of the group.

Their first child was Laura Ann followed by four more children born in Illinois. Their sixth baby arrived after they had moved to Bourbon county, Kansas.

They had stopped first in Johnston county, Kansas, no doubt because of sickness. for when we get to Blatchley, this was certainly the case. As usual it was a family-based move with large numbers of kin traveling together. The destination was three counties to the south in Bourbon County.

Here, the families settled on farms near one another. There was no railroad and no town of Bronson at that time. The name Wilsonville was applied to the post office which was in Jonathan's home and for which he acted as postmaster.

They became prosperous farmers, but in 1875 in some kind of epidemic, they buried their youngest child, George, who was 13. It was in the same month that Sarah Hodges Wright, Mary Ann's sister, lost her five youngest sons. What a terrible time this must have been for the family. with six little children gone in a month. The following year George's loss was replaced by the birth of their last child.

Jonathan became the treasurer of the township and later on gave up farming to associate himself with the Wright-Ireland Mercantile Company in Bronson.

Their life was typical of the time and area - hard work, homemade fun, family on all sides and a deep religious commitment. Their church, the Methodist, was the rock on which their lives were built.

I knew Great-grandmother Wilson only from family stories and pictures but they show a woman with remnants of great beauty, a fineness of feature on which is stamped both strength and suffering. Unlike most of the Wrights, she seems to have been slim and dark-haired. In the family she was always spoken of as a person of gentleness and dignity and sweetness.



In 1908, Mary Ann died. As the local newspaper recounted, "A very sad and sudden death occurred in our City Saturday morning when Grandma Wilson was called away.....a blood vessel was burst in her brain and death ensued almost immediately." In this small town where everyone knew one another well or were related, elderly and beloved people were usually referred to by the whole town as "Grandma Wilson" or "Sister Jennings" or "Uncle Jonnie".

Jonathan was very lonely after Mary Ann's death; they had been married fifty-five years. Sometimes "he would sit on the front porch and sing what those who knew him best called his 'lonely' song." He loved children about him and they loved him in turn. He lived for many years with his daughter Laura Ann in her little white house in Bronson. He was too lonely in the big house he had shared with Mary Ann.

I can just barely remember Great-grandfather Wilson as a tall man of once-great physical strength who had a long white beard, pink skin and blue eyes. He once held me on his lap and as I cuddled into his arms he sang "Froggie Would A'Courtin' Go". It must have been almost my earliest memory as I was only three when he died at the age of 94.

In the Bronson Pilot, there was a small sketch of him when he died:

Uncle Johnnie lived an interesting and useful life. He had many characteristics which young people today might well admire and emulate. He was always vitally interested in world affairs and actively engaged in community undertakings as was indicated by his great interest in reading.....He not only believed in but practiced honesty, thrift, patience and clean living. He had no use for the liar; he saved religiously; he was tolerant of others in all activities, including politics and religion; and he, as much as anyone the writer knows, actually practiced the maxim, 'If you haven't anything good to say of a person, say nothing.' He was not given to demonstration. He did not 'make over' anyone, even the members of his own family, yet his friends and relatives knew that he cared for them...

Of their children, Great-aunt Lizzie took after her mother physically - slender and fine-featured, and was a lovely old woman whom I saw occasionally at family gatherings.

My great-aunt Molly had the apple cheeks and twinkle of the Wrights. I liked her and her huge booming-voiced husband, Uncle Isaac Carl very much. I once spent a happy week with them in Parsons, Kansas in their small home near Uncle Isaac's grocery store. She was a jolly, tidy woman, ample and kind. When I was married, she gave us a handsome Double Wedding Ring quilt which she had made and quilted. I still have it.

Great-uncle Ed was a quiet, whimsical man whose wife, Aunt Lou was an



affectionate, Juno-esque woman of irrepressible bounce and energy.



The Wright's story continues:

Blatchley Wood Wright m (1) Elizabeth Jane Hodges

(2) Sarah Elizabeth Wright, daughter of John Wright

Allen Wright and Hannah Peebles had a younger son named Blatchley Wood Wright. His brother was John who married Lucinda Walden. This will get fairly confusing, but hang in there!

Blatchley was named for a minister friend of his parent's in Kentucky which accounts for, but doesn't excuse saddling the boy with this very strange first name.

He was born in 1824, 13 years after brother John. He married Elizabeth Jane Hodges a member of another Kentucky neighboring family. Her father was Myles Hodges. The Hodges family is so numerous and the claims and records so confusing that I have been content to list only her father!

Together they raised a family of six children, of whom John Lewis was the second. Joining the family migration, Blatchley came to Illinois. Here he became a very successful farmer. Nonetheless when his brother John and other kinsmen set their sights on Eastern Kansas, he and his family journeyed along with them.

Although travel was slow, things went well until in Johnson county, Kansas they ran into a typhoid epidemic. Elizabeth Jane and her brother James who was married to Sarah Wright, both died. That is why the two of them are buried so far from any of the homeplaces of the family.

The caravan sadly moved on. Sarah Wright with her fatherless brood of three and her uncle Blatchley with his motherless family of six helped one another. Once in Bourbon county where the group stopped and bought their various farms, Sarah moved into her uncle's house and became his housekeeper.

Although marriage between first cousins was fairly common, that of uncle and niece certainly was not. Nonetheless Sarah, 28, and Blatchley, 48, did marry in 1872. As Aunt Nanny wryly remarked, "It was not generally known that she was his niece!" Within a few years, Sarah and Blatchley had two sons of their own so that their household of eleven children was a large and lively one.

Sarah was a devoted stepmother and her stepchildren loved her and always spoke of her with great affection. The household was a musical one and was remembered as a gay and happy place.

But in 1875, an epidemic swept through the little community and within five weeks, Sarah had lost her three sons by James Hodges, as well as her two young sons by Blatchley. This was the same disaster which took the life of Jonathan and Mary Ann's child. Later Blatchley and Sarah had one more son, who was in



ill health most of his life.

When I was in Kansas in the 70's, I visited the remnants of some of these family farms. There was a particularly large and imposing farmhouse, then condemned, which was where this family had lived. Blatchley was by far the most successful of all the Wright brothers and was considered wealthy by the fairly modest expectations of the time.

Blatchley died when he was 85 in 1909.

John Lewis Wright m 1874 Laura Ann Wilson  
1849 - 1893                      1856 - 1947

After the harvest in 1874, these two cousins were married. John was 25 and Laura 18. They lived on their farm a few miles outside of what became the town of Bronson, Kansas. In addition to the usual farm crops, John Lewis also raised cattle. Here their family of six children were born. After Maggie's birth in 1875, there came at two year intervals Oscar, Eva May, Walter and Frank.

When Frank was eight years old, the last baby was born. This was Mattie Zelma who arrived on September 22, 1892. From the start, as the baby of the family she was loved and looked after by everyone. A tiny thing, she was not well and for a long time was very thin and delicate.

But into this happy, busy family, tragedy came. John Lewis at the age of 44 was gored by one of his steers in the barn of his farm and died.

Now came the trials and testing of Laura Ann, left with a farm to administer with the help of her children whose ages were 18, 16, 14, 12, 9 and 6 months-old Zelma. Maggie was driven around to pupils' houses by Frank to give piano lessons - a welcome source of cash.

Everyone turned out to do what was necessary to keep the farm running and the family together. They all worked and worked and worked. Laura became from necessity tougher and sterner by the day. Not only was it difficult to run a farm with the children as hands, but two of them were not well. Maggie, the eldest, whose sweetness and gentleness became a family legend, died two years following her father's death. Zelma, the last born, was so frail that she could not go to school until she was about nine years old. These added burdens were grave ones for Laura.

After her eldest children started to marry and establish their own homes and lives, she moved from the farm in 1903 to a small four-room cottage in Bronson.

Oscar, her eldest son, married Julia King and became a merchant. He was a partner with his grandfather, Jonathan Wilson and his brother-in-law Will Ireland. The Wright-Ireland general store was an important institution in the early part of the century. Oscar prospered and built a comfortable,



commodious home across Clay Street from the little house into which his mother had moved. He saw that Laura had what she needed although she was so proud that he could never do as much for her as he wanted to. She insisted on being charged for her groceries like every one else, for example. But if he was often thwarted in material gifts to her, he managed to be a great strength in other ways. He was always at hand and he came to see her at least once a day.

Oscar had need of her sustenance and strength too, as his young wife, soon after the birth of their daughter, Maurine, became stricken with something like arthritis. She became an invalid confined to her chair and bed for the rest of her adult life.

My memories of Uncle Oscar and Aunt Julia are gentle and glowing. His house was a comfortable square white house with a wrap-around porch on two sides, and set in a large yard with big trees at the side and a fine kitchen garden behind the side lawn. Anna Dismang, a pleasant ample woman, was the family's housekeeper for many years both before and after Julia died in 1931.

Aunt Julia was tenderly cared for and in return was cheerful, alert and kind. Both Uncle Oscar's and her faces radiated happy, chuckly smiles. She suffered much pain but I at least never heard her refer to it. She had a marvelously kind face with eyes delightfully crinkled with amusement. She was always exquisitely dressed and wore special embroidered satin slippers.

Although house-bound for 12 years, she was up to date on everything, and visitors came in and out of her home. When I was visiting Grandma, I was over there at least once a day. It was a privilege.

Uncle Oscar was a heavy-set man, bald and with a pink complexion. He dressed well but soberly, always wearing high, stiff, Calvin Coolidge collars. The store was my special delight. Due to my status as the niece of the owner, I roamed and poked into everything. At the main crossroads of the town it was in a large brick building on the corner, with windows flanking the front door. Inside the floor was wooden but the ceiling was covered with intricately pressed tin.

In the front of the store was the clothing section - men's overalls and bandanna handkerchiefs, shoes to the right with a fine ladder which slid back and forth on ceiling rails so that the clerks could climb up and winkle out a shoe box from the highest shelves.

Stairs near the middle of the store led up to a kind of balcony where the ladies clothing was discreetly displayed. Opposite the stairs down on the main floor was a side door to the street.

To the rear were the groceries. There were barrels of pickles, apples, prunes, apricots, peanuts, crackers and dried beans. There were also cats languorously patrolling. In the middle of this section was a cast-iron stove with isinglass windows in the door. It had a shiny fender around it and wooden



chairs in a circle so that men could sit and talk and warm up while their orders were being filled or their wives shopped and visited.. There was news to impart and learn. Back of all this were the hardware and feed supplies.

In 1899, twenty-year-old Eva married a neighbor, William M. Ireland. Uncle Will who was in partnership with Oscar and Jonathan Wilson, he worked of course in the Wright-Ireland store. It was in Bronson that they started their family of five children. Those five were my beloved Ireland cousins. Later, the family moved to Ottawa, Kansas where Uncle Will had the best of all imaginable jobs; he was a candy salesman!

Their household was gay and humorous and full of liveliness where, in retrospect, it seemed to me that everyone was always laughing and joking. Aunt Eva was a plump, motherly, jolly lady who was universally loved. Uncle Will, tall, balding and delightful was everyone's friend. He always wore bow ties and around home a gray cardigan sweater, and small oval gold-rimmed spectacles. He loved jokes - both to play and to tell. For a little girl like me, Uncle Will was sheer delight; he always had candy to give me and he gave me a special name "Mary Jane Sorghum", which made me feel important and loved. Aunt Eva was a superb cook and her house was redolent with the smell of all good things. She wore her hair in a taffy-colored bun on the tip-top of her head and her plump face had the right kind of laughing creases. Her capacity for love and comfort was endless.

We often went there for Christmas, unless we went to Maurine's (Uncle Oscar's daughter). Since this was the occasion for a great family gathering we went to the place most convenient for the greatest number. Those Christmases were the delight of my life. An only child, I literally adored my gay and handsome cousins and the family life they represented. For many years I was the youngest of the lot and they lavished attention on me to my heart's content.

My beloved cousins were: Romola the serene elder sister who died when she was only 34; "Pat" (Harold) who inherited his parents' knack for people and love and laughter; Thelma, feminine and lovely and very special to me - only paripherally because we shared the same middle name, "Gene" (Emmett) handsome and generous and the source of wily jokes (called "sells" - why?), and quick, sandy-haired Harry.

Another of grandma Laura Wright's children was William Walter Wright. He was very quiet and had a sweet smile which slowly and wondrously glowed as it grew. He never had a lot to say, but one always liked to be with him. I liked to just be alongside when he fed the chickens, shucking the dried corn off the cob in his big rough capable hands, or skipping beside him as we walked to town. Surprisingly he was quite artistic. I have a sample of his Spencerian script which is elegant and delicate and graceful. I don't really have too many memories of Aunt Mabel until later on in her life when she used to come east to visit her



daughter Leota. After Leota, there was Lucille and then Dorwin, and these cousins I have seen more of in other places than in Bronson or at family gatherings.

The youngest of Laura and John Lewis' sons was Frank Lee, who was the only one to finish college. He went out to Bucklin Kansas where he was the principal of a high school and there he met his wife, Nancy Boosenbark from Missouri. Later on they went to Boston where he earned his PhD from Harvard. At the University of Washington in St. Louis he was the head of the education department until he retired.

Most of the time we saw Uncle Frank and his family in Wichita as they came and went to vacation in Colorado. However we once went to St. Louis where we had a wonderful, incredibly sultry week going to the St. Louis Opera, to see the Cardinals play, and moseying up the Mississippi on a paddle wheel steamer.

One summer I also went along with them to vacation in Colorado on Lily Mountain near the Y camp. It was very exciting and I loved the idea of having three big "brothers" even if only temporarily. The boys, Homer, Frankie and Evan fascinated me but I was very timid around them - and half scared of them although they couldn't have been nicer to me. Much later, Aunt Nannie and I carried on quite a correspondence about family history and her insights as an outside insider were incisive.

My memories of grandmother Wright start when I a very young girl in about 1927. Sometimes I went there with mother and daddy to family celebrations for the 4th of July, Thanksgiving, Labor Day or Grandma's birthday. Other times I went by myself for a week with her.

I loved her little house, a tiny, square, four-room bottage. There was always a particular smell - slightly mouldy (it was built about a foot above the ground with no basement), somewhat sweetish, and often overlaid with the delicious smells of her kitchen.

In the little living room was a daybed with a very old indigo and white woven wool coverlet spread on it and next to it was a capacious ochre-painted rocking chair. That was the chair in which great-grandfather Wilson sang to me. Over the daybed was one of those grotesque and frightening Victorian lithographs of a great stag, battling horrendous waves, the whites of his eyes gleaming. On the other side of the room was a fanciful dark oak Victorian desk and glassed-in bookcase, full of curlicues and as useless and ugly a piece of carpentry as can be imagined. There was also a modern side chair which had been given to grandma by Uncle Frank.

The "good" bedroom was alongside. Here there was just enough space for a large chest of drawers, a small curtained closet, and a bed with a shiny green bedspread. In this house of exquisite hand-made quilts, thaaf awful rayon bedspread had pride of place.



Behind the sitting room was the heart of the house and the largest room - the kitchen. In one corner was a big cast-iron cook stove which used coal for fuel. In winter this furnished heat for the kitchen - unfortunately the same thing prevailed in summer! On Saturday night, pots of water were heated here for baths, taken in a tin tub placed on the kitchen floor.

In another corner was grandma's treadle Singer sewing machine. Above the machine was hung a felt sunflower pincushion and beside it from a nail on the wall hung a Wright-Ireland calendar and a farmer's almanac. On the other wall of the corner was a small shelf on which was a golden oak clock, the "Daily Devotions" from which grandma read every morning, and next to it was the crank telephone. Each house had a distinctive ring composed of so many "shorts" and so many "longs". Everyone knew everyone else's rings and would often listen in on these party line calls. At times this became a problem - not only because it would have been nice to have one's conversation private, but also because as each phone cut in on the line, the voices at the other end became fainter.

Opposite the door to the sitting room was a "pie safe" which was a big double-door cupboard with star-pierced tin panels on the doors and painted a rather bright cerulean blue. In front of this was a large round oak dinner table. On the pie safe wall was the door leading out to the back porch.

The next wall contained the door to the pantry where the sugar cookies with raisen faces lived. There was a dry sink - really just a table on which there was a large washing bowl with a towel and small mirror above. On the floor to the side was a bucket of drinking water from the cistern and hanging above it on the wall was a tin dipper.

When one walked out the kitchen door it was onto a slanting wooden back porch extending the length of the house. Off to the right led a few stone steps to the spring house where in the cool, damp, gloomy spring house, the butter and other perishables stayed fresh. Nearby was the cistern and the red iron hand pump which after a few energetic priming pumps would bring up a gush of cold water.

From the back porch over to the side street was a very narrow diagonal path which I remember particularly as it was of heavily ribbed concrete and made a lovely noise as one dragged a stick along it. At the corner of this walk and the sidewalk leading along the side street, was a little shed where coal, kindling and the like were stored. To get to grandma's privy - always called the outhouse - one walked on this sidewalk to the back of the lot where there was a small and smelly cubicle, which I disliked not only for the smell but also because it was the happy home of numerous daddy-long-legs spiders. The toilet was a hole in the wooden bench. Alongside was a nail on which hung an old Sears Roebuck catalogue; a page of this was handy reading that doubled as toilet paper. There



was also a covered bucket of powdered white lime which one was expected to sprinkle down in the hole before leaving.

In the side yard of the house was grandma's yard and flower garden and a large tree or two. Grandma was a good gardener and her flowers were of the old-fashioned varieties: zinnias, marigolds, pinks, bachelor buttons, butter-and-eggs, and my favorite, portulaca. Stretching along behind the lawn and glowers was the clothesline propped up in its long expanse by a notched pole. Then behind the clothesline and the spring house, extending all the way over to the street was the vegetable patch. Sweet corn grew there and tomatoes and all sorts of other good things.

So this was her house and garden; this was setting in which grandma lived. It was important only because it belonged to grandma, the person around which the whole family revolved.

When I knew her she was a little lady about five feet tall and plump as a dumpling. Her face was kindly and wise and a stranger to bitterness or malice or envy. The sternness so pervasive in the early memory of her children had faded and I remember her as a moral and upright person, who was a gentle and laughing grandma. Her eyes, almost hidden by round cheeks when she laughed, were bright blue. Her long waist-length hair remained brown with only a little gray in it until her death at 91. A picture taken of her just before her wedding shows shoulder-length curls, but as soon as she married she "put up her hair" as befitted her new status. Thereafter she wore it in a bun on top of her head and held in place with tortoise shell hair pins and side combs.

Like the rest of her, her clothes were very conservative. In the summer she might wear a white dress of a tiny sprigged batiste with the sleeves cut short to mid-way between elbow and wrist. In winter, her dresses were dark, fairly long and if trimmed, had perhaps a bit of "nice" white lace at the collar. She had two or three brooches, all small and modest. Toward the end of her life she did wear a wristwatch, but otherwise her only jewelry was her plain gold wedding band. Her only beauty aid was glycerin and rose water for her skin. And of course only rainwater for washing her hair.

She wore small gold, oval glasses firmly planted on her nose. With these she could see to do the most minute and delicate stitches which I have ever seen in quilting. The only "fine" work she did was tatting, which appeared on baby dresses, pillow slips and handkerchiefs which grandma produced without fail for the family. However her mending and her darning could have been framed for perfection and fineness. The same was true of my mother, and since they both taught me how to darn socks, I cannot do otherwise than practically re-weave a hole as she did.

Quilting sessions were sometimes held in grandma's parlor with church ladies clustered around the large rectangular quilting frame which nearly



engulfed the small room. It was a matter of quiet pride with her that her stitches were tiny and perfect. And it was true. If one examined a "church" quilt, one could always find her section for its tiny, pin-prick stitches.

Cheery and hard-working, she accomplished a great deal and kept healthy in the process. She would put on her sunbonnet and pull a pair of old silk stockings (with the feet cut off) over her arms to protect her skin from the sun, and out she would go to work in her garden or to catch a chicken and wring its neck (how I hated that part!) or to hang out the washing.

Her cooking! Apple, gooseberry, peach pies; chocolate, white and burnt sugar cakes; all kinds of corn and tomato relish, bowls of string beans and other vegetables from her garden, wilted lettuce (hot sugared vinegar and water poured on top and drained) and pickled beets, clove-studded peaches and crab apples, mounds of the whitest mashed potatoes mashed by hand and beaten for an eternity to make them white and fluffy, feathery tall bisquits and of course fried chicken light brown and crisp. Sometimes we had chicken and dumplings. Or noodles which she would roll out, cut and then dry by hanging them over the backs of the kitchen chairs protected by pages of the Bronson Pilot. In summer there were big luscious watermelons served in long wedges which some of us liked to eat out on the back porch without plate and fork, spitting the seeds out into the grass. In season, Uncle Oscar would bring over fat red strawberries from his prized patch.

When there were family gatherings, the women mostly visited in the kitchen as they prepared the food and then washed and dried enormous numbers of dishes. Meanwhile the men talked together in the steamy Kansas afternoon out under the trees, stretched out for a nap or played a game of horseshoes at Uncle Oscar's. A final late afternoon snack of pie and ice tea and the families would start to go home.

A distant cousin, Charles Stitt, once wrote me about Grandma Wright, "...her home was always open to me anytime during the day or night, the door always unlocked so I could come in at any time and go to bed. I can never forget her nice feather mattress she had made herself. As far as I know she never spoke an unkind word to anyone, and everyone considered her as his true friend."

After his mother died, Everett Wright, a grandson of Blatchley's lived with Aunt Laura and went to high school in Bronson. Everett's father was not a good man and didn't take care of his children. This boy worked for John Lewis to earn some money and his father tried to collect the boy's wages in vain. John refused to give him the boy's salary and Everett was forever grateful. Although his father, George Wright, was a poor one, Everett was fiercely proud of the Wright family; "It was the greatest family ever!" he said.

She was called Aunt Laura by everyone in town, related or not. Not only was she and her family a stalwart in the Methodist Episcopal Church South in



Bronson, having taught Sunday School all her life, but she was also what passed for the town nurse. Many people owed their lives and health to the dedication of "Sister Wright" She helped Dr. Cummings whenever he needed her, no matter the time or the weather. He lived on Clay Street nearer town. I used to visit the Cummings with her when I visited. The great attraction here was their exotic pet parrot who could say "Hello" and "Polly wants a cracker" in the most miraculous way.

Another close friend was Lawrence Moore, the editor of the Bronson Pilot and the town's leading intellectual. That might seem pretentious to speak of a leading intellectual in a place no more than a wide spot in the road, but there were a surprising number of well-read, serious people there. Mr. Moore was a charming and soft-spoken man of great energy and dedication.

When visiting, I always slept with grandma. In winter the bedroom was icy. I would leap into bed as fast as I could to snuggle down in the feather mattress and be covered with another big fat "feather bed". Grandma would take down her hair and braid it down her back in one long braid, put on her long white nightgown and her baby-bonnet-like night cap, and then removing her glasses and winding the clock would kneel down beside the bed to pray.

On Sundays she dressed in her best dress and hat for the walk to church, carrying her good purse with some coins for the offering, her Sunday School lesson and well-worn Bible.

In the evening she returned for evening services and on Wednesday she went to prayer meetings which besides long prayers consisted of lots and lots of good Methodist hymns.

The little church was a white frame building on the corner across from Uncle Walter's house. It had a plain square chopped-off steeple. Inside there were ranks of golden oak benches, a Spartan altar and places for the choir to sit. Behind the main body of the church were two small rooms for the classes. If we were in Bronson on Memorial Day, we would gather arm loads of the best flowers and keeping them fresh in old scrubbed-out vegetable cans and jars, carry them to the cemetery to put on the graves of our relatives.

To keep up with her scattered family, she wrote letters on small linen-weave note paper in her crabbed but legible script. She always used a small black fountain pen which had a gold ring on top.

Much later in her life, grandma finally gave up her cherished little house and came to live with us. Independent as ever she arranged to sell her modest possessions at auction. To our dismay, we heard about it after it was done. And now someone else possesses the cookie jar, the pale mint-green milk glass tumbler out of which I always had my milk, the old tin pie safe, the golden oak clock and ochre rocking chair. She did bring with her, her cherry bed and dresser and some of her quilts which are now my prized remembrances.



She fell and broke her hip when she was very old. The hip mended but it triggered other problems and her mind began to go. We had to have a practical nurse with her at all times as she would slip out of the house and wander about in her nightgown and robe. But occasionally the old tart grasp would return. One day she surprised us all by saying to her rather uninformed nurse, "That was Winston Churchill of course. Everyone knows that!"

She was not in pain and she slipped easily and quietly into death in 1947 in her bedroom, surrounded by love in our home in Wichita.