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## FEATURE ARTICLES

Identifying a Teenage Mother in Rural Pre-1850 America: the FAN Suggests and atDNA Confirms Shadrack Odom's First Wife  
by *Elizabeth Shown Mills CG, CGL, FASG, FNGS, FUGA* 245

Was Leonard Baumgardner (1755–1839) of York, Pennsylvania, the Father of Anna Maria “Mary” Wehrly Meyers (1791–1852)? Using Conflict Resolution to Establish Identity  
by *Lynn Nelson, CG* 275

Determining the Parents of Sarah (Osborn) Spencer Sherwood Long of Washington County, New York  
by *Denise E. Cross, CG* 289

## 2023 FAMILY HISTORY WRITING CONTEST WINNER

A Family for Mary (Congleton) Bottorff, 1814–1885  
by *Elizabeth Bottorff Ahlemann* 299

**COMMUNICATIONS** 242

**EDITORS' CORNER**  
Shadows and Silhouettes 243

**ADMINISTRATION** 244

**SIDELIGHTS**  
All in the Family 298

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# Identifying a Teenage Mother in Rural Pre-1850 America: the FAN Suggests and atDNA Confirms Shadrack Odom's First Wife

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By Elizabeth Shown Mills, CG, CGL, FASG, FNGS, FUGA

*When all contemporary county records are destroyed, when no state vital records exist, when FAN research points to a family that moved through a dozen or more “burned counties,” atDNA helps mold the ashes of those courthouse fires into a plausible proof argument.*

Shadrack Odom had been wed scarcely three years when his young wife died, leaving a toddler and a newborn. Within months he had remarried.<sup>1</sup> His new wife, Elizabeth Cooksey, reared his young sons, Sam and John, and bore Shad ten more children. She outlived him by more than half a century,<sup>2</sup> as Granny Odom to nearly two hundred descendants across Mississippi and several states to the west. One great-granddaughter who knew her said: “She was not our *real* grandmother, but we loved her like she was.”<sup>3</sup> That great-granddaughter—and other contemporaries—could not recall who Sam and John’s “real” mother was.

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© Elizabeth Shown Mills. The author is a former editor of *NGSQ*, a former president of the American Society of Genealogists and the Board for Certification of Genealogists, the author of *Evidence Explained*, and the architect and editor of the two-volume set *Professional Genealogy*. Websites cited in this paper were last accessed on 9 November 2023.

1. For abstracts, transcriptions, and/or images of all known documents for Shadrack, see E. S. Mills, “Shadrack Odom (ca. 1819–aft. 1861): Research Notes”; archived online at *Historic Pathways* ([www.historicpathways.com/download/ShadrackOdom.pdf](http://www.historicpathways.com/download/ShadrackOdom.pdf)). His son Sam (Samuel E. Odom) was born 4 February 1838; Pleasant Grove Cemetery (Conway, Leake Co., Miss.), Samuel E. Odom tombstone; personally visited and read. His son John V. Odom was born 2 Feb 1840; see *Find A Grave* ([www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)), memorial 65080123, digital image, 2 Feb 2011, by “Linda,” tombstone for John Odom (Craig Springs Cem., Craig Springs, Oktibbeha Co., Miss.).

2. Mississippi State Registrar of Vital Statistics, Mrs. Elizabeth Odom, State File No. 22406 (1916), copy issued 27 Mar 1975 to the author. Also “Mrs. Odom” obituary, *Union (Miss.) Appeal*, 7 Jun 1917, p. 1, col. 1.

3. Interview, ca. 1968, with Elizabeth T. (Jeffcoat) Shown, daughter of Sam’s daughter Carrie (Odom) Jeffcoat, with whom the aging Sam and his wife Elizabeth (Boyd) Odom spent their last years. Sam’s stepmother lived nearby. Mrs. Shown, aged ten when Granny Odom died, related childhood anecdotes told to her about Sam’s father Shad, but she had no recollection of anything about Shad’s first wife. For Elizabeth Cooksey and her family, see E. S. Mills, “Testing the FAN Principle against DNA: Zilphy (Watts) Price Cooksey Cooksey of Georgia and Mississippi,” *NGS Quarterly* 102 (Jun 2014): 129–52.

That young mother died in 1840 in Newton County, Mississippi, created four years earlier from lands ceded by the Choctaw Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. Three courthouse fires ravaged Newton County. No pre-1872 marriage records survive. No probate files, court minutes, or deeds of sale survive that might have named her.<sup>4</sup> Scant early Newton County church records do not include her.<sup>5</sup>

Mississippi did not record births or deaths until 1912—years after Sam and John were buried;<sup>6</sup> thus, no death record names their mother. The 1840 federal census, taken between 1 June and 8 September, enumerates Shad with two infant boys and a female aged twenty to thirty.<sup>7</sup> Since Shad's first child by Elizabeth Cooksey was conceived in September 1840,<sup>8</sup> the woman on the 1840 census was likely Shad's second wife. How can the short-lived wife's identity be proved under these circumstances?

#### DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

Shadrack Odom's genealogical FAN—his friends and family, associates, and neighbors—possibly held valuable clues. The ashes of those courthouse fires were sifted repeatedly for every census neighbor, every name in a tax-roll cluster, every identifiable associate of every associate. A thorough search would go beyond looking for direct evidence—explicit statements of fact to identify her. It would pursue anomalies, define patterns, and connect “dots.” It followed many FAN members into other counties and states where they moved.

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4. Alfred John Brown, *History of Newton County, Mississippi, from 1834 to 1894* (Jackson, Miss.: Clarion-Ledger, 1894), 59–60, recounts the February 1864 fire set by Sherman's army, from which most records were saved. More destructive were fires of 1876 (*ibid.*, 328–29) and January 1911, reported in *Newton (Miss.) Record*, 2 Feb 1911, p. 1, cols. 1–2.

5. Bethel Baptist Church Minutes, 1839 [1840]–1945; MS M342, Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg.

6. “Questions and Answers about Vital Records,” Mississippi State Department of Health ([www.msds.gov/msdhsite/\\_static/31,0,109,76.html](http://www.msds.gov/msdhsite/_static/31,0,109,76.html)).

7. 1840 US census, Newton Co., Miss., p. 141 (stamped), line 11, Shadrack Odum household, p. 147v for certification; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) microfilm publication M704, roll 216. The 1840 census was directed to begin on 1 June; the Newton County return was certified on 8 September by Anderson Pinson, who lived next door to Shadrack and his father.

8. The 1900 US census reports a June 1841 birth for Shadrack and Elizabeth's first daughter, Rhoda; see Leake Co., Miss., population schedule, South Half of Beat 3, enumeration district (ED) 34, sheet 14, dwelling/family 229, for Rhody Moore; NARA microfilm T623, roll 816. A June 1841 birth is compatible with Rhoda's other census data. Elizabeth's obituary states she was mother to twelve children. Samuel and John, whom she had raised from infancy, would have been included in that number. In September 1971, her elderly grandson Esrom Odom of Leake Co. provided the writer a list of Shad's children: Samuel, John, Bill, Cade, Cal, Neal (“died young”), Tomie, Jimmy, Alex, Marine [Marion], Rodie [Rhoda], and Sis [Eliza]. The list corresponds to Shad and Elizabeth's children on the censuses of 1850–80, except for Neal whose birth and death apparently occurred between censuses.

Modern Odom and Cooksey genealogists assign various names to Shad's unknown wife, most commonly "Margaret Williamson" and "Lisa Stephenson."<sup>9</sup> Some online trees call Shad's *second* wife "Margaret"—giving her the double-name "Margaret Elizabeth," although contemporary documents call her only "Elizabeth." No evidence supports the claimed names for Shad's wives; and no Williamson or Stephenson families appear within Shad's FAN.

The first surviving record Sam Odom created in adulthood—the 1860 enumeration of his household—raises one of the many questions surrounding his mother's identity. At eighteen, in 1856, he wed the fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Jane Boyd<sup>10</sup>—the child of a family in Shad's FAN before moving to adjacent Leake County. Elizabeth's mother Elmira had died in childbirth in 1853,<sup>11</sup> shortly after Elmira's mother-in-law died.<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth's widowed father, James Boyd, took his four children back to Newton County where his late wife's parents could help rear them.<sup>13</sup> By 1860 Elizabeth's father and all her siblings but one had also died.<sup>14</sup> She and her baby sister would have shared the inheritance from their father, a small-scale farmer. That inheritance enabled Sam and Elizabeth to start their marriage with land and a home. The 1860 census reveals this:<sup>15</sup>

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9. Lisa *Stephens* (var. Eliza, Elisa, Lise, Liza) was the name of one of Shad's daughters by Elizabeth Cooksey. Born December 1862, she married William R. Stephens. For examples of her name variants, see 1900 US census, Attala Co., Miss., Beat 4, ED 10, sheet 9, dwell./fam. 154; NARA microfilm T623, roll 800. Also, 1920 US census, Madison Co., Miss., Beat 5 (T12 R5E), ED 52, sheet 1, dwell./fam. 2; NARA microfilm T625, roll 886.

10. Attala Co., Miss., "Confederate Pension Applications N to P," no. 1103, Mrs. E. J. Odom, widow of Samuel (also signed as "Mrs. S. E. Odom"), 4 Sep 1916; *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)), Image Group Number (DGS) 8632732, image 364.

11. Elmira's death can be bracketed between the birth of her fifth child, on 10 Aug 1853, and the date her widower took out a license to remarry, 3 Oct 1853. For the child's birth date, see *Find A Grave*, memorial 34625556, digital image, 9 Mar 2009, by Shirley Myers Kerr, gravestone for Martha Elmira Scarborough (Harmony Cem., Nacogdoches, Nacogdoches Co., Tex.) For James Boyd's remarriage, see Leake Co., Miss., Marriage Book B:72, James Boyd and Mary Smith; *FamilySearch*, DGS 7724345, image 354.

12. Patsy Robinson, contributor, "Warren–Vaughn–Ellison Bible," *NGSQ* 78 (Mar 1990): 56, for death of Mary Boyd, daughter of John and Priscilla Warren.

13. For Elmira's family in Newton County, see Mills, "Testing the FAN Principle against DNA."

14. For the complex details of James Boyd's last years, see Mills, "Jane's Offspring: Scots-Irish Boyds in Georgia and Mississippi (The First Six Generations)," MS, 56–58; archived online, *Historic Pathways* ([historicpathways.com/download/JanesOffspringFirstSixGenerations.pdf](http://historicpathways.com/download/JanesOffspringFirstSixGenerations.pdf)).

15. 1860 US census, Newton Co., Miss., pop. sch., Decatur post office, p. 141, dwells. 951–52, fams. 961–62; NARA microfilm M653, roll 588. The filmed copy of the 1860 census has many copying errors. The identification of Shadrack as "Frederick" is a typical error made by enumerators when they created the second and third copies of the census for submission to the Census Bureau and the secretary of their state. The Census Bureau copy is the one subsequently microfilmed and digitized for widespread use.

951/961	Fredrick [Shadrack] Odem	45	marr.	farmer	\$2400/\$854	b. Miss.
	Elizabeth [née Cooksey]	39				b. Miss.
	[nine children]					
952/962	<b>Samuel Odem</b>	23	marr.	farmer	\$550/\$385	b. Miss.
	Elizabeth [née Boyd]	20				b. Miss.
	Jane	3				b. Miss.
	Sarah	1				b. Miss.
	John Odem	20		farm laborer		b. Miss.
	Solomon Sessums	18		farm laborer		b. Miss.

*Why was this Solomon Sessums in the young couple's home?*

Sam's brother John living with him is not surprising. But who was Solomon? Sam's fortunes were modest. His brother could help him with the farm. Why would another laborer be needed? Solomon Sessums was not likely a randomly hired "farm laborer."

The 1850 and 1860 censuses identify Solomon and connect him, albeit indirectly, to the family:<sup>16</sup>

<b>1850</b>	Thomas Sessums	43	marr.	farmer	\$0	b. Ky.
	Zilphy	37				b. Ga.
	Kader	15				b. Miss.
	John	13				do.
	Elizabeth [page break]	11				do.
	<b>Solomon Sessions</b> [ <i>sic</i> ]	9				b. Miss.
	Ellis, male [ <i>sic</i> ]	7				do.
	Celia	2				do.
<b>1860</b>	Thomas Cissume	53	marr.	farmer	\$550	b. Ky.
	Zepha	46				b. Miss.
	<b>Solomon</b>	18				b. Miss.
	Elis, female [ <i>sic</i> ]	16				b. Miss.
	Laura [ <i>sic</i> ; should be Celia]	12				b. Miss.
	Zepha	10				b. Miss.
	Nathan	7				b. Miss.
	Hiram	4				b. Miss.

16. 1850 US census, Newton Co., Miss., pop. sch., p. 185, dwell./fam. 431; NARA microfilm M432, roll 378. 1860 US census, Newton Co., Miss., pop. sch., Union p.o., p. 102, dwell. 682, fam. 697. Solomon is double-listed on this census, once in the parental household and once in the Odom household.

FAN research on Thomas Sessums helped link him to the family and helped reveal information about the maiden identity of Elizabeth (Boyd) Odom's mother.<sup>17</sup> Only one Sessums family lived then in the county; and only one Solomon had been born into that family. In brief:

- Thomas Sessums's wife Zilphy, née Cooksey, was an older sister of Shad's second wife, Elizabeth.
- Zilphy and Elizabeth's half-sister Nancy, by her husband John Parks, had borne a daughter Elmira—the young wife of James Boyd who left him a widower in 1853.
- Shad Odom's two sisters had married brothers of Nancy, Zilphy, and Elizabeth Cooksey.<sup>18</sup>

Solomon Sessums was therefore a nephew of Sam's stepmother and a half-first-cousin-once-removed of Sam's wife. However, the cousins had never been close; Solomon and Elizabeth had grown up more than fifty miles apart.<sup>19</sup> The Cookseys and Odoms had numerous other kin in their neighborhood. Why, then, would the teenaged Solomon Sessums live with Sam and Elizabeth—a stepson of one of his nine maternal aunts and uncles, married to half-kin among his dozens of cousins? Why would Elizabeth, with two babies to tend and a brother-in-law to cook for and clean after, take in another male relative? Logic suggests Solomon Sessums was more closely connected to Sam Odom than “nephew of stepmother” or “wife's half-cousin-once-removed.”

#### *Identifying Thomas Sessums's Family*

Thomas Sessums, Solomon's father, first emerged on record in 1829 when he married Zilphy Cooksey Jr. in the older county of Rankin.<sup>20</sup> See figure 1. No other Sessums appears there in censuses, court records, deeds, tax rolls, probate files, or federal land grants. His bride's family, headed by her widowed mother Zilphy (Watts) Cooksey, had moved there with Watts kin from the also-burned Covington County (figure 1) after her last husband, William Cooksey, died.<sup>21</sup> Thomas appears to have gone to Rankin County seeking work and then forged strong ties to his new wife's

17. Mills, “Testing the FAN Principle against DNA.”

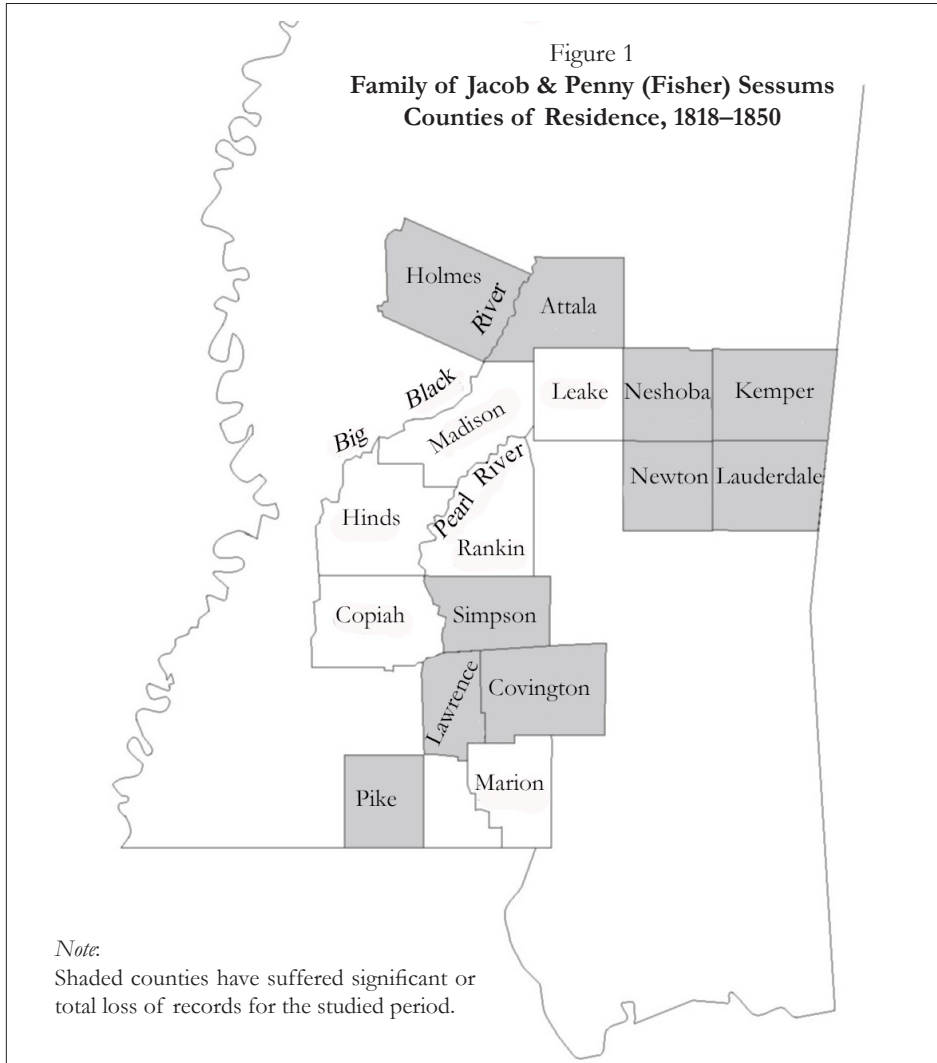
18. Mills, “Testing the FAN Principle against DNA,” 136–37, 148 (fig. 2), 150 (fig. 3).

19. The Sessums family farm in Newton lay in Section 5, Township 8 North, Range 11 East. James Boyd's farm in Leake Co. lay in S31 T12N R7E. For both, see US Department of the Interior, *Bureau of Land Management* (glorerecords.blm.gov), search terms Mississippi: Newton and Sessums: Thomas; also Mississippi: Leake and Boyd: James.

20. Rankin Co., Miss., Marriage Book 1:12; Circuit Clerk's Office, Brandon, Miss.

21. Mills, “Testing the Fan Principle against DNA,” 136–37, for the Watts-Cooksey family. All branches of these families were also investigated and eliminated as a potential birth family for Shad's first wife. For Covington's record losses, see “Covington County, Mississippi, Genealogy,” *FamilySearch Research Wiki* (www.familysearch.org); losses confirmed via on-site visit to the county courthouse.

family. In 1834, as Choctaw lands opened to the east of them, he and his in-laws moved into the vacated domain and bought small tracts to farm in the new Neshoba County (figure 1), where Shad Odom's father William had also settled.<sup>22</sup> Neshoba's records for the 1830s, when these families settled there, are also lost.<sup>23</sup>



22. For abstracts, transcriptions, and/or images of all known records created by or about William Odom, see Mills, “William Odom (ca. 1786–87–aft. 1870) & Wife Jane Johns(t)on (ca. 1793–aft. 10 June 1856): Research Notes”; archived at *Historic Pathways* ([www.historicpathways.com/download/WilliamOdomResearchNotes.pdf](http://www.historicpathways.com/download/WilliamOdomResearchNotes.pdf)).

23. Neshoba's marriage records date only from 1912, probate from 1890, and court records from 1877. Only deeds are relatively complete but meager for the period of interest. Dates are from the author's on-site inventory of holdings.

For Mississippi's burned counties, the most valuable resources—aside from federal land and census records—are random tax rolls and state censuses at the state archives.<sup>24</sup> The 1834 Neshoba tax roll and the post-1836 Newton tax rolls identify no Sessums except Thomas until his sons reached adulthood. The 1840 federal census introduces a householder who does not appear on the assessments:

<b>Jacob Sessions</b> [ <i>siz</i> ]	1 white male	60–70
	1 white female	50–60
	1 white male	20–30
	1 white male	15–20
	1 white male	10–15 <sup>25</sup>

Jacob Sessums's name is well known to his many descendants across Mississippi, Texas, and Oklahoma. Sparse details of his life, wife, and parentage are confused in online accounts, however.<sup>26</sup> Born about 1777 in Duplin County, North Carolina, Jacob arrived in South Mississippi's Lawrence County before 1818, after residing on the Cumberland River of Kentucky and Tennessee. After the first Choctaw cession, the 1820 Treaty of Doak's Stand that opened lands in West Central Mississippi, Jacob followed Lawrence County's Silver Creek into the ceded lands and settled his large family on a tract in the new Simpson County. See figure 1. Official records there were destroyed in 1840 and again in 1872.<sup>27</sup>

By 1840 Jacob and two sons-in-law, Neal Williams and Samuel Courtney, had temporarily joined his son Thomas Sessums in Newton County.<sup>28</sup> Soon after, allegedly in the wake of his wife Penny's death, Jacob and most offspring moved to northeast Texas. The families of his son Thomas and his daughter Mary "Polly" Williams

24. Many of these are now imaged online as "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687](http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687)). For thorough research, one should use the Browse option and read the individual rolls, rather than rely on the search engine.

25. 1840 US census, Newton Co., Miss., p. 137, line 31, Jacob Sessoms. Jacob's census "neighbors" have been researched and their land locations platted, to define a neighborhood for him. The sequence of surrounding names reflects no logical path on contemporary maps. Apparently, the page with Jacob's data represents the enumerator's catch-all page on which he listed individuals he had missed in his first round of the county.

26. For a correction of Jacob's misidentification and for his roots in Duplin and Sampson Cos.—along with abstracts, transcriptions, and/or images of all known records created by Jacob and his wife across their lifetimes—see Mills, "Jacob Sessums (c1777–c1856) & Spouse Penelope "Penny" Fisher (c1780–c1845): Research Notes"; archived online, *Historic Pathways* ([www.historicpathways.com/download/JacobSessumsPennyFisherResearchNotes.pdf](http://www.historicpathways.com/download/JacobSessumsPennyFisherResearchNotes.pdf)).

27. "Simpson County, Mississippi, Genealogy," *FamilySearch Research Wiki*; losses verified through on-site visit to the county courthouse.

28. 1840 US census, Newton Co., Miss., p. 142, lines 13, Samuel Cooksey, 14, Zilpha Cooksey [Sr.], 15, Thomas Sessoms, and 16, Neal Williams. Jacob's son-in-law Samuel Courtney is not on the 1840 census but appears on Newton's 1840 tax roll; see "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687](http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687)) > Newton > County tax rolls 1840, Box 3711 > images 4 (Cooksey, Coartney), 10 (Odom), and 11 (Sessoms).



stayed behind. The 1850 census enumerates Jacob in Shelby County, Texas, living with his son Redding. By the 1860 census, he was dead. An 1882 Shelby County fire destroyed probate records that might have named a deceased daughter and her heirs.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1896 and 1904, eighty-six offspring filed claims with the US Dawes Commission declaring descent from “Penny Fisher, a full-blood Choctaw” and her husband “Jacob Sessums, a white man.” Their aim was not simply to be recognized as Choctaw. In the Mississippi and Texas societies where this family lived, traditions of Native American ancestry were typically whispered—not publicly proclaimed. However, the Dawes Commission existed to distribute the Five Civilized Tribes’ communal lands among proven tribal members.<sup>30</sup> Free land was a powerful incentive that turned many family whispers into public declarations.

Jacob and Penny’s grandson Wilson Russell “Russ” Sessums led the family effort. The Choctaw Nation initially rejected his claim for lack of evidence. An American court upheld his appeal and ordered the Choctaw to accept him and the children and grandchildren claiming under him. Encouraged by his success, other family branches filed a spate of claims. Amid protracted proceedings, most Sessums claims were consolidated into Thomas’s son John’s file. The Dawes Commission rejected them for lack of supporting evidence.<sup>31</sup>

#### SEARCHING THE SESSUMS FAMILY FOR MISSING FEMALES

The hypothesis that Solomon Sessums shared Sam Odom’s home because of close kinship is difficult to prove, given the extensive record loss in the key counties where they lived. Reconstructing all family branches requires identifying and using all surviving records for places and times of residence. That means turning each page of surviving volumes or files, searching for unindexed names and events. It requires collecting data bits and shards that, individually, seem unimportant, but that can be compared, sorted, and assembled to recreate family units.

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29. 1850 US census, Shelby Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 35 (stamped), dwell./fam. 485; NARA microfilm M432, roll 915. Also, “Shelby County, Texas, Genealogy,” *FamilySearch Research Wiki*.

30. The indispensable guide to these records is Kent Carter, *The Dawes Commission and the Allotment of the Five Civilized Tribes, 1893–1914* (Orem, Utah: Ancestry.com, 1999).

31. Choctaw MCR 184, John Sessums claim, contains most of the affidavits—but no proofs because the family had none. Their paperwork is, nonetheless, a rich genealogical source. A list of the consolidated claims appears in John’s file, imaged in “Dawes Packets,” *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/54726775](http://www.fold3.com/image/54726775) and 88 subsequent images); citing *Applications for Enrollment in the Five Civilized Tribes, Compiled 1898–1914*, NARA microfilm M1301, roll 86. Family claimants by other surnames, whose files are imaged also in this database, include offspring of Thomas Sessums’s sister Polly (Mrs. Neal) Williams, particularly James A. J. Williams, Choc. MCR 5571, and his sister Dicey (Williams) Wren, Choc. MCR 6153. Also see *Senate Documents, 62d Congress: 3d Session, December 2, 1912–March 4, 1913*, vol. 15 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 595–600, being a report of the court case “W. R. Sessums et al., plaintiffs v. The Choctaw Nation, defendant.”

*Sessums Family Summary*

Information about this Sessums family, studied across twenty-seven counties in seven colonies/states, spanning three centuries is summarized here. Data is from extant documents created by all identifiable family members and their offspring.

1. **Jacob Sessums** (son of Isaac and grandson of Nicholas) was born about 1777, Duplin County, North Carolina;<sup>32</sup> he is last found in the 1850 Shelby County, Texas, census.<sup>33</sup> About 1796,<sup>34</sup> in Sampson County, North Carolina (cut from Duplin in 1784), he married **Penny Fisher**, born about 1780 to the Revolutionary War major Southey Fisher and a wife identified to date only as Phebe.<sup>35</sup> Penny apparently last appears in the 1841 Newton County, Mississippi, census as the only tick mark in the female column.<sup>36</sup> Identified children of Jacob and Penny were, as follows:<sup>37</sup>

2. REDDING SESSUMS, born 2 March 1798, Sampson County, North Carolina; died 28 November 1879, Bowie, Montague County, Texas; buried in Queens Park Cemetery, Bowie County.<sup>38</sup> On 5 February 1822, in Lawrence County,

32. For Jacob's birth and family in N.C., see Mills, "Sessums & Fishers of Sampson County (Formerly Duplin), NC: Preliminary Survey," report, 29 June 2021, 146 pp.; archived online, *Historic Pathways* ([www.historicpathways.com/download/SessumsFisherSampsonCoNCprelimsurvey.pdf](http://www.historicpathways.com/download/SessumsFisherSampsonCoNCprelimsurvey.pdf)).

33. 1850 US census, Shelby Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 35 (stamped), 28 Oct 1850, dwell./fam. 485.

34. The marriage year is extrapolated from the birthdate of their first son, Redding, and the fact that the 1800 census attributes to their household one male and one female under age five. See 1800 US census, Sampson Co., N.C., p. 531, line 16, Jacob Sessoms; NARA microfilm M32, roll 32.

35. Penny's parentage is established by two deeds settling her father's estate: On 25 October 1807, "Thomas Fisher, John Fisher, Reuben Fisher, Elijah Fisher, and Jacob Sessums" conveyed an enslaved man to Thomas Wallace (newly wed to Fisher's widow). Two days later, Thomas "Wallis" pledged to convey a woman and her children to "John Fisher, Elijah Fisher, and Jacob Sessums" "after the death of my Wife Phebe." See Sampson Co. Deed Book 14:369, 404; *FamilySearch*, DGS 7540369, images 481, 501. Other documents reinforce the deduction that the Fishers and Sessums of 1805 and 1807 were Southey and Phebe's children and heirs. On 10 June 1805, Reuben Fisher sold five tracts "willed to him the said Reubin Fisher by Southy Fisher Dec'd," with a reservation that "Phebe Wallace [is] to have free privilege of the Land on the east side of the Main Road"; see Sampson Co. Deed Book 13:274–75; *FamilySearch*, DGS 7540369, image 244. No will has been found. At February Term of court, 1802, Mrs. Phebe Fisher and [son] John Fisher "prayed Adminin. on the estate of Southy Fisher," with Sessums Parker as bondsman; see Sampson Co. Minutes, Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1800–1808, no visible pagination; *FamilySearch*, DGS 8139513, image 165.

36. On the 1840 US census, Newton Co., Miss., p. 137, line 31, Jacob Sessoms. The one female in Jacob's household appeared in the 50–60 column. For 1841, see "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* > Newton > State census returns, Unknown > images 2, 4. The wrapper for this census, dated "1841," is at *ibid.* > State census returns 1841, Box 4887 > image 2. Newton Co. took only two state censuses in this decade: 1841 and 1845; the quite-different 1845 return, on which Jacob does not appear, is imaged separately in this collection.

37. Additional information on all these children, showing their interactions, can be found in Mills, "Jacob Sessums (c1777–c1856) & Spouse Penelope "Penny" Fisher (c1780–c1845)."

38. *Find A Grave*, memorial 62227145, "John Albert Redding Sessums," created 27 Nov 2010, by "figrl," with digital image by Evalée Houtz of Redding Sessums tombstone (Queens Park Cem., Montague Co., Tex.). The tombstone appears to be contemporary.

Mississippi, he married Mary Ann Brown.<sup>39</sup> She was buried in 1887 beside Redding under a joint stone.<sup>40</sup> Redding and Mary Ann were the parents of

- i. ALICE ANN “AILSEY” SESSUMS, born about 1823–24, Mississippi;<sup>41</sup> died about April 1889.<sup>42</sup> On 9 October 1870 in Ellis County, Texas, she married the widowed farmer and minister, Rev. Henry Shaw.<sup>43</sup> The 1880 census presents them as childless.
- ii. WILLIAM B. SESSUMS, born about 1825, Mississippi;<sup>44</sup> died before 22 April 1868, Ellis County, Texas.<sup>45</sup> About 1850, likely in Shelby County, Texas, he married Mary Martha [—?—].<sup>46</sup>
- iii. FEMALE CHILD, born about 1827, Mississippi; enumerated in 1830 as aged 0–5.<sup>47</sup> She is not named in the 1896 family sketch penned by her sister Permeasa’s husband, which named the five children Redding and Mary Ann brought to Texas.<sup>48</sup> Her age eliminates her from consideration as the female Shad Odom married in 1837.

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39. Lawrence Co., Miss., Marriage Book 1:112; FamilySearch Library microfilm 905518, item 2.

40. Additional information for Redding, Mary Ann, and their children—with abstracts, transcriptions, and/or images of each document—can be found in in Mills, “Redding Sessums (1798–1877) & Spouse Mary Ann Brown (c1800–1887): Research Notes”; *Historic Pathways* ([www.historicpathways.com/download/ReddingSessumsMaryAnnBrownResearchNotes.pdf](http://www.historicpathways.com/download/ReddingSessumsMaryAnnBrownResearchNotes.pdf)).

41. 1850 US census, Shelby Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 35, dwell./fam. 485 for Eliely Sessums. 1880 US census, Johnson Co., Tex., pop. sch., prect. 7, ED 87, p. 24, dwell. 203, fam. 215 for Annie Shaw; NARA microfilm T9, roll 1313.

42. In April 1889, her brother-in-law A. B. Neal filed his “settlement” as her guardian; see Comanche Co., Tex., probate file 198, “A. A. Shaw Lunatic,” guardian’s settlement; *FamilySearch*, DGS 7022993, images 359–61.

43. Ellis Co., Tex, marriages, unknown vol., p. 366, Shaw-Sessums, licensed 13 Sep 1870, married 9 Oct 1870; “Texas, U.S., Select County Marriage Records, 1837–1965,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com/search/collections/9168](http://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/9168)).

44. The 1850 and 1860 censuses place his birth between 2 Jun 1825 and 1 Jun 1826; the 1830 census uses a tick mark for him in the 5–10 column. See 1830 US census, Covich Co., Miss., p. 119 (penned), Redding Sessums; NARA microfilm M19, roll 70. Also, 1850 US census, Shelby Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 35, dwell./fam. 484. Also, 1860 US census, Ellis Co., Tex., pop. sch., Red Oak Creek p.o., p. 53, div. 7, dwell. 679, fam. 656; NARA microfilm M653, roll 1293.

45. Ellis Co., Tex, marriages, B:366, Henry Shaw-Alsey Ann Sessums, licensed 13 Sep 1870, married 9 Oct 1870; *FamilySearch*, DGS 4820351, image 418.

46. 1850 US census, Shelby Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 35, dwell./fam. 484, cites her as “Mary.” Also, 1860 US census, Ellis Co., Tex., pop. sch., Red Oak Creek p.o., p. 53, dwell. 679, fam. 656, cites her as “M.M.” The 1931 death certificate of their son “Wm Buck” Sessum cites her as “Martha”; see “Texas Deaths, 1890–1976,” *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1983324](http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1983324)) > Death certificates > 1931 > Vol 102–108, certificates . . . Colorado–Tarrant counties > image 2098. Shelby’s marriage records are destroyed for this period.

47. 1830 US census, Covich Co., Miss., p. 119, Redding Sessums.

48. *History of Texas Supplemented with Biographical Mention of Many Families of the State* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1896), 337–39, autobiography of Allen B. Neal, husband of Permeasa Sessums and son-in-law of Redding and Mary Ann; imaged online at *Internet Archive* ([archive.org](http://archive.org)).

- iv. PERMEASA SESSUMS, born 31 March 1829, Copiah County, Mississippi. On 20 June 1855 in Navarro County, Texas, she married Allen B. Neal.<sup>49</sup>
  - v. WILSON RUSSELL “RUSS” SESSUMS, born December 1833,<sup>50</sup> likely Copiah County, Mississippi, where his father was taxed that year;<sup>51</sup> died after 21 January 1902.<sup>52</sup> On 28 September 1855 in Johnson County, Texas, he married Eliza A. Ratlif.<sup>53</sup> Russ was the family member who initiated the Choctaw claims.
  - vi. ELIZABETH SESSUMS, born about 1835–36, Mississippi;<sup>54</sup> married 18 March 1863 in Ellis County, Texas, William Fleming.<sup>55</sup>
3. MARY “POLLY” SESSUMS, born about 1800, Sampson County, North Carolina;<sup>56</sup> last of record on the 1880 census, Leake County, Mississippi.<sup>57</sup> On 13 January 1820 in Lawrence County, Mississippi, she married Neal Williams. His father John co-signed the marriage bond; her father Jacob penned his permission.<sup>58</sup> Polly and Neal were the parents of
- i. FEMALE CHILD, born about 1821, perhaps in Lawrence County; enumerated on 1830 census as aged 5 to 10.<sup>59</sup> Not enumerated in 1840, when

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49. *History of Texas*, 337–39, citing Permeasa's birth and marriage dates, as well as marriage place.

50. 1900 US census, Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory, T2N R3E, ED 133, sheet 5B, dwell. 20, fam. 21; NARA microfilm T623, roll 1847.

51. “Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951,” *FamilySearch* > Copiah > County tax rolls 1823–1860, Box 3781 > image 180.

52. Testimony of Reuben P. Sessums, referencing “the old man W. R. Sessums” as still living, filed in “Dawes Packets,” *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/54727018](http://www.fold3.com/image/54727018)), Choc. MCR 184, John Sessums, Claimant.

53. Marion Day Mullins and Norma Rutledge Trimmer, transcribers, “Johnson County, Texas, Marriage Records, 1843–1880” (MS, 1955), unpaginated (roughly chronological), 28 Sep 1855, “W. R. Sessums–Eliza A. Ratlif (under 18 years)”;

FamilySearch Library microfilm 227498, item 5, image 25. A more-original record of the marriage has not been obtainable.

54. 1850 US census, Shelby Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 35, dwell./fam. 485. Also, 1860 US census, Ellis Co., Tex., pop. sch., Red Oak Creek p.o., div. 7, p. 53, dwell. 678, fam. 655.

55. Ellis Co., Tex., Marriage Book B:106; *FamilySearch*, DGS 4820351, image 286.

56. The 1860 census cites her age as 59 (i.e., born 2 June 1800–1 June 1801). Madison Co., Miss., pop. sch., Canton p.o., p. 74, dwell. 533, fam. 531; NARA microfilm M653, roll 586. The 1800 census, for which enumeration began the first Monday in August, cites one female child 0–5 in the parental household; Sampson Co., N.C., Fayetteville Dist., p. 531, line 16, Jacob Sessums.

57. 1880 US census, Leake Co., Miss., pop. sch., stamped p. 427-C, ED 51, p. 35, unnumbered dwellings and families, Thomas Sessums household with “Mary Williams, Sister”; NARA microfilm T9, roll 653.

58. Lawrence Co., Miss., Marriage Book 1:33, 46–47; Office of the Circuit Clerk, Monticello. For all known records created by and about Neal and Polly, see Mills, “Neal Williams (c1795–aft. 1863) & Spouse Mary ‘Polly’ Sessums (c1800–aft. 1880): Research Notes”; *Historic Pathways* ([www.historicpathways.com/download/WilliamsNealMarySessumsResearchNotes.pdf](http://www.historicpathways.com/download/WilliamsNealMarySessumsResearchNotes.pdf)).

59. 1830 US census, Simpson Co., Miss., p. 186, line 22, Neal Williams NARA microfilm M19, roll 71.

- she would have reached marriageable age.<sup>60</sup> No further trace of this daughter has been found.
- ii. CHILD, born about 1823, perhaps in Lawrence County; death reported on 1825 state census of births and deaths for 1824.<sup>61</sup>
  - iii. JOHN WILLIAMS, born about 1825;<sup>62</sup> died between November and December 1862 in Confederate service.<sup>63</sup> On 8 June 1844, he married Jenette Johnston<sup>64</sup> either in Newton or Attala County, Mississippi,<sup>65</sup> where pre-1858 courthouse records were also destroyed.<sup>66</sup> As a widow, Jenette moved her family to Johnson County, Texas, to join kin. By 1900, she had moved with relatives to the Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory. There, her son James A. J. Williams, daughter Dicie (Williams) Wren, and grandchildren filed Choctaw claims that outlined their descent from Jacob and Penny, through their father John Williams and grandmother Polly Sessums.<sup>67</sup>
  - iv. THOMAS WILLIAMS, born about 1827 and enumerated as a tick mark in the parental home on the 1830 and 1840 censuses; died after February 1858, when he and brother John filed a petition in Madison County, Mississippi, on behalf of “our father Neill Williams.”<sup>68</sup> The 1850 census

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60. 1840 US census, Newton Co., Miss., p. 142, line 17, Neal Williams. The error-plagued 1840 census of Newton attributes two young females to the family, aged 5–10 and 15–20. Those tallies should be 5–10 and 10–15. These two female children were Penny, born 1832, and Gracie Luvicy, born May 1830 (tallied on 1 June 1830 census as 0–5, thus 10–15 on 1 June 1840).

61. “Mississippi, U.S., State and Territorial Census Collection, 1792–1866,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1125](http://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1125)) > Lawrence > Not Stated > images 4 (“Niel” Williams) and 6 (for county totals). This census has been separated from the page that dates it; Ancestry cites it as undated. The column tallies on the last page (154 white births, 41 white deaths, 24 persons over 70) exactly match the statistics on a lone sheet imaged in a different collection from the same repository, a sheet labeled “Return of the Census of Lawrence County for the year 1825 together with a return of the births and deaths of 1824”; see “Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951,” *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9PWR-VQ6](http://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9PWR-VQ6)) > Lawrence > 1825 State Census > image 3.

62. 1860 US census, Leake Co., Miss., pop. sch., Carthage p.o., p. 82, dwell./fam. 533, adjoining brother Jacob Williams; NARA microfilm M653, roll 586.

63. “Civil War Service Records (CMSR)—Confederate,” *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/83128445](http://www.fold3.com/image/83128445) and six subsequent images).

64. “Dawes Packets, *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/60104584](http://www.fold3.com/image/60104584) and 60104585), affidavit of claimant Dicie V. Wren, Choc. MCR 6153, stating the maiden name of her mother and marriage year of her parents. Jenette/Jenetta appears as “Minetta” on the 1860 US census, Leake Co., p. 82, dwell./fam. 533.

65. John’s parents moved from Newton to Attala about the time of his marriage.

66. “Attala County, Mississippi, Genealogy,” *FamilySearch Research Wiki*; losses confirmed by on-site visit to the county courthouse.

67. “Dawes Packets,” *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/60104584](http://www.fold3.com/image/60104584) and 26 subsequent images), 19 Aug 1902, affidavit of claimant Dicie V. Wren, MCR 6153, especially family chart at 60104610. *Ibid.* ([www.fold3.com/image/56063520](http://www.fold3.com/image/56063520)), affidavit of claimant James A. J. Williams, MCR 5571.

68. Madison Co., Miss., Chancery Cause 915, Neill Williams; *FamilySearch*, DGS 5818715, images 645–50.

of adjacent Attala County presents Thomas as a young farmer, twenty-three, with an implied wife Elizabeth, eighteen, living six houses from his sister Luvicy and her new husband.<sup>69</sup> Thomas does not appear on the 1860 or later censuses; nor is he identified among the many Thomas Williamses who enlisted in (or were conscripted into) the Confederacy.

- v. GRACIE LUVICY WILLIAMS, born about 1829;<sup>70</sup> tallied in parental household in 1830 as aged 0–5.<sup>71</sup> In Attala County, in 1849, she married Francis Marion Gatlin.<sup>72</sup> The couple moved to Jones County, Mississippi, to work with his brother; amid the hardships of Reconstruction, they returned to Luvicy's siblings in Leake County<sup>73</sup> before moving with extended kin to Johnson County, Texas.<sup>74</sup> During their brief 1879 stay in Leake County her son Major Slade Gatlin married Rhoda Ann Elmira Elizabeth Odom, daughter of Shad Odom's son Sam.<sup>75</sup>
- vi. PENNY A. WILLIAMS, born about 1831–32; died after the 1870 census of Holmes County, Mississippi,<sup>76</sup> where fire destroyed many records in 1884.<sup>77</sup> About 1854, while Penny's parents resided in Attala, she married Jeremiah Gatlin. After he was conscripted into Confederate service, she apparently lived with her parents; in January 1863, the county board that oversaw the welfare of soldiers' wives and children authorized a payment to her father for "furnishing Mrs. Gatlin 227 lbs. pork 27.50."<sup>78</sup>
- vii. JACOB N. WILLIAMS, born about 1834–35; lived in 1860 next to his brother John Williams;<sup>79</sup> died after the 1880 Leake County census that places

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69. 1850 US census, Attala Co., Miss., pop. sch., p. 169 (stamped), dwell. 1162, fam. 1166, Thos. Williams and 169v, dwell. 1168, fam. 1172, F. M. Gatlin; NARA microfilm M432, roll 368.

70. "Alabama, Texas and Virginia, U.S., Confederate Pensions, 1884–1958," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1677/images/32241\\_1220701439\\_2214-00430](http://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1677/images/32241_1220701439_2214-00430)), application of Mrs. Luvicy Gatlin (widow of Francis M. Gatlin) age 71, 7 Jun 1900, Johnson Co., Tex.; signed with her X mark.

71. 1830 US census, Simpson Co., Miss., p. 186, Neal Williams.

72. "Alabama, Texas and Virginia, U.S., Confederate Pensions, 1884–1958," application of Mrs. Luvicy Gatlin.

73. 1860 US census, Jones Co., Miss., pop. sch., Ellisville, p. 60, dwells./fams. 392, Mitchel Gatlin and 393, F. M. Gatlin; NARA microfilm M653, roll 584. Also, 1880 US census, Leake Co., Miss., pop. sch., Beat 2, ED 49, p. 23, dwells. 197–99, fams. 202–04.

74. "Alabama, Texas and Virginia, U.S., Confederate Pensions, 1884–1958," application of Mrs. Luvicy Gatlin.

75. Leake Co., Miss., Marriage Record F:127, M. S. Gatlin to Miss E. Odom; *FamilySearch*, DGS 7724347, image 73.

76. 1870 US census, Holmes Co., Miss., pop. sch., Ebenezer p.o., stamped p. 131 (penned p. 17), dwell. 134, fam. 143; NARA microfilm M593, roll 731.

77. "Holmes County, Mississippi, Genealogy," *FamilySearch Research Wiki*; losses confirmed via on-site visit.

78. *The American Citizen* (Canton, Miss.), 9 Jan 1863, p. 2, col. 4. For Jeremiah's service, see "Civil War Service Records (CMSR)–Confederate," *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/83319360](http://www.fold3.com/image/83319360)).

79. 1860 US census, Leake Co., Miss., pop. sch., Carthage p.o., p. 82, dwell./fam. 532.

his residence between his sister Luvicy and her newlywed Gatlin son who had married Jacob's daughter.<sup>80</sup> About 1856, apparently in Attala, Jacob married Mary A. [—?—].<sup>81</sup> He served the Confederacy but spent much time hospitalized from battle wounds and disease.<sup>82</sup>

- viii. SOLOMON D. WILLIAMS, born between March and June 1837; died in Confederate service about mid-1863 after multiple hospitalizations for disease and battle wounds.<sup>83</sup> On 11 July 1859 in Madison County, Mississippi, he married Ellen Fisher.<sup>84</sup> The 1850 census places Solomon in the parental household in Attala County; the 1860 return cites Solomon and Ellen next door to his parents in Madison.<sup>85</sup>
- ix. SARAH WILLIAMS, born about 1843–44; died after the 1860 Madison census, where she still lived in the parental home. No subsequent marriage of a Sarah Williams has been conclusively tied to her. Her birth after Shad Odom's wife died eliminates her from consideration in this project.
- 4. FEMALE SESSUMS, born about 1800–10; one of three females in that age bracket enumerated for Jacob and Penny on the 1810 census. One of the three died before 1820<sup>86</sup> and one should be Charity, below. No marriage or children have been found for the second daughter who survived until 1820.
- 5. FEMALE SESSUMS, born about 1800–10; not in the parental household in 1820.<sup>87</sup>
- 6. THOMAS SESSUMS, born about 1807, Kentucky,<sup>88</sup> died after the 1880 census of Leake County, Mississippi.<sup>89</sup> On 24 September 1829 in Rankin County,

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80. 1880 US census, Leake Co., Miss., pop. sch., Beat 2, ED 496, p. 23, dwells. 197–99, fams. 202–04.

81. Period of marriage extrapolated from 1860 census data.

82. "Civil War Service Records (CMSR)—Confederate," *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/79419287](http://www.fold3.com/image/79419287)).

83. "Civil War Service Records (CMSR)—Confederate," *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/79420042](http://www.fold3.com/image/79420042) and eleven subsequent images).

84. Madison Co., Miss., Marriage Record G:266; *FamilySearch*, DGS 7724349, image 555.

85. 1850 US census, Attala Co., Miss., pop. sch., p. 328 (stamped), dwell. 1110, fam. 1114. Also, 1860 US census, Madison Co., Miss., pop. sch., Canton p.o., p. 74, dwells. 533–34, fams. 531–32.

86. 1810 US census, Christian Co., Ky., p. 573, line 8, Jacob Sessons; NARA microfilm M252, roll 9. Also, 1820 US census, Lawrence Co., Miss., pop. sch., p. 64, line 34, Jacob Sessims; NARA microfilm M33, roll 57.

87. 1810 US census, Christian Co., Ky., p. 573, Jacob Sessons. Also, 1820 US census, Lawrence Co., Miss., pop. sch., p. 64, Jacob Sessims.

88. 1850 US census, Newton Co., Miss., pp. 184v and 185, dwell. 431, fam. 431, Thomas Sessions age 43, next door to brother-in-law Shadrock Odham. Also, 1860 US census, Newton Co., Miss., pop. sch., Union p.o., p. 102, dwell. 682, fam. 657, Thomas Cessum age 53; next door to brother-in-law Samuel Cooksey.

89. 1880 US census, Leake Co., Miss., pop. sch., stamped p. 427-C, ED 51, p. 35, unnumbered dwellings and households, Thomas Sessums household shared with "Mary Williams, Sister."

Mississippi, he married Zilpha “Zilphy” Cooksey.<sup>90</sup> Their ages and marriage date eliminate Thomas and Zilphy from consideration as parents of the female whom Shad Odom married in 1837.

7. CHARITY SESSUMS, born about 1810, Christian County, Kentucky;<sup>91</sup> died after the 1880 census of Smith County, Texas.<sup>92</sup> Shortly before June 1830 in Simpson County, where marriage records are destroyed, she married Jesse Courtney; no children appear in their 1830 household adjacent to her parents.<sup>93</sup> As a widow in 1850, she and her children lived with her brother Reuben in Shelby County, Texas.<sup>94</sup> About 1852, likely in Shelby County where marriage records are destroyed, she married William Nail who died before the 1860 census where she and her children appear adjacent to the younger W. A. Nail and four houses from her newly married son Jake Courtney.<sup>95</sup> Charity's daughters, on the basis of age, can be eliminated from consideration.
8. SARAH SESSUMS, born March 1816, Kentucky; died after the 1900 census, Angelina County, Texas.<sup>96</sup> About 1833, in Simpson County, Mississippi,

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90. Rankin Co., Miss., Marriage Book 1:16; Office of the Circuit Clerk, Brandon.

91. 1860 US census, Shelby Co., Tex., pop. sch., Beat 8, Buenavista p.o., p. 75, dwell./fam. 489, Charity Nail; NARA microfilm M653, roll 1304. Her newly married son Jacob “Jake” Courtney is four houses from her at 485/485. Her birthplace is based on the fact that her father was taxed that year in Christian County.

92. 1880 US census, Smith Co., Tex., pop. sch., prect. 2, ED 111, p. 12, dwell./fam. 108, living adjacent to daughter Lishabie (Mrs. Daniel) Shed; NARA microfilm T9, roll 1327.

93. 1830 US census, Simpson Co., Miss., p. 186, Jesse Courtney; living between Jacob Sessums and brother-in-law Neal Williams.

94. 1850 US census, Panola Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 154, dwell./fam. 137, adjacent to their brother Solomon D. Sessums; NARA microfilm M432, roll 913.

95. 1860 US census, Shelby Co., Tex., pop. sch., Beat 8, Buenavista p.o., pp. 74–75, dwells. 485, 488, 489, fams. 485, 488, 489. Charity's two oldest at-home children, born of Jesse Courtney, are assigned their mother's married name: Nail. No known record explicitly names Charity's Nail husband. Tradition holds that he was the Nail family's aging head, William. That tradition is supported by the county tax rolls which drop the oldest William between 1857 and 1858, the period in which Charity conceived her last child. See “Texas, County Tax Rolls, 1837–1910,” *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1827575](http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1827575)) > Shelby county > 1857 > image 15; 1858 > image 17.

96. 1850 US census, Simpson Co., Miss., pop. sch., p. 318, dwell./fam. 436; NARA microfilm M432, roll 381. Also, 1860 US census, Trinity Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 61, Sumpter p.o., dwell. 370, fam. 369; NARA microfilm M653, roll 1306. Also, 1900 US census, Angelina Co., Tex., Justice Precinct 4, ED 4, p. 101A, dwell. 59, fam. 61, Francis Courtney household with “Sarah, Mother”; NARA microfilm T623, roll 1607.



where marriage records are destroyed, she married Rev. Samuel Courtney.<sup>97</sup> On the basis of their birth dates and Sarah's age, Sarah's daughters can be eliminated from consideration as the female Shad Odom married in 1837.

9. SOLOMON D. SESSUMS, born 1819–20, Mississippi; died after the 1870 census of Panola County, Texas. About 1846, apparently in the burned county of Shelby where his father resided before Panola was created, he married Margaret [—?—].<sup>98</sup> Some of their children also filed Choctaw claims. Based on their birth dates and Solomon's age, they can be eliminated as the female Shad Odom married in 1837.
10. JACOB SESSUMS JR., born about 1823, Mississippi; died, unmarried, 1 January 1848, at the stated age of twenty-four, in the U.S. General Hospital at Xalapa, Vera Cruz, a casualty of the Mexican War.<sup>99</sup> He appears immediately after his brother Solomon on the 1847 Panola tax roll.<sup>100</sup> His age eliminates him as a potential father for the female Shad Odom married in 1837.
11. REUBEN FISHER SESSUMS, born 1824–25; last on record 29 July 1867.<sup>101</sup> On 25 November 1856, in Panola County, Texas, he married Nancy Fleming.<sup>102</sup>

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97. The identity of Sarah's husband is established by the above-cited censuses of 1850–60. Sarah's maiden name is cited on the death certificate of her son Isaac Newton Courtney; "Texas Deaths, 1890–1976," *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1983324](http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1983324)) > Death certificates > 1934 > Vol 75, certificates . . . Harris-Jefferson counties > image 468. The 1833 Mississippi state census, Simpson Co., enumerates Samuel Courtney as a household of one male and one female, with no children, suggesting that they (who were not householders on the 1830 federal census) were newlyweds at their first appearance in 1833; see "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* > Simpson > County tax rolls 1824–1845, Box 3764 > images 92–93 (Courtney), 95 (Sessum). While the film label describes the record as a "tax roll," the document's header on image 92 (as well as the content of the document) clearly identifies it as a census.

98. 1850 US census, Panola Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 154, dwell./fam. 136, Solomon Sesom, adjacent to brother Reuben and widowed sister Charity Cortney. Also, 1870 US census, Panola Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 50, Beat No. 1, dwell./fam. 418, adjacent to son Reuben; NARA microfilm M593, roll 1601.

99. "Mexican War Service Records—Texas," *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/272714504](http://www.fold3.com/image/272714504) and twenty-three subsequent images), for Jacob Sessum, 3d Corporal, Texas, 1st Mounted Volunteers, Mexican War; citing NARA, *Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Soldiers Who Served During the Mexican War in Organizations from the State of Texas*, microcopy 278, roll 4.

100. "Texas, County Tax Rolls, 1837–1910," *FamilySearch* > Panola > 1847 > images 12–13. The Jacob of this tax roll was not Jacob Sr. because contemporary Texas law set a maximum age of fifty-five for poll tax. See *Early Laws of Texas: General Laws from 1836 to 1879*, 2d ed., 3 vols. (St. Louis, Mo., Gilbert Book Co., 1888), 2:150, ch. 21, art. 1877 §2.

101. The 1850 and 1860 censuses place his birth between 2 Jun 1824 and 1 Jun 1825. See 1850 US census, Panola Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 154, dwell./fam. 137, Reuben Sessom, living with widowed sister Charity Cortney adjacent to brother Solomon Sesom. Also, 1860 US census, Ellis Co., Tex., p. 102, Red Oak Creek p.o., dwell. 697, fam. 674. Also, Johnson Co., Tex., voter registration, 1867, p. 435, Sessums R F; "Texas, U.S., Voter Registration Lists, 1867–1869," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2274](http://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2274)).

102. Panola Co., Tex., Marriage Book A:217; *FamilySearch*, DGS 7255682, image 132.

Some of their descendants also filed Choctaw claims. Reuben's age eliminates him as a potential father of Shad Odom's wife.

### *Assessing the Results*

This genealogical summary of the Sessums family in Mississippi when Shad married his unidentified wife, leaves two females unaccounted for:

- **Female Sessums**, born 1800–1810 to Jacob and Penny. She appears as a tick mark in 1810 and 1820 censuses. She does not appear in 1830; did not marry during the 1820–25 period when her parents lived in Lawrence, where marriage records survive; and has not been found in marriage records of other Mississippi counties. Research on her parents and their FAN suggests no adult identity for her. Were she the 1837 wife of the significantly younger Shad, her age at first marriage would have been highly irregular in her society.
- **Female Williams**, born to Neal and Mary “Polly” (Sessums) Williams about 1821, based on her siblings' birth patterns. On the 1830 census she appears as aged 5–10 and would have been about sixteen when young Shad Odom married his first wife.

Thus, only one viable candidate for Shad's wife in the Sessums family remains: the female child born to Neal and Polly Williams about 1821. Two additional steps can test the hypothesis.

1. Reconstruction of the lives of Neal and Polly Williams. That should associate them with, or place them near, Shadrack Odom at the time of the marriage. It may reveal records that establish a connection.
2. DNA study. Because Shad's first wife's proposed parents would be five generations removed from the writer, autosomal DNA lies at the cusp of usability for reliable evidence. Given the targeted families' number of offspring, some autosomal matches would be expected.

### *Neal and Polly (Sessums) Williams*

Neal Williams first appears in Lawrence County on the state census, as a young male under twenty-one but already independent.<sup>103</sup> On 11 January 1820, he asked the county court for a license to marry Polly Sessums, presenting her father Jacob's permission and signing the marriage bond with his father John Williams as surety. The couple married two days later before a justice of the peace.<sup>104</sup>

This John Williams and his wife Rhoda, like Jacob and Penny Sessums, had brought their family to South Mississippi from Sampson County, North Carolina,

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103. “Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951,” *FamilySearch* > Lawrence > 1818 State Census > image 22.

104. Lawrence Co., Miss., Marriage Book 1:33 (bond) and 46 (return); Office of the Circuit Clerk, Monticello.

where John's family had been enumerated in 1800 and 1810.<sup>105</sup> He acquired three tracts of land in Lawrence County, Township 9 North, Range 18 West,<sup>106</sup> and died there after the 1850 census, surrounded by numerous offspring.<sup>107</sup>

Neal and Polly's lives were far less stable. Of legal age when he married, Neal was liable for an annual poll tax. However, he does not appear on county tax rolls until 1828. Like his brother-in-law Redding Sessums, reportedly a house carpenter in this decade,<sup>108</sup> Neal likely moved from job to job.

The 1825 state census, which reported 1824 births and deaths, documents Neal in Lawrence County in 1825, and the death of one of his family members,<sup>109</sup> however, he was not taxed there. By 1828 he had settled with Polly's father in adjacent Simpson County (subsequently burned), where he was enumerated in 1830 and taxed in 1828 and 1832.<sup>110</sup> The 1833 state census shows Neal and Polly had left Simpson County again.<sup>111</sup>

The 1833–1843 decade marked major upheavals for everyone in Polly's family. The 1830 Choctaw Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek opened new land in East Central Mississippi. The Sessums clan succumbed to the pull. Polly's brother Thomas entered government land in the region that became Newton County, being one of the first

105. 1800 US census, Sampson Co., N.C., p. 528, John Williams. Also, 1810 US census, Sampson Co., N.C., p. 161, line 8, John Williams; NARA microfilm M252, roll 42.

106. Images of John's three patents are available at US Department of the Interior, *Bureau of Land Management*, for 1826 and 1841 tracts in present Jefferson Davis Co., Miss.

107. 1850 US census, Lawrence Co., Miss., p. 405v, dwell./fam. 121 for John, Rhoda, their widowed daughter Elizabeth Bridges and her five children; NARA microfilm M432, roll 386. Other sons and daughters surround them in the neighborhood. For all known documents created by and about John, Rhoda, and their children in early Lawrence Co., see Mills, "Williams & Associates of Lawrence County, Mississippi, 1814–c1860," report, 31 Jul 2021; archived online, *Historic Pathways* ([www.historicpathways.com/download/Williams-LawrenceCoMS.pdf](http://www.historicpathways.com/download/Williams-LawrenceCoMS.pdf)). Also, see Mills, "Reassembling the Family of John & Rhoda Williams, Pioneers of Lawrence County, Mississippi: A Proof Argument," 26 Sep 2022; archived online, *Historic Pathways* ([www.historicpathways.com/download/WilliamsJohnRhodaReassemblingFamilyProofArgument.pdf](http://www.historicpathways.com/download/WilliamsJohnRhodaReassemblingFamilyProofArgument.pdf)).

108. A family account penned by Redding's son-in-law asserts that Redding built the first house in Jackson, Mississippi's capital, where settlement began in 1821. See *History of Texas Supplemented with Biographical Mention of Many Families of the State*, 337–39.

109. "Return of the Census of Lawrence County for the year 1825 together with a return of the births and deaths of 1824," previously cited.

110. 1830 US census, Simpson Co., Miss., p. 186, line 22, Jacob Sessoms, 23, Jesse Courtney (married to Charity Sessums), and 24, Neal Williams (married to Polly Sessums). Also, "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* > Simpson > County tax rolls 1824–1845, Box 3754 > 1828, images 37 (Sessom), 38 (Williams); and 1832, image 73 (Williams).

111. "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* > Simpson > County tax rolls 1824–1845, Box 3764 > [1833] images 92–93 (Courtney), 95 (Sessums). This state census is clearly labeled "census" but is filmed with tax rolls and does not appear in the separate groupings for Mississippi state censuses that are offered by *FamilySearch* and *Ancestry*.

thirty-five taxpayers in 1834.<sup>112</sup> Polly's brother Redding moved to adjacent, and new, Kemper County,<sup>113</sup> but soon left for Texas. Her father Jacob—absent from Simpson County tax records after 1834—moved to Newton with son Thomas and son-in-law Samuel Courtney. Polly and Neal joined them there.<sup>114</sup> Jacob was beyond the age for poll-tax liability and bought no federal land in Newton County. He appears on no surviving record there until the 1840 census.

Neal also avoided taxation in those years but was enumerated in Newton's federal census of 1840 and on the 1841 state census. Those two records link Neal Williams to his proposed son-in-law Shad Odom. Table 1 shows the sequence of entries on each year's return.

Table 1 1840 and 1841 Residences, Newton County, Mississippi	
1840 CENSUS <sup>a</sup>	1841 CENSUS <sup>b</sup>
<i>p. 142, consecutive entries</i>	<i>image 1, consecutive entries</i>
Samuel Cooksey [brother-in-law to TS]	Samuel Cooksey [brother-in-law to TS]
Zilpa Cooksey [mother-in-law to TS]	<b>Shadrack Odom</b> [m. Elizabeth Cooksey]
<b>Thomas Sessoms</b> [TS]	David Gill [brother-in-law to TS]
<b>Neil Williams</b> [husb. of Polly, sister of TS]	<b>John Coosey</b> [brother-in-law to TS]
	[skip 2]
	<b>Thomas Sessums</b> [TS]
<i>p. 141, consecutive entries</i>	<i>image 3, consecutive entries</i>
John Parks [brother-in-law to TS]	John Parks [brother-in-law to TS]
John Cooksey [brother-in-law to TS]	[skip 3]
[skip 6]	<b>Niel Williams</b>
<b>William Odom</b> [father of Shad]	<b>William Odom</b> [father of Shad]
<b>Shadrack Odom</b>	
<i>Sources:</i>	
a. 1840 US census, Newton Co., Miss., p. 141, begin line 2, and p. 142, begin line 13; National Archives and Records Administration, microfilm publication M704, roll 216.	
b. "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," <i>FamilySearch</i> ( <a href="http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687">www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687</a> ) > Newton > State census returns, Unknown > images 2, 4. The cover page for this census, dated 1841, is filmed (without the return) at > Newton > State census returns, 1841, Box 4887 > image 2.	

112. "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* > Neshoba > County tax rolls 1834, Box 3711 > image 3.

113. "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* > Kemper > County tax rolls 1834, Box 3675 > image 5 (Sessums).

114. 1840 US census, Newton Co., Miss., p. 142, Samuel Cooksey, Zilphia Cooksey, Thos Sessoms, Niel Williams. Samuel Courtney is not on the 1840 census but appears on Newton's 1840 tax roll, previously cited.

In short:

- In 1840 the Neal Williams family lived next to Polly's brother Thomas Sessums.
- In 1841 the Neal Williams family lived next to Shad Odom's father, William (a resident of Chunky Creek, about six miles from the Sessums-Cooksey lands off Conehatta Creek).<sup>115</sup>
- Meanwhile, Shad married (second) Thomas Sessums's sister-in-law and left the parental farm to live amid the new wife's kin.

Therefore, the 1840 and 1841 censuses suggest that Shad Odom and Neal Williams exchanged homes between the two enumerations.

Neither Neal Williams nor his father-in-law remained in Newton. Jacob Sessums and his younger sons moved to Texas where the oldest son Redding lived. Neal and Polly moved north to Mississippi's Attala County. Several of their children married there—again in a county with no surviving court, deed, marriage, or probate records for the years of their residence there.<sup>116</sup>

In 1854 the Williamses moved again, this time across the county line into Madison (the corner where Attala, Leake, and Madison abut; see figure 1). There, Neal bought federal land and paid taxes.<sup>117</sup>

In February 1858, Neal's two oldest sons initiated *non compos mentis* proceedings for their father, saying he had suffered mental issues since birth. The court appointed "twelve good discreet and lawful men . . . to make inquisitions." When they concluded "that Mr. Neil Williams is incapable of Managing his own property," a neighbor was

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115. William Odom's land lay in S20 T8N R12E; Thomas Sessums's land lay in S5 T8N R11E. See US Department of the Interior, *Bureau of Land Management*, search terms Mississippi: Newton; Odom, William; and Sessums, Thomas.

116. "Attala County, Mississippi, Genealogy," *FamilySearch Research Wiki*; losses confirmed by on-site visit to the county courthouse.

117. On 12 Dec 1854, Neal paid for 80 acres in the E½ of the SE¼ of Section 23, Township 12 North, Range 5 East, Choctaw Meridian; the patent was not issued until 1 Oct 1859. See "United States Bureau of Land Management, Tract Books, 1800–c.1955," *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2074276](http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2074276)) > Mississippi > Vol. C3 > image 143 (original p. 140). For the patent, see US Department of the Interior, *Bureau of Land Management*, search terms Mississippi: Neal Williams. Neal was taxed for the land on Madison's first surviving tax roll after this purchase; see "Mississippi State Archives, Various Records 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* > Madison > County tax rolls 1857, Box 3719 > image 124.

appointed his financial guardian.<sup>118</sup> In 1859, when his first annual account should have come due, the county's probate, deed, and court records lapse for six years.<sup>119</sup>

The 1860 census shows Neal with Polly and their last daughter, adjacent to their youngest son who had just married.<sup>120</sup> A war-time court order, published as a legal notice, reveals Neal was alive in January 1863. The county was reimbursing citizens who supported families the soldiers had left behind. Neal received \$27.50 for "furnishing Mrs. Gatlin 227 lbs. pork."<sup>121</sup>

At that point, Neal Williams drops from public records. He and Polly are not on the 1870 census.<sup>122</sup> In 1880, the propertyless widow "Mary Williams," by then an octogenarian, lived with her brother Thomas Sessums in Leake County. No county where family members lived has a probate for Neal Williams—hence, no record naming Shad Odom's sons Sam and John as heirs to their late mother's share of land Neal apparently owned at his death.<sup>123</sup>

### *Evaluation*

Sessums and Williams research crisscrossed twenty-seven counties in seven states, yielding no *direct* evidence that a daughter of Neal and Polly (Sessums) Williams was the mother of Sam and John Odom. No document explained why newlyweds Sam and Elizabeth (Boyd) Odom shared their home with Thomas Sessums's son in 1860. All other members of Shad's FAN had been eliminated.

All other branches of the Sessums family had been eliminated also, except for Thomas Sessums's sister Polly and her husband. Polly and Neal had one missing daughter of age to be Shad's wife. One pair of censuses, 1840 and 1841, provide a concrete link between Shad and the Williamses—placing Neal and Polly next door to Shad's parents, seemingly in the home Shad had just vacated.

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118. Madison Co., Miss., Chancery Cause 915, Neill Williams; *FamilySearch*, DGS 5818715, images 646–50. Also, Madison Co., Miss., Probate Minutes, Book 7:481–82; *FamilySearch*, DGS 5818262, images 788–89.

119. "Madison County, Mississippi, Genealogy," *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, reports no "known history" of record loss but that assessment misses a critical gap in records during the Civil War period. *FamilySearch* does offer images of a volume labeled "Deed Records, Vol. P, 1859–1865" (DGS 8201454) but the content jumps from 1859 to 1865, leaving six years undocumented. The missing records were not found in an on-site visit.

120. 1860 US census, Madison Co., Miss., pop. sch., Canton p.o., p. 74, dwell. 533, fam. 531, N. Williams, and dwell. 534, fam. 532, Solomon Williams.

121. "Board of Police," *American Citizen*, 9 Jan 1863, p. 2, col. 4; reprinted 27 Mar 1863, p. 1, col. 4.

122. The 1870 Leake Co., Miss., census omits the neighborhood in which Polly's son and daughter, J. N. Williams and Luvicy (Williams) Gatlin, are found in 1880.

123. No deed record suggests the sale of his land. The first post-war land-tax roll that survives for Madison Co., 1887, taxes his land to one J. B. Cauthen; see "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," *FamilySearch* > Madison > County tax rolls 1887–1888, Box 3940 > image 151. Research into the Cauthens has not proved a connection.

## DNA EVIDENCE

Exhaustion of the documentary trail left one set of evidence to be explored: DNA. Y-DNA and mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) were inappropriate for this problem, requiring an unbroken male line or an unbroken female line. Autosomal DNA (atDNA) remained an option.

However, the number of intervening generations and the typically small size of shared segments at that genetic distance lie at the edge of what is currently considered reliable.

Three conditions needed to be met for atDNA to support the hypothesis drawn from the documentary evidence:

- atDNA matches must exist between Sam Odom's offspring and those of Polly and Neal.<sup>124</sup>
- atDNA matches should exist between Sam's offspring and those of Polly Sessums's siblings.
- atDNA matches should exist between Sam's offspring and those of Neal Williams's siblings.

All three conditions have been met. The centiMorgans (cM) that Sam Odom's great-granddaughter (designated ESM on figures 2–4) shares with tested descendants of the Sessums and Williams families fall within the designated range for the kinship proposed in each case.<sup>125</sup>

All proposed kinships also fall within the general range that AncestryDNA's match list suggests and the more specific relationships projected by AncestryDNA's ThruLines for those matches whose trees proved accurate (or were satisfactorily corrected). Three charts graph the results:

1. Matches between Sam Odom's line and siblings of his proposed mother, [—?—] Williams.
2. Matches between Sam Odom's line and descendants of Polly Sessums's siblings.
3. Matches between Sam Odom's line and descendants of Neal Williams's siblings.

AncestryDNA's database offers eighty-six matches between Sam's descendant ESM and identifiable descendants of Polly and Neal, Polly's siblings, and Neal's

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124. This condition should also exist for tested offspring of Sam's full brother John. At this writing, only six identifiable descendants have tested (all of whom also share multiple other ancestral lines) and none have agreed to share their DNA data or to upload results to *GEDmatch* so that potential Sessums and Williams matches might be explored.

125. Blaine T. Bettinger, "The Shared cM Project Version 4.0 (March 2020)," *The Genetic Genealogist* ([thegeneticgenealogist.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Shared-cM-Project-Version-4.pdf](http://thegeneticgenealogist.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Shared-cM-Project-Version-4.pdf)).

siblings. Four matches had errant trees and descend from other ancestors held in common with ESM.

The trees of six matches had to be built or corrected before results could be evaluated. Thirty-nine of the eighty-two valid matches were not used for this paper because they also descend from Polly's brother Thomas Sessums and his Cooksey wife; that they also match ESM through Odom, Cooksey, and Watts ancestry would skew the analysis.<sup>126</sup> Eleven others were similarly excluded because of intermarriage with other branches of ESM's tree.

Of the remaining thirty-two valid matches, nineteen responded when asked to participate in this project. Six of those nineteen are not included among charted matches because they descend from lines otherwise represented. The fourteen charted individuals include thirteen who agreed to be identified.<sup>127</sup> The identity of the fourteenth has been privatized.<sup>128</sup>

None of the nineteen respondents had uploaded their AncestryDNA data to *GEDmatch* for chromosome analysis. Three agreed to do so, but that sampling is too small to effectively triangulate segments at a genetic distance of five to eight generations. *GEDmatch*'s shared-match feature revealed no other matches from the targeted families.<sup>129</sup>

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126. For a discussion of the issues posed by this situation, see Kimberly T. Powell, "The Challenge of Endogamy and Pedigree Collapse," in Debbie Parker Wayne, ed., *Advanced Genetic Genealogy: Techniques and Case Studies* (Cushing, Tex.: Wayne Research, 2019), 127–53. The number of matches in this project allows the writer to set aside this branch and still have sufficient matches (and a sufficient number of lines of descent) to test this paper's hypothesis.

127. The response rate is not surprising. Across five decades of the author's research, this branch of her family has been protective of its privacy and resistant when family tradition has been challenged—especially the most sacred tradition: the belief in an (allegedly Choctaw) "Indian princess."

128. Thomas W. Jones offers ethical guidance on this point: "If a living person withholds permission, the author can use genetic data without personally identifying information. . . . When someone withholds permission to share identifying information, the genealogist should redact not only the person's identifying information but also parental information that could identify the person. See Jones, "Writing about, Documenting, and Publishing DNA Test Results," in Wayne, *Advanced Genetic Genealogy*, 277–302; for quote see p. 292.

129. *GEDmatch* (www.gedmatch.com) also allows analysis of shared segments below the 8 cM minimum threshold set by Ancestry. Re the statement "the sampling is too small": The odds that any *two* 5C (fifth cousins, that being the most-common relationship in this project) would inherit the same 10 cM (the most common segment size in this project) are .000163% (1.63E-04), according to Leah LaPerle Larkin, "What Are the Odds?" *The DNA Geek: Mixing Science and Genealogy* (thednageek.com/what-are-the-odds : posted 4 Jun 2017), chart "Probability of a segment of a given size being shared by two people after N transmission events." A more-recent study by Amy Williams of Cornell, using the university's Ped-sim (Pedigree Simulator) software, projects that if the minimum threshold is lowered to 7 cM, then *three* 5C stand a 0.116% chance of sharing the same segment; see Williams, "How Often Do Two Relatives Share DNA?" *Hapi-DNA: Tools and Tips for Genetic Genealogy* (hapi-dna.org/2020/11/how-often-do-two-relatives-share-dna-2 : posted 3 Nov 2020). Segment triangulation at this genetic distance requires segment analysis of a significantly larger pool of matches.



None of the fourteen charted matches have tested at other companies that also offer a chromosome browser. The shared-match tool at AncestryDNA, which suggests possibilities for genetic triangulation, is limited to matches that share more than 20 cM.<sup>130</sup> Only one of the fourteen matches meets this criteria for comparison, a fifth cousin once removed, while AncestryDNA recommends the tool for fourth-cousin range or closer.<sup>131</sup> Thus, the conclusions drawn from this research rest upon tree triangulation.<sup>132</sup>

For each matching line, the writer has researched every parent-child and sibling link and all relevant details within the line to the MRCA (Most Recent Common Ancestor). The tree of each charted match has been studied sufficiently to determine that no other shared ancestors exist within the generations defined by the size of the shared segments.

The eighteen pages of documentation for the lineages of these fourteen charted matches exceed the space a journal article can allot. Two workarounds have been applied. First, every generational link, date, place, and identity is documented in the author's public tree, with information privatized only for living individuals.<sup>133</sup> Second, the eighteen pages of documentation for the charts have been posted as an appendix at the author's website *Historic Pathways* under Research > Sessums.

As an overview for the fourteen matches to ESM on figures 2–4:

- All range between third cousin twice-removed and fifth-cousin once-removed.
- After the application of Ancestry's Timber algorithm, ten of the fourteen

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130. This 20 cM minimum at AncestryDNA is further reduced by its proprietary algorithm, Timber, whose premise holds that when any two matches share a segment with thousands of other people, it is likely to be a cultural inheritance rather than a match within a genealogically relevant timeframe. The algorithm then filters out segments deemed to be “due to more distant relationships,” and uses only the remainder for its matching criteria. If the down-weighted total does not meet other criteria, a match is not reported. If the remaining segments meet other criteria, then AncestryDNA reports the number of shared centiMorgans as “weighted” (meaning that Timber has been applied), and “unweighted.” See Julie Granka, “Filtering DNA Matches at AncestryDNA with Timber,” *Ancestry* (blogs.ancestry.com/techroots/filtering-dna-matches-at-ancestrydna-with-timber : posted 8 Jun 2015).

131. “What Are Shared Matches?” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com/cs/dna-help/matches/shared-matches : undated).

132. For tree triangulation versus segment triangulation and the value of each, see Jim Bartlett, “Lessons Learned from Triangulating a Genome,” in Wayne, *Advanced Genetic Genealogy*, 1–25. Bartlett (p. 9) defines tree triangulation as “finding at least three Matches in a TG [triangulated group] who all [share] the same MRCA [Most Recent Common Ancestor],” adding, “the three Matches should be no closer than first cousins to each other.” The results of the Sessums-Williams project observes the last criteria and significantly exceeds the first. Bartlett also recommends (p. 15) “A *rule-of-thumb* is that the number of Match/families with MRCAs in a TG needs to be at least the same number as the number of “Greats” in the MRCA.” This criterion has also been met or exceeded for each Sessums or Williams couple who serves as MRCAs.

133. See Elizabeth Shown Mills, “Shown-Jeffcoat Family,” user-contributed tree, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/71173579).

matches fall within the 10–19 cM range, one shares 38 cM, and three share only 9 cM.<sup>134</sup>

- Four lines stem from three siblings of Shad's proposed wife.
- Five lines stem from five siblings of Polly (Sessums) Williams, Shad's proposed mother-in-law.
- Five lines stem from three siblings of Neal Williams, Shad's proposed father-in-law.

The degree of completeness of ESM's tree within the relevant time frame allows no other position in which to place these Sessums and Williams matches. Moreover, ESM's AncestryDNA matches include another twenty-nine descendants of Jacob Sessum's father Isaac, grandfather Nicholas, and great-grandfather Nicholas. These have not been included in this proof argument because of space limitations and the complexities that would be introduced by adding three additional generations of matches. Still other matches at *23andMe* and *FamilyTreeDNA* are excluded for the same reasons.

#### SHAD'S FIRST WIFE: CONCLUSION

Thorough and systematic research, the FAN principle, and DNA allow the identification of Shadrack Odom's first wife—at least, by birth family if not by given name. Beyond reasonable doubt, and despite obstacles posed by a slew of burned counties, Shad married the eldest daughter of Neal and Polly (Sessums) Williams, born about 1821 in Lawrence County, Mississippi.<sup>135</sup> Neither genetic nor documentary research has generated a competing hypothesis. Four strands of tradition and one additional piece of evidence support this conclusion:

- Previously reported assertions by some Odom genealogists that Shad's first wife was Margaret *Williamson* have never been attributed to anything but “tradition.” This project suggests the tradition hints at a core truth—Shad's wife was a *Williams*, rather than a *Williamson*.
- The previously reported list of Shad's children, which his elderly grandson Esrom Odom penned in 1971, includes a son named *Neal*, who reportedly died young.<sup>136</sup> That son, with a unique name in the

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134. Bartlett, who has mapped almost all segments of his 23 chromosome pairs to specific ancestral couples, reports comparable results, stating (p. 5): “The bulk of my TGs are in the 10–20 Mbp (or cM range).” That parallels this Sessums-Williams project.

135. The relationship questioned at the start of the paper—between Shad's son Sam Odom and the Solomon Sessums who shared his 1860 household—was indeed much closer than the two collateral relationships known at the beginning of the Sessums research (i.e., “nephew of stepmother” or “wife's half-cousin-once-removed.” Sam's mother was Solomon's first cousin.

136. 1840 US census, Newton Co., Miss., p. 141, Shadrack Odom.

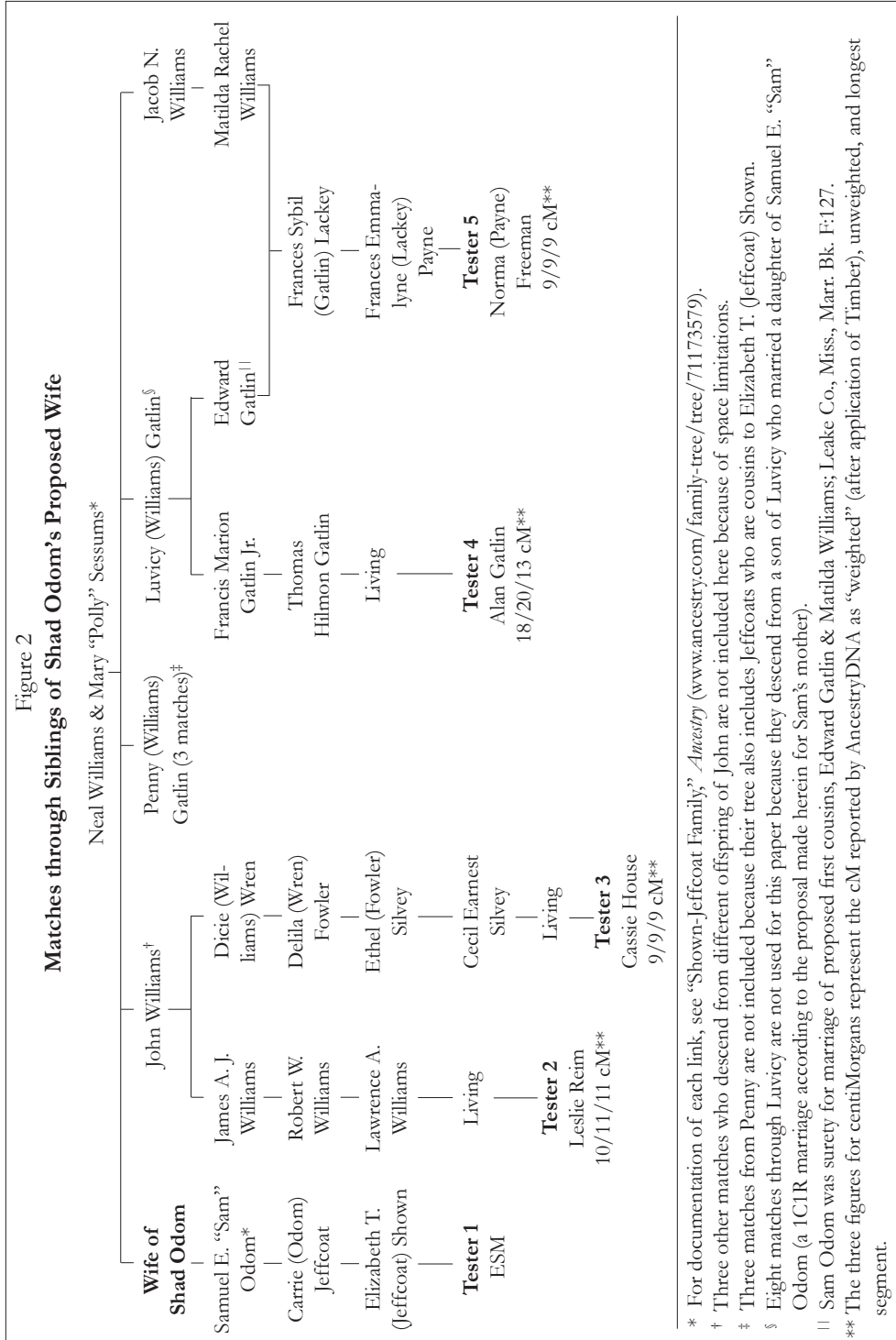
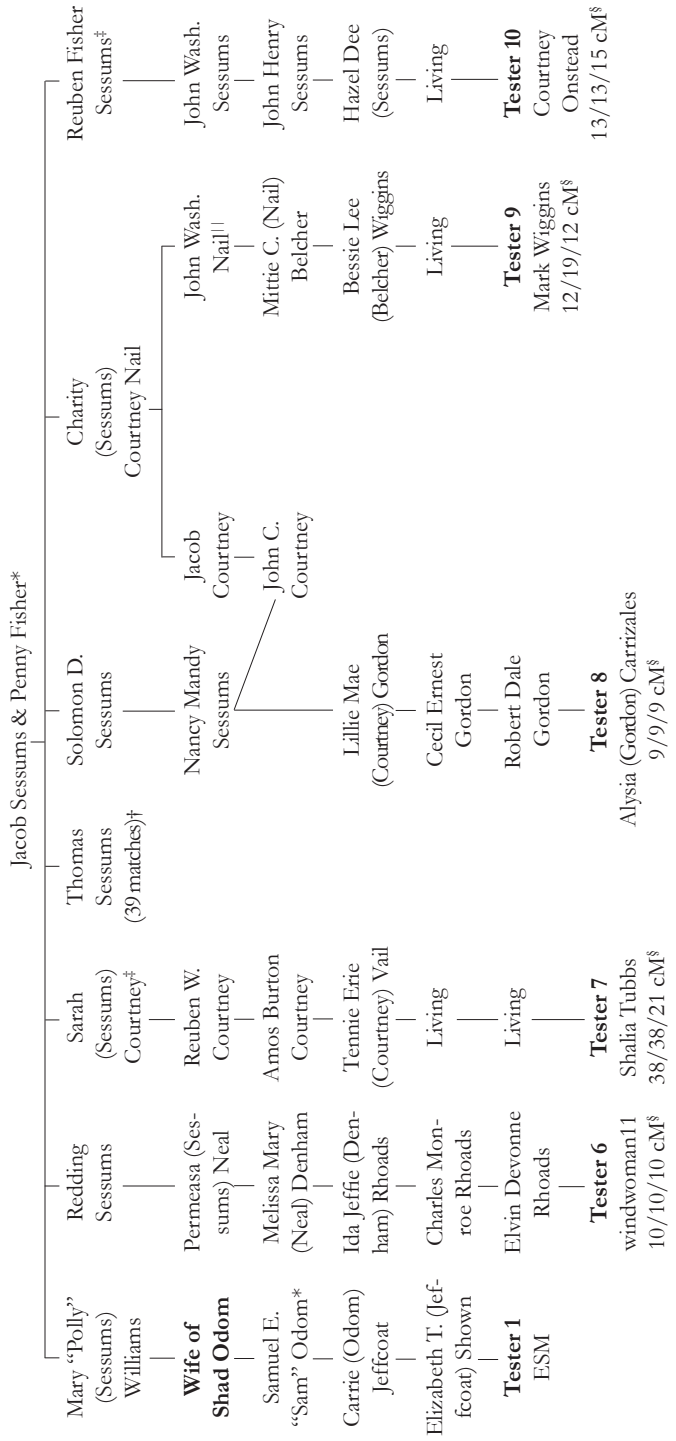


Figure 3  
Matches through Siblings of Mary "Polly" (Sessums) Williams



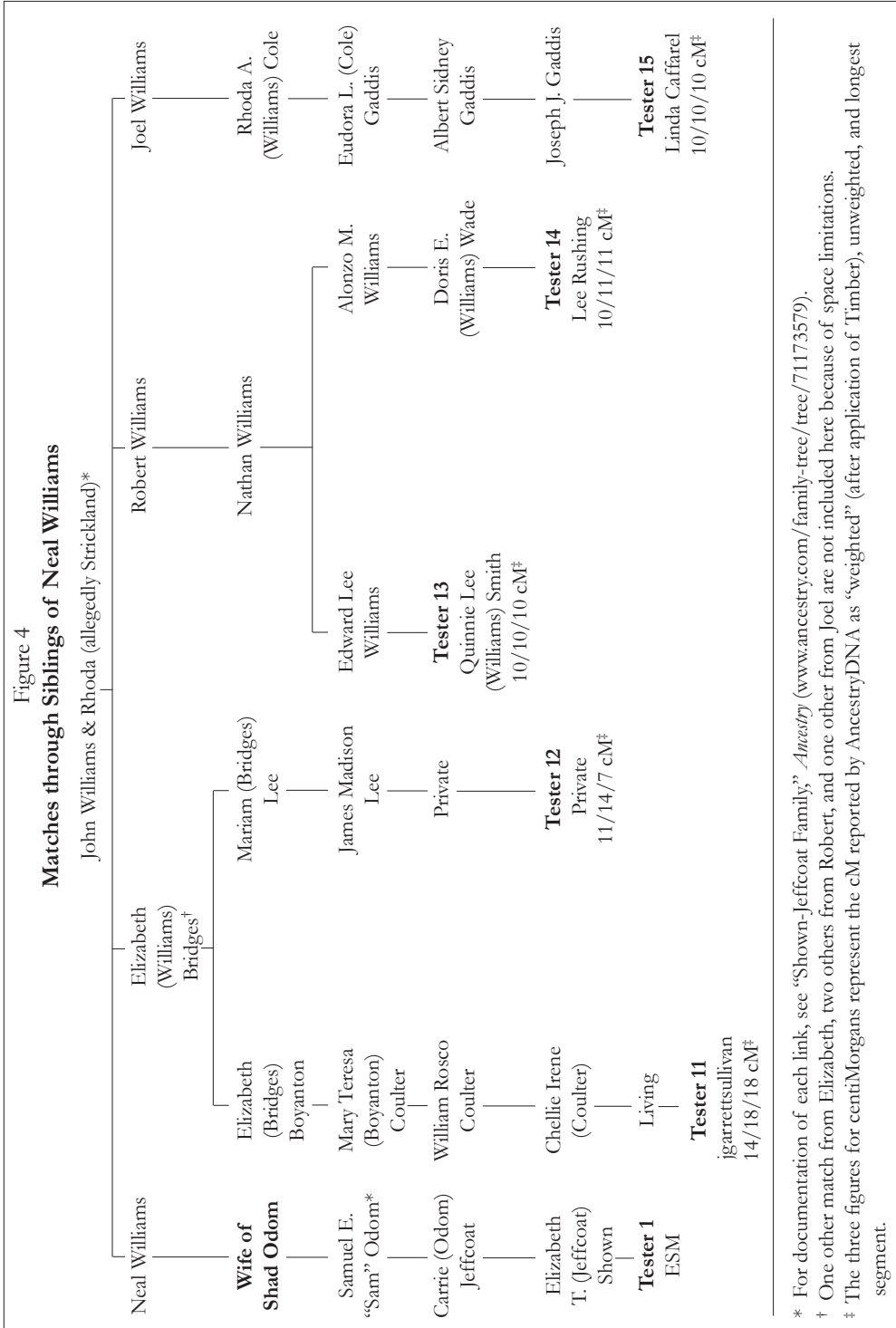
\* For documentation of each link, see "Shown-Jeffcoat Family," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/71173579](http://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/tree/71173579)).

† Thirty-nine matches through Thomas are not used to test this paper's hypothesis because they also share ESM's Odom and/or Watts-Cooksey ancestry through Thomas's wife Zilphy Cooksey, a three-fourths sister of Shad Odom's second wife, Elizabeth Cooksey.

‡ Four matches through Sarah and one match from Reuben's son John Washington Sessums are not included because of space limitations.

|| John Washington Nail also married his first cousin Mary Frances Sessums, daughter of Solomon D. Sessums.

§ The three figures for centiMorgans represent the cM reported by AncestryDNA as "weighted" (after application of Timber), unweighted, and longest segment.



Odom-Boyd-Cooksey-Jeffcoat-Watts family cluster, carried the name of his proposed grandfather, Neal Williams.

- A key tradition among Sessums and Williams descendants, that Polly Sessums's mother was Native American, also exists among Sam Odom's descendants. Sam's youngest daughter Carrie asserted it to this writer in her childhood. Carrie was a young woman when her Sessums-Williams cousins filed their Dawes Commission claims.<sup>137</sup> While the Dawes Commission or the existing body of evidence did not uphold that tradition, it nevertheless points to potential for Polly's mother's birth family. Penny Fisher was born in a county (Sampson, North Carolina), particularly known for Native-rooted multiracial families that merged into the dominant "White" society.
- A fourth tradition also stems from Carrie Odom. According to Carrie, her teenaged crush was her cousin Jesse Odom, son of Sam's brother John. Her mother Elizabeth forbade a marriage, saying there would never be *another* cousin marriage in the family.<sup>138</sup> Until then, in Carrie's conventionally proved ancestry (that of her mother and her father's father), *no* instance of any ancestor marrying a cousin had been found.

The current argument supports Carrie's mother's position. Carrie's older sister Rhoda Ann Elmira Elizabeth Odom married 30 July 1879, Major Slade Gatlin,<sup>139</sup> son of Luvicy Williams and Francis Marion Gatlin Sr. Slade's maternal grandparents were Neal Williams and wife Mary "Polly" Sessums.<sup>140</sup> If this paper's argument is correct, Elmira married her father's first cousin.

- On the day Slade Gatlin posted bond to marry Elmira, with her father Sam Odom as his bondsman, Sam also served as bondsman for Slade's brother Edward to marry Matilda Rachel Williams. Both couples were married before the same minister.<sup>141</sup> Matilda, daughter of Jacob N. Williams, wed her first cousin Edward, son of Luvicy (Williams) Gatlin.<sup>142</sup> Both were grandchildren of Neal and Polly, and both would have been Sam's first cousins, based on

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137. Carrie (Odom) Jeffcoat to the author, interview for the latter's 1958 school project, "Who Am I?"

138. Jeffcoat, interview, 1958.

139. Leake Co., Miss., Marriage Record F:127, M. S. Gatlin to Miss E. Odom.

140. Mills, "Neal Williams (c1795–c1863) & Spouse Mary 'Polly' Sessums (c1800–aft. 1880): Research Notes," pp. 4–6.

141. Leake Co., Miss., Marriage Record F:127, E. Gatlin to Miss M. A. [R.] Williams; *FamilySearch*, DGS 7724347, image 73.

142. Eleven months later, the 1880 enumerator recorded the married cousins living in three consecutive households with both sets of parents. US census, Leake Co., Miss., pop. sch., Beat 2, ED 49, p. 23, dwell. 197, fam. 202, F. M. Gatlin, and wife "Levicy," both aged 50, with children; dwell. 198, fam. 203, J. N. Williams and wife Mary, aged 45 and 49; dwell. 199, fam. 204, Edward Gatlin and wife Matilda [née Williams], aged 23 and 19, sharing their home with "aunt" Martha Gatlin, aged 56.

this paper's identification of Sam's mother—hence, Sam's service as their bondsman.

Only the family's naming patterns suggest a given name for Shad Odom's first wife: this first-born child of Neal and Polly might have been named *Rhoda* or *Rhoda Ann* for her paternal grandmother, Rhoda (allegedly Rhoda Ann Strickland) Williams. Two factors support the theory:

- When young widower Shad Odom took a new wife and she immediately bore him a daughter, they named her *Rhoda*. The new wife had no sister, mother, or grandmother named Rhoda. However, by common custom throughout the American South, when a young wife died without a daughter to carry on her name and the husband remarried, the first daughter of the new marriage often was given the name of the departed wife.<sup>143</sup>
- Shad's son Sam Odom and his wife Elizabeth Boyd produced six daughters. Most had either one or two names; but one daughter had four: Rhoda Ann Elmira Elizabeth.<sup>144</sup> *Elizabeth* was the name of the child's mother and the paternal step-grandmother who had reared the child's father. *Elmira* was the name of the child's *maternal* grandmother. For the first two names, *Rhoda Ann*, to be given in memory of the child's other grandmother, Shad's first wife—herself the granddaughter of a Rhoda—would follow the pattern suggested by the child's other two names.

Every genealogical researcher hopes to prove each ancestral link with direct evidence from reliable and unambiguous sources. Reality often delivers a different outcome. When marriages and deaths occurred in counties whose legal records were destroyed during the span of their lives there,<sup>145</sup> when a young wife died before censuses named her, when her children died before their society kept vital records, alternate strategies had to be devised and used. The four most productive in this case were the application of exhaustive research in surviving records; the extension of that research to include all members of the husband's FAN to eliminate candidate families and develop plausible hypotheses; the elimination of competing hypotheses; and finally the testing of the remaining hypothesis against genetic evidence, adhering to genealogical standards for the type of DNA used.

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143. Genealogical literature offers no thorough study of naming patterns in the American Southeast. In making this observation, the author is drawing upon her own five decades of research in the society under study.

144. For the documented details of this family unit, see Mills, "Jane's Offspring," 69–71.

145. The total count for burned counties through which Jacob and his children were tracked is thirteen: one in Tennessee, ten in Mississippi, and two in Texas.

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# Was Leonard Baumgardner (1755–1839) of York, Pennsylvania, the Father of Anna Maria “Mary” Wehrly Meyers (1791–1852)? Using Conflict Resolution to Establish Identity

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By Lynn Nelson, CG

*Multiple conflicts raised questions about Mary’s identity. Resolving those conflicts in light of cultural and historical context connected her with her father.*

**M**ary Wehrly was a woman of many names. Records associate her with four given names and three surnames. The multiple names, a curious chronology, and three apparent burial locations suggest the records are for more than one person.

Documents for Leonard Baumgardner provide no surname for his daughter Mary, obscuring her identity. Despite this ambiguity and the many contradictions in Mary’s documents, several compiled works report Mary as Leonard Baumgardner’s daughter, without explanation.<sup>1</sup> Citing these issues the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution denied a 2019 application, though earlier applications for the same relationship have been accepted.<sup>2</sup>

Viewing Mary’s documents within cultural and local historical context resolves many conflicts and determines they are for one woman. Further analysis and correlation of documents confirm Mary as Leonard Baumgardner’s daughter.

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1. Membership application, Edward Albaugh Heckert, National no. 45689, on Leonard Baumgardner (Pennsylvania), approved 29 Oct 1927, National Society Sons of the American Revolution; *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2204](http://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2204)). Also, *FamilySearch* Family Tree, ID 9KXG-QNK, Anna Maria Baumgardner (1791–1852); *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/9KXG-QNK](http://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/9KXG-QNK)). Multiple online *Ancestry* trees, for example, “Public Member Trees,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1030](http://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1030)), “Gayle Morris Family Tree,” family tree by “perl23,” profile for Anna Maria Baumgardner (1791–1852).

2. A letter from the Office of the Registrar General of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, dated 19 Jun 2019, requesting additional documentation to establish the identity of Leonard Baumgardner’s daughter Mary. This was in response to a DAR supplemental application, national number 839400, for member Catherine Tymniak, for ancestor Leonard Baumgardner. The letter was sent as a photograph via email. Catherine Tymniak, [EMAIL FOR PRIVATE USE], email to author, thread dated 12 Aug 2019, “Re: Status update - Mary (Baumgardner) Wehrly Meyer research assignment”; author’s files. Also, Daughters of the American Revolution, “Ancestor Search,” entry for Leonard Bumgardner, Ancestor # A016905; *DAR Genealogy Research* ([http://services.dar.org/Public/DAR\\_Research/search/?Tab\\_ID=1](http://services.dar.org/Public/DAR_Research/search/?Tab_ID=1)).



## LEONARD BAUMGARDNER

Leonhardt Baumgaertel, later Leonard Baumgardner (about 1755–1839) of York, Pennsylvania, is well documented in historical records and genealogical biographies. He is also the subject of several portraits by an early nineteenth-century York folk artist. Leonard came to the American Colonies during the Revolutionary War, part of the Hessian auxiliary troops contracted by King George III to support British forces. Leonard, like many of the so-called Hessian troops, was not in fact from the German state of Hesse. He hailed from Ansbach, Bavaria, and was quoted in one biographical sketch saying, “Listen you, before this I was from Ansbach.”<sup>3</sup>

Colonial forces captured Leonard at the Battle of Yorktown, Virginia, in October 1781. He was held prisoner in Winchester until his release as part of a prisoner exchange.<sup>4</sup> He deserted the British on 2 October 1782.<sup>5</sup> Wanting to remain in America, he enlisted in Armand’s Legion of the American Continental Army, and served until discharged in York, Pennsylvania, in November 1783.<sup>6</sup> He stayed in York for the rest of his life, marrying and raising a family there.

Baptismal registers of Christ Lutheran Church identify six of Leonard’s eight known children, but not Anna Maria “Mary” or anyone with a variant of that given name.<sup>7</sup> The church register documents baptisms for his children born before and after Mary’s reported 1791 birth date, but no entry exists for her, nor for one other

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3. For his birth year, Application of Leonard Baumgartner for bounty land, 5 Mar 1828, York, Pa., number B.L.Wt. 1305-100, p. 3; Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files; Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15; National Archives, Washington, D.C.; *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/12737808](http://www.fold3.com/image/12737808)). For his birth year and death date, “Died . . . Another Revolutionary Hero Gone,” *Pennsylvania Republican* (York, Pa.), 27 Mar 1839, p. 2, col. 8. For his background as a Hessian soldier, Lion G. Miles and Jonathan R. Stayer, *The Hessians of Lewis Miller* (Millville, Pa.: Precision, 1983), chapter for Leonard Baumgardner, p. 1, the source of the quote. Also, Jonathan Stayer, “Hessians of Lewis Miller: Assimilation of German Soldiers in America after the Revolution” (master’s thesis, Pennsylvania State University–Harrisburg, 1988), 29; consulted at the York County History Center, York.

4. Miles and Stayer, *The Hessians of Lewis Miller*, Baumgardner chapter, p. 1. Also, Witness deposition, 5 Feb 1838, Leonard Baumgardner, pension application no. W4513, Lewis Shelley (York Co., Pa.); RG 15, NA–Washington; *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/16560134](http://www.fold3.com/image/16560134)).

5. Clifford Neal Smith, *Mercenaries from Ansbach and Bayreuth, Germany, Who Remained in America after the Revolution* (McNeal, Ariz.: Westland Publications, 1979), 9.

6. Miles and Stayer, *The Hessians of Lewis Miller*, Baumgardner chapter, p. 1. Also, Application of Leonard Baumgartner for bounty land, 5 Mar 1828, York, Pa., no. B.L.Wt. 1305-100, p. 5; *Fold3* ([www.fold3.com/image/12737816](http://www.fold3.com/image/12737816)).

7. Christ Lutheran Church (York, Pa.), 1733–1801, vol. 1, register; *FamilySearch* ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)), Image Group Number (DGS) 7856724, images 108–202. Author searched page by page of the chronologically organized baptism records from 1785 through 1807. Most pages were unnumbered; some years had numbered entries. Although the *FamilySearch* catalog indicates that Volume I for this church includes entries from 1733 to 1801, it actually includes baptism entries into 1855. No entry was found for Anna Maria Baumgardner or variants. For her siblings, see Catarina, image 109; Peter, image 111; Rebekah, image 128; Daniel, image 143; Salome, image 153; Samuel, image 195.