

BENJAMIN LEIGH

Every family, admittedly or not, has a black sheep, and Benjamin, “the bigamist” is the one in Gilbert Leigh’s family. Benjamin was born about 1783 possibly in Bertie County, North Carolina, the youngest son and surviving child of Gilbert Leigh, “Architect”, and Elisabeth (Foster) Leigh. Little is know of his early life, but it is most probable that early in life he was apprenticed, as his brother James had been, to one of his older brothers, probably Richard. In 1806 he married Sarah (Knowles) Jackson Weeks, a woman said to be old enough to be his mother. The attraction? Mrs. Weeks was twice widowed and very wealthy. They had no children—she was probably past childbearing age.

The next we hear of Benjamin in North Carolina is in a petition for divorce dated Sept. 28, 1814 filed by Sarah Leigh. “...about Twelve Months ago the Aforesaid Leigh [Benjamin] has left her and Removed to the State of Tennessee as she is currently informed, taking with him Another woman (whom she is informed he has since married) and Also the greatest part of the property which he had by her at the time of their intermarriage...” She goes on to say she fears he will return and take away what little she has left and asks the legislature to pass an act to secure it for her. The Legislature may have granted her a divorce, but it did not approve her petition to secure the remainder of her property. But don’t feel too sorry for Sarah. Benjamin did not come back for more, and her will, dated April 15, 1831 and probated in Perquimans Co Feb. 1833 indicates she still had many assets, particularly in slaves.

Tennessee property records (Williamson Co Deed Book “C”, p 499) show Benjamin Leigh bought from William Perry for \$1000.00 90 acres on the Big Harpath River, bounded by Perry, Wm Tarkington and the middle of the Harpath River. The deed was dated October 7, 1813 and registered Jan. 1, 1814. He added in 1817 additional lands on both sides of the Big Harpath. The land backed up to the Natchez Trace, the military road between Nashville and New Orleans, and tradition says that Andrew Jackson and his men forded the Harpath in back of the Leigh home on their way to New Orleans. There is a picture of the Leigh homestead, much altered from its original state, as it was in 1970 in *Historic Williamson County: Old Homes and Sites* by Virginia McDaniel Bowman. I find it amazing that the homes of four of Gilbert’s five sons remain standing into the twentieth century. They must have been really good builders.

Tennessee marriage records show a bond for the marriage of “Benj. Lee to Patsy Barlett” May 3, 1814, Henry Hadger bondsman. Remember “Patsy” was a common nickname for Martha. She was either pregnant at the time, or had already given birth to their oldest daughter. My records show that her maiden name was Whedby. **Mary Fouts has information from Mrs. Lula Fain Major of Franklin, TN that gives the following information: Martha’s first husband, Capt. Barclift was lost at sea. She had two little girls, Lidia and Ann. I wonder if they stayed in North Carolina with the Barclift or Whebee family or made the journey to Tennessee.** Benjamin and Martha had five children, four daughters and a son. The 1850 Williamson County census shows Martha

[daughter] as 36, Mary 34, Elizabeth 33, Lavina 32, and Gilbert, 31, all born in Tennessee.

Benjamin made his will May 1, 1820; it was probated April, 1831 Court (Williamson County Will Book 5, pp. 18-19). In it he names his wife, Patsy, “which was the widow of William Barclift in North Carolina and moved with me from there and we was married at this place”, daughters Patsy [Martha], Mary, Betsy [Elizabeth], Levina and son, Gilbert. Wife Martha died also in Williamson County in 1844.

It has been suggested that Whitmill Leigh, from Perquimans County, was the son of Benjamin Leigh. I do not believe that is the case. Some say he was married before Sarah, his first wife being from the influential Whitmill family in Hertford Co NC. Speculation is that she died in childbirth in 1806 and he immediately married Sarah. Others say Whitmill was Benjamin’s and Sarah’s child, born before their marriage. Both hypotheses seem to me trying to make something fit that doesn’t. Why would they send the child off with some non-related person before Benjamin left for Tennessee? I think it is much more likely that Whitmill is the descendant of another Leigh from the Albemarle or Tidewater Virginia area or even from the King William or King & Queen area.

In doing some research for Dick Purser I have been reading some correspondence from Cynthia Urfer regarding the Richard Leigh bibles and her mother’s memories. She indicates that after the War and after the death of Richard Leigh, Jr. the family went to Tennessee, she said to be near the family of James Leigh, Richard’s uncle. I believe she meant Benjamin’s family, as they were in Tennessee.

The oldest daughter of Benjamin and Martha Leigh, Martha, never married and died after 1860. The second daughter Mary C. Leigh (5-1-1815—3-1-1879) married 2-26-1833 in Williamson Co., William Beard Hulme (1-29-1808—11-6-1862) a farmer and neighbor. William was the son of Robert (Bobby) Hulme and his third wife Susan (Beard) Stockett. Three Hulme brothers, George, Robert and William came to Williamson County from Wilkesboro, North Carolina and settled about 1800. A legend about Bobby is that he was very “worldly” prior to a severe earthquake in the region that formed Reel-foot Lake. He, like many others, thought the end of the world was at hand and was thoroughly frightened. From then on he led an exemplary life. As an example of his “worldliness”, he was said to enjoy cock fighting. Mild by today’s standards!

William and Mary Leigh Hulme had many children: listed in the 1850 census as Robert B. 15 (m); John W. 12 (m); Ellen E. 11 (f); Elizabeth S. 10 (f); William B. 6 (m); Fountain E. 4 (m); Mary C. 1 (f). The 1860 census shows two additional children James 7 (m) and Daniel 4 (m) in 1860. Robert [oldest son] was killed at the Battle of Chicamauga, never marrying. He was said to have been kneeling beside a wounded comrade to help him, when word was passed that the enemy was approaching. Robert’s gun was thrust bayonet down, into the ground. As he reached for his gun, a bullet from the gun of the enemy killed him instantly. He was found still kneeling, his knees and gun forming a tripod.

John Wesley Hulme married Sarah J. Cowley. Their children were: William; Fannie m. Vesey; May; Kate m. Hadley; Della m. Pickard; Emma; Bruce. Ellen E. Hulme married 1) John W. Wray, son of Willis B. and Ann H. Wray, in Williamson County 1-25-1859 and 2) Mr. O'Neil. She had one son, William, by the second marriage. Elizabeth Stockett Hulme married Henry C. Hamilton in Williamson County 11-13-1868. Their children were: May m. Baker; Eleazar (died in childhood); Bird m. Calvert; Catherine; Margaret m. Trice; James Winter. William B. Hulme [son] married Sarah Ann Sawyer in Williamson Co. 6-9-1865. A wound received while in the Confederate Army never healed. Children were Robert, Hugh, Walter and William. Fountain Elliott Hulme (3-31-1846—4-13-1927) married Cleo Evans. Their children were Elliot Irving and Kittie Robinson (died in childhood). Mary Catherine Hulme married David Gray Stockey. Children: Albert, Henry, infant daughter, Roland Hill (drowned in early manhood, unmarried). [The date of that marriage that I have is 12-3-1860. If this is true, she would have been 11—young even then. Maybe the date has been miscribed. There was another Mary C. Hulme, 17 at the time, first cousin to this person; it was possibly her, but I have indication she married someone else.] James Joseph Hulme married 1) Sallie Lazenbury in Williamson Co. 12-25-1872. Their children were Laura m. Sweeney and Mary m. Maury. James married 2) Emma Cotton—no surviving children—and 3) Margaret Cotton, son Leigh. Emma and Margaret may have been daughters of Eliza Cotton's (Gilbert's wife) brother, Robert Foster Cotton. Daniel died in childhood. I have tried to contact several Hulmes, but so far unsuccessfully.

Lavina (? Lavinia) Leigh married Agustus D. Frazier 3-2-1834 in Williamson County. He is listed in the 1850 census as a blacksmith. **They had at least one child, Anderson Mayfield Frazier, who had a daughter, Tennessee. There is a descendant of this line, a Mrs. C. P. Nichols, with whom Mary Fouts corresponded in 1975.**

Elizabeth Leigh (1816-1901) married William Armstrong (1809-1879) in Williamson County 11-2-36. William's parents came to Williamson Co. from Franklin Co. VA in 1813. William is listed as a farmer in the 1850 census. Elizabeth and William Armstrong lived in the Leigh homestead, built by Benjamin. They had two sons, William who died in 1860 while studying medicine at the University of Nashville, and Benjamin who married 16 year old Mary O. Reagen in 10-2-1861 just as he was leaving for the Confederate Army. Benjamin Leigh Armstrong was killed at the battle of Murfreesboro in 1862, just before the birth of his child. Before he left for the war he gave his wife a pin for the baby in case he did not return. It was always treasured by his daughter—Willie Armstrong, the late Mrs. J.H.C. Leigh. [Does any one know of this person or her descendants? See later under Gilbert Leigh.] The widow, Mary O. Armstrong married in March, 1875 James Pinkerton, a widower with six children. The Leigh homestead passed to the descendants of Mary C. (Leigh) Hulme. It stayed in the family until 1932.

Gilbert may have been the black sheep of the black sheep. He was the youngest child of Benjamin and Martha Leigh. He was born 5-25-1819 in Williamson Co., TN and died 1-6-1903 in Muhlenburg, KY. He married Eliza Cotton (9-8-1819 – 6-7-189?) on 12-20-1838 in Davidson Co., Tennessee. She was the daughter of Allen Cotton and Mary (Barham) Cotton of Davidson County, TN. The 1850 census gives Gilbert's occupation

as “mechanic”. I don’t know what that would have meant in 1850—certainly not what it means today. Perhaps he worked on repairs of railroads or steamships. In the 1850 census he and wife Eliza and 5 children are shown living next to sisters Lavinia, Elizabeth and Martha in Williamson County. The grand jury, March term 1850, of the Circuit Court of Williamson Co. indicted Gilbert H. Leigh, “late of the county aforesaid” [Williamson] for assault and malicious wounding (possibly attempted murder) of Robert W. Atkinson on Aug. 28, 1848. I wrote to Tennessee Archives for all the records of the indictment and trial. They sent the indictment only. Apparently, there was no trial. Gilbert and family, sensing what was to come left the state and moved to Kentucky. A child was born there in 1851.

The children of Eliza and Gilbert Leigh were: Mary Ann b. 11-7-1839 in Davidson Co., TN, d. May 7, 1928 in Muhlenburg Co., KY; Benjamin Allen, b. 2-15-1842 in TN, d. 9-13-1881, in Muhlenburg, KY; James R., b. about 1843 in TN; Thomas J., b. about 1845 in TN; John Henry, b. about 1847 in TN; Mattie E. b. 1851 in KY; Margaret, b. 1853 in KY; Talitha (Tabitha? This name is spelled differently, each time it is written), b. 9-6-1855 in KY, d. 5-30-1934 in Muhlenburg, KY; and Robert F. b. May 1858 in KY, d. after 1930, presumably in Arkansas.

The Leigh family lived near Greenville, the capital of Muhlenburg, Co. Kentucky. Why Muhlenburg, Ky? I believe they needed to get out of Tennessee and there was a Cotton relative (Stephen) living in Muhlenburg at the time. In the 1860 and 1870 census, Gilbert is described as a “farmer”. In the 1870 census, his sons, Benjamin, James and Thomas were living in his household and also described as “farmers”. Henry was also in the household in 1870, described as a teacher. In the 1860 census Gilbert has \$7,000 real property and \$3,000 personal property. In 1870 those numbers have lowered to \$2500 and \$ 1500.

Mary Ann Leigh married Thomas R. Taggart (1-25-1832—12-28-1875) in Muhlenburg Co. 7-31-1862. Their children were Robert Emerson b. 7-10-1863, d. 10-23-186?; Emmett Taggart b. about 1866; Mary b. about 1869; and Thomas, b. 1871. Thomas, Jr. married Katie H. Hunt (April, 1877-- May, 1963) on Aug, 23, 1898 in Muhlenburg, KY. In the 1900 census they were living with his mother, Thomas working as a farm laborer. Children that survived Katie Hunt Taggart were Mary Catherine (Taggart) Langly of Reseda CA (8-29-1901--1-13-1992) and Thomas Ray Taggart of Tampa FL (3-3-1905 – 8-1984).

Benjamin Allen Leigh died in 1881 without marrying. I have been unable to find anything on James. **I have a document that shows a James Leigh dying in Williamson Co. TN. I can’t remember the date, nor can I locate the document.** He survived the Civil War and was listed in his father’s home in 1880 census as 37 years old and unmarried.

Thomas J. Leigh served as bondsman or surety for both his sister, Maggie, in 1879 and his brother, Robert, in 1896. He was Postmaster for the post office at Belton, then named “Yost”, 8 miles east of Greenville. I can find nothing on a marriage. **Mary Fouts’ information has Thomas Jefferson Leigh as being a great-grandson of Benjamin Leigh.**

His daughter was Eliza Belle Leigh, from Thomas Jefferson Leigh's first wife. His descendants are back in Williamson Co. TN. Could this be a son of Gilbert's son Thomas? A descendant, Robert Waitman Morgan was alive in 1975, living in Franklin, TN (Williamson Co.).

I can also find nothing on "Henry" or "John Henry". I believe if Willie Armstrong married her cousin; if so, where does the "C" come from? 1930 census shows him [J.H.C. Leigh] 82, her [Willie J. Leigh] 67 and shows her age at marriage 23 and his 40. It certainly could be, and probably is that this is "John Henry" Leigh, son of Gilbert and her first cousin, once removed. So far I have been unable to find children.

Mattie married John J. Driskill at her father's home 2-19-1885. Her brother, R.F. Leigh served as bondsman. They are not in the 1900 census in Muhlenburg Co. Maggie married Bennoulli B. Bibb at her father's home 12-24-1879. The 1880 census shows them living with his parents, he farming, she teaching school. There was a B.B. Bibb, b. 12-12-1886, d. 9-2-1955, buried Acadia Parish Louisiana. The dates are right, but I can't verify there is a connection. Talitha F. Leigh was married at her father's home 8-21-1887 to Palace L. Dwyer (Jan 4, 1862 – Dec. 14, 1934). Her brother Robert served as surety. Their children were Raymond H, b. April, 1895 and Morton L. Dwyer b. 12-26 1892 Butler Co., d. 6-25-1969 Muhlenburg Co. Morton married 12-24-1912 Clara Carver (11-3-1895—8-1-1983). They had four sons: James P., Rayburn Jack, Harold E. and Charles and a daughter, Mary C. Raymond married Myrtle_____ and had a daughter, Jane.

Robert F. Leigh, named after Eliza's youngest brother Robert Foster Cotton, married Lizzie Furness 12-30-1896 in Muhlenburg, KY. He was a builder in Todd Co, KY at the time. In the 1900 census they were living in Muhlenburg, KY. His occupation is listed as carpenter. They eventually moved to Van Buren Co., Arkansas. They never had any children.

I have not yet made responsive contact with any person from the Benjamin Leigh line. Although a number of the lines are dead ends, there are still possibilities, and I will continue to try. **Mary Fouts had contact with this line, but it has been some time ago – 1975—but her recent efforts to reconnect has not been successful.** It is difficult trying to trace lines in other states without visiting, and I have not been able to do that.

Virginia Leigh Refo
March 16, 2005