



KNOW YOUR ROOTS

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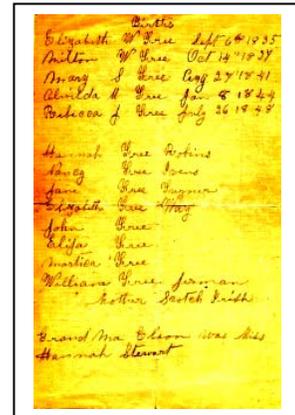
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THE JOHN FREE FAMILY

A lot of time and energy has been spent on our Free family, a family that there was so little information about that it was sort of a mystery. Where did this wife of James Youngs Durland come from? How is it that Harry Durland never talked about his mother, Rebecca? And so the search began and it blossomed into a saga, one that is ongoing in today's technology.

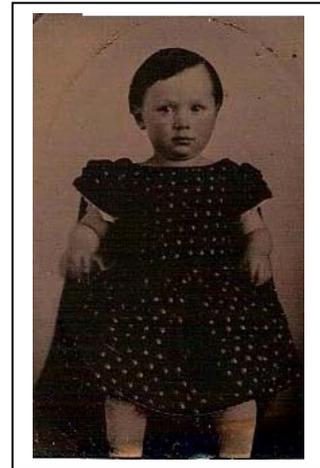
In the beginning years ago all I had was a handwritten paper enclosed in the Dorlandt book. These clues opened up many, many hours of searching and the family of Rebecca Free was traced as far back as Abraham in 1730 in Pennsylvania but then the name stopped. Through Nancy Jackson, who helped me tremendously, we were able to unravel quite a story. But Abraham had to have parents. Who were they? Did they change the name Free as often happens in genealogy searches? Finally, it was ascertained that Free could have been Frey at one time and if so, the answer to these questions can be answered but how to be sure? Fortunately through the newsletters another researcher found me, a descendent of Rebecca's brother, Milton, and her grandfather is still alive. A descendent of the original Frey has his DNA on file. It has to be male through male and our side is all female through Rebecca so it became possible for these male descendents to combine and compare the two. Consequently sometime in the future we may now have the answer to Abraham's parents but if the DNA doesn't provide a clue we are back to square one. Meanwhile we wait.



Little has been written about several of Rebecca's siblings. One who was very active with the family was John. He was the eldest son of the family born in 1826 and farmed with his father, William, from the time he was able through the family moves from Ohio to Illinois. It was in Jersey County, Il. that he met and married Elizabeth Hooper from England. This photo, an ambrotype, I believe to be an early one before his marriage in 1860. Ambrotypes were so fragile, they were displaced by tintypes in 1856. John was 33 when he married Elizabeth so he was a bachelor a long time.

According to some correspondence I received, John and Elizabeth moved to a farm owned by one of the Hoopers, as the 1860 census shows him as head of the household. He was no longer farming with his father. His father was still head of his household in the census of Jersey County in 1865.

The first child of John and Elizabeth arrived in 1861. In a tintype (right) by Rebecca she called him “John’s first child, little Willy.” Of course his name was really William after his grandfather. The tintype was encased in a little box, but it was so dark it was hard to see. A friend cleaned it up and so here is Little Willy without the box. Note the dress on a boy. Putting dresses on young boys was the custom at the time.



Another child wasn’t born to John and Elizabeth until 1864 and that was their first girl, named after John’s mother Mary. Poor child, she looks so unhappy. Note that the tintype was painted, her dress blue and her stockings pink. Undoubtedly it was her mother who was holding her. This photo has been enhanced also and taken out of the box.

Another girl was born in 1866 and was named Alwilda after a sister of John’s but known in the future as Wilda.

Then, unfortunately, John’s mother Mary Elizabeth died in 1866 plus he lost his eldest sister Ruth. These losses must have affected John greatly for I find him buying land in Clay County, Il. in 1867 because his father William sold his farm to William Hooper in 1867 and the Free family moved. John also moved with the family and Elizabeth gave birth to another girl Alma in 1869. In the 1870 census in Clay County, John became the head of the family of Frees, not William, but his father and his siblings all the way through to Rebecca are listed in the same household. One can only assume that his father needed him to help farm. It must have been hard for Elizabeth to leave all the Hoopers, an enormous family, but at that time women followed their men.

Soon, many things happened in the Free family which would affect John. His brother Milton married Susanna Peake in 1870 and had the wanderlust. His sister Rebecca married James Durland in January of 1872 and moved to her own home and his sister Alwilda married Isaac Clark in June of 1872 and also moved away. And then in November 1872 John’s father died. John’s responsibility to the family was over. His unmarried sisters Mary and Elizabeth would start their own lives and John and his wife, the former Elizabeth Hooper, returned to her family in Christian County. Then another son Charles Fred was born in 1877 and Elizabeth was happy, rejoined with the Hooper clan.

So the 1880 census showed John and Elizabeth with five children, but in 1882 Elizabeth had another daughter, Cressie, and John continued to farm through the years. However, when he died 29 October 1890 his estate showed he had no real estate. Elizabeth survived him but I do not have any more information about her. John’s estate was very interesting because of all his assets and much of it was farming equipment. His widow received \$1165 and personal property of \$345.50.

It seems that today the only descendents of John and Elizabeth are from their first child William H. who married, left the family, and settled in Texas. Mary married Louis Hardin but was childless. The other four, Charles and his three sisters, stayed on the farm of an uncle James H. Hooper who was a bachelor. When James died he willed his farm to Cressie which was a surprise to everyone as Charles had been working the land for his uncle during his lifetime. None of the four married, and one by one each Free passed away - the John Frees in Illinois were no more.

(Webmaster & Technical Advisor: Jerry Larkin)