

Mary Durland, Author/Researcher



# *KNOW YOUR ROOTS*

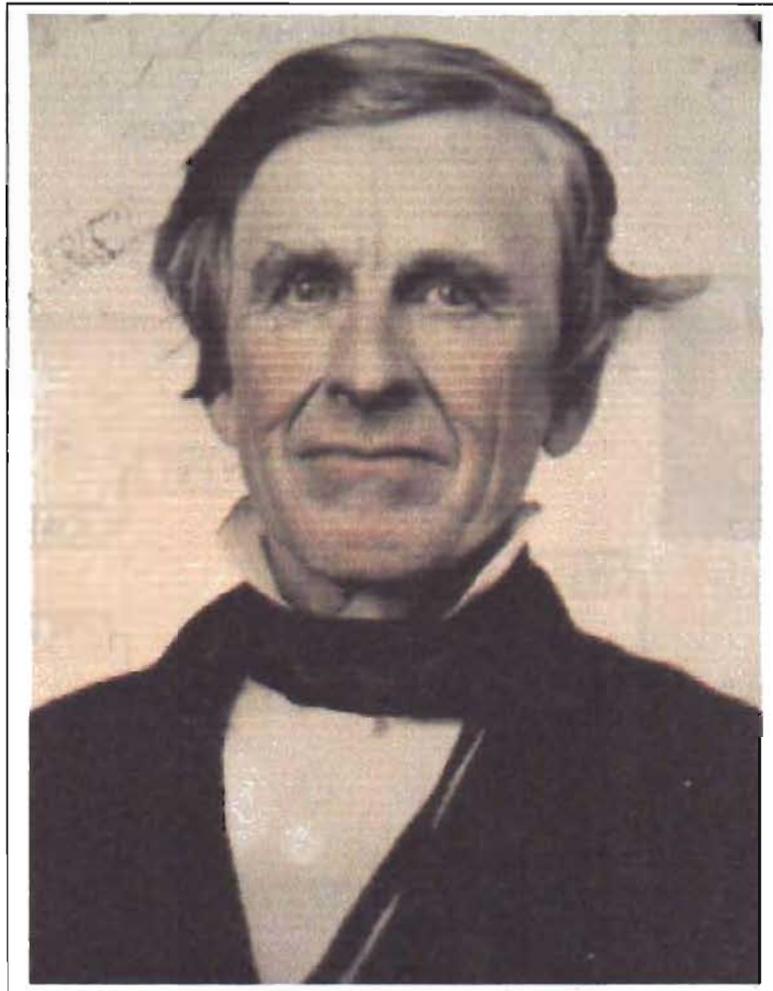
*A Family That Doesn't Know Its Past Doesn't Understand Itself*

VOLUME IV NUMBER 3

FREE/ELSON

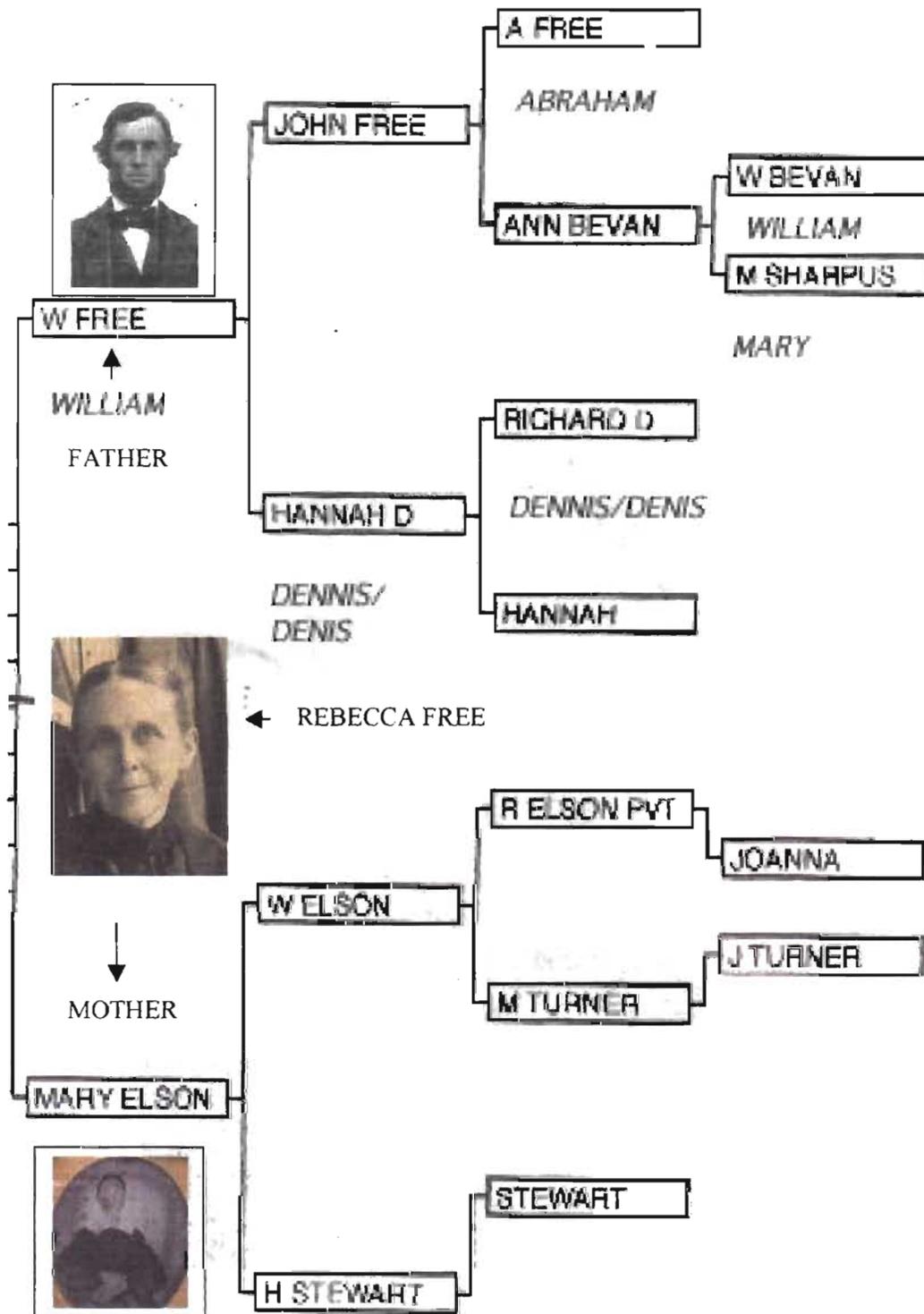
SEPTEMBER 1999

## **The Mystery Is Solved**



William Free 1796-1872  
Son of John Free and Hannah Dennis

**New Information on the Parents and Ancestors  
of REBECCA FREE, Mother of Harry Durland**



## THE ANSWER!

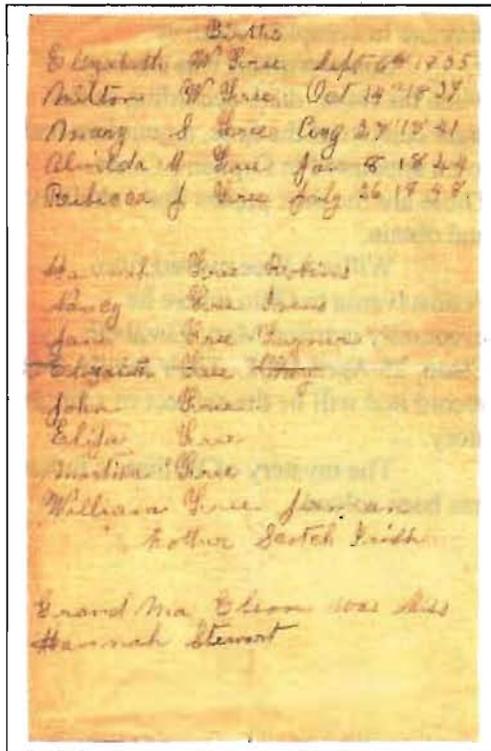
In the Free/Elson Newsletter of March 1996, the question was raised, "Who was the father of William Free, A B or C?"

Would he be A, the Palatine, Hans Jacob Frie?

Or B, Abraham Free who died in 1738 according to his probated will.

Or C, one of the Hessians who, at the time of the Revolution, fought with the English against the colonists.

The only clues were in the handwritten note left in the Dorland book. This list below is presumed to give all the names of William's siblings and the spouses of his sisters, not his brother's spouses. The word "German" was written next to the name of William.



As you can see in the note, the first five names are the children of William living at home at the time. These clues were all there were to work on.

All my efforts to reconcile one of the three mentioned were fruitless because I couldn't find any connections to the group William mentioned.

Hans Jacob Frie was German as were the Hessians. There was no way of telling what ethnic persuasion Abraham was.

After many years of researching and money being paid to other researchers and collecting all the Frees possible, the only one left that made sense was Abraham but Abraham died in 1738. According to census records, William was born in 1796. Abraham could not have been his father. Of all the Frees on record, which one was William's father.

Once more serendipity played a role in uncovering the solution. Preparing for a genealogical trip while in Philadelphia, I decided to make one last visit to our genealogical library here in San Antonio in order not to duplicate effort. While searching all the references in Pennsylvania, I came upon the name of someone who was also seeking information about the name of Free.

Very often queries are placed in genealogy sources when people are hoping to find a link to their ancestry. This one was from 1995 but it was from the area close to Philadelphia. With not much time to spare before my trip, I wrote a letter hoping this person was still interested, still at the same address, and would respond promptly.

The rest is history. She not only was excited to receive my letter; she had the proof I needed. She had material that I had not even touched upon.

I met with her in Philadelphia and we were able to put everything together. Now I know. William's father was John and his mother was Hannah Dennis. If you refer to the family tree on Page 2 you can see where Abraham comes in. Abraham was the father of John.

I had a will of John Free, the elder who died in 1801 but this will mentioned no children so I didn't know if William belonged to him or not. Ordinarily wills have the name of children but none were in this will.

Remember all I knew was that William had these siblings mentioned on the sheet of paper that was in his handwriting. Incidentally, he had a brother named John also.

And this is where Nancy, the Pennsylvania contact came in. She had a land deed, which not only mentioned these sisters and their married names but also listed a sister Elizabeth and William as minor children! In 1801 William, having been born in 1794, a given fact, would have been a minor when John the elder died in 1801.

The deed was barely readable but it was clear enough to make out the names.

William's father John was born sometime between 1730 when Abraham married Ann Bevan and 1738 when Abraham died. During that time, five children were born and if the assumption is correct that the first boy was named John, William's father John was the first boy born around 1731. After all there were five children born in a space of eight years.

John, son of Abraham, married Hannah Dennis 4 September 1770, and all the girls with their married names and the men were mentioned in the deed. They were exactly the same as I had on the slip of paper with one exception.

Instead of eight children, there were nine on the deed, seven adult children and two minors. The one not mentioned was Mary who married Nathaniel Davis. The others checked off perfectly. I can forgive William for neglecting to mention one sister!

This is just the beginning of the history of Rebecca's father William, and of William's father and mother.

When Abraham died, he had quite a bit of property, both in Newtown, Pennsylvania and in Philadelphia. There are other deeds, which eventually I will write for but they are in complete disarray.

Since William was a minor when his father died, according to the legal custom of the time, a guardian had to be appointed in Orphan's Court. These are the next papers that I shall try and obtain.

William Free moved from Pennsylvania to Ohio where he eventually married Mary Elizabeth Elson, 25 April 1822. Their family is on record and will be the subject of a future story.

The mystery of William's father has been solved.

## ANN BEVAN, OUR QUAKER ANCESTOR

Continuing with our Colonial Roots, so far Ann Bevan is the first Quaker in our history. In order to understand her Quaker roots it is necessary to know a little about how the Quakers or today called Friends, came to be in Pennsylvania.

In 1681 William Penn received a charter from King Charles II in England to establish a colony in the new world. It was in payment for a debt owed to William Penn's father.

In 1682 William Penn who was a Quaker established the area which he called Sylvania and eventually became Pennsylvania. The Quakers followed him because they were treated very harshly in England. Penn gave government to the people, which is what he based his beliefs on.

They also believed in humanitarianism, racial equality, prison reform, and education. There was no militia and only a modest police force. They believe that God is within every man.

With self-government, they conducted monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings. Silence prevailed at these meetings until one would speak.

The parents of Ann, our ancestor, were William Bevan and Mary Sharpus who were married. Ann was born 8 May 1705 in Newtown, Pennsylvania

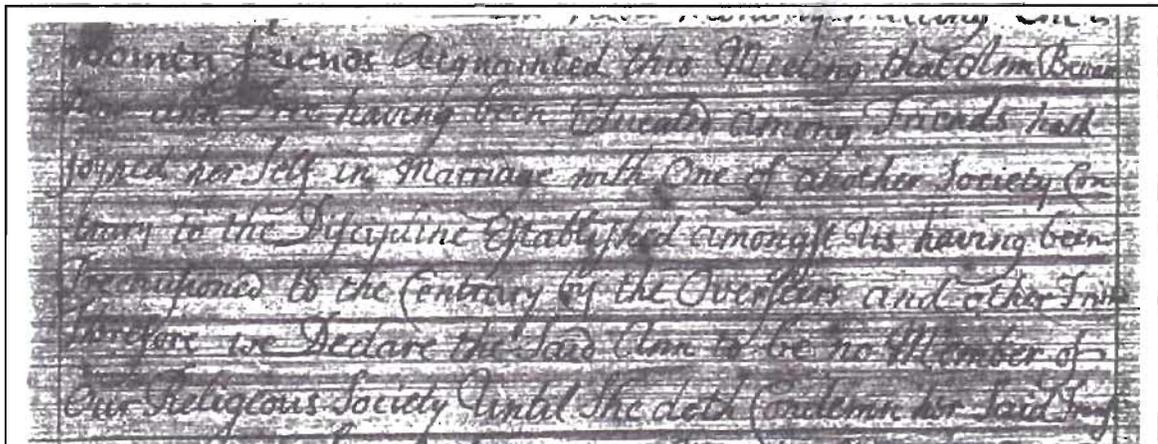
Most of the meetings of the various groups have been chronicled in a register and are open for all. For example, in 1706 William Bevan was noted with others as members of the Newtown group.

In the Newtown Meeting of 1712, William Bevan is included as a "Taxable Assessment."

On 18 March 1830, the Friends "brought" a complaint against Ann Bevan for proceeding in marriage before a priest with one of another society... Friends will talk with her.

Then there is a record in the registry of when she was married; she was ousted from the Friends. Part of the formal announcement below reads "...the women Friends of Ann Bevan now Ann Free having been educated among Friends hath joined herself in marriage with one of another Society contrary to the Discipline established amongst us having been cautioned to the contrary by the overseers and other Friends. Therefore we declare the said Ann to be no member of our Religious Society until she doth condemn her said transgression to the satisfaction of our monthly meeting."

Ann Bevan was married to Abraham Free on 30 April 1730 in Christ Church Philadelphia. With her children, the Bevan family of Friends became part of our heritage.



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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT RICHARD ELSON Revolutionary Soldier

Richard Elson is another of our Revolutionary War ancestors. He was introduced to you in the Free/Elson issue of May 1998. Also included was a family tree showing you where he fits into the family.

On page 2 of this newsletter you can see that Richard was the father of William Elson William Elson is the father of Mary Elizabeth Elson, Rebecca's mother.

He married Mary Turner in Maryland sometime before 1768 when his first child was born.

All in all he and Mary had 6 children but the record of all of their births has not be authenticated. John Harris Elson, a son, was born 1771 and then there was 13 years before William, our ancestor was born in 1784.

Sometime in those 13 years he enlisted in the Revolutionary militia. We know that he was a private in the Augusta County 4th Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Co, Washington County, Virginia.



How long he served and his record is on file in the Washington.

His next records are extracted from the Yohogania County minutes in the Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in the W. Augusta District. Also he is mentioned several times in the in the Minute Book of the Records of the District of West August and Ohio and Yohogania Counties, Virginia. On December 13, 1776 he was appointed constable in Yohogania County. (This county in later years became part of Washington County, Pennsylvania.

In the records of this county's Minutes Richard Elson is mentioned deposing several people. For example during 1777 and 1778 recorded are cases of debt, one of trespassing, and several appraising estates.

Obviously there was still a Militia because in 1778 he was given a commission as ensign from the governor.

There are undoubtedly other accounts of his term in office as constable.

He stayed in the area, which eventually became Brooke County, West Virginia. There is a record of his death on the 4 of December 1804

So when you think of the fight for freedom and those who fought, to achieve it, you can add another ancestor Richard Elson in Virginia to the others.



## MARY'S MESSAGES



To those of you who brought me the signature of Benjamin Franklin as B. Free Franklin, I have a special message. I went to the library and looked at several biographies of old Ben and found not one mention of the word Free in regard to this specific signature.

According to the post office, this was a postmark used by Franklin. The little explanation on the advertising piece said that historians do not agree as to what the "Free" meant.

Lest you think that it was a family name as many of you wondered I hasten to tell you that it was not the maiden name of his mother or any other family member that I could find. That does not mean it could not have the name of some kin from his past.

However, since other genealogists have not latched on to this, and inasmuch as I could not find any pedigree of Franklin, for the time being, we shall have to accept the assumption made in the Post Office and Museum notice. This tourist ad for the Post Office and Museum says quote, "Franklin was making a patriotic reference to the American struggle for freedom." Let's accept it as that.

As a result of my recent discovery, you will notice on Page 2 that there are some new names in the Free family pedigree. Try and remember

these surnames, Dennis and Bevan and keep them separate from the James Durland branch. They belong to the Rebecca Free branch.

Under the Elson grouping you will find the one that I have mentioned in the past, Hannah Stewart. She is quite close inasmuch as she was married to William Elson, the father of Mary Elizabeth. Mary Elizabeth Elson was the mother of Rebecca.

I'm going to try and find out more regarding Hannah Stewart about whom I know nothing. She was born in Virginia and that is new territory for me.

I'm tempted to join Ladies of the Thistle that is an organization for those who have Scotch Ancestry. We qualify under Elson and Stewart because they are Scotch-Irish and were in this country by 1776. Elson does for sure but as I say, I have done very little on our Scotch-Irish heritage.

I'm ignoring the National Huguenot Society because I think they are too discriminatory.

My papers have been submitted for the Colonial Dames XVII Century. We'll see if I am accepted.

In the recent Chicago Genealogical Society newsletter it stresses the need for history when researching and writing about family history. It goes on to say that genealogy and history cannot be separated. "Man cannot be dissociated from the times and places in which they lived and still be understood."

Putting our ancestors into a historical context is my contention entirely, and coincidentally the reason for the sub-heading on the newsletters.