

Case Study

The Importance of Bibles: A Case Study

According to Diane L. Richard, you shouldn't underestimate the importance of the family Bible

GENEALOGISTS AND FAMILY researchers like Bible records. We especially like those where the Bible is old enough that the entries might be from when events actually occurred, where we see different handwriting suggesting multiple authors and where specifics are provided (e.g., names, dates and places).

Though truth be told, we'll take any Bible, even if it just has names — it can still be a great source to either corroborate found information and/or be a primary source when needed.

I'm going to talk about a project for which census, marriage and newspaper records gave a fairly good picture of a family, though we had some information that seemed a bit inconsistent and some troubling gaps.

Finding a family Bible online at the Library of Virginia (LVA) website, www.lva.virginia.gov, really helped fill in some of the missing details, and it was eventually discovered that the wife's family started in Petersburg, Virginia, then moved to North Carolina, her father died in North Carolina, her mother moved back to Petersburg, and her mother eventually returns to North Carolina and died there.

And, before I get too far ahead of the story, let's see how the project research played out.

First, what did we know to start?

As with any project, you typically start with some information.

In this case, we knew the following:

- Robert A. Watson, b. abt 1826 in KY, d. 23 Jan 1912 in Edgecombe Co., NC
- Robert's wife was Georgeana Smith, b. 10 Nov 1833 in Petersburg, VA, d. 25 Sept 1919 in Edgecombe Co., NC [her death

You also start with a research goal — ours was to learn about the ancestors of Robert and Georgeana.

Though extensive research was also done on Robert A. (or RA) and his ancestry, for this case study, we will just focus on Georgeana's family. Starting with

this information, the following initial research strategy was established: look for missing census records, missing vital records (birth, marriage and death) and newspaper records — death notices, obituaries etc.

Second, what initial research did we do?

Census Records

Using the information from

Georgeana's death certificate, we found the "Smith" family in the 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 censuses. These revealed that the entire Smith family was in Petersburg in 1850 and then came to North Carolina in 1860.

Since Levicy [not Lucy as on Georgeana's death certificate] was a widow with young children in 1870, living in Petersburg, we assume that her husband, James, died before 1870.

Vital Records

For this early time period, the only vital records that we were likely to find were marriage bonds. Fortunately, we did find the 1864 marriage record of Robert and Georgeana in Edgecombe County. This is consistent with her family

1850 Census - City Petersburg (VA)			
266-599	James A. Smith	28 m	Millwright
	Levicy	26 f	
	Georgeana	6 f	
	Margaret	15 f	
1860 Census - Edgecombe County (NC)			
258-000	James A. Smith	38 m	Sept Mill
	Levicy	36 f	
	Georgeana	11 f	
	Margaret	11 f	
	Hugh	1 m	
	Oliver	6 m	
1870 Census - Petersburg, VA			
268-271	Smith, L. Mrs.	37 f	Keeping Home
	Hugh G.	15 m	In Printing Office
	Oliver	13 m	At School
	Goldston	8 m	Home
1880 Census - Petersburg, VA			
	Smith, Levicy	45 f	Keeping Home
	Oliver	21 m	Seam
	Goldston	18 m	At School

A run-down of the Smith family in the 1850-80 US censuses, showing the move to North Carolina, Levicy being widowed and her return with the younger children to Petersburg (VA).

certificate]

- For the 1870 and 1880 US census, they were living in Edgecombe County

- Parents of Georgeana were father = James E. Smith and mother = Lucy Crowder.

- Family papers received from LVA state that James E. Smith was a contractor and architect who served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He was killed in the southern part of North Carolina during the latter part of the War.

moving from Petersburg to Edgecombe by 1860. Since, at this time, marriage bonds and licenses only conveyed the groom, bride, place of marriage, date and person performing marriage, no other information could be learned — such as, was her father still alive in 1864.

Newspaper Records

Increasingly, more newspaper archives are being digitized — and, this can only occur if such an archive still exists. There were four newspaper collections that I looked into: The State Library of North Carolina (which has an extensive collection of early 20th century and older newspapers), libraries in Edgecombe to see what they have, the LVA website (to see what I could learn about surviving Petersburg newspapers) and the Godfrey Memorial Library, www.Godfrey.org, (for access to their 19th Century US Newspapers collection).

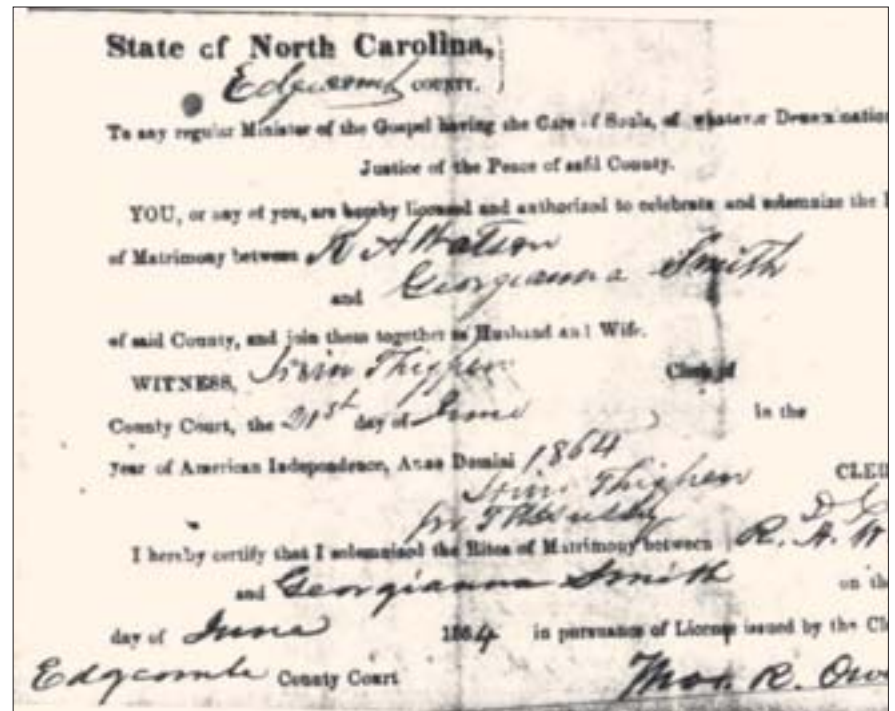
1. Checking with both the State Library of North Carolina and the Tarboro Library, we learned that there are no extant newspapers for Tarboro (Edgecombe County) that fit our needs. Tarboro did have some newspapers back to the 1850s! It's just that there are gaps, including one pretty much from post-Civil War till about 1925. It is theorized that the copies could have been destroyed in the 1919 flood as the newspaper office used to be downtown, close to a river and those back issues may have been stored on a lower level of the building.

2. A Petersburg newspaper contained a brief article which stated: James E. Smith, late of Petersburg, died, Alamanos, accidentally shot, 7 June 1869, Page three, column one, *Daily Express* [note: suspect that location should be Alamance!]

Third, what next? Serendipity definitely played a part in stumbling across relevant family Bibles. Basically, it was in researching the extended Crowder family (Levicy's parents) that we "found" the Smith-Watson-Crowder family Bible transcript, <http://image.lva.virginia.gov/Bible/24248/index.html>, and the Smith family Bible records, <http://image.lva.virginia.gov/Bible/34174/index.html>, available on the LVA website. A brother of Georgeana, named Rev. Hugh Crowder Smith D.D. (a learned Greek and Hebrew scholar having graduated from Richmond College and Louisville Theological

<http://image.lva.virginia.gov/Bible/24248/index.html>, and the Smith family Bible records, <http://image.lva.virginia.gov/Bible/34174/index.html>, available on the LVA website. A brother of Georgeana, named Rev. Hugh Crowder Smith D.D. (a learned Greek and Hebrew scholar having graduated from Richmond College and Louisville Theological

KILLED.—We learn that James Murrey, of Alamance, recently shot and killed Jas. E. Smith, late of Petersburg Va. Murrey was guarding Big Falls Cotton Factory, as we learn, in the night, when Smith attempted to pass by in the public road; Murrey says he hailed him three times, and received no answer, fired and killed the unfortunate man who leaves a wife and children to mourn his loss. Smith lived on the premises of one of the Murrey's, and probably worked in the Factory.—*Milton Chronicle*.



Top: The death notice of James E. Smith as it appeared in the Petersburg (VA) *Daily Express*. The original source was the *Milton Chronicle*, a Caswell County, North Carolina newspaper. We did confirm the existence of this particular cotton factory.

Above: R. A. Watson and Georgianna Smith married 21 June 1864 at Edgecombe County, North Carolina.

Seminary) apparently passed the family Bible to a son who then donated the material to the library.

It ends up that he deposited not one, but two family Bibles with LVA — the second focused more on the Watson family and so is not reported here, although it did include important information about RA's parents and their travels and reiterated some of the information from the other Bible.

What it did contain for Georgeana's family was a cornu-

copia of information about her parents, her siblings, her grandparents and extended family. In fact, quite a bit of research went into figuring out how all the people listed were connected to one another!

Some of the most significant pieces of data included in the Bible were:

- Georganna and/or Georgeanna are how her name is spelled in the Bible
- Edward is the middle name of

Case Study

James E. Smith

- marriage of James E. and Levicy Crowder, 30th Day of November 1843, Garysburg Hotel, Garysburg, North Carolina [note: another earlier North Carolina connection]

- James E. Smith parents = Samuel Smith (Petersburg) + Diannah Leath (Prince George County)

- Levicy Crowder parents = Herod Crowder + Pamela W.

- Robert & Georgeana married 21 June 1864 (matches found marriage bond)

- James E. Smith born 29 October 1822

- Georgeana Smith born 16 November 1844

- Levicy Crowder born 6 September 1823

- death of James E. Smith in Alamance at Big Falls

- Levicy Smith died at the home of her daughter Mrs. Robert A. Watson in Tarboro in 1883

With the information from this Bible, we were off and running and were able to document most of the listed individuals and determine how they were all related. With a surname like Smith, without the Bible, we may never have been able to easily document this family, given the variety of locales involved.

Conclusion

Bibles can be a key element to your ancestral research. Remember that not all families maintained a family Bible, and even if they did, it still may be in

The funeral of Mrs Levicy Smith will be preached at the residence of her son-in-law Capt. R A Watson this afternoon at 4 o'clock

Tarboro, N.C.
March 31st, 1883.



Top: This notice was included in the Bible telling us that the funeral for Levicy (Crowder) Smith will be preached at the house of her son-in-law in Tarboro.

Left: This page of birth entries from the same Bible lists the youngest children of James E. and Levicy Smith as well as the children of Robert A. and Georgeana Watson.

ilies have become, do not limit your search for a family Bible to the geographic area of where the direct line ancestors lived. Any branch of your family tree could have ended up with the family Bible and they may have then deposited it in the archive where they last lived, which may have no connection to the ancestral stomping grounds.

Do consider Bible records — most were written by a family member at the time of the documented events or sometimes by their children. Regardless, they can provide needed evidence about a person's life, or at least suggest where and in what type of records you might find corroboration.

“private” hands and unknown and/or unavailable to you. Though, like in this case, many family Bibles, and/or copies of their pages, have been donated to libraries and research repositories. We were fortunate that we were already looking at records held at LVA since Petersburg is located in Virginia, and so we literally stumbled across the two mentioned.

Given how scattered some fam-

Bible Collections Online

- **Bible Records Online,** www.biblerecords.com
- **Family Bible Website,** <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~familybibles/index.html>
- **Family Bible Master Surname**

Index, www.ancestorhunt.com/family_bibles_index.htm

- **Family History Archives,** www.lib.byu.edu/fhc/index.php
- **State collections, such as Kentucky Bible Records,** www.kentuckygenealogy.org/bible.htm

FC

Diane L. Richard has been doing genealogy research for over 22 years. She currently does professional research in North Carolina and DC and can be found online at www.mosaicrpm.com/Genealogy