

Case Study: Odyssey of the Miles Family

Diane L. Richard uncovers the story of Elizabeth Miles and her family

THIS STORY CONTAINS a familiar element from the Civil War era south — a white landowner fathering children with his slaves. It also contains the less familiar — a white woman raising two mulatto sons and a white landowner looking after all his children following the Civil War, regardless of race. We'll discuss researching Elizabeth Miles, her uncle, his slaves and discovering an interview (part of the slave narratives collection) given by one of her sons, in Raleigh in the 1930s. In this interview, he discusses his heritage, who his father was and what he remembers of life.

Given the above, can we document what the supposed story is? Might this inspire or facilitate your own research into those who were slaves or born free, though to a slave parent?

What We Knew

We started with some extensive facts from census records, with a sprinkle of family lore thrown in:

- Betsy/Elizabeth Miles was a white woman who never married.
- She had a mulatto son, Lafayette Miles, born c. 1858 in Halifax County, North Carolina.
- She and son Lafayette were living in Halifax County in 1860.
- Betsy had another mulatto son, named William/Billy (born c. 1863, also in Halifax County).
- She lived in Halifax County in 1870 and sometime after 1881, moved to Williamsboro, Vance

County where she was found in 1900.

- It is not known where, or exactly when, Betsy died.

Challenges

Given that Betsy/Elizabeth Miles was a non-landed white female, never married, and we have yet to determine when or where she died, this presents some challenges. She will not appear in the tax records (landless and female), her sons were born too early for birth registers and no existing marriage record eliminates using the license to determine who her parents were. Since her sons were listed in the 1860 census, they would not be found in an estate file or similar documentation where slaves were often found listed.

Since Betsy was not a slave, this eliminates looking for any information about her in Freedman's Bureau Records, Emancipation Records, Cohabitation Records and other record types which typically document African-Americans in post-slavery North Carolina and elsewhere. It is conceivable that her children's father, Tom, may be listed in these records, but so far we have not found any reference to him.

We also have not found Betsy (or sons) in the 1880 census. Had they moved from Halifax to Granville, Franklin or Warren Counties (precursors to Vance County, where we do find them in

1900)?

Serendipity would be a big help at this point.

Slave Narrative — What a Find!

Some serendipity did strike in the form of a most fortunate find for this project — a surviving narrative held in the Southern Historical Collection, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Thaddeus S. Ferree Papers, <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/ff/Ferree,Thaddeus.html>.

The interview appears to have been done by T. Pat Matthews on 20 September 1937. The subject was Lafayette Miles of 317 N. Haywood St., Raleigh, North Carolina, 66 years old (this was consistent with a 1930 census entry showing Lafayette in Raleigh).

It is a fascinating account of his life, the practices of the day (including some brutal treatment) and his ancestry.

Though one would think that we had satisfied our goal by locating this narrative, in some ways our work was just starting. This was written near the end of Lafayette's life. Though the narrative certainly seems authentic, it would be nice to find documentation to substantiate what was recorded in the interview.

Some Hits and Misses

The next step was to document the various individuals and details mentioned in the slave narrative.

A La Fayette Mials died 4 Feb-

313321	Elizabeth B Miles	31	F.	W.	Norma Cooper		do
	Lafayette	13	M	W	et Cooper		do
	William	8	M	W			do

1870 census entry for Elizabeth Miles and her sons Lafayette and William, in Halifax County, North Carolina.

Research

bruary 1942 in Raleigh, listed as “negro”. He was buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Raleigh as Lafayette Mial in space 1317 (location unknown). His parents were Thomas Mials and Betsy (MNU). This fits with the information we know.

Fortunately, for Betsy (Miles), from the slave narrative we know that her aunt became Betsy Hockaday and that she and her husband William had three children — Warick, Tom and Susan. With these details, it was possible to find the Halifax County marriage of a Bersheba Jackson to William Hockada (father of Thomas), 28 December 1827 and to trace this family through the census (mother, father and three children in the 1850 records) and estate records. This also suggested that Betsy Miles’ mother’s maiden name may have been Jackson. We did find a Rebecca Jackson who married an Akriel Miles on 30 January 1827 in Halifax. If Bersheba and Rebecca were sisters, and Betsy (Miles) was Rebecca’s daughter, this would make Betsy (Jackson) Hockaday the aunt of Betsy (Miles). Unfortunately, though we could track Akriel in the 1830 and 1840 census, we don’t find a viable candidate in the 1850 census. No will or estate record was found for Akriel/Achrial.

Though there are some abstracted early slave records for Granville county (which includes references to the Hockaday family of Halifax county), at [http://www.africanneas.com/library/ncdeeds/1746-1828\[h-n\].html](http://www.africanneas.com/library/ncdeeds/1746-1828[h-n].html), the references are not modern enough to help identify Tom or his mother, Maria.

In the 1847 and 1849 lists of Halifax County scholars, we discovered a Thomas Hockaday, a Susan Hockaday, a Warwick Hockaday and an Elizabeth Miles — names familiar to us from the slave narrative. This appears to be Elizabeth/Betsy and her Hockaday cousins!

No bastardy bonds or similar were found for Lafayette or William Miles. If Betsy’s family

had sufficient means, neither a bastardy nor apprenticeship proceeding may have been instigated. We have found no record suggesting that Betsy or her sons were ever dependent on public welfare.

We did find a T(h)om Hockaday/Hocardy (father of Lafayette) and wife Lucy in the 1880 Gaston, Northampton Census and the 1900-1920 censuses for Roanoke Rapids, Halifax. Lucy (widow of Tom), died in 1923 and is buried somewhere in Halifax County. No death certificate has been found for Tom. There is no evidence to suggest that he was ever a landowner, suggesting that, though his father may have looked after him, it might not have been through a transfer of land as the slave narrative suggested.

On the other hand, the William Miles who dies in 1920 in Vance County could have been Lafayette’s brother. The

Hockaday. Is this her surviving brother or is it Tom Hockaday, father of Lafayette? Could this be the connection between Tom and his father’s family — as a tenant on his father’s half-sister’s land?

So, some hits and some misses. Much of the narrative has not been verified, though we have been able to substantiate elements of it and it does provide us with Lafayette’s memories — invaluable in itself. And, we have identified a possible father for Betsy, Achrial Miles and possibly an aunt, Bersheba (Jackson) Hockaday.

There was one final piece of evidence. An abstract from



Above: 1942 death certificate for a Lafayette Mials (Lafayette Miles). Left: 1850 slave schedule for William Hockaday.

death certificate lists parents as Billy Land and Betsy Jackson, states that he was white, had a wife Annie and is buried in Elmwood Cemetery. However, other than the mother’s name, the evidence is too scant for any definite conclusions to be drawn.

What about the estate file for a Susan A. Hockaday administered by W. S. Hockaday? Is this the Susan who was a sibling to Warwick and Thomas? The files show a 1903 rent payment from a Tom

William Hockaday’s will, at <http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/halifax.htm>, held by the North Carolina Archives, contains some intriguing details. p.301, I Warwick Hockaday...son John Hockaday tract of land...the following negroes Ned about twenty five years old, Anthony about twenty three years old, Enoch nineteen years old, & Charlotte & her two youngest children, also my black called Betty, yoke of oxen & ox cart & one cow & calf...to my son William Hockaday

tract of land...my negro woman Maria & her children and [their future increase said] negroes now being in the possession of my said son...to my son Warrick Hockaday & to my three daughters Fanny, Judy & Tempy all the negroes and other property that I have advanced to them...26 October 1847. (his mark). February Court 1851.

This Maria and her children, in the possession of William Hockaday, could be a good fit for Tom's mother Maria considering that his father was supposedly William Hockaday. The 1850 census tells us that William had five slaves in his possession, including a 10-year-old male (which may have been Tom) and a 25-year-old female (possibly Maria).

The 1860 census for William shows a 38-year-old female and a 19-year-old male and two other slaves. This is consistent with the 1850 entries and with the above hypothesis of Tom and Maria.

More research needs to be done on Maria (born c. 1822-25) and her

children. Additionally, perhaps Lafayette Miles filed for a Social Security Number?

Conclusion

This is obviously not a complete study of the Miles, Jackson and Hockaday families and the connections between the white branches of these families and their slave holdings. Hopefully, it is enough to suggest possibilities that you might use in your own research.

- Is there a surviving slave narrative for an ancestor? As you can see, this document provided a myriad of clues that we could research.
- Have you exhausted available marriage and death records? Even though we could not find all the death records, those we found confirmed elements of the story.
- Is the family consistently found in the census records? If not, do you know why not? For example, given that Lafayette was about 22 in 1880, was he now working for the rail-

road? This doesn't explain our inability to find Betsy/Elizabeth and William, but it might explain Lafayette's absence.

- Don't forget to check out wills and estates — always an excellent resource for information on slaves since forenames and sometimes relationships (e.g., mother and child) are explicitly stated.

Though African-American research during and after the period of slavery can be challenging, look for as many types of records as possible. You never know when you might stumble across that fact-filled slave narrative, emancipation paperwork, Freedman's Bureau records (including a physical description and family lineage), estate file listing slaves and relationships or some other document which will be a key to your family history research.

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Diane L. Richard is a frequent contributor to Family Chronicle.



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