

Jessee Family Newsletter

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Will the Real Frankey Lea Please Stand Up?

Our previous newsletter postulated that our Jessee Family's founding grandmother, Frankey Lea, who married John Jessee, was the daughter of John Lea (1735-1803) of Caswell County, NC. Based on this lineage, we can trace our pedigree via her grandmother Anne Herndon, to Edward the III, King of England and the Royal Families of Europe. I had great fun detailing that pedigree in that newsletter, and still hope we can prove it. Those of you descended from Archer Jessee and his second wife Rachel Herndon, can take heart--you are a descendant of Anne Herndon's father, Edward Herndon, via a brother of Anne's, thus still "royalty." The rest of us might yet have to prove our case.

Dean Jessee and I asked that we concentrate some of our genealogy effort on proving or disproving this relationship of Frankey and her alleged father, John Lea. Since then, I have had several pieces of information provided to me which further establish that John Lea of Caswell County, indeed had a daughter, Frances or Frankey, but there is still no evidence that this Frankey married John Jessee, and I am still unclear as to who her mother was. One document indicates that John Lea married Winnefred some years after Frankey's alleged birth.

A new member of our Genealogy Team, Tom Rudder of Carmichael, California, postulates that Frankey Lea is not the daughter of John Lea, but the daughter of George Lea (16 Jan. 1739-15 Jan. 1825) who married in 1761 Lucy Tolbert (26 July 1739-20-Dec. 1813). This George Lea is included in the manuscript, *How I am Kin to the Leas*, and is a descendant of Col. William Lea (1654-1703) and Mary Green of King and Queens Co., VA. He is the subject of Chapter I in that manuscript (pg. 2.) George Lea appears as great-grandson 6.d. (page 4), the son of William Lea and Mary Barnett, who is the son of John Lea and Ann Taylor, who in turn is the son of the first William. This pedigree is illustrated in the attached charts.

George Lea and Lucy Tolbert's first daughter, "Frankey" is born 2 Dec. 1762. That would make her about 13 or 14 years old when she marries John Jessee in 1775 or 76. While that may be a bit disquieting, it is nevertheless possible, and better explains how she could still be having children at age 41 when their last child, Jane Jessee, is born in 1803, compared to John Lea's Frankey. She would be age 48 or even 51 in 1803, if 1755 or 1752 is her correct birthdate.

Tom Rudder has recently acquired the document *Amite County, Mississippi, 1699-1890* by Albert Eugene Casey, Published and Bound by the Amite County Historical Fund, 1957. Tom acquired copies of several sections of it from the McComb Public Library, McComb, MS. This document extensively covers the Lea Family of VA, NC, and GA. It is well documented with references to a variety of sources, and appears to represent some very thorough research and scholarship. Copies of applicable pages are attached.

This source has extensive genealogies of both the John Lea and George Lea families. I am including in this newsletter pedigree and descendants charts which illustrate the information provided. Significantly it indicates that John Lea was born c 1744 in Spotsylvania Co., VA, and died in Caswell Co., NC, in 1803. He married Winnefred (last name unknown) in 1765 at age 21, and had his first child John Lea Jr. in 1766. He does have a daughter "Frankey" born several years later, about the time our Frankey would be marrying John Jessee. This alone just about eliminates John Lea as the father of our Frankey Lea.

This source reveals that George Lea had a daughter Frankey born Dec. 2, 1761. The source for this is cited as Bible data from Frances Powel Otken, a descendant of one of Frankey's siblings. There is no indication who Frankey married.

Furthermore, Tom assembles several other arguments that are quite persuasive. First is the fact that according to the Caswell County Deed Book 1777-1817, George Lea is an attorney in fact, witness, or agent for several John Jessee sales of land in the 1770-90's. George Lea is involved with the Jessee family in several ways. Secondly, George's father, William Lea, and George Lea own land adjacent to John Jessee's land between Hyco and Cobbs Creek on the Person and Caswell, County line (see map). In contrast, James and John Lea's land was at least five miles away on Country Line Creek. Our Frankey was the girl next door.

Lastly is the evidence of family names. John, William, James and Archer were names often used by George's branch of the Leas, not to mention the spelling of Lea itself. John and Frankey named their children John, William, Archer, Lea, and lastly George Lea. The tradition of naming children William, John, Archer, Lea, or George Lea carries on for many generations in several Jessee families, and would be an appropriate honor for important ancestral grandfathers, not the family lawyer.

Tom makes a strong case for George Lea. We ask help in further researching this assertion. I think we must conclude that all the evidence is not in, and hopefully there is more to find. There were several Frankey Leas in Caswell Co., NC at this time. Another possibility has been suggested that Frankey was a daughter of William Lea, George's sister. There must be evidence about which one married our John Jessee. In any event, will the real Frankey Lea please stand up?

The John Jessee and Frankey Lea Home and First Jessee Cemetery is Located-- A Memorial Proposed

Tom Rudder through several annual trips to Russell County and extraordinary research effort has located some 18 or more Jessee Family cemeteries in Russell County. I am still puzzling how to convey his hand-prepared map of Russell County showing the location of these 18 sites. Anyone planning a trip to Russell County should have a copy of his map. I am going to suggest that Tom make up another copy and send it to the Russell County Library for inclusion in the Jessee Family materials there. The library should be a first stop for Jessee Family Researchers in Russell County anyway!

Tom's most important find is the unmarked location of John Jessee and Frankey Lea's graves in a previously little-known Jessee cemetery, near their original homeplace opposite Mill Creek.

Here is Tom's own description.

Location of the John Jessee and Frankey Lea Jessee Cemetery

Take road #645 north (from road #71) approximately 3 miles west of Lebanon. Jessee's Mill is approximately 1 mile from road 71, on the left. The Andrew Jackson Jessee large brick house is across the road from the Mill. Shortly after passing the house, the road winds up and away from Mill Creek. Approximately 1/3 mile ahead there is a cattle loading facility on your right. The entrance to the old "George Lea Jessee" place is 100 feet beyond (with cattle crossing) after you leave the pavement. The cemetery is on the first plateau of the hill on your left as you drive from the highway to the house. The Branson Cemetery is alongside the Jessee Cemetery.

This location would be the original John Jessee land and site of the first Jessee yellow poplar log cabin built in Reeds Valley. Tom offers much evidence to support this. The original John Jessee homeplace was acquired by Archer Jessee from the estate of John Jessee then sold to his brother George Lea Jessee, April 1, 1828 (Russell Co. Deed Book 8, pg. 87 and 90). It remained in the George Lea Jessee family for three generations until sold first to H. Ashbrook in 1894 then J. B. Branson, Dec. 6, 1896 for another generation. W. A. and J. A. Jessee briefly acquired it in 1917 to sell it to E. K. Counts in 1917. It has been referred to as the Branson or E. K. Counts Place in more recent times. This land is now owned by Dr. and Mrs. Catherine Sampson Smith, he is a veterinarian in Lebanon, VA, and I believe she may be related to the Counts family.

Evidence that John and Frankey Jessee are buried here comes from further research by Tom Rudder. The following is an excerpt from *Pioneer Recollection of Southwest Virginia* by E. J. and Hetty Swindall Sutherland. On page 427-28, Eliza Jane (McReynolds) Turner (born in Reeds Valley May 11, 1846 and recorded September 21, 1924) states "Several of the old Jessees are buried in the graveyard on the E. K. Counts farm near here. Among them were Old John Jessee and his wife, Frankie(SIC), his son George, and his wife Elizabeth. I was at the burials of Uncle George and Aunt Elizabeth." It also should be noted that she states that John and Frankey Jessee first moved from Caswell County, NC with her grandfather, Joseph McReynolds, to Burke's Garden, before moving to Reed's Valley, in Russell County. She indicates that John and Joseph served together at the Battle of King's Mountain, 1780, in The

Revolutionary War, although John Jessee's recorded service from April 1781 to April 1782 would dispute that claim.

Tom provided photographs of the beautiful old farm house that exists there today and suggested that the original John Jessee cabin may be inside. Unfortunately this photo will not copy well for the newsletter or I would share it. Tom provided a copy of a page from *The 1938 WPA Historical Project*, available in the Russell County Library, which describes the George Lea Jessee cabin on this site. Others more familiar with the history may be able to clarify if any of the original John Jessee or George Lea Jessee yellow poplar log cabin exist today.

Tom and I propose that a memorial stone for John and Frankey Lea Jessee, founders of the Jessee Family in Russell County, VA be established on the site of the Jessee Cemetery described here.

Tom has received verbal permission from Mrs. Smith, and has begun to spread the word amongst his family and friends in Russell County. With this newsletter I would like to make it a formal proposal for the consideration of all members of the Jessee Family.

We need help, especially from family members in Russell County. We need an action committee and suggest that one be formed of volunteers in Russell County. Tom Rudder and I, and I am sure several others from out of State will gladly be members and contributors, but we need leadership in Russell County. We need further site research, photographs, a specific memorial location determined, and written permission from the current landowners. We need to establish a memorial fund in a local bank, with at least two volunteers who would serve as secretary and treasurer, to establish the account, make arrangements, and co-sign checks. we need some exploratory work on the cost of a stone memorial. We need a budget prepared based on local costs for a stone, site preparation, and any ceremonies or celebrations planned. This would be a beautiful opportunity for a Jessee Family Reunion in Russell County.

Tom and I are willing to help as much as we can from afar, but need some local helpers to make this happen. I will be glad to coordinate information and specific planning for the stone through this newsletter. Please let us know your interest and how much you would be willing to pledge to such a memorial. If 50 to 100 families donate \$20-\$50, we could have a budget of \$2-3000, which may be just enough.

Volunteer Help With Research Needed

The Moravian connection might be a clue to our Frankey Lea mystery described above. Do you suppose John and Frankey were married within the Moravian Baptist Church? Would exploration of the Moravian archives be of any assistance? Actually, I am not inclined to believe that John and Frankey were Moravian since none of their children persisted with this specific religion, although most were devout Baptists. It is Tom Rudder's opinion that the Jessee's owned Moravian Land, which the Moravians sold to raise money for other efforts, but that they were not themselves Moravians.

In contrast, Margaret Jessee Young, of San Luis Obispo, writes that according to her father and family lore the Jessees left France because of religious persecution, went to England, then Wales, then to America with their religion. This would be consistent with the Moravian experience. I am more inclined to think they were members of the congregation at Lea's Chapel which was very near the Jessee and George Lea farms in North Carolina. Do you suppose any of those Church Records exist?

These are but two areas of needed research. We do have some leads. Tom Rudder provides a reference to a book, which we need to locate. It is:

Records of Moravians in North Carolina, Raleigh, NC State Printer, 1922, by Adelaide L. Fries. A Rucker Family genealogist, Barbara Bonham, of Caswell Co. NC, tells me that all the Moravian deeds and historical records are recorded in Forsyth Co., NC. This is where Winston-Salem and original Moravian Church in Old Salem is located as well. Sounds like a lovely place for vacation, wish I could make it mine.

I have begun to explore Frankey's alleged new mother, Lucy Tolbert. There are Tolberts in both NC and VA early in the 1700s, so we do have grounds for research. Based on family names I would postulate that there is an Archer or Wilson family connection in our pedigree too. I would sure welcome help in finding such.

Thanks for Your Research and Support

Many of you have written to express support of the Newsletter and to offer help for which I am grateful. Your contributions are most welcome. The last Newsletter was the first that broke even. I have tried to provide each of you printouts of charts based on any information you may have shared with me about your own branch of the family. Thanks to new software shared by Jeff Jessee of Florida, those charts should look better in the future too. Please keep the information coming.

In addition to that already mentioned, Linda Blaylock of Oklahoma City wrote to refute the assertion that John Lea was our Frankey's father, and offered much more information about the Leas and Herndons. She is descended from Archer's second wife Rachel Herndon, and is indeed of royal descent and a nice person too.

Harold Dorton, of Martinsville, VA, responded to the last newsletter indicating that his research, and that of cousin Mary Anne Hale Myers, of Rosedale, VA, supports the Tom Rudder thesis above, that Frankey was a daughter or granddaughter of William Lea, George Lea's father, not John Lea. Further, he indicates evidence of several other Jessee families who lived before or during the same time in Spotsylvania, Middlesex, and Fincastle Counties in VA. More research leads.

We welcome the help from Linda Blaylock, Harold Dorton and Mary Ann Hale in the research effort

and I thank them for their support too. I will share here whatever your research reveals, and you all are welcome to write your own articles too.

Tom Rudder, An Extraordinary Person

It must be clear by now that Tom Rudder has made significant contribution to this newsletter, to the Jessee Family data base, and to this editors appreciation of the quality of work being done out there. Tom first called me last Spring, having seen a copy of the first newsletter from a mutual contact. Tom's mother is a Jessee and he was born and raised in Russell County, went to Castlewood for High School. He stayed in California after service in the military. He is now retired from McClelland Air Force Base and lives near Sacramento, CA. He visits Russell Co. often and maintains close relations with his family and friends there. Tom and his wife Shirley are extraordinary genealogy and history buffs, collecting treasures of every sort along the way. Shirley has organized and arranged the materials they have gathered so beautifully, that working with them is a pleasure too.

Tom and I have become real genealogy buddies, talking on the phone at length and in great detail about the most obscure of subjects. We are probably the only two people who could immediately identify who Canebrake and Shoo-boot Lea are. and why one would care. Tom only lives about 100 miles away, but we did not meet until this fall. In the meantime, we exchanged many packages and letters.

Amongst their treasures shared have been dozens of copies of materials and several books lent to me with trust and generosity. From them I have gleaned well over 2000 more records for the data base.

Tom is a true scholar and researcher. He requires pretty positive proof of the facts before he will accept a thesis or theory. He is sharp and has great attention to and memory of details. His scrutiny of my data resulted in a dramatic change of understanding and appreciation for a higher standard of analysis and thought. He is a dogged detective too. I am sure happy to have you join this effort.

Previews of Coming Attractions

The great pleasure of doing this newsletter has been the people I meet. As I write this newsletter, new materials are coming in from Thomas Jefferson "Jeff" Jessee, Donald Dortch, and Howard G. Jessee, famous for Jessee Enterprises, which should provide much new stimulation and information for the next newsletter.

The Purpose of This Newsletter

In the first newsletter, I provided information about my 27-year interest and work on the Jessee Family genealogy and a good deal of personal history and that of my Jessee family in California. Through this Newsletter, I am volunteering to maintain a central mailing list of Jessee genealogists, and to facilitate the exchange of information between us. I am again providing the newsletter to all of you on the enclosed mailing list. Most of you responded to the first newsletters, or were referred to me by someone who received the first newsletters. For that I thank you. I really look forward to your response; I enjoy your letters and appreciate the questions and information provided.

I have, am, and will enter all genealogy information provided to me into the Jessee Family Data Base, over 6000 records now. I would like to trace all the 15 family descendants of John Jessee and Frances Lea. I have quite complete information on several of your families, and I am willing to key in your family data and print charts for you.

I am asking you, if you haven't done so already, to verify your continuing interest by responding to this newsletter with informatin about your family. If you are not interested, please give this newsletter to a member of your family that may be. If I do not hear from you, I will remove you from the list.

Please feel free to correct anything I may have in error in any of these materials. Please provide names and addresses of family members who have interest in this effort. I am not looking for every family member, just those with interest in the family genealogy, willing to exchange information and represent their own branch of the family or area of the country.

I would appreciate your help in defraying the cost of research, printing and postage of this newsletter. I am including copies of various source documents of mutual interest and importance, and selected pedigree and descendant charts as those are developed. I will of course look for means to keep copying costs within bounds, but it still exceeds 6 cents per page, plus postage as you see. I will cover these costs up front, but eventually need your help. However, I do not want to exclude anyone with real interest who can't afford to contribute either. Please share what you can.

I am organizing our mailing list by the original 15 families descended from John Jessee. We now have 10 of John Jessee's 15 children represented, please note the Jessee families not represented and help us locate their descendants too.

I do my own work with an IBM compatible computer and *Personal Ancestry File*, PAF software. I am able to both provide and receive genealogy information using the GEDCOM data protocol on IBM or Mac diskettes and by modem too. If you have not yet bought a computer and software, the cheapest and probably best way to begin would be with the PAF and a cheap IBM clone computer. I would be willing to help you get established. I am available on Internet as well, and would welcome correspondence via this medium if you are also connected. My Internet Address is JJESSEE@OAVAX.CSUCHICO.EDU. Your comments on how to improve this newletter are welcome.

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