

Jessee Family Newsletter

Vol. 3, No. 2 May 1994

Will Some of you Frankey Leas Please Sit Down!

In the last newsletter, I asked, *Will the Real Frankey Lea Please Stand Up?* and requested information, evidence, or other proof regarding several possibilities. Well the resources, bits of information, analysis, interpretations, and opinions have been flowing in. I am quite overwhelmed in several respects by the contribution of new materials, and several scholarly exchanges of information and ideas. I am thrilled by the new information, but up to my gunnels in sorting it all out and coming to conclusions. In fact the new information throws doubts on most of our previous theories.

There are at least five "Frankey Leas" standing up. Your choices are:

1. Frances "Frankey" Lea (b. 1755)

da. of John Lea of Country Line Creek
and Winneyfred.

2. Francis Lea (b. after 1752)

da. of Henry Lea
and Elizabeth Lea

3. Frankey Lea (b. after 1752)

da. of James Lea of Cobbs Creek
and Elizabeth Lea.

4. Frances "Frank" Lea (b. 12/ 2/ 1761)

da. of George Lea
and Lucy Tolbert.

5. Frances Lee (b. aft 1750)

da. of Richard and Lillie Lee.

6. None of the above.

I have attached pedigrees and appropriate descendants charts for these five Frankey Leas. I invite continued analysis, critique, and addition and correction of the information reflected in these charts. I have relied on Ben Rose's material as presented in his book, *Reports of Research on The Lea Family*. I strongly recommend purchase of this book as a resource for Lea Family Genealogy. See his letter

attached.

Below I will summarize a variety of facts and opinions relative to these Frankey Leas.

Frankey #1: This is the daughter of John Lea of Country Line Creek. This is the same John Lea who we originally alleged to be descended from James Lea and Anne Herndon and which links the Leas/Leighs to the royalty of Europe. Since then, I have had several pieces of information provided to me which further establish that John Lea of Country Line Creek, indeed had a daughter, Frances or Frankey, but there is still no evidence that this Frankey married John Jessee, other than that this "fact" has been typed in, at some later date, on several different descendants charts for this John Lea and wife Winneyfred, including some DAR documentation. That fact still needs to be substantiated with better evidence.

John Lea's will of 1803 casts doubt on this being our Frankey Lea. In it John Lea names all his other daughters by their married names, but refers to her as Frankey Lea. He leaves her a little piece of land, a Negro boy and a cow and a calf, and does not so provide for his married daughters. Furthermore, she buys additional domestic items at the estate sale as Frankey Lea. This sounds like an unmarried daughter, not our Frankey who lived 250 miles away, with 15 kids and a newborn in arms in 1803.

Furthermore, Ben Rose states that John Lea of Country Line Creek is the son of John Lea of Mattaponi River, King and Queens Co., VA, and not necessarily of the Virginia Leigh family or Herndon descent.

Frankey #2: This is the Francis Lea daughter of Henry and Elizabeth Lea suggested by Mrs. Zella Detweiler. There is no doubt that Henry Lea and his wife Elizabeth had an only daughter of a young age in 1774, at his death. His will refers to Francis as his only child and provided money for his wife Elizabeth to see to her education.

In the will, Henry appoints his "well beloved friend James Lea (my brother-in-law) and Anne McNeil ???? Executors..." I cannot read the three- or four-letter word after Anne McNeil. I don't know if it is a name or some other appellation, like Senr. The document is also witnessed by John Lea, James Roberts and Thomas McNeil.

Ben Rose and others have stated that Henry Lea was a child of William Lea of Cobbs Creek from an assumed first marriage. William of Cobbs Creek was later married to Mary and had children Sarah, James of Cobbs Creek who marries an Elizabeth Lea, John Lea, and George Lea. Dr. Albert Casey also shows additional children, Zachariah and Barnett which either is in error or possibly additional children from the first marriage, brothers to Henry.

However, in disagreement with Casey, Ben Rose says there is no evidence that this William Lea is descended from Captain John Leigh or any other Leighs of Virginia.

Ben Rose also suggests that Henry's wife Elizabeth later married James Lea referenced above. That would not make him Henry's brother-in-law, at this time, but rather a half-brother. Could Henry have

made that mistake in his will?

There are of course other James Leas in this area at this time as well. Elizabeth, if indeed she is the same Elizabeth Lea, a daughter of William Lea of South Hico as suggested by Ben Rose, does not have a brother named James. Still his beloved James Lea could be another James Lea married to an unknown sister of Henry's as well.

James Lea of Cobbs Creek and later South Hico marries an Elizabeth Lea and has children listed: Abner, Richard, Benjamin, Frankey, Naamah, Eunice or Nicey who marries a Chandler, and Anness Lea. This Frankey could be one and the same as Henry's Francis.

I believe that Henry Lea's Francis could be a real candidate as our Frankey Lea only if she is not the same Frankey as #3, discussed below, and if his wife Elizabeth was not the same Elizabeth who marries James Lea of Cobbs Creek. I am particularly interested in determining what land he owned that Frankey may have inherited and how that might relate to land she and John Jessee sold later in Caswell Co., NC.

Frankey Lea #3: This is the daughter of James Lea of Cobbs Creek and his wife Elizabeth Lea referenced above. This indeed may be the same person as Frankey Lea #2. It is believed that his wife Elizabeth was the daughter of William Lea of South Hico, first married to Henry Lea, and this daughter Frankey is Henry Lea's daughter Francis, an adopted daughter or step-child.

The case against this being our Frankey Lea is the fact that James Lea of Cobbs Creek, in his will of 1816, also refers to his other daughters by their married names, and refers to her as Frankey Lea. This suggests she was unmarried or married to a Lea.

Frankey Lea #4: This is the daughter of George Lea and Lucy Tolbert referred to as Frank. According to Bible sources recorded by Frances Powel Otken, a descendant of one of Frankey's siblings. First child "Frank, a daughter, is born 2 Dec. 1762." That would make her about 13 or 14 years old when she would marry 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. She would be age 48 or even 51 in 1803, if 1755 or 1752 is her correct birthdate. There is no indication in this Bible indicating who Frank married.

There is much evidence in the suggested proximity of this family's land to the John Jessee land on South Hico Creek, and in the names of John and Frankey's children to suggest that this George Lea was the father of our Frankey Lea.

A George Lea was closely associated with the legal affairs of John Jessee in Caswell Co., NC, but this may have been another George Lea, since it is believed George Lea and Lucy Tolbert moved from Caswell County to Georgia well before 1800. No further mention of Frank is made in the later affairs of George Lea and Lucy Tolbert. She could have left the family at a very young age to marry their neighbor John Jessee.

Frankey Lee #5: This is the daughter of a Richard and Lillie Lee or another Virginia Lee family, perhaps, from Westmoreland Co., VA. This would be the oft stated Henry Lightfoot Lee and Robert E. Lee connection that many family members believe is the ancestry of our Frankey Lea. The implication is that John Jessee married Frankey Lee before he came to Caswell Co. NC, and that she is no relation to the Lea family of NC. She would be a daughter of the Virginia Lee family. Please see the article on "Research Needed" for additional information regarding this idea.

None of the Above: I think we must consider that our Frankey Lea is none of the above. We must conclude that all the evidence is not in to prove any of these, and hopefully there is more to find. There were several Frankey Leas living in Caswell Co., NC at this time and maybe more in Virginia, and some are possible candidates for our Frankey Lea or Lee.

Thank You

Many of you have written to express support of the Newsletter and to offer monetary help for which I am grateful. The last Newsletter was the first that broke even. In return for new information provided, I have carefully recorded the information and sent back printouts of charts for correction and addition to those that sent it. I am glad to provide you finished pedigree or descendancy charts. Please keep the information coming.

I am enclosing copies of some letters and other resource items received from our readers of potential interest or help to you too. I would like to draw your attention to the work of Robert J. Gibson (303 Hilltop Drive, Madison Heights, VA 24572-3625, 804-846-0900) editor of *The Gibson Times* a similar but far more extensive Family Newsletter. The Gibsons are intermarried with the Jessees and other related families.

I am overwhelmed by the generosity of a few of you who have provided extensive copies of source materials, additional references, and who have given very much time, analysis and opinion. I want to give special attention to two.

First my Uncle Gene Jessee, whose ear I bent with all my enthusiasm for the family genealogy these many years, and who trusted me with the most personal stories of our family and his life. He was always the first to get the latest genealogy news and my first and most faithful subscriber to the newsletter. I am including a memorial essay in this newsletter as a tribute to him.

Secondly, I want to thank retired Colonel Howard Gilmer Jessee for his special kindness and generosity with me. Howard discovered me by way of this newsletter only about a year ago, and decided to test my veracity with a telephone call. We have had many a good phone conversation since. Howard is a living Jessee character, a descendant of Reverend David Jessee, who lives in both Russell Co. (on original David Jessee land on Moccasin Creek) and Hondo, Texas. His extraordinary career in the US Air Force serving under General Curtis LeMay, is matched by a lifetime of travel, research, collection, and writing

about the Jessee Family, the Sons of the American Revolution, and other historical endeavors. He loves history and he loves this family.

I am honored that he has shared so much of his time with me and has made extensive copies of his materials for me to use in this work. He was amongst the first of well wishers who greeted me after recovery from some surgery I had this Spring. I think Howard Jessee shares a number of the characteristics I admired about my Uncle Gene. Characteristics I think may be genetic in the Jessee family. They are always strong, often demanding, and sometimes a little rough, on the outside; a devoted husband, father and loyal friend on the inside. I am enclosing in this newsletter some of the treasures he has shared with me

John Jessee and Frankey Lea Memorial Proposed

Tom Rudder has recorded for us some 18 or more Jessee Family cemeteries in Russell County (See revised map enclosed). Anyone planning a trip to Russell County should have a copy of his map. Tom has sent a copy to the Russell County Library for inclusion in the Jessee Family materials there. The library located in a lovely new building in Lebanon, should be a first stop for Jessee Family Researchers in Russell County anyway!

Tom's most important contribution is identifying the location of John Jessee and Frankey Lea's unmarked graves in the George Lea Jessee cemetery, near their original homeplace in Reed's Valley. 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 on Carr's Creek and Beck's Branch. Tom offers much evidence to support this, and I have had several others providing supportive information and opinion.

From posterity, Mrs. Mamie Jessee Clay states in a letter to Mrs. Zella Detweiler, April 26, 1966: "The Maxwells are making some more pictures of my ancestral home, which our great great great grandfather John Jessee built the old log part which still stands, and my father built a lot of rooms onto it....The land you spoke of on Beck's Branch is what is now called Mill Creek. It has been called Mill Creek since

Jessee Browning built a mill. Jack Jessee built a mill and Jessee Sutherland had a mill."

Nevertheless, there is also disagreement about this particular location. We need more effort at proving or disproving this assertion, so please help, get in the fray.

Current evidence shows that 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, and Catherine is, I believe, a descendant of 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. John Jessee's recorded service from April 1781 to April 1782 would dispute that, and other claims above are not substantiated.

Tom has provided photographs of the beautiful old farm house that exists there today and suggested that the original John Jessee cabin may be inside. Others have provided me photographs of an older original poplar log home on the same site and suggested that it had burned down. Tom provided copy 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 or locale may be able to clarify if any of the original John Jessee or George Lea Jessee yellow poplar log cabin exist today, and whether they can confirm or rebut this location for their burial site.

Several subscribers have joined us to 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. We would like to put together 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, Howard G. Jessee and I, and 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 with at least two volunteers who would serve as managers, to establish the account, make arrangements, and co-sign checks. 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. I would like that to happen in the Summer of 1995, and I love a potluck picnic.

We need local helpers to make this happen. I will be glad to coordinate information and specific planning for the memorial through this newsletter. Please let us know your interest and how much you would be willing to give to such an effort.

Research Needed

Several individuals have expressed willingness to do research if we could give them a specific problem or lead to follow. I offer the following as candidates.

1) The Moravian or other church connections in NC might be a clue to our John and Frankey Lea mystery. Were John and Frankey married within the Moravian Baptist or another Church in Caswell Co., NC? 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 Jessees 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.

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.

Mrs. Zella Detweiler suggests we explore the church records of the following for evidence of John Jessee and Frankey Lea and other Lea and Jessee ancestors.

a) Bethel Hill Baptist Church, located in the northern part of Person Co. NC, which was constructed in 1774.

- b) Wheeler's Primitive Baptist Church organized before 1791.
- c) Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church, organized in 1875, but may have earlier records.
- d) Flat River Church, the oldest church in Person Co., NC

I can provide additional information to anyone who would like to seriously explore these leads. Call me.

2) The origins and parents of our John Jessee remains as much of a mystery as does Frankey Lea.

The following quote from the letters of Mrs. Mamie Jessee Clay to Mrs. Zella Detweiler offers much fruit for thought and potential research. Note some editorial comments by Mrs. Detweiler-ZD, and me-JJ. Mrs. Zella Jeanne Jessee Detweiler, who was my first inspiration in genealogy, some 30 years ago, is still living independently at age 90. She has provided me many new resources, ideas, and encouragement. She and Mrs. Clay, now deceased, had a lively correspondence in the 1960s. Mrs. Detweiler has been especially kind to share those letters with me.

"John Jessee Sr. left that home [the alleged ancestral home in Wales, England-JJ] and came to America, and he is the only one (Jessee I mean) that ever came. [Note: I've found several- ZD] He never owned any land 'til he and Frances went to Caswell Co., NC. In Spotsylvania Co. John Jessee Jr., who was my great grandfather, and Orange Co. seems that he had some land in both of those counties. He was born in 1775 [that has to be wrong-ZD] and Archer his brother in 1776. [Note: This John would be the John who married Mary Armstrong and the first child of John and Frankey-ZD.] John Jessee Sr. came to Russell Co. in 1778, and in 1791 he bought more land from Thomas Price and this was when he built the house that I sent you a picture of where I was born. He owned all the land in Reed's Valley, Russell Co., on both sides the road, and on both side the road on Carr's Creek, which later was called Mill Creek. The home place is still there and that was the William Jessee house that burned, that Sam Jessee house I told about. When he came from Caswell Co., NC he brought the grandfather clock which I now have, and is was said by the older folks in the family he brought the clock from England when he came to Westmoreland Co., VA, worked on the Lee farm and took Frances for his wife. When he built the big log house he built one below the house for the Lea or Lee to live in, and a 2 room house or what is now the Candler place, and my oldest sister, Corrie who married Walter Candler went to housekeeping in later years in that house."

"When John Sr. died in 1815, John Jr. and Mary moved into the big house with his mother, and all that was in that house became theirs at his mother's death in 1834, or maybe 1835. John Sr. and Frances are buried in a cemetery on the Bill Jessee farm where many Jessees are buried, and it is only about a half mile from my old home place."

This information has some errors and confusion, but it refutes many ideas and notions we have held about John Jessee and his origins. It provides several leads for additional research. References to the original John Jesse(e) as John Jessee Jr. and suggestions that there was a John Jesse(e) in Russell Co. as early as 1778 is one. This suggest that there may have been more than one John Jesse in America at this

time, even in Russell Co., or that our John Jessee was indeed the son of an unknown John Jessee, not Henry Jessee, as we currently believe.

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, indicates evidence of several other Jessee individuals or families who lived before or during the same time in Spotsylvania, Middlesex, and Fincastle Counties in VA.

Mrs. Detweiler suggests we research the John Jesse who witnessed some deeds in Spotsylvania Co., VA in the 1740s and to keep on the lookout for a Jesse(e), surveyor or chain carrier, on some old land grants. His signature would be important. It could be compared with the Russell Co. signature of our John Jessee.

The Gabriel Jessee family descendants of Russell Co. are not descendants of our John and Frankey, but rather of Old Philip Jessee, who lived to be 108, and who they believe was a brother of John and Henry Jessee. We obviously have much more to learn. I am still very much interested in evidence of that.

3) Several of John and Frankey's children require additional research. In particular, we need to discover the descendants of:

a) Lea Jessee and Barbara Gose

b) Boedicea Jessee and Stephen Gose Jr.

c) Frances Jessee and William Stone,

who had five children and moved to Browning, Missouri. We need research in Browning and Jackson Co., MO. for these and other Jessees.

d) Sarah Jessee and Wilson Vermillion

e) James Jessee and Jane Burk

f) Elizabeth Jessee and George Gose

g) Rebecca Jessee and William Burk

h) Jane Jessee and Henry Fuller

Several of these deserve research into the Gose, Burk, Stone, Vermillion, and Fuller families of Russell County.

Previews of Coming Attractions

At this writing, I have much more material than I can do justice to in this newsletter. In particular I wish to give future attention to the several Jesse and Jessee families, who are definitely not descendants of our John Jessee and Frankey Lea of Russell Co. There is plenty of evidence that there were several other Jesse and Jessee families in America at the same time as our John and Frankey, and evidence of emigration of additional Jesses after 1800 as well. A few of those descendants are now subscribing to this newsletter and supporting our research effort. We may yet find common ancestors for all of us.

This Newsletter

In the first newsletter, I provided information about my 30-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 providing the newsletter to all of you on the enclosed mailing list who responded to or were referred to me by others. For that I thank you. I really look forward to your letters and appreciate the questions and information provided.

I will enter all genealogy information provided to me into the Jessee Family Data Base, over 10,000 records now, and return appropriate charts to you. I would like to trace all of the 15 family descendants of John Jessee and Frankey Lea. I have organized our mailing list by the original 15 families descended from John Jessee. We now have 10 of John Jessee's 15 children represented.

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

Please feel free to correct anything I may have in error in any of these materials and provide me names and addresses of others who have interest. 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 appreciate your donations in defraying the cost of research, printing and postage of this newsletter. 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 to continue. However, I do not want to exclude anyone with real interest who can't afford to contribute either. Please share what you can.

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 Internet or 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 started. I am available on Internet, 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 newsletter are welcome.

The Jessee Family Newsletter
is edited and published by
James Wilson "Jim" Jessee
1272 Hobart Street
Chico, CA 95926.

916-342-2652

All Rights Reserved.