

HOME IS WHERE YOUR STORY BEGINS . . .

The Harris Family of Jackson Township, Newton County

The society received an email from Sue Hurlbut of Redlands California, informing us that she had several copies of Civil War era letters from Newton County residents, John T. and Louisa (Coshaw) Harris, Henry Coshaw, Micha Halstead, Elizabeth (Coshaw) Kessler and other related family names. She was planning a visit to our Resource Center to do research on the family. Sue works as a volunteer at the San Bernardino County Museum in Redlands, California, and travels the United States researching items that are donated to them, which is a story within itself.

The letters were donated to them from the family of the late Ruth Harris, the great-granddaughter of John and Louisa Harris. Through the letters the path that led them to California was revealed, as well as correspondence from John T. Harris, a member of Company B of the 51st Indiana Volunteer Infantry, to his wife Louisa (Coshaw) Harris, living in Jackson Township. News of the war, politics, the Rebels and general military existence is beautifully illustrated in ink and pen. The entire collection consists of over 100 letters, dating from 1858-1895. At this point in time we have digital copies, but Sue assures me that eventually we will receive the original copies. Excerpts from those letters regarding the Civil War will appear in the next edition of *The Newcomer*.

Sue's extensive research has revealed seven (7) generations, of the Harris family, beginning with (1) Benjamin Harris, who had a daughter named Unity Harris, who died in 1788. She married a John Ladd, and from this marriage there were nine children: Guli, b. 1769; Rachel, b. 1771, d. 1795; Elizabeth, b. 1772; Benjamin Harris, b. 1774; Margaret, b. 1776; Unity Smith, b. 1780 in Charles City, Virginia, d. 1846 in Indiana; Mary, b. 1782; Sarah, b. 1785; John, b. 1787, d. 1788.

John and Unity Ladd's sixth daughter, (2)Unity Smith married Dr. Thomas Harris, (ca. 1740-1828.) However, there isn't any documentation to his lineage. Speculation would be that he was the grandson of the first generation Benjamin Harris. (3) Dr. Thomas Harris' wife may have been his cousin.

Further evidence of this fact would be the naming of their first born, Benjamin T. Harris, b. February 10, 1808 in Virginia, d. Sept 4, 1837 in Tippecanoe County, Indiana. Their other children were: Lucy Ann, b. 1807; Mary T., b. Feb 1, 1821, d. May 11, 1845; Sarah W., b. February 4, 1814; Thomas W., b. December 10, 1816, d. August 1, 1890; Lucy Ann, b. July 30, 1822. Unity Smith (Ladd) wife of Dr. Thomas Harris was born in 1780 in Charles City, Virginia and died September 20, 1846 in Indiana, and is buried in Tippecanoe County, Indiana.

(4) Benjamin T. Harris, (1808-1837), son of Dr. Thomas and Unity (Ladd) Harris, married Elizabeth Faulk, b. November 30, 1807, d. December 30, 1856 in Jasper County, Indiana. From the source list Sue provided, I was able to find a bit more regarding Benjamin and Elizabeth Harris. From page 739 of the Biographical History of Tippecanoe, White, Jasper, Newton, Benton, Warren and Pulaski Counties, Indiana, 1899, Micah B. Halstead sketch, (he married John T. Harris' sister, Virginia U.):

"Our subject (Halstead) was married August 30, 1857, to Miss Virginia U. Harris, who was born in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, February 19, 1836. She is the daughter of Benjamin and Betsy (Faulk) Harris, her father being the son of Thomas Harris, of Vir-

ginia, the well known physician. Benjamin Harris was married in Virginia and came to Indiana in 1835, settling in Tippecanoe County, where he died in 1837. He was a farmer and speculator and a prominent man in his community. His wife survived him and kept the family of little children together, giving them the best education in her power. In 1851 she removed to Jasper county, where she entered land and improved a farm, on which she died December 30, 1856, when forty-nine years of age. Both she and her husband were members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, and were most estimable people. Their children were as follows: William, Henry O., Regina, John, Virginia, and Benjamin."

The children of Benjamin and Betsy (Faulk) Harris were: William F., b. January 26, 1830, d. on June 3, 1874, buried at the Harris Cemetery in Jackson Township, Newton County; Henry Oliver, b. November 5, 1831, in Nansemond, Virginia, d. October 27, 1919, in Jasper County, Indiana, and is buried in Rensselaer, Indiana; Elizabeth Regina, b. November 11, 1833, d. August 21, 1853; (5) John Thomas, twin to Virginia Unity, b. February 19, 1836 in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, d. July 13, 1895 in Rensselaer, Jasper County, Indiana. He is buried in Weston Cemetery; Virginia Unity, twin to John Thomas, b. February 19, 1836, married Micah B. Halstead, d. April 25, 1916, in Rensselaer, Jasper County, Indiana; Benjamin, b. April 2, 1838, d. December 8, 1916, in Jasper County, Indiana. These generations of the family were the early pioneers of our area, and many other local names are tied to this lineage, such as Ham, Handley, Kessler, Yeoman, and Halstead.

(5) John Thomas, son of Benjamin and Betsy (Faulk) Harris, married Louisa Jane Coshaw, daughter of William W. and Catherine (Buckley) Coshaw. There are many different spellings to the Coshaw name, but the Notice of Estate in the *Newton County Union*, Dec 3, 1863, for Henry Coshaw indicated this spelling, so I will use it throughout. Catherine (Buckley) Coshaw, b. 1811, d. 1849, was the daughter of Isaac B. and Abigail (Turney) Buckley, and is buried in Carroll County, Indiana.

The children of William W. and Catherine Coshaw were: Elizabeth Abigail, b. 1835 in Fayette, Indiana, (not sure if Lafayette or Fayette County), d. February 6, 1869; Henry H. Coshaw, b. 1837 in Indiana and died on September 5, 1863 in Camp Sherman, MS at the age of 26. He was a member of Co. D., of the 12th Indiana Volunteer Infantry. The cause of his death was typhoid fever or pneumonia. In the letters from John T. Harris to his wife, Louisa (sister to Henry), he continually asks if she had any correspondence with him; Thomas J. Coshaw, b. August 1839 in Carroll County, Indiana, d. February 15, 1907 and is buried in Jasper, Illinois; Louisa Jane, b. August 26, 1841 near Kokomo in Howard County, Indiana, d. October 22, 1884 in Newton County. She is buried in the Harris Cemetery, Jackson Township, Newton County, Indiana.

The children of John T. Harris and Louisa Jane (Coshaw) were: Oscar William, b. October 14, 1860, in Newton County, d. August 15, 1938, in Redlands, San Bernardino, CA; Grant D. Harris, b. 1864 in Indiana, d. November 28 1892, in Redlands at age 28, the cause of death was pneumonia; Bruce T. Harris, b. September 13, 1866 in Indiana, d. February 9, 1886 in California, about age 19; Detmer E., b. April 4, 1869, d. September 16, 1870, age

1, and is buried at Harris Cemetery, Jackson Township, Newton County, Indiana.

From the Obituary of John T. Harris, July 18, 1895, *Rensselaer Republican*:

“John T. Harris died last Saturday afternoon, at the residence of F. M. Parker, just north of town, after a sickness of two weeks.

“He was born in Tippecanoe County, this state, February 19, 1836, and his age at death was therefore 59 years, 4 months and 24 days. He was an old resident of this and Newton County, coming here with his parents in 1851. He lived in what was then Jasper County, but afterwards became a part of Newton County. He was married in 1859 to Louisa Koshaw. Four sons were born to this union, of whom only one the oldest is living, and he is now in California. His wife died in 1885, and in 1887 he married Miss Nellie Jackson, who survives him. He moved to Rensselaer in 1893, buying and occupying a good residence, which was destroyed by fire, a few months ago.

“He joined the Union army in 1861, and served faithfully for three years in Company B, of the 51st Indiana Regiment. Many years ago he and his wife united with the Cumberland Presbyterians, but after the disbanding of that organization he had no church connections.

“His other surviving near relatives are two brothers, Henry and Benjamin Harris, well known and highly respected residents of Rensselaer, and a twin sister, Mrs. M. B. Halstead, of Newton Township.

“The funeral was held Monday afternoon, at the First Baptist Church and was conducted by Rev. W. E. Wight, of Illinois. Interment was made in Weston Cemetery.

“The deceased was a member of the Rensselaer Post, Grand Army of the Republic, and the burial services were conducted by the Post, in accordance with the funeral rituals of the order. Some

37 army veterans took part in the services, among whom were the following members of Mr. Harris’ own Company: John Higgins, Recorder of Newton County, Dr. G. B. Smith, of Foresman, Hon. J. B. Lyons of Brook, Isaac Denny and John Lowe, of Kentland, and S. E. Yeoman of Rensselaer.”

(6) Oscar William Harris, the son of John T. and Louisa (Coshaw) Harris was the only living child at the time of John’s death. He married Alice Cook, and from their marriage there were seven children, Ruth Harris, b. 1883, d. 1957; Chester Cook, b. 1885, d. 1940; Hazel, b. 1887, d. 1900; Benjamin Harrison, b. 1889, d. 1949; Virginia R., b. 1891, d. 1909; John Milton, b. 1896, d. 1962; Olive E., b. 1898, d. 1968.

(7) Ruth Harris, from whose family the letters were donated to the San Bernardino County Museum in Redlands, California. Sue tells me that their interest in this family is in the study of the fruit industry during the Civil War era, and the letters sent back and forth from California to Indiana give a wonderful description of the lushness of the area. Many times, Grant wrote home to his father encouraging others to send money to invest in land in the area.

The research that Sue produced on the family history in combination with the letters that span 62 years, 1858-1916, give a rich, detailed story to the life and times of a pioneer family of Newton County.

Note: A complete excel file of all the letters with dates, to/from/ names mentioned and subject of the letter is available at the Resource Center in Kentland. Print outs of the digital prints of the letters are also on display. A special thank you to Sue Hulburt and the San Bernardino County Museum for making us aware of their donation. Written and submitted by Beth Bassett.