

News, Updates, & More



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July 2015

FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

Please let me know if you have any issues using the Varner Genealogy website. Since I have moved the storage location for the information I am concerned with the speed and availability of the information. I do not seem to be having any difficulties but want to be sure others are not having problems!

Copies of all issues of the newsletter are downloadable from the Varner Family website.

<Link to Varner Family Genealogy>

<http://brucevarner.com/VarnerGenealogy.htm>

Always need input for future newsletter subjects. If you have any specific area of interest or specific family detail that you would like to see expanded upon, please let me know.

This newsletter will soon be provided to members of the long lost (to us) Varner family line descended from Samuel Philip Varner.

Samuel Philip Varner 1846-1896
 George Henry Varner 1880-1946
 Henry Edgar Varner 1919-2003

I hope for this new involvement to broaden our the family knowledge.

QUESTIONS / NEWS

Q) I just received the Varner newsletter. Funny you should select money for your article. Last week at the Family History Center, I was working with a client who found a will from the late 1700's that mentioned a woman left her daughter 20 shillings. I struggled to find what that meant in today's money?

A) After the Norman Conquest of Britain in 1066, the pound was divided into twenty shillings and 240 pennies. It remained so until decimalization on 15 February 1971. So,
 1 Pound = 20 Shillings
 1 Shilling = 12 Pennies

Money used in the colonies in the late 1700's came in the form of: Colonial Bills, Continental Currency, Philadelphia Bank Notes, and then the US Dollar. The actual hard money most prominent however was still British coinage or old Spanish Riels. As money was pegged to gold/silver, we can get a close approximation of value.

Between 1823 & 1914, Britain was on the gold standard. The exchange rate was about £1 to \$4.86. So, 20 shillings

(Same as 1 Pound) was approximately \$4.86. We can use the dollar equivalent of \$4.86 to equal the 20 shillings left by mother to daughter.

Adjusted for inflation, \$1 in 1776 would be worth \$28.13 in 2011. So, the 20 shillings would be worth approximately \$136.71 (28.13 x 4.86).

While that might not seem like a lot. Remember that when Nancy Varner was working for Edmund Riggs in 1877, she was receiving \$7.00 a month for her wages.....

The Riggs Family: A Large Presence in Miller County, MO.

It has been sometime since we have discussed the Riggs families of Miller County. I think it cannot be overstated the importance of the Riggs upon Miller County during the period between 1840's and the 1870's. I thought I would discuss some of the details around that families impact to Miller County during this 40 year period.

Owen Riggs was said to have worked on the river. The only reference to this comes from an Obituary of Owen Riggs referenced later in this article. Owen Riggs, and likely the brothers, made their early fortune cutting timber in Miller County. Then building flatboats to transport the timber and sailing said timber down the Osage, into the Missouri River, and on down the Mississippi to market. It makes sense that Owen had river experience. Access to a large river to gain experience would have been accessible to Owen as a young man. He was born and raised on the Ohio River in

What is now Tyler County, West Virginia on the east bank, and the state of Ohio on the west bank of the river.

The 1928 reference book "A History of Pleasants County West Virginia" states that James Riggs (Grandfather of the Riggs brothers) "...married and with his two small sons, Basil and Edmund, came to the Ohio Valley in 1797 making his home below what is now New Matamoras (Ohio).... Basil Riggs crossed over the river and made a home in the bottoms above Raven Rock Narrows, Edmund, the other son of pioneer James Riggs, married Elizabeth Roby, and their children were Owen, Calvin, Josiah, Mrs. Mary Ann Holdren, Betsy, Maria and Caroline. Owen and Calvin went to Missouri." (Notice that the younger brother Edmund was for some reason not mentioned in this reference.)

Even though only two of the brothers are mentioned above as coming to Missouri, the three Riggs brothers came to Miller County near the same time. Calvin Riggs was born in 1810, followed by Owen Riggs born in 1813, and Edmund Riggs born in 1819.

Census records from Virginia (Before the area became West Virginia) indicate Calvin, Owen, and Edmund were born to Edmund Riggs Sr. who along with wife Elizabeth Roby are recorded to have had a total of 15 children.

Although the Riggs family is quite well researched, what became of these 3 brothers had not been previously known to other Riggs researchers.

In 1838 All three brothers each purchased their first recorded pieces of land in Miller County. Owen also purchased land in Cole County. Whether they had in fact moved to Miller Country by that time, or were just speculating in land is not known. All of the many parcels of land that the brothers subsequently purchased in Missouri were paid for in cash.

No census record is found for the brothers in 1840.

In 1841 the brothers purchase another 7 pieces of land. Five in Miller County and two more for Owen in Cole County, in addition to that in Miller County. On the patent applications each brother still listed their residences as Tyler Co., Virginia.

In 1845 Calvin and Owen had the honor of becoming the first two people arrested in new Miller County for liquor-law violation.

By the 1850 census each brother was listed as living in District 13 of Miller County. Calvin and Owen are shown living in the same residence with 2 other male laborers. Edmund was in his own place with wife Mary and two children ages 5 & 2. The census listings for real estate and personal property for each brother became more substantial with each passing census.

In 1856 Owen Riggs is recorded as purchasing a negro woman named Harriet as a slave for life. Harriet was obtained from John Flanagan for the sum of one thousand dollars in hard pair and pledged to be of sound body and mind, free of any encumbrances. Owen Riggs is also referenced as having purchased a negro

woman named Matilda for \$850 in the "Judge Jenkins' History of Miller County".

By the 1860 census Calvin was also married with children. Calvin with wife Charlotte in Osage Township. Owen next door with several farm laborers. Edmund also in Osage Township with wife and 5 children.

On Oct. 12, 1863 the probate for Calvin Riggs was filed with Charlotte Riggs and Owen Riggs as administrators. Calvin's estate took six years to settle. Appraisal of personal property totaled \$1,508.64. Cash on hand in the amount of \$550.90. Real Estate totaling 400 acres. In addition notes of loan from 15 individuals due the estate totaled \$2,003.37 with interest. So by the death of Calvin, he had acquired a very substantial estate. From a genetic standpoint, Calvin left no known male offspring.

During the Civil War Owen and Edmund Riggs were levied taxes as southern sympathizers. In Richard Bense's 2004 treatise, "The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century", Bense studied over 16,000 US House of Representative hearings about loyalty oaths, troops, and elections to occur during and after the Civil War. Missouri had the largest number of such hearings of any state. One such hearing mentioned the Riggs of Miller Co. Mo.

"The county at the time concluded that Edmund Riggs, who had failed to pay the tax, had known his name was on the list. As evidence the county assessor used the fact that the list had been posted at the local mill and because Edmund's brother Owen Riggs did in fact know both men were on

the list and would have told his brother. That Owen knew the two were on the list was validated because Owen had at the time gone to authorities and inquired as to how he might be removed from the list.

In 1869 Owen Riggs filed a plat drawing with Miller Co. using land he owned on the east side of the Osage River to create the town of St. Elizabeth. The town was laid out on the river bank into 128 lots, each 20' x 80', grouped by 16 lots to a block. Plat contained streets & alleyways.

A reference to the town was made in the Campbell's Gazetteer of Missouri, published in 1874 by R.A. Campbell, of St. Louis. That reference states:

"St. Elizabeth, on the south bank of the Osage River 18 miles below Tuscumbia, was laid out by Owen Riggs in 1869, and has 1 store and a Catholic church, the only one in the county. Population, about 60."

In the 1870 census Owen is listed as living in Jim Henry Township with his wife Malinda and 4 female children. Edmund is listed as living in Osage Township with this wife and 4 male children.

On Oct. 30, 1875 probate of Owen Riggs was filed with T. B. Robinson as principal administrator. Also listed as administrators were: Marks Lesem, J. G. Lurton, and Abel Jarrett. The estate took several years to settle. Initial appraisal of personal property totaled \$5,011.17. Real Estate total was not clearly defined in records. In addition notes of loan on 89 transactions due the estate totaled \$9,182.32 with interest.

One note due Owen was from Sam Varner for \$5.17 to settle for lumber in 1872.

On Thursday, Oct. 14, 1875 the obituary of Owen Riggs appeared in the Miller County Vidette, Tuscumbia, Mo. The article is provided here in full for an overview of Owen. It should be noted however that it contains several inconsistencies:

"Last week we noticed the death of one of our most respected citizens, Owen Riggs. We will now attempt a review of his life. He was born in Tyler Co., West Virginia. Was usually called the 'long reach' on the Ohio River. At his death he was 59 years old. From boyhood, he was raised on a farm on which he was born, and was an industrious and faithful boy, he thus worked until manhood. At this time he done some boating on the Ohio and Missipp at odd spels when not busy on the farm. In the year 1838, he came to Miller County and purchased some real estate with a view of someday locating here, but remained on the Virginia farm and continued boating on the Ohio and Mississippi until 1844 when he came to Miller Co. to live. One of his first deeds and boldest ventures of his eventful life, was the building of a flat boat on the Tavern creek in this county, load it with pork, taking it down the Osage, Missouri and Mississippi rivers into the Yazoo Pass, trading. Finally went down the Mississippi and closed out his load of pork at Vicksburg, he then came back to Miller Co., where he engaged in farming, raising stock, buying and shipping to a very great extent. In 1847, he married the daughter of Henry C. Lurton, by whom he had 2 daughters, who are both living and married. His first wife died in 1858. In 1863 he married Madada Birdsong, by whom he had 2 children who are now living to mourn his loss. In 1857, he went into partnership with D.

Cunningham in which venture he lost heavily. During these many years he bought wheat, corn, and tobacco and shipped it.

Cororants took advantage of his kindness and nichered from him. He died comparative poor. His father is still living on the old farm where Owen started in life and is now over 100 years old. We believe he has but one brother living, Edmond Riggs, who is a resident of this county. During the war the Bushwhackers, supposing him to have a large amount of money and in attempting to force him to disgorge, they built a fire in the woods and burned his legs into a crisp, from which he suffered for many years. In fact, it shattered his constitution so that he never recovered his former self. This was one of the most self (sic) acts that was perpetrated during the War in this part of Missouri. This imperfect and brief sketch is all we can give as it is next to impossible to get the correct data. We have lost one of our worthiest citizens. May his departed spirit rest in peace."

NOTE: Owen Riggs established the original town of Old St. Elizabeth on the Osage River in 1869, located on the east bank. He helped to establish the first Catholic Church in Miller Co. when it was built at Old St. Elizabeth about 1870. Owen Riggs once owned 6000 acres in Miller County in its early days! It took 9 years to settle his estate after his death. With his death came the slow demise of Old St. Elizabeth on the Osage.

Whatever the incident or incidents where Owen may have suffered losses, they somehow became an in-correct written

legacy that was mentioned in the obituary at the time of his death. A number of references to Owen Riggs in books about Miller County wrongly state that he lost his wealth.

A study of the probate records for Owen Riggs however reveal a more true picture. In fact Owen left such a large estate that it took from the time of his death in 1875 until 1884 to fully settle. It appears from all the records found to date that subsequent authors have perpetuated this myth that seems to originate from Owen's death notice.

From a genetic standpoint, Owen also apparently left no male off-spring.

On Mar. 3, 1877 probate of Edmund Riggs was filed with Mary A. Riggs and James C. Piles as principal administrators. Affidavit states said Edmund Riggs died at Miller County, Missouri in 1877 leaving as his heirs: Mary A. Riggs his widow, children Owen Riggs, Okey Riggs, James Riggs, William Riggs, Phirby Jones, Edmund Jones, children of Elizabeth Jones, formerly Elizabeth Riggs, now deceased.

Initial appraisal of personal property totaled \$907.45. \$35.75 in cash. With Real Estate totaled at least 509 acres. Included were 4 notes of loan due the estate.

Claim #15 against the estate of Edmund Riggs submitted on Apr. 2, 1877 was for \$13.15. The claim is from Nancy Varner who swore she had been employed by Edmund Riggs and was due 3 ½ months' pay @ \$7.00 per month, totaling \$24.50. \$11.35 had been received but Nancy Varner

was still due \$13.15. Payment was allowed in open court on Feb. 13, 1878.

Probate for all three brothers confirm that each had substantial estates and each was heavily engaged in business and lending within Miller County. Here is the overview:

Wealth Increase Over the Years:

1850

Calvin
\$2,500 real estate
Owen
Not Listed
Edmund
\$1,000 real estate

1860

Calvin
\$4,500 real estate & \$1,500 personal
Owen
\$12,000 real estate & \$4,500 personal
Edmund
\$6,000 real estate & \$9,500 personal

1870

Owen
\$20,000 real estate & \$4,000 personal
Edmund
\$2,000 real estate & \$800 personal

Wealth At Probate:

Calvin

400 acres real estate, \$4,062.91 personal

Owen

Undefined real estate, \$14,193.49 personal

Edmund

509 acres real estate, \$943.25

While the records are unclear about how well thought of the Riggs brothers were in Miller County, it cannot be doubted that

they were financially important in the early decades of Miller County.

In the years after the brothers deaths, the children of Calvin and Owen, all female, took other surnames through marriage. The male children of Edmund (Nancy Ann's "Employer") quickly drifted to other parts of Missouri and then onto Washington state. The Riggs familial ties to their ancestors in West Virginia were apparently totally severed by this time as no one from the original Virginia Riggs knows the whereabouts of any living relatives to Calvin, Owen, or Edmund.

I have been working to find living descendants of Edmund Riggs, so far without success. Graves of some of Edmunds male Riggs children are found in Washington, but tracing living relatives has been unproductive to this point.

George Varner of Missouri Direct Line DNA

I am extremely happy, and at the same time apprehensive at the progress made in obtaining a willing Samuel Philip Varner male to male descendent for DNA testing.

Bill Varner (Billy Joe Varner b. 1944) has been very happy about the connection, and to learn details about the family history.

I received Bill's agreement and have obtained the Family Tree DNA testing kit in Bill's name. Last week however,

when I contacted him to schedule a meeting, I discovered he is sick.

The meeting was postponed so that he could recuperate. I am hoping the in the next couple of weeks Bill will be better and I can schedule a trip to Versailles to meet with Bill and obtain the DNA sample.

Again, Bill's ancestry is listed here:

George Varner (1789-1861)

Samuel Philip Varner (1846-1896)

George Henry Varner (1880-1946)

Henry Edgar Varner (1919-2003)

Billy Joe Varner (1944-)

Dee Bremer has also been doing some hard work running down information on the cousins of Bill Varner through a second marriage by Samuel Philip Varner. The information involves possible methods of contact for descendants form this other side of the Samuel Philip Varner family. The information looks promising and I hope to follow up on it in the near future.

Have a happy 4th of July!!!.....

Bruce Varner