

Ellen W. Chaney, Frontier Rancher

Michael A. Ports*

Introduction

The following material is another installment in the proposed series of articles on the many descendants of Christopher Chaney, Texas Patriot. Each article focuses on the family of one particular individual, his or her spouse, and their children. For the present installment, the focus is on the family of Ellen Chaney, his youngest known child. Hopefully, the following will provide some new and interesting family history for other researchers. Of course, it is hoped that others will step forward with new information.

Coming of Age in the Texas Republic

1. Ellen W. Chaney was born July 15, 1834, in Washington County, Virginia, the youngest daughter of Christopher and Rebecca Chaney.¹ She would have had little memory of her life in Virginia as she was just two years old when the family moved to Texas. Virtually nothing is known of her early years in Sabine County before the family again moved when she was just eleven years old. Growing up without a father, who had died in 1836, was not easy. Her eldest brother Frank led the family in 1845 to Grimes County where young Ellen came of age. It is evident that she obtained at least enough schooling to learn to write her name.

She was just seventeen years old when she married her neighbor Nathan Davis. Their license was dated September 25, 1851 in Grimes County.² Nathan Davis, nineteen years old, was living in the household of Peter Keer in 1850, probably working as a farm laborer.³ Also in that same household were John Davis, aged 13, and Nancy Davis, aged 11. It is presumed that John and Nancy were Nathan's siblings. Nathan Davis appears on the 1853 tax roll of Grimes County, but not before or thereafter.⁴ He paid the tax that year for one poll, but no real or personal property. It is presumed that he died in late 1853 or early 1854. Of course, it is possible that he abandoned his wife and baby daughter. No probate or other record of him has been found in Grimes County. Nathan may have been related to Keziah Davis, who married Ellen's oldest brother.

The children of Nathan and Ellen W. (Chaney) Davis were:

¹ Christopher Chaney, Texas Patriot, Texas State Genealogical Society Quarterly, STIRPES, Volume 41, Number 4, December 2001.

² Marriage Records, Grimes County, Texas, Book H, Page 82. Grimes County Courthouse, Anderson, Texas. (Hereinafter cited as Grimes Marriages.)

³ 1850 Census, Grimes County, Texas, Page 761. All Texas census schedules at Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

⁴ Real and Personal Property Tax Rolls, Grimes County, Texas, 1846-1901. All Texas real and personal property tax rolls at Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

2. i. Rebecca Ann, born December 2, 1852 in Grimes County, Texas.

Widowhood and Remarriage

After the death of her first husband, it is presumed that Ellen lived with her long-widowed mother Rebecca. Because her husband had left her with no inheritance or other means of support, life on the farm must have been difficult for the young widow and infant daughter. No doubt being forced by circumstances to help her mother in managing the operation of the home farm taught Ellen how to manage large scale ranching operations on her own.

Ellen married Prue Benson Stuckey, the son of Daniel Stuckey, by license dated August 9, 1855 in Grimes County.⁵ Daniel Stuckey was her brother-in-law, having previously married her eldest sister Mahala. Thus, Ellen married her own nephew! Prue Stuckey was born circa 1833 in Mississippi. He first appears on the tax rolls of Grimes County in 1857 charged with the tax on one poll, but no real or personal property. Prue next appears on the tax rolls in 1859 charged for the tax on one poll, two horses, a wagon, and oxen worth \$250. In 1860, Prew reported that he was 27 years old, was a farmer, placed no value on his personal property, owned \$2,600 worth of real estate, and had been born in Georgia.⁶ Ellen reported that she was 26 years old and had been born in Virginia. Living in their household were their daughter Rebecca, her mother Rebecca, and Josephine Harrelson. Prue owned no slaves. His farm was valued at \$2,100 and consisted of 10 acres of improved land and 200 acres of unimproved land.⁷ He valued his farm implements and machinery at \$10. He owned twenty horses, fifty cows, eight oxen, two hundred cattle, and sixty swine and valued his livestock at \$2,700. He produced one hundred bushels of indian corn, two bales of cotton, fifty pounds of butter, and \$95 worth of slaughtered animals.

Soon thereafter they moved to Blanco County where, on September 7, 1861, Prew Stuckey served as a private in Captain George Freeman's Cavalry Company, Pedernales Home Guard, 31st Brigade of Texas Militia.⁸ The company was organized for home protection against Indian depredations and the invasion of black republicans. The Confederacy needed able-bodied men for the War and Prue answered the call to duty by enlisting as a private in Company C, 16th Texas Infantry, on March 19, 1862 at Camp Hebert near Hempstead.⁹ At that time, he received a bounty of \$50 for a commitment to serve for the duration of the War. In June 1862, he was detailed as a nurse in quarters. The regimental return for November 1862 indicates that he was absent sick in Drew County, Arkansas.

The 16th Texas Infantry Regiment saw its first combat duty in northeastern Louisiana in 1863, during the

⁵ Grimes Marriages, Book H, Page 220.

⁶ 1860 Census, Population Schedules, Grimes County, Texas, Page 110.

⁷ 1860 Census, Agricultural Schedules, Grimes County, Texas, Page 20.

⁸ Military Records, Confederate Muster Rolls, 1861-1865. Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

⁹ Compiled Military Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations From Texas, Sixteenth (Flournoy's) Regiment of Texas Infantry. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

early summer. In 1864, it fought against Bank's Red River Campaign and, with other Texas units, was hurriedly moved to Arkansas, after the engagement at Pleasant Hill, Louisiana, to check Steele's advance on Camden, Arkansas. Prue Stuckey could not accompany his Regiment to Arkansas, because he was captured at Pleasant Hill on April 9, 1864. He was exchanged at Blair's Landing, Louisiana on April 20, 1864. During the summer of 1864, the regiment received orders to return to Louisiana. For a time, it was stationed at Shreveport. Late in the War, it moved to Marshall, Texas and then to Hempstead, where it disbanded on the last day of April, 1865.

Divorced on the Texas Frontier

Apparently, Prue and Ellen separated either shortly before, during, or soon after the war. Neither Prue nor Ellen have yet been located on the 1870 Census anywhere in Texas. No known children resulted from their marriage. Prue Stuckey moved back to Grimes County, where his divorce from Ellen became final on February 15, 1871.¹⁰ He married Liberty Belle Taylor by license on June 1, 1871.¹¹ Prew, aged 47, was enumerated in the 1880 Census with his wife, Liberty aged 36, and three children: Lon M., Prew B., and John D.¹² Prue Benson Stuckey died intestate in 1894 and was buried at the cemetery adjacent to the Martins Prairie Missionary Baptist Church near Kieth. His widow Liberty died intestate in 1901.¹³ She was buried next to her husband.

Mrs. E. W. Stuckey in 1862 appears for the first time on the tax rolls of Blanco County, Texas, with no land, but with 22 horses valued at \$440 and 400 cattle valued at \$1,000.¹⁴ In 1863, she again appears with no land, but with livestock valued at \$3,075. In 1865, Mrs. E. Stuckey paid taxes on 500 cattle worth \$3,000. It is curious that her husband, Prue Stuckey does not appear on any Blanco County tax rolls. Perhaps Prue does not appear on the tax rolls because he was away in the army. More likely, Prue and Ellen were separated soon after their move to Blanco County. Because the early county records were destroyed by a courthouse fire in 1876, not much is known about Ellen's life there. It is clear, however, that she was an enterprising woman. Ellen became a successful rancher, acquiring many horses and hundreds of cattle. Such success was no easy task for a divorced woman living on the Texas frontier.

In 1866, Mrs. E. Stuckey paid taxes in Blanco County on eleven horses valued at \$220 and five hundred cattle valued at \$2,500. In 1867, she paid taxes on one town lot in Pittsburg valued at \$250, eleven horses valued at \$920, 240 cattle valued at \$960, and miscellaneous property worth \$130. Her town lot in Pittsburg was identified as Lot 8, Block 5. In 1868, she paid taxes on her town lot valued at \$250, eleven horses valued at \$240, and 295 cattle valued at \$935. In 1869, she paid taxes on her town lot valued at \$250, twelve horses valued at \$250, 325 cattle valued at \$1,000, and miscellaneous property valued at

¹⁰ Civil Minutes, District Court, Grimes County, Texas, Book E, Pages 151-2. Grimes County Courthouse, Anderson, Texas.

¹¹ Grimes Marriages, Book K, Page 13.

¹² 1880 Census, Population Schedules, Grimes County, Texas, Enumeration District 60, Sheet 51.

¹³ Grimes Deeds, Book 49, Page 242.

¹⁴ Real and Personal Property Tax Rolls, Blanco County, Texas, 1859-1903.

\$10. In 1870, she paid taxes on her town lot valued at \$150, nine horses valued at \$135, two hundred cattle valued at \$600, and miscellaneous property valued at \$10. She also paid taxes on her 200-acre portion of the C. Chaney Headright in Johnson County valued at \$500. Ellen does not appear on the Blanco County tax rolls for 1871, 1872, 1873, or 1875. She did pay taxes on her town lot in Pittsburg valued at \$250 in 1876, but does not appear there on any later tax rolls.

Moving to Lampasas and Remarriage

Just when she left Blanco County is not clear. On March 5, 1878, Mrs. E. W. Stuckey married E. C. Cheatham by license in Lampasas County.¹⁵ Very little is known about her third husband, E. C. Cheatham. No record of him prior to their marriage has been found. Ellen W. Cheatham of Lampasas County appointed C. Y. Kouns of Johnson County her attorney to sell her portion of father's headright in Johnson County.¹⁶ She sold her portion of that land to G. W. Patterson, R. R. Young, Jr., and W. D. Young on November 27, 1880. However, no deed was filed as she continued to hold liens on the property until their notes were paid and settled. By her attorney, she released the liens on 40 acres of the tract on October 9, 1882.¹⁷ The remaining liens were released and a final deed filed on March 30, 1886.¹⁸ Both Ellen and her husband, E. C. Cheatham, signed the deed and releases.

Neither Ellen nor her husband have been located in the 1880 Census anywhere in Texas. But, that they were residents of Lampasas seems sure. In 1881, Ellen W. Cheatham paid taxes in Lampasas County on a 12-acre tract valued at \$200, one carriage, buggy, or wagon valued at \$50, two horses valued at \$40, five cattle valued at \$30, one hog valued at \$2, \$20 cash on hand, and miscellaneous property valued at \$94. The 12-acre tract had been part of the original Owen Clinton Headright. On August 18, 1881, Ellen W. Cheatham of Lampasas County appointed Thomas Traweek also of Lampasas County to be her attorney to sell her town lot at Pittsburg in Blanco County.¹⁹ She had purchased the town lot from Rufus Perry sometime before 1867. On August 29, 1881 by her attorney, Ellen sold her lot in Pittsburg to W. A. Hudson for \$10.²⁰

On February 1, 1884, E. W. Cheatham purchased Lot 7, Block 3 of Standifer's Addition to Lampasas from J. W. Murray for \$175.²¹ In 1884, E. C. Cheatham paid taxes in Lampasas County on one carriage,

¹⁵ Marriage Records, Lampasas County, Texas, Marriage Book A, Page 6. Lampasas County Courthouse, Lampasas, Texas.

¹⁶ Land Records, Johnson County, Texas, Deed Book V, Page 112. Johnson County Courthouse, Cleburne, Texas. (Hereinafter cited as Johnson Deeds.)

¹⁷ Johnson Deeds, Book 28, Pages 491 and 492.

¹⁸ Johnson Deeds, Book 32, Page 317.

¹⁹ Land Records, Blanco County, Texas, Deed Book 4, Page 319. Blanco County Courthouse, Johnson City, Texas. (Hereinafter cited as Blanco Deeds.)

²⁰ Blanco Deeds, Book 4, Page 320.

²¹ Land Records, Lampasas County, Texas, Deed Book 2, Page 484. Lampasas County Court House, Lampasas, Texas. (hereinafter cited as Lampasas Deeds).

buggy, or wagon valued at \$35, two horses valued at \$100, and miscellaneous property valued at \$5. In 1885, E. C. Cheatham paid the taxes on one carriage, buggy, or wagon valued at \$25 and two horses valued at \$100. He paid the poll tax in 1884, but not in 1885 or thereafter. On July 6, 1886, Mrs. E. W. Cheatham purchased a 30-acre tract of land in Lampasas County at a public sheriff's sale for \$155.²² The tract was located about two miles northeast of the town of Lampasas being the northeast corner of the W. S. Graham pre-emption survey. In 1887, Ellen W. Cheatham paid taxes on the 12-acre tract valued at \$250, 30-acre tract valued at \$150, one town lot valued at \$75, eleven cattle valued at \$55, \$100 cash on hand, and miscellaneous property valued at \$105. The town lot was identified as Lot 7, Block 3 of Standifer's Addition. That same year, E. C. Cheatham paid taxes on one carriage, buggy, or wagon valued at \$20 and two horses valued at \$60.

In 1888, Mrs. E. W. Cheatham paid taxes on her 12-acre tract valued at \$150, 30-acre tract valued at \$200, eight cattle valued at \$40, and miscellaneous property valued at \$200. That same year, E. C. Cheatham paid taxes on one carriage, buggy, or wagon worth \$10 and two horses worth \$50. On October 27, 1890, E. C. Cheatham and wife sold their 30-acre tract to H. M. Sweet for \$350.²³ In 1890, E. C. Cheatham paid taxes on two carriages, buggies, or wagons worth \$10 and one horse worth \$20. In 1891, he paid taxes on two carriages, buggies, or wagons valued at \$40, and three horses valued at \$60. That same year, she paid taxes on the 12-acre tract worth \$120, one town lot worth \$30, and two cattle worth \$10. In 1892, E. C. Cheatham paid the taxes on the 12-acre tract valued at \$120, one town lot valued at \$38, three horses valued at \$40, and four cattle valued at \$15.

Because E. C. Cheatham does not appear on the tax rolls for 1893 or thereafter, it is presumed that he died in 1894 or 1895. No record of his estate has been found in the Lampasas County probate records. Based upon the tax rolls, he owned very little in taxable personal property and no real estate at all. Thus, it comes as no surprise that he died intestate and that his small estate was not probated. On March 10, 1894, E. C. Cheatham and wife sold Lot 7, Block 3 of Standifer's Addition to Lampasas.²⁴ Mrs. E. W. Cheatham was taxed for the 12 acre tract of land and a few cattle for the years 1894, 1895, 1896, and 1897.

After the death of her third husband, Ellen lived with her daughter and son-in-law. In 1900, Ellen Cheatham was identified as a widow who was born in June 1833 in Virginia.²⁵ She was listed as having had only one child. She remained with her daughter and son-in-law in Lampasas. In 1910, she was listed as a widow aged 75.²⁶ According to her tombstone, she was born on July 15, 1834 in Washington County, Virginia and died on March 8, 1912. She was buried next to her daughter and son-in-law at the Oak Hill Cemetery in Lampasas. No death certificate was recorded for her. However, in both the 1900 and 1910 Census, the birth place for both her father and mother was listed as Virginia. She presented her

²² Lampasas Deeds, Book N, Page 393

²³ Lampasas Deeds, Book Y, Page 192.

²⁴ Lampasas Deeds, Book Z, Page 161.

²⁵ 1900 Census, Population Schedules, Lampasas County, Texas, Enumeration District 102, Sheet 14,

²⁶ 1910 Census, Population Schedules, Lampasas County, Texas, Enumeration District 168, Sheet 4,

will to the county clerk who recorded it among the deed records on January 11, 1879.²⁷

Last Will and Testament of Mrs. E. W. Cheatham

In the name of God Amen

I Ellen W. Cheatham of Lampasas County Texas, being of sound mind and memory, do hereby publish and declare this my Last Will and Testament, hereby revoking all other Wills heretofore by me made.

1st. I desire my body to be buried in a decent and Christianlike manner, suited to my circumstances and condition in life.

2nd. I give and bequeath to my husband E. C. Cheatham the sum of Five Dollars.

3rd. I give and bequeath to my beloved daughter Rebecca Traweek, wife of S. T. Traweek my entire stock of cattle and horses, my buggy, and all household and kitchen furniture except two bedsteads, beds and bedding.

4th. I give and bequeath to each of my beloved grand daughters, Clyde and Daisy Traweek, one bedstead, one bed and bed furniture.

5th. I desire and direct that all of my improved lands in this State shall be leased annually to honest and trusty tenants untill such time as my Executor to be hereinafter named shall deem it advisable to sell the Same, and I hereby authorize and empower my said Executor at such time as he may think best to Sell all of my land improved or unimproved upon such terms as he may think best for the interest of my Legatees and devisees.

6th. In case of the sale of my lands or any part of the same by my Executor, I desire and direct that all money arising from the Sale of my lands, as well as that arising from rents, shall be put at interest, upon good and solvent security untill the same shall be distributed as herein indicated.

7th. I desire and direct that all moneys arising from the sale of my lands or from rents of the Same, shall be paid and distributed by my Executor eqally, Share & Share alike to my daughter Rebecca Traweek and her children, each child to be paid its distributive share when it attains its majority, or if a girl when it marries but in the event my daughter Rebecca Traweek becomes a widow before the final distribution and Settlement of my Estate lands, or if the lands are not sold, then one third of the land, the residue to be paid and distributed to the children of my said daughter Rebecca Traweek at the time and in the manner specified above. I further desire and direct that my Executor shall pay to my daughter Rebecca annually, fifty dollars untill her eldest child becomes of age. 8th. In the event my daughter Rebecca Traweek and all the children from her body shall die before my Estate is paid out and distributed to them I desire and direct that my entire Estate real

²⁷ Lampasas Deeds, Book E, Page 412.

and personal shall be sold and the proceeds distributed among the poor widows and orphand of this Lampasas and adjoining Counties the beneficiaries to be selected by my Executor.

9th. I hereby Constitute and appoint D. C. Thomas Sole Executor of this my Last Will and Testament, and it is my special desire and request that the Probate Court will not require or accept any bond of my said Executor.

In testamony of which I hereunto sign my name in the presence of the undersigned witnesses this 10th day of January AD 1879.

Ellen W. Cheatham

Conclusion

The foregoing article summarizes all that is known about Ellen W. Chaney and her three husbands: Nathan Davis, Prue Stuckey, and E. C. Cheatham. The author is indebted to the staff of the Texas State Land Office, Texas State Library and Archives, Grimes County Courthouse, Blanco County Courthouse, Johnson County Courthouse, Lampasas County Courthouse, Dallas Public Library, and Clayton Library in Houston for their patience, knowledge, and assistance. Special thanks are due to the author's cousin Julia Cauble Smith for her insightful review and valuable suggestions. The author regrets never having met any of his cousins from this branch of his family tree. Hopefully, the foregoing article will spur descendants or other researchers to offer comments, questions, additional information, as well as suggestions for further research.

* 5427 Mission Road, Fairway, Kansas 66205. Member, Texas State Genealogical Society.