

HISTORY OF THE THORNTON FAMILY - MINERVA THORNTON BICKELL - 1907

My Great Grandfather, Samuel Thornton, was born in Clare County in Ireland in about the year 1712. He came to America at an early age with his Matthew Thornton, and settled in the town of Londonderry, New Hampshire. They were loyal to their adopted country.

Matthew was born in Ireland in 1714 and after coming to America he studied medicine and commenced its practice at Londonderry. He was in Congress a short time late in the autumn of 1776 and was the last signer of the Declaration of Independence. He died in 1803.

Samuel, my Great Grandfather, was a Presbyterian Minister, so history does not mention him as doing anything particular; but, one thing, he was not a Tory. He moved to North Carolina where he died. He had 3 children that I know of: Margaret, James and Robt. The three children moved to South Carolina. Margaret married Matthew Reed and died leaving no children. James, my Grandfather, settled in Abbeville County near Abbeville Courthouse. He was born in 1747 and was married to Jeannette Montgomery in 1767. She was born in Ireland. Her parents came to America when she was 3 years old. They started with 5 children, but the baby died and was buried at sea. Her brothers and sisters were John, Polly and Nancy. Another daughter was born after they came to America. Her name was Jane. They landed at Charlestown, South Carolina, and moved on to Abbeville County and settled near Abbeville Courthouse, where her father and mother died. When she was 12 years old she was taken by a man by the name of MacDonald, with whom she lived until she married my Grandfather. ~~She had~~ She had a brother, John Montgomery, who was a model young man, and his name became a family name. All of my Father's family named a boy for him. Two of my Grandfather's sisters married brothers by the name of Strain, of Revolutionary fame. Their mother was a widow and had 7 sons, all old enough to fight for freedom. The youngest, who afterwards became my Great Uncle, was 17, which was at that time considered very young to go to war. One of the other sons was killed in battle and when he was brought home to his mother, she said she wished she had seven more sons to give to their country. That showed her loyalty and also the spirit of the times. The sister that married the older Strain had a son, who died young, by the name of Harvey. He was a model man and his name became a family name also.

Grandfather and Grandmother Thornton moved from South Carolina to Hiland County, Ohio in 1807, when my father was 18 years old. They had 7 children: Polly, John (my father), Samuel, William, Levi, Abner and Jane. They settled on Cedar Run where my father and Mother were married in 1817. Father had an Uncle Levi who settled in the southern part of Illinois. They had a family but I do not know much about them. Only that my Uncle Levi (Father's brother) went to see them and married one of his Uncle's daughters and never came back. They had 3 sons. His oldest son's name was Levi Calvis McKee. The second son's name was Theoffiles James Miller, and the other's name was Samuel. I have forgotten the other names of the third son. Anyway, their names did not kill them, as my brother Ethan found one of them in the army of the Civil War. He was a captain of a company. They lived near Vandalia.

Father's brother, Samuel, had a family. His wife's name was Ann McGaffey. They had 6 children: William, James, Watson, Montgomery, John and Mary Ann. The last two were twins. Watson became a Methodist Minister. He died young, leaving a very young son who also became a Methodist.

Thornton  
family

FATHER

Not  
found

Hudson

Minister. He went in to the Civil War and served until the war was over. He commenced preaching soon after, was married and went West as a Missionary and became Superintendent of all Methodist Missions in Arizona and Utah and was sent to New York to collect men to go there. But his wife died there and he came back. In 1905 he was Chaplain in the penitentiary at Joliet, Illinois.

*John of James  
17 June*  
Polly, Father's sister) married John Shields and moved to Illinois before I was born; so I do not know much about her. William and John (my father) got their Father's farm.. They divided it and lived near each other until I was 5 years old, when my Father sold his share and moved to another place about 3 miles away. Uncle William lived on his farm after that until he moved to Indiana in 1835. His oldest son, William, was a very successful physician. He visited Europe with his wife (going to Europe in those days was something big compared to going today). He lived in Cincinnati most of his time and practiced among the very wealthy. He was worth \$100,000 when he died. He had no children so he left half of his money to his wife and the other half to his brothers and sisters, of whom he had 9 living. There were 11 children. One died as a child. Uncle William continued to live on his farm near Logansport, Indiana where he died in 1860. Only one son (Harvey) remained with him until he died. The others moved to various parts of the United States. Harvey lived near Logansport until he died a few years ago. He was a farmer and one of the best of men. One son, the youngest, is living Near Philadelphia, Pa. He is a lawyer. I think all the rest are dead.

Abner, Father's brother, married Ester Strain. She died young, leaving 2 children. He was a teacher. I do not know how long he lived or whether he married again.

Jane married her cousin, Harvey Strain, and died soon after.

*Polly Johnson  
Jan 18*  
Now I must tell of my Mother's side of the house. My Great Grandmother's name was Ann Lawrence. She was born of English parents about 1735 and left an orphan when young. She had an uncle, a bachelor, who took her and another girl cousin, and was to divide his property between them if they married to suit him. He was a wealthy English Squire, but they married husbands of their own choice and therefore lost the money. But my Great Grandmother married a man that was worth more than money could buy. He was a man of character and made her a good husband and good living. He was a widower with one son. They afterward had two sons that I know of, but do not know much about them, as they lived in New Jersey and North Carolina. My Great Grandmother was married in New Jersey and moved to South Carolina where she lived until she died. One son lived and died there, but the other son (my Grandfather) moved to South Carolina before the Revolutionary War. My Great Grandfather's name was William Johnson. My Grandfather's name was James Johnson.

I will now introduce my other Great Grandfather, Patrick Downy. He was born in Ireland. He was a young man about the time the Catholics and Orangemen were fighting, so he concluded to come to America. His name is Irish, but he is of Scotch descent and a strong Presbyterian. My people were all from the North of Ireland and all of them were church-going people. Great Grandfather Downy started from Ireland with 500 pounds of English money and a chest of clothes. Two dozen ruffled linen shirts and plenty of other clothing; but he was caught in a storm at sea, the ship was lost and all of his money and clothes. He was sick in his cabin when the ship began to sink. With great effort he got out of bed and to

*Abigail Downy*

the side of the ship when the life boat was pushing off. He jumped in, but it was so full they did not like to take him, but of course could not throw him overboard. He saved nothing but his underclothing. They landed at Charlestown, South Carolina. He was young and industrious so went to work in the new country at Abbeville and soon had himself a farm. He married, but I do not know my Great Grandmother's name. They had one son, Jack, and three daughters, Polly, Peggy and Abigail, who was my Grandmother. My Great Grandfather Downy had four slaves, one for each of his children, when he died. I forgot to say his wife died before his children were hardly large enough to keep house, but he never married again. The oldest daughter, Polly, married a man by the name of Havelin and Peggy married a man by the name of Diffie. Jack married, but died soon after. Abigail, the youngest, married my Grandfather, James Johnston, who had come to Abbeville (spelling changes) from North Carolina. They were married about 1774, just before the Revolutionary War, so they had a taste of it. My Grandfather was a home guard. They had to do that to keep anything at all, as their Tory neighbors stole everything they could get their hands on. There was a time that the Whigs had to hide in the daytime. If they came home, they had to come in the night and put out all the fires. You know there was no matches in those times, nothing to make a fire with but a flint and steel, and it was not easy to make a fire. Once when my Grandfather was home at night, there was some Tories came and walked all around the house, and thinking he was not at home they started for the barn. He knew then they were going to take his horses. He started out to the barn, but my Grandmother held him back, knowing he would be killed if they found he was there. So, sure enough, they took both of his horses, but one of them came back. It was a very fine horse. Another time, when Grandfather was away in the daytime, there was a company of soldiers, Tories, came with an English officer. They came in the yard and commenced to take honey out of the beehive. My Grandmother was so provoked that she went out and reproved them, as that was all she could do. One of the men was holding a rail with one handle made of cedar wood. He held it with his thumb over the edge and held it out to her, giving her the butcher knife, and asked her to help herself. She took the knife and struck at his thumb as hard as she could. But she missed it, cutting into the rail about an inch. It made the man so angry he told her he would run her through with his sword. But the English officer told him he better not try it. But while Grandmother was out of the house, they took Grandfather's silk hat and black silk necktie and several other things. When she found the things were gone, she got one of the neighbor women to go with her to where they were camped, which was close by, and she told the officer and he hurted the man and brought the things to her. But she saw in a minute they had punched it full of holes, so she dropped them and picked up a handsnake and as the fellow turned around she hit him a jolt in the back which made him grunt; then the officers all roared and laughed. But that was the spirit of the times. Another time, one of their neighbors had ten acres of fine oats to cut and all the men had gone. So the woman and her girls went to the field and cut and shocked it. Just afterward while they were resting in the house, they looked out and saw a company of soldiers turn their horses into the field and tear each shock of the oat down and trample them under their feet. Enough of the Tories. only I am glad none of my people were Tories.

After the war was over, of course the times were hard; but people did not expect as much as they do now. Slavery was not thought of to be a crime and when my Great Grandfather died, my Grandmother fell heir to one of his slaves. His name was Chambo. He had been brought from Africa

when he was a child, 7 years old. His mother was sick and had sent him to a spring to bring her a gourd of water when the ship men sprang out of the bushes and caught him, and he never saw his Mother again. Of course he was nothing but a poor black slave, but if we are so fortunate as to get to Heaven, we will see Champo there. He was a remarkably good man. He worked all the time for his board and clothes and did his own cooking, spinning, weaving and sewing. He preferred doing it, and they just let him do it. He was a privileged character. I could tell many things about him that would be interesting, but it would make this history too long. Enough, he died when my Mother was 10 years old. My Mother was the youngest of 8 children.

About that time some of the people and the Pastor of the Presbyterian Church began to think slavery was wrong. Ohio was a new and a free state, so quite a number of the people and the Minister moved there and settled on Rattlesnake Creek in Highland County. Hillsboro is the county seat. My Grandfather and Grandmother Johnston had 8 children: William, Ann, Peggy, James, Patrick, Nancy, Abigail and Folly. When the Revolutionary War was over, at the time the children began to move to Ohio, my Mother was 12 years old. Her oldest brother, William, settled in southern Indiana. The next brother, James, settled in Ohio in 1807. Before coming he married Betsey Strain and his sister married John Strain, Betsey's brother. Both families came to Ohio along with others at the same time. My Grandfather at that time had not sold his farm, so he could not go. He finally sold in the spring of 1812, and was going the next fall but was taken sick and died. After Grandfather took sick, Uncle James went back horseback and stayed with him until the end. There were 3 girls and Grandmother left at home. Abigail had died at 16 and Patrick had married and moved to Alabama. So Grandmother and the three girls went to Ohio with Uncle James. My mother at that time was 18 years old. *Lives in Seco Riv. Valley, Kansas*

*Jonathan Johnson*  
My Grandfather first came to Chillicothe, Ohio, and stayed there one year. As I stated before, they came in 1807, just one hundred years ago this coming summer, 1907, but they moved up to Highland County. They had built a church out of hewed logs and Mr. Barr, their Carolina Pastor, was preaching for them. I think he preached for them until he died. The War of 1812 was on at that time and one of my Uncles, Samuel Thornton, was in the army. He was with Hull when Hull surrendered on Lake Erie. Then there was a general call to every man. So nearly every young man in that part of the country went. They had to start on Sunday morning, so they went to Church and stacked their guns outside of the church until the services were over; then they bid their friends goodbye and went away to war, as they thought. But when they arrived at Sandusky word came that they did not need them, so they marched back home.

*James E. Johnston*  
My father, John Thornton, and my Mother, who was Folly Johnston, were married in 1817. They had 12 children and all lived to be grown. Their names were James, Johnston, Sarah, Ann, Jane, Nancy, Minerva, Mary, Harvey, Abigail, Ethan E., Martha E. and Henry Harrison. Henry Harrison was killed at the Battle of Stone River in the Civil War and is buried near Chattanooga. He was too nice, like many others, to be killed, but we had to bear it. He was so fair, with dark curly hair and dark eyes, but he will soon have no one to remember him. He said he did not want to go to war, but he thought it his duty to go, so he went and in less than six months he was killed. Brother Harvey disappeared. He was traveling in Texas taking pictures. Mother received letters from him regularly until suddenly they stopped and we never heard from him again.

I am in the same line as my father's

James E. Johnston

16  
130  
2

That was in 1853. Father died in 1853.

*1851*  
 My oldest brother, James, left home at the age of 19. He was a great reader and wanted to get an education, but the boys and girls in those days had very little chance to get even a very common education. He worked hard and studied every moment he could spare from his other duties until he was enabled to teach. He taught one term in Bloomington College in Indiana in the year of 1835. The next year after my Father had moved to Indiana he worked with the engineers that surveyed the Lake Erie Canal from Bloomington to the Ohio River in southern Indiana, where my Mother's brother lived. He afterwards made his home there and studied law under a Mr. Breckenridge. He married Mr. Breckenridge's wife's sister, William Ann McCullough, and in 1851 moved to Texas. He was practicing law in Texas and was doing well until just before the Civil War broke out, when he moved to Minnesota. He stayed there until after brother Henry was killed and then decided to enlist. He was given a commission for Commissary of Brigade. He went to Vicksburg when General Grant was besieging that city. While there he was sent with General A. J. Smith to Louisiana to meet General Banks to take a fort, but Banks was too slow and the result was defeat. When he got back to Vicksburg he was taken sick with the Flu and had to be sent home. He came near dying and was sick for two years. His doctor finally told him he would have to leave Minnesota or he would die so he went to Texas which helped him so much that he was soon appointed Military judge. He was able to do business ten years when he was stricken with paralysis, from which he never recovered. That was another brother we had to give to our Country. M

*1851  
 1864  
 Red River  
 1864*

My oldest sister, Sarah, married William McConnel, one of the best of men. He was one of the pioneers of Indiana reservation. He lived on the farm where he first settled until he died. Sister Sarah lived on the farm with one of her sons until she died. They had 8 children, five sons and three daughters: Samuel, James, Mary, Ed, Robert, Cornelia, John and Fannie.

Sister Jane married Levi Houk. They had 12 children. Several of them died while young.

Johnston went to the war, but came back sick and died.

Mary was next, then Harriet, Sarah, Agnes and Martha. Sarah and Agnes are dead, Martha is living yet in 1907. Then came Kate, Hetty, Fannie and two little boys, George and Frank. They moved to Minnesota after the war and both died there. I forgot to mention the living son, Dick. He is living in Minnesota.

Sister Nancy married John Nock, who died and left her with two little children, Sisie and George. When George was 14 years old he went into the army and served two years. He was never well after that. He married and died soon after from diseases contracted in the War.

I, Minerva, came next. I married Milton Pickell in 1843. We had 7 children: John Alfred, Ellen, Mary, Harvey, Laura and Charlie. We settled on a farm adjoining the McConnel's where we lived until we raised our children. Then we traveled around a great deal until my husband died in 1893. We were living in Galveston, Indiana, when he died.

My brother, John, was next. He married Margaret Dean and went West

soon after he was married. They had 6 children. He started to move to California and died soon after he got there. Some of his family are living at Pueblo, Colo. I do not know how many are living.

Sister Mary married a Baptist Minister, Allen. They had three children. Her husband died in Michigan. She is living with one of her sons in Fort Worth, Texas. Her son's names were Adow, John and Ethar.

Brother Harvey is next. He is the one that disappeared.

Abigail came next. She married Elijah White. They lived in Kokomo, Indiana, as long as he lived. They had two children, John and Mary. Mary married Dr. Furman of Indianapolis, Indiana. They moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where he died. Abigail was with Mary, her daughter, in Los Angeles, California. She died in 1940.

Brother Ethan came next. He was Captain in the Civil War. He married soon after he come out but his wife died soon after. His wife's name was Eliza Grove. They had one child, a boy. It died soon after the mother.

Martha came next. She went to visit my brother, James, in Texas soon after he went there and married Theodore Gillette, a Methodist Minister. He was a Chaplain in the Rebel Army but is a good man. They had 12 children; having 8 living. They are all good men and women and living in Texas and New Mexico. Sister Martha and her husband and some of their children are living in El Paso.

My parents had a large family, but not one of us ever did anything to make them ashamed of us. I can go back to 1730 or about that, and every relative was industrious and respectable citizens, and I think I have about as good a record of my ancestors as most people. My mother and father were very intelligent people. Mother was more so than any one I have ever known. She could do most any kind of work and was a good scholar and very uncommon Bible student. My father was a very honest man, which is something to be proud of. He was never able to mass a fortune but raised a large family and made us a good living. He had a good name and respect of all his neighbors and a good name is better then riches.

History of the Thornton Family  
Beginning with Samuel Thornton

by

Minerva Thornton Bickell--1907

May 22, 1910, written in 1907 George Freckenridge