

My Great-Great-Grandmother's Bed

My name is Dwayne Wrightsman. I grew up in Macoupin County, Illinois, from 1936 through 1954, but have since lived most of my life in an old 1753 house in the seacoast of New Hampshire. In my spare bedroom is an old bed that my grandmother, Lillia Melva (nee Gibson) Wrightsman, gave me when I was a school boy living in Virden, Illinois. She told me then that the old bed was handed down to her by her grandmother, Julia Ann (nee Davis) Cummings, and that she had promised her grandmother to eventually pass the bed on to one of her own grandchildren.

The arrangement for the bed was made sometime after the 1880 Federal Census, when the widow Julia Ann (nee Davis) Cummings, age 72, was then living in North Otter Township, Macoupin County, in the home of Javan Gibson, wife Mary (nee Cummings) Gibson, and five children, one of them being my grandma, Lillia Melva Gibson, age 6. My grandma's grandma, Julia Ann (nee Davis) Cummings, continued to live with my grandma Wrightsman during the 1880s.

After Julia Ann (Davis) Cummings' daughter Mary (Cummings) Gibson died in 1889, Julia Ann moved from my grandmother's home in North Otter Township to Salem, Oregon, to be with her brother Garret Davis. Garret died in 1891. When Julia Ann (Davis) Cummings died in Oregon in 1894, ten days short of her 87th birthday, all of her brothers and sisters were already dead. Her husband was dead. All of her children were dead. Thanks to the Gibson family, she had a sufficient number of grandchildren (even in Salem, Oregon).

I don't know why I became the grandchild to whom my Grandma Wrightsman decided to pass down the bed. I was just one of many of her grandchildren. Possibly it was because I ate lunch with her almost every school day back in the 1940s, and that my parents' house was only three blocks away from grandma's house, making it easy to move the bed.

When I ended up in New Hampshire in the 1960s, I told my mother, who still had the bed in Virden, that I was going to move the bed to New Hampshire as my sons

needed it and that the old bed would be perfect for my old house (although it was definitely not perfect according to my sons who had to sleep on it).

My sons have long moved on. But the bed is still with me. It is a constant reminder of my great-great-grandmother, Julia Ann (Davis) Cummings. As I aged I became increasingly interested in her family. Every time I contemplated the bed I thought about the family life of Julia Ann nee Davis (daughter of Solomon Davis) and her husband William Cummings (son of John Cummings).

It is said in the 1879 Macoupin County history book (page 215) that John Cummings settled in Macoupin in August, 1824, and that he was the very first to settle in North Palmyra. The Solomon Davis family settled a few years later on lands bordering that of John Cummings. The Cummings and Davis tracts in 1828 were located in Sections 4, 5, 8, and 9, Township 12 North, Range 8 West.

William Cummings (son of John) and Julia Davis (daughter of Solomon) were married, March 12, 1829, in Greene County. They were true pioneers, married in Macoupin County before it became a County!

I later learned that the Davis and Cummings families came from the Scott County, Kentucky, area and that they were interrelated before they moved, but it took me a long time to learn the complexity of their relationships in Kentucky.

John Cummings was the head of the Cummings family. He was from Virginia. He married Lucy Elliott in Kentucky in 1792. His bondsman was William Holding. Both Lucy Elliott and William Holding were from Queen Anne's County in Maryland. William Holding's wife, Anne, was also from Queen Anne's County. They married in Maryland prior to moving to Kentucky. Logic suggests that Anne was a sister of Lucy Elliott since William Holding was bondsman for John Cummings.

Solomon Davis was also from Virginia. He married Elizabeth, or Betsy, as she was sometimes called, but there was no record of the marriage because the early marriage records in Scott County were destroyed by fire. Like the other wives, Elizabeth or "Betsy" was also born in Maryland, and so was John Elliott, a close friend and neighbor of the Holdings, the Cummings, and Solomon Davis.

On July 3, 1794, Solomon Davis, John Cummings, and John Elliott, joined Captain George Frazer's Company of the Mounted Volunteers of the Kentucky Militia, all three serving to October 26, 1794, for a total of 116 days. At the time they joined, John Cummings was already married. He and his growing family settled several times, first in Bourbon County, KY, then in Scott County, KY, moving on to Indiana, and then on to Illinois, where he lived in Saline County (1821) and Sangamon County (1822) prior to his final move to Macoupin County (1824-1825).

From 1794 to 1828, the Solomon Davis family lived on Eagle Creek in Scott County. There they were neighbors of the William Holding family. Tax records show that Solomon Davis paid taxes, in 1805, on 64 acres. The year before, the tax on the same 64 acres was paid by William Holding. In the 1810 census, William Holding Sr., William Holding Jr., and Solomon Davis were listed sequentially as heads of household. On July 14, 1828, William and Anna Holding sold 64 acres of land adjacent to 36 acres of land sold the same day by Solomon and Betsy Davis. The closeness of these two families suggests that the wives may have been Elliott sisters, or perhaps that Betsy, wife of Solomon Davis, was born a sister of William Holding.

Solomon Davis did not lose much time after selling his 36 acres in Kentucky. Three months later, on October 23, 1828, Solomon Davis bought 80 acres in what would become North Palmyra Township in Macoupin County, but at the time was governmentally a part of Greene County.

Solomon Davis's 80 acres was "kitty-corner" from John Cumming's 80 acres which Cummings acquired earlier that year on February 12. Needless to say, Solomon Davis knew that he was headed for Illinois to join his friend John Cummings, or perhaps Solomon's wife Betsy Davis was seeking to join John's wife Lucy (Elliott) Cummings. Both wives were born in Maryland. One wonders if Betsy was Lucy's sister, and therefore also an Elliott.

The closeness of the two families quickly brought together William Cummings and Julia Ann Davis as they married in March 1829, five months after the Davis family settled next to the Cummings. If their mothers were sisters, William and Julia Ann as husband and wife would have been first cousins. This is not easy to

contemplate, but first-cousin marriage may have run in the family. William and Julia Ann (Davis) Cummings had a daughter Sarah Jane Cummings, born 1832, who married her first cousin, Theophilus Davis, born 1831. They were married in Macoupin County in 1851.

Most of the children of William and Julia Ann (Davis) Cummings did not survive to old age. Sarah Jane died in 1862 at age 30. William F. died in 1869 at age 21. John E. died in 1869 at age 34. All three were buried in Oak Grove Cemetery in Macoupin County. A third son Thornton F. died in 1863 in the Civil War at age 21. The father, William Cummings, born in 1803, died in 1877 at age 74. He, too, was buried in Oak Grove Cemetery.

The only child of Julia Ann (Davis) Cummings who survived to old age and had a large family of her own was Mary Cummings. She married Javan Gibson, who was a farmer and a Brethren minister in North Otter Township, Macoupin County. Mary (nee Cummings) Gibson was mother of nine children, namely Julia Elizabeth (b.1858), Amanda Jane (b.1860), Ida Alice (b.1862), Emulus Nead (b.1865), Sarah Belle (b.1867), Albert Quinter (b.1869), William Milton (b.1872), Lillia Melva (b.1873), and Olie Bertha (b.1878). Lillia Melva (Gibson) was my grandma who passed on to me her grandma's bed.

I see the old beautifully carved wooden bed in my home every day and think about and try to realize what their lives were like back then. Incidentally, the bed, as beautiful as it is, is not good for sleeping.