

4. The Dennis Family

By

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Seabay's father had the full name George Washington Dennis. She thought that her grandfather Dennis was named Jake (nickname "Buck"). (1) However, I am convinced that her paternal grandfather was, in fact, himself named George Washington Dennis. Her great-grandfather was John O. "Jack" Dennis who appears in the 1822 tax roll of Ohio County owning no land or other taxable property. Iva (Dennis) Black of Beaver Dam, KY was the great-granddaughter of Thomas Saulsbury Dennis, Grandad Dennis's uncle. She wrote me in 1981 that John O. Dennis and his wife Rachel Depoyster resided a short distance from where she was born and reared, a place that later became known as Highview. It was a small mining town approximately 9 miles south of Beaver Dam, Kentucky.

A link to Europe that takes us very far back in time is through Grandad Dennis's grandmother, Nancy Mariah Iler. She married Franklin Faught and was the mother of Nancy Ellen Faught, Grandad's mother. The Iler/Eyler family was originally from Switzerland, but settled in Germany, from where their ancestor, Conrad Iler, came to America. (2)

An interesting document that I have a copy of reads:

KNOW all men by these presents, that we Franklin Fought (*sic*) and Washington Phipps are held and firmly bound unto the Commonwealth of Kentucky in the penal sum of 150 lawful money for the true payment whereof we bind ourselves, our heirs &c Jointly and severally firmly by these presents sealed with our seals and dated this 12 day of March 1845. The condition of the above obligation is such that whereas there is a marriage intended shortly to be solemnized between the above Franklin Fought and Nancy Maria Iler now if there should be no lawful cause why said marriage should be obstructed then the above obligation is to be void otherwise to be and remain in full force.

Aunt Seabay told me that her grandfather Dennis may have had a sister named Seabay for whom she was named. However, that aunt was more than likely on her grandmother's side, not her grandfather's. Emma Seabay Annis was the wife of George Washington Faught, the brother of Aunt Seabay's grandmother Nancy Ellen Faught. Thus, she was right that it was an aunt who was one of the namesakes for the many given names she bore: Grace Juanita Seabay Sara Ellen Oleta Dennis. Depending on who you were talking to, Seabay was called Grace, Juanita, or Seabay, but I never heard anyone call her Sara, Ellen, or Oleta.

Returning to the Dennises, George Washington Dennis the first was married in 1861 and had two children with Matilda Boswell. She died in 1870 and shortly thereafter, he married Nancy Ellen Faught. On his first marriage license, he says that his father was born in Henderson County, KY and his mother in Georgia. On the second marriage license, he lists both as born in Maryland. His eldest brother was the Thomas Saulsbury Dennis mentioned above, and the 1880 census listing for T. S. Dennis shows his father born in Kentucky and mother in North Carolina, so, who knows where the first Dennis in our Kentucky line really came from! There were lots of Dennises in this area of Kentucky in the period before 1850. Mrs. Lennie C. Dennis of Lewisburg, KY, with whom I also corresponded in the early 1980s, did a lot of

research on the Dennis family. She was convinced that all the Dennises of Ohio, Butler, Muhlenberg, McLean, and Logan counties were related.

Grandad Dennis's first cousin, Eller (Elle Belle) Bullock, the eldest daughter of his brother, Newton Patterson Dennis (b. 1870), thought that both her father and George W. Dennis were born in Arkansas. She told me that there was a third boy named Roger or Robert who died on the trip back from Arkansas. Eller said that George W. and Nancy Ellen Dennis decided to move from Kentucky, but after they left the state, George took sick and "Ma Bratcher brought him back to Kentucky in a covered wagon."

After George Washington Dennis died in 1878, Nancy Ellen was called Ma Bratcher because she married Silas Bratcher and lived with his family at Morgantown, Butler County, KY. The Bratchers were already a large family when Silas's first wife died in 1874, and apparently Grandad Dennis and Newton did not find themselves in a happy environment in the Bratcher household. They decided to leave the crowded home, taking with them a bolt of fabric from which they intended to have shirts made after they arrived at their destination, the home of Nancy Ellen's brother, Thomas Payne Faught. However, Newton had a change of heart and said he wanted to turn back. They took out their pocket knives and divided the material, after which Newton returned to Ma Bratcher and George went to live with his "Uncle Doc" Faught. This apparently happened after the 1880 US Census because both George and Newton are in the entry for the Bratcher household, although Newton is listed as a stepson, and George has no indication of the relationship to Silas Bratcher.

According to Seabay, Charles Lighter who lived at South Carrolton (Muhlenberg County), Ky owned about 300-400 acres in the "Bend" region of Ohio County. Grandad Dennis rented some of this land before coming to the farm where I lived the first six years of my life in Central City, Ky. Mom said that Grandad and Mammy lived on the Lighter farm when she, their first grandchild, Nell Bolton, was born.
(3)

NOTES

1. It is interesting that these names show up in later generations of our family. Billy Dennis's son has the full name Jacob Andrew Dennis, but everyone calls him Andy. His cousin, Jeffrey, son of Billy's brother Jack is called "Buck."
2. It was Judge Arthur Iler of Central City who gave my mother the advice to initiate the divorce from Dorman Wiggins rather than risk losing a custody battle. It was his son, who gave me genealogical information on the Iler ancestors that stretches all the way back to 1684. Judge Iler also showed me a silver ring which Emperor Maximillian of Mexico gave to one of the Eylers who served as ambassador to Mexico.
3. Susie Dennis Winters said that Charlie Lighter's last name was really Barnes. She visited them in Ohio County once or twice.

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