

6. The Riggs and Huckleberry Families

By

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My grandmother, Eura Lee Riggs was the daughter of Finley J. Riggs and Ada Lee Huckleberry. The Huckleberry family adds quite a bit of color to our family history, so I will discuss them first.



Ada Huckleberry Riggs holding Dorman Wiggins

I had some correspondence with Mrs. Mima Huckleberry Collier in 1982 that provided background material on the Huckleberry family. Mrs. Collier wrote a small booklet "Some Facts Pertaining to Huckleberry History". She sold me a copy for \$2.10 (insisting it be paid in advance because she had been stiffed by people who ordered copies in the past!). In the booklet, Mrs. Collier presents the original German family name as either Heidelborn or Hauckinstiver, but also lists possible relatives in Pennsylvania with the names Hoglebarger and Hockenberry. In a 4/16/1982 letter, she cast doubt on all these names when she indicated that ". . . we do not really know who we are." Nevertheless, she

believed that the original Huckleberry ancestor was Benjamin Huckleberry, Sr., and he came here from Germany about 1743. He had 3 sons, George, Frederic, and Benjamin Jr., plus a daughter Elizabeth.

There are lots of theories about how the name “Huckleberry” got attached to the family, and here is one from the booklet that is particularly entertaining.

. . . Frederic and Benjamin Jr. had no money, no job, and could speak no English. They were wandering around the hills near Uniontown, Pennsylvania, Westmoreland County, when they discovered “wild huckleberries” growing in abundance. They found them good to eat, and decided others would like them too, so they picked several gallons, took them into town and sold them. In this way they bought good cheese, crackers, and other food. Not speaking English, they learned the berries were called Huckleberries and when asked their names, they said, “Jah – Yes. Huckleberry.”

George Huckleberry was a soldier in the Revolutionary War from Westmoreland County, PA, where his father Benjamin settled near Uniontown. George came to Jefferson County, Kentucky in 1783 and moved across the river to Charlestown, Clark County, Indiana in 1796. He is supposed to be buried on the old family farm where Fourteen Mile Creek flows into the Ohio River (so named because it enters the river 14 miles upstream from the Falls of the Ohio). George’s son, Daniel, was captured by Indians and killed just as George was about to overtake them. They threw his body into a small stream that flows into the Ohio River and to this day is supposed to be called Huckleberry Creek.

When I asked my cousin, Judy (Riggs) Sandefur about the Huckleberry links in our family, she didn’t seem to have a very high opinion of them, perhaps related to an early incident in our family history.

“**WILL PROBABLY DIE**” blared the headline for a 1903 newspaper story with subtitle, “Isaac Huckleberry Shoots Finley Riggs. His Son-in-law.” On June 20, 1982, Mamaw Eura (Riggs) Wiggins told me the story of how her father, Finley J. Riggs, was shot by her grandfather, Isaac C. Huckleberry. She thought this happened shortly after her brother, Bill Riggs, was born in 1903, but in fact, it was a bit earlier than that. Finley Riggs’ death is erroneously reported in one newspaper, *The Republic*, on April 4, 1903, p. 14. The dispute was over a rail fence separating the adjacent farms owned by the two about 4 miles outside Beech Grove, KY. A lawsuit had previously been filed, and the verdict went in favor of Huckleberry. Finley Riggs was shot in the stomach with a shotgun, but miraculously survived. The newspaper account said he received 50 shots in his stomach, 30 in his chest, and 40 in his hip. Isaac Huckleberry was subsequently sentenced to 18 months and spent about one year in the Eddyville penitentiary. He drowned near Evansville, IN in 1908, but his son-in-law lived until 1932.

Finley Riggs was quite a drinker according to Mamaw Wiggins. When he died at the age of 57, they found a bag full of empty vanilla extract bottles in his store at Lemon, KY. He had consumed the alcoholic liquid and hid the bottles. The earliest Riggs whom I can geographically place in our family tree is Joseph Riggs who was in Accomack County, VA in 1783 when his son Abraham was born. A generation later, his grandson, William H. Riggs, was in Washington County, KY., and two generations after that by 1840, William Buchanan Riggs, Mamaw Wiggins’ great-grandfather, was in Daviess County, KY, from which McLean County was formed in part in 1854.

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