

## **7. The Wiggins Family**

By

Gary Wiggins

© 2018; revised 6/18/2021

The English surname Wiggins comes from the Old English term “wincon” and “unicon,” terms that meant noble and worthy. HouseofNames has a similar derivation:

The ancient and distinguished surname Wiggins indicates "son of Wigand," a personal name derived from the Breton name "Wiucon," meaning "high and noble." This name was introduced into England at the time of the Norman Conquest of 1066. Singular forms of the name were still found in Normandy as late as 1198: Radulphus Wigan; and Richard Wiguen.

In 1986, I attended a conference in Cranfield, England, then made my way to Oxford by about 4:00 PM on a Friday afternoon. I promptly went to the Records Office to try to find an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Thomas Wiggins who was from Oxfordshire, the place of birth on Thomas D. (Donaldson) Wiggins's Civil War service records. When I asked if I could search the old records, I was met with a chilly British response, “Do you have an appointment, Sir?” My response was “No, but I’ve come a hell of a long way to be told that I need one.” That worked, and the clerk was in fact very kind and helped me find the appropriate microfilm. One promising family lived in an area of Oxfordshire called Blackthorn, a hamlet in the Ambrosden parish area. The Wigginses seem to have come to this area in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but I don’t know where they lived before that time. The younger Wigginses appear to have left the Blackthorn area by 1825.

Grandad Orban Vance Wiggins' first cousin, (Altha) Chloe Wiggins thought that there may have been as many as 11 children in the English Wiggins family, and the Wiggins family I selected in Oxford had 10 children. She told me that there were four Wiggins brothers working in the Oxfordshire potato fields who decided to come to America. Chloe wasn't sure if they all came at the same time or two by two on different ships. Some think they were stowaways, so when the ship reached here, they jumped overboard to swim to shore, and one of them drowned. I've never been able to confirm this story, but I think it is plausible. I have found no record of a Thomas Wiggins in the lists of 19<sup>th</sup>-century arriving ship passengers, so perhaps they were stowaways. Also supporting the story is the discovery that Thomas's brother, Josiah T. Wiggins, settled in Randolph, Cattaraugus County, New York, a county that borders Pennsylvania. I was never sure that I had the right Wiggins family until I found Josiah. He died in 1888 in Randolph, NY. The Ancestry.com obituary below says that he came to the United States in 1831 when he was about 23 years old. If they came together, Thomas would have been about 18 years old when they arrived. The print is difficult to read in places, but I think I finally transcribed all of the words right.

### **Death of Captain Wiggins**

Our community was startled on Sunday evening by the death of Captain Wiggins. He had been seriously ill for a number of days, but had insisted upon being taken to the polls where he deposited a Republican vote on Tuesday and had not been so well for the next few days. Sunday he seemed to be rapidly mending and to all appearance was on the road to recovery when suddenly about dark he died almost without warning. He had some form of heart disease and suffered intensely from the first.

Josiah Wiggins was born in Blackthorn, England in 1805 [actually, 1808 –GW]. He early learned his trade as a shoemaker and enjoyed the rough and tumble of an English journeyman's life with the keenest relish. On one occasion he walked 150 miles to see the first steam locomotive start on its trip, where a man rode ahead on horseback to warn the people off the track. When a mere boy he enlisted in the English army but served only a few months. He was married to Hannah Stanton at Blackthorn, who from that time until his death was his constant companion, and although now in her 86<sup>th</sup> year was his nurse and attendant to the last.

Captain Wiggins came to the United States in 1831, making his home in Jersey City and New York for several years, in which last place he was for some time on the police force, or as it was then termed, a watchman. In 1838 he moved to Randolph, [NY] which has ever since been his home. He was at one time captain of a company in the state militia, his active service was confined to the anti-rent difficulties which culminated at Dutch Hill. [a 1699-ft. peak in Cattaraugus County, NY, where Randolph is located. --GW]

Captain Wiggins, as he was always afterward known, was in every respect a model citizen, active in every good work, an enthusiastic Mason and Odd Fellow, as he had been in their day of the Sons of Temperance, and many other organizations. At his death he was poor master of the town, a position he had filled acceptably for nearly or quite thirty years.

He leaves a widow and three daughters, Mrs. Chas. F. Hedman of Jamestown, Mrs. Thos. Smith and Mrs. J. M. Prince of this place. He had but one son, Lieut. David T. Wiggins, who lost his life in the bloody charge at Spottsylvania Court House, May 12, 1864.

The funeral was held on Tuesday from the Episcopal church, of which the deceased had been a life-long member. The exercises were in charge of Randolph Lodge No. 359 F. and A. M., who were in full attendance. The Order of Odd Fellows and the fire department paid homage to the old Captain by attending in uniforms. At the church Rev. Palmer preached a short sermon warning all of the inevitable and exhorting them to prepare for eternity. Prof. Edwards followed with remarks on the life of the deceased, and spoke touchingly of his kindness to the poor, his genial, jolly manner on the street and his willingness to forward the interests of the country of his adoption. The men who bore the casket from the church were his companions for many years. They, too, had made their home in pleasant Randolph when there was nothing but the natural resources of the country to attract their attention. At the grave the Masons took charge and carried out the impressive service of their grand order.

Over three hundred people stood with bowed heads and glistening eyes as those gray headed men carefully lowered the remains of their old comrade into the grave. The sun seemed to sink, and the wind grew colder as the words "dust to dust and ashes to ashes" were pronounced and another landmark was effaced, another of nature's noblemen had sought his long rest.

Thomas Wiggins was a shoemaker, as was his father in Oxfordshire. Chloe thought that Thomas came to Louisville, Jefferson County, KY, then to Oldham County, KY, before arriving in Daviess County and settling in Livia or Livermore. Both Thomas and his wife Mildred Ann (Wilhite) Wiggins are buried on the Underwood farm near Livia. I saw Mildred's tombstone when we stopped on one of our trips to Central City. By then I had heard a story that Thomas went through the Civil War without a scratch, but he was killed a few years later in a dispute that took place at Antioch Church near Livia.

When I knocked on the door of the Underwood farmhouse, no one answered, but I spotted a fellow weeding his garden at the side of the house. I walked toward him and said "Hello." If I thought the response from the clerk in Oxford was chilly, this guy's response was closer to a blizzard. He didn't even look up from his weeding, but I proceeded to tell him the story of the death of my ancestor that I thought was buried on this farm and concluded by saying his name was Thomas Wiggins. At this point, the man looked up and said, "Yep, there's a Wiggins back there. I know that story. It was a Tanner boy that killed him." I was thunderstruck that some 110 years after the death of my Wiggins ancestor, this man not only had heard about him, but knew who killed him. He took me to the family graveyard that was quite a distance from the main road and showed me the tombstone. Even better, he said he knew some people who had more information about the incident and gave me the name and address of his "Aunt Virgie" Coke.

When we got home, I promptly wrote Aunt Virgie, but got no response. Weeks later in August 1979, her son, Ben H. Coke, sent me an apologetic letter saying that his mother was in bad health, but he was including information about the Wiggins murder. He sent a photocopy of a local history article that appeared on page 1, Section 2 of *The Owensboro Messenger* from February 14, 1943. It includes these paragraphs:

Two young men who resided in what is known as the old Mitt Tanner home, several miles beyond where the old Antioch church was located and which house is now on the H. R. Johnson farm, killed the sexton at Antioch, and they themselves left for parts unknown. The story varies, one version being that the two men accompanied two girls to Antioch church, horseback. In those days women wore riding skirts, a long flowing black or blue calico skirt that was buttoned over the wearing apparel of the woman rider. When she dismounted the skirt was unbuttoned and removed, leaving her dress fresh and clean. The two girls, according to the story, had placed their riding skirts behind a door at Antioch church, and, after services, some dispute arose between the men and the church sexton, a Mr. Wiggins, over the skirts. A fight ensued, and the sexton was killed. The two men left the country and were not heard from again.

Many years later, a resident of that community is supposed to have met one of the men in Texas, where he was then a prominent and successful rancher. The other version of the story is that Mr. Wiggins was killed accidentally, by the two men, who had a feud with another family and mistook Mr. Wiggins for a member of that family. When they found out the next day they had killed the wrong man, they left for parts unknown, never again returning to Daviess county, and supposedly were never heard from.

Another version of the story was published in the book *Life of Mike Moore, The Jolly Irishman*. (Owensboro, KY: Stone Printing Co., 1908):

During this winter and while a big revival of religion was in progress at the Antioch Christian Church which was conducted by a Campbellite preacher named Franklin, from Cincinnati, old Mr. Wiggins was killed by Albert Tanner, in the church after the services was over. It seems that some of the young people had been disturbing public worship by talking and laughing during the service. Mr. Wiggins who was sexton, threatened to present the names of offenders to the grand jury. This threat only added fuel to the flame and caused the fire of indignation to burn

more furious. On this night they cut up more than usual. However, after meeting broke, young Albert Tanner stepped behind the door to get his sweetheart's riding skirt and in doing so partly shut the door which stopped the congregation from going out. Mr. Wiggins slammed the door back in his face, reproving him for his conduct. Tanner drew a dirk knife and stabbed him three times. He fell dead on the floor of the church before the congregation knew of the awful tragedy enacted. Esq. Jas. A. Small was there at church that night, but before he could make the arrest of the Tanner boys, they escaped, during the confusion of the congregation. They left that night and went to Calhoun where Logan Fields their kinsman was engaged to pilot them through to Texas. In a few years their father Uncle "Mit" Tanner who was one of the best farmers and citizens of the county, sold out his farm goods and chattles and went to his boys. They are all dead now, and no doubt but this sad event, which caused the trouble and sorrows of two happy families, has long since been forgotten.

There are enough similarities in the two versions to lend much credence to the story that Thomas Wiggins met an untimely death. I am still amazed that the farmer knew it was a Tanner who killed him.

Grandad Orban Vance Wiggins wrote me in 1961 that another Civil War-era relative, John C. Corey, his maternal grandfather, was shot by guerillas just before the end of the war. He recovered from the wound and lived several years after that. He was born in New Hampshire and came to Kentucky via Pennsylvania.

Speaking of shooting, I forgot to say in the Riggs chapter that Finley J. Riggs, Mamaw Wiggins's father, also killed a man at his store in Lemon, KY, according to Judy Sandefur.

Thomas Wiggins married Mildred Wilhite, and that union provides us another link to Germany. Her earliest known ancestor is Michael Wilhite, born about 1680 in Weichersbach in Hessen, Germany.

Thomas D. Wiggins' son, Robert Bruce Wiggins Sr., married Caroline Howard, and the Howard family ancestors have been traced back centuries before America was even discovered, to 1215 in Wiggenhall, Norfolk, England. Below is a picture of Caroline Howard in late life.



The Wiggins clan gathered for a family reunion in the early 1900s, and they are all shown in the picture below.



The list below was compiled by Chloe Wiggins Brasher, who gave me the picture.

**Top Row:** 1. Sudie Jobe Wiggins – wife of Thomas Wiggins 2. Tom Wiggins. 3. Ben Wiggins 4. Lula Mackey Wiggins 5. Oma Stevens Wiggins – wife of Terry Wiggins 6. Chloe Wiggins – daughter of Terry Wiggins 7. Terry Wiggins 8. John Fairline – husband of Ellie Wiggins 9. Ellie Wiggins Fairline

**2<sup>nd</sup> Row:** 10. Orban Wiggins – son of Tom and Sudie 11. Amos Wiggins – son of Tom and Sudie 12. Ethel Wiggins – daughter of Tom and Sudie 13. Arcadia Wiggins – daughter of Ben and Lula 14. Guy Wright – husband of Alma Wiggins 15. Margaret Wright – infant daughter of Guy and Alma 16. Alma Wiggins Wright 17. Oce Mackey – husband of Sarah Wiggins 18. Cosette Mackey – daughter of Oce and Sarah 19. Sarah Wiggins 20. Robert Wiggins – widower at time of picture

**Bottom Row:** 21. Dave Wiggins – holding: 22. Son Terry Wiggins 23. Otis – son of Dave Wiggins 24. Pearl Kerrick – wife of Dave Wiggins 25. Neva Wiggins – daughter of Ben and Lula 26. Robert Bruce Wiggins – my grandfather Wiggins 27. Caroline Howard Wiggins – my grandmother Wiggins 28. Verna Mackey – son of Oce and Sarah 29. Eva Lee Fairline – daughter of John and Ellie Wiggins Fairline 30. Rovene Fairline – daughter of John and Ellie Wiggins Fairline 31. Velma Fairline – daughter of John and Ellie Wiggins Fairline 32. Agnes Fairline – daughter of John and Ellie Wiggins Fairline.

Wiggins -

Left to Right -

Top row

1. Studie Jobe Wiggins - wife of Thomas Wiggins
2. Tom Wiggins
3. Ben Wiggins
4. Lula Mackey Wiggins
5. Oma Stevens Wiggins - wife Terry Wiggins
6. Chloe Wiggins - daughter of Terry Wiggins
7. Terry Wiggins
8. John Fairline - husband of Ellie Wiggins

2nd row 9. Ellie Wiggins Fairline

10. Urban Wiggins - Son of Tom & Studie
11. Arnes Wiggins - Son of Tom & Studie
12. Ethel Wiggins - daughter of Tom & Studie
13. Arealia Wiggins - daughter of Ben and Lula
14. Guy Wright - husband of Alma Wiggins
15. Margaret Wright - infant daughter of Guy & Alma
16. Edna Wiggins Wright
17. Ode Mackey - husband of Sarah Wiggins
18. Cora Mackey - daughter of Ode & Sarah
19. Sarah Wiggins -

20. Robert Wiggins - Widower at time of picture

Bottom Row 21. Dave Wiggins - holding

22. Son ~~Terry~~ Wiggins
23. Son Otis, of Dave Wiggins
24. Pearl Kerrlake wife of Dave Wiggins
25. Neva Wiggins daughter of Ben & Lula
26. Robert Bluse Wiggins - (my grand - father Wiggins)
27. Caroline Howard Wiggins - (my grand - mother Wiggins)
28. Verna Mackey son of Ode and Sarah
29. Eva Lee Fairline daughter of John & Ellie Wiggins Fairline
30. Revene Fairline " " " " " "
31. Velma Fairline " " " " " "
32. Agnes Fairline " " " " " "