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Free Family

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Free Family

(Revised 1991)

**Bobby Anderson
7965 Ridgewood Road
Goodlettsville, Tenn. 37072**



F R E E

By BOBBY ANDERSON

There was a time -- say shortly after World War II, when you could have fielded an entire baseball team at Penrod, and had a Free by name, at every position. Plus a few on the bench.

All of these Frees came from the same progenitor, who first came to Muhlenberg County in the 1870s. Thus, all Frees in and around Muhlenberg County are the descendants of William C. Free, a Confederate soldier, who migrated to Muhlenberg County, from Georgia, after a brief stop in Todd County.

William Christopher Free is possibly (but not proven) the son of Adam and Elizabeth Free. He was born in South Carolina in December, 1826. Adam, himself, was born in South Carolina in circa 1795 and Elizabeth in North Carolina in circa 1794. The data was gathered by the late Lonnie Free of Penrod, a grandson of William, and by Debbie Free Hinton, now living in Livermore, but Debbie was quoted recently that she was not "convinced" that Adam and Elizabeth were the parents of William C. Free. Adam and Elizabeth also lived in Alabama for a period of time, being censused in Lawrence County in 1850. Among their children, in addition to William, were Rebecca (1824 in South Carolina); Jackson, 1831; Elizabeth, 1833; Lafayette 1834; Mary 1840; Mourning, 1841 and Cintha, 1842, all born in Alabama.

By virtue of these dates, it can be shown that Adam and Elizabeth left South Carolina, where their first two children were born in 1824 and 1826, and were in Alabama as early as 1831, when Jackson was born. It also might be noted that Adam and Elizabeth may have lived in Georgia for a while. First is the evidence that William later reported he was born in Georgia, and second, because many Frees, carrying the same surnames as some of Adam's family, also have been found in early Georgia censuses.

Though William C. Free was not shown in the Alabama census when it was taken in 1850, Lonnie Free, in his letters and other papers left at his death, indicate that William had returned to Georgia, where he married in 1850-51.

Lonnie also indicated there was some evidence that Rebecca, the oldest child, became a midwife in Lawrence County, Ala.

Debbie Free Hinton, who descends through the Elisha Free family to be shown later, found in her research, other Free families in Alabama in the 1800s. Allen (or Alden), born in South Carolina, was head of household in one in 1850, with his wife, Jane; J. W. Free, also born in South Carolina, and wife Nancy, were included in another household, As were Thomas Free, born in South Carolina, and his wife, Susan. In each case, the wife was born in Alabama. In yet another household, John Free, born in 1826 in Georgia was found, and Martha Free, 24, born in Alabama, was another. These indicate that some early Free families lived in Georgia and Alabama as early as circa 1825, and may have been instrumental in inducing Adam and Elizabeth to move to that area.

In 1860, in Lawrence County, A. L. Free and wife Lida, resided. Debbie Hinton believes this is the same as Adam's Lafayette in the 1850 census, since she found where an Adam L. Free married Lydia (Lida) Jane Holt in Limestone County, Ala. in 1854.

In Georgia in 1850, there were Frees in Habersham and Dekalb counties. In Habersham were Elisha, Lewis, Martin and Simion and in DeKalb, Thomas. Later children of William Free in Kentucky,

were Thomas and Elisha, meaning only that they could have been named for these kin, cousins or uncles in Georgia, where William was known to have lived for a while.

Debbie Hinton also was able to find William C. Free and his wife, Elizabeth, in the 1850 census, living in Dekalb County. They were in the home of Jonas Melton, 45, a farmer, and his wife, Mary, 36. Children included William P. 17; Sarah Ann, 13; Charles 9; Henry W. 7; Andrew 6; Marcus 5; Drury D. 4 and Marion C. 2. Then there was William C. Free, 23 and Elizabeth Ann, 19. It is not known if Jonas and Mary were the parents of Elizabeth Ann, though it would seem likely. However, in later paragraphs, we are quoting Lonnie Free again with the possibility that Elizabeth Ann (or as he calls her Mary Elizabeth) was the daughter of Peter Milton (not Melton).

Early censuses in South Carolina, in 1790 and 1800, show Frees living there, including an Adam Free, who could have been a forebear of the Adam Free who fathered William and others.

* * *

WILLIAM C. FREE

William Christopher Free, as noted, was born in either South Carolina or Georgia. In the 1880 Muhlenberg County census, both he, and his son Thomas, listed their birthplaces as in Georgia. Lonnie Free, Thomas' son, noted that William probably left his parents' home in Alabama when he was around 22 years of age. He was not found in the Alabama census of 1850, when the rest of the family was censused there.

He was however found to be in Pierce County, Ga. (near Waycross) when he married there around 1850. His first bride was Elizabeth Ann Melton. She was either the daughter of Jonas Melton of Dekalb County, or of Peter Milton (as Lonnie Free believed), who also had a son, James M. Milton, who married Amanda Powell in Georgia. She was the daughter of Carter R. and Celia Ann Beasley Powell. James and Amanda were the parents of 12 children.

Five children were born to William C. and Elizabeth Ann Melton (or Milton) Free. They were Alpha Ann (June, 1851); Sarah Francis (March 5, 1855); Thomas Columbus (April 11, 1857); Lucinda Ann (July 25, 1859) and Elisha Bruce (April 14, 1861). Lucinda, Alpha, Thomas and Elisha were known to have come to Muhlenberg County with William prior to 1880.

There is a little evidence to show where William and Elizabeth Ann lived in their early married life. In 1860, they were in Fannin County, Ga., in the Stock Hill precinct, where he was listed as a farmhand. At that time, he was 34, Elizabeth 29 and they had four children, Alpha 9, Sarah 5, Thomas 3 and Lucinda 1. Elisha was not yet born. He would be born in 1861. In April, 1864, William joined the Confederate army, and gave his address as Fannin County, Ga. (Blue Ridge), a county near the Tennessee border (across the state line from Copperhill and Ducktown, Tenn.).

Beset by smallpox, William "deserted" (in the word of Lonnie Free) the southern army and moved his family to Nashville, Tenn., where the women in the family were placed in a hospital. Sarah Frances, the second child, died there near the end of the Civil War. William packed up the remnants of his family and moved them to Todd County, Ky.

His wife, Elizabeth Ann died in Todd County shortly after the Frees arrived there. Lonnie Free stated the death was "sometime between 1872 and 1876, and she is buried in Todd County," according to his papers. However those years are incorrect, as will be noted. William Free married Aretta Angeline McMillen, who was born in March of 1828, in Todd County on Dec. 22, 1865 according to marriage records researched more than once. Plus, in the 1900 census report, William and Aretta Angeline Free were recorded as stating they had been married 37 years. This would have meant a marriage in about 1863, but that also is doubtful. More rational is that Elizabeth Free died in early or mid-1865, soon after the Frees arrived in Todd County, and William Free married Aretta McMillen the same year. Aretta may have been of the same McMillen family into which Jepha Milton (or Melton), son of James and Amanda married in Georgia in 1874. The McMillens may have come to Kentucky with the Frees.

As if to prove the William C. Free -- Aretta McMillen marriage occurred prior to 1870, the census of that year in Todd County lists them living in the Sharon Grove precinct as William C. Free, 44; Aretta A., Free, 40; Altha A., 18; Thomas C., 13, Lucinda J., 11 and Elizha B., 8. It is necessary also to recall that Sarah Frances, the other child, died in Nashville around 1864-65 of smallpox.

The other four children, Lucinda, Thomas, Alpha and Elisha came to Muhlenberg County with William and Aretta prior to 1880.

Alpha A. Free married John W. Hardison in Muhlenberg County on Feb. 15, 1877, setting the Free's entry into the county at that date or before. Lucinda married W. A. Hardison on Oct. 29, 1885 in Muhlenberg County. Thomas married Nancy Strawther Hall on Dec. 21, 1882 and Elisha married Georgia Elizabeth Shepherd on Dec. 2, 1886, both in Muhlenberg County.

In 1880, when the family was first censused in Muhlenberg County, William, Aretta, Lucinda and Elisha were in the home of the daughter, Alpha and her husband, John W. Hardison. The Hardisons, who had two children then, William, 2, and James W., eight months, lived then in an area generally between what is today Mud River Mine and Twin Tunnel in south Muhlenberg. Close neighbors were the Hoskinsons, the Beadnells, the Graysons and Shepherds, all known to have lived at Mud River, and the Mahans, who were near Twin Tunnel. The other son, Thomas, lived with Dr. A. D. James at Laurel Bluff (Penrod) where he apparently worked as a farm hand.

There is no documentation as to when William C. Free died, nor where he is buried. Knowing that he was alive when the 1900 census was taken, and that his death does not appear in vital statistics, which were recorded first in 1911, his death can be marked sometime in the period between 1900 and 1911. In 1900, William and Aretta were making their home with his son, Elisha near Gus, in a direction toward Mud River Mine. William was 73 and Aretta 72. Aretta's death is documented as on March 13, 1913, when she was 82 years old. They are possibly buried at Mud River.

William Christopher Free's middle named was learned from a death certificate for Elisha Free, where his father was listed as Christopher Free. However, he was affectionately known in the area of South Muhlenberg County as "Uncle Billy Free".

* * *

ALPHA ANN FREE HARDISON

Alpha Ann was born, the first child of William and Elizabeth Ann Free, in June of 1851. On Feb. 15, 1877, she married John W. Hardison in Muhlenberg County. They made their home in 1880 between Mud River and Twin Tunnel, but in 1800, they lived in an area bounded by an imaginary triangle formed by lines from Gus to Penrod to Dunmor. The general area was believed to be near to the present-day Hughes cemetery. They were the parents of at least five children. Listed in 1900 were:

William G., born January, 1878;
George B., born October, 1881;
Laura F., born January, 1884;
Pink L., born May, 1887.

The second child shown in the 1880 census, James W., then an infant, probably died before 1900.

There is no known death date or burial site for John and Alpha, who were alive in 1900. He was 39, she 49 at the time.

Of these children, George Hardison married Sena Hunt, daughter of Green and Nancy Davis Hunt. Among their children were Edward Hardison, who married Ora Wallace; Sena Ann, who married Ray Fleming and a third, Mildred. These families lived for many years between Dunmor and Hope School. Ray Fleming still resides at Penrod.

* * *

LUCINDA J. FREE HARDISON

Lucinda J. Free, born in Georgia on July 25, 1860, married W. A. Hardison in Muhlenberg County on Oct. 29, 1885. It is known that in 1900 they lived near Drakesboro and had four living children. Lucinda reported to the census taker that she had borne nine children, but only four were alive. They were:

Vernie, born August, 1866, died in 1960, and is buried beside his wife, Maude (1887-1964) at Ebenezer.
Mary B., born in April, 1891.
Amy, born January, 1896.
William, born August, 1899.

Another child was Oscar Hardison, born after 1900, who lived at Drakesboro (Mondray) for many years. He married Mary Creasy. Their children were Jewell Howard, Ray Nell and Willie Murl Hardison.

Lucinda Free Hardison died April 30, 1932 in Muhlenberg County.

* * *

THOMAS COLUMBUS FREE

Thomas Columbus Free was born in Georgia on April 11, 1857. On Dec. 21, 1882, in Muhlenberg County, he married Nancy Strawther Hall (7-28-1869), daughter of Andrew J. and Charity Davis Hall. Their children were:

- (1) Alice Inas, born Oct. 9, 1885;
- (2) Dellar Doretta, born March 18, 1887;
- (3) Willie Wyatte, born Sept. 24, 1890;
- (4) Nettie Barbara, May 5, 1893;
- (5) Lonnie, born April 21, 1896;
- (6) Katie, born May 8, 1899.

Thomas C. Free died shortly after the 1900 census was taken, and Nancy (Nannie) Free then married William Henry Hunt on Dec. 4, 1902, when he was 71 and she 33. They were the parents of two children, Mary Hunt, born Aug. 15, 1904 and Robert Allen (Bob) Hunt, born Jan. 10, 1907. William Henry was the son of John and Ann Jenkins Hunt, and was born in 1829. His first marriage was to Mary (Polly) Nannie. He was the grandfather of former state representative Howard Hunt.

THOMAS FREE'S CHILDREN

ALICE INAS married John G. Stanley in Muhlenberg County on Dec. 21, 1901. It is believed she is the same Alice who also was later married to Floyd Jackson, the parents of Elvis Jackson, born on Feb. 16, 1909 at Drakesboro. Vital statistics show his parents, Floyd and Alice Free Jackson were both born at Mud River. Little else is known of the Alice Free family.

DELLAR DORETTA FREE was born March 18, 1887, and family records fail to show any data on her or her later life.

WILLIE WYATTE FREE was born Sept. 24, 1890 and once again on March 11, 1917, the Free and McMillen lines came together. Willie married Flora Etta McMillen (born Feb. 13, 1900), daughter of William Taylor and Mary Ellen Wallace McMillen of Penrod. Willie served in France in World War I in the quartermaster corps and for many years managed the farm of his brother-in-law, Harley McMillen at Penrod. Their children include: (1) Melvin Earl Free (1919) who married Harriet Elizabeth Mallory. They now live in Greenville. Children are Rebecca and Sandra; (2) Oscar Lee Free (1922), now deceased. He married Genevieve Baise; (3) William Edward (Billy) Free (1924), married Edith Lorene Hardison of Mud River Union. They still live in that area. Children are Edwin Mitchell and Kelly Gene; (4) Rena V. (1926) married J. W. Walker. They live in Okeechobee, Fla. Children are Shannon Gale (Corum) and John Steven Walker; (5) G.W. Free (1928), married Ruby King of Penrod. They live in Louisville. Children are Janet and Robert Wood Free. (6) Newman Eugene Free (1930), married Norma Jean Tucker. They live in East Peoria, Ill. (7) Elza Ray Free (1936), married Janie Bell Buchanan and lives in Louisville. Their children are Rayetta Jean and Kimberly Faye. (8) Jimmy Glynn Free, (1939). An infant was born and died in 1916. Willie Free died Dec. 11, 1947. Flora died Jan. 24, 1991. Both are buried at Penrod.

NETTIE BARBARA FREE was born May 5, 1893, and on Dec. 25, 1916 married Evan Estil Crews (1888-1968), who was also to serve in France in World War I with the Sixth Infantry Division. He worked for many years for Kirk Coal Co. at Beech Creek, and they lived near Kirk store at the intersection of the present Browder-Beech Creek Road. Mr. Crews was the son of James B. and Elizabeth Gardner Crews. Nettie died Nov. 15, 1966 and Evan on April 2, 1968. They are buried at Mt. Moriah. Their children: (1) Eldon (1918), died in 1987. He was married to Helen Pruett and lived in Clarksville, Tn. at the time of his death. (2) Louise, (1920) married Elmo Bartlett and still lives at Beech Creek. (3) Nancy June (1923) married Elman McDonald. He is now deceased and

June lives in Beechmont. (4) Paul Truman (1925) resides in Dayton, Ohio. He is married to Marcie Hornik. (5) David Ray (1931) married Ruth Cowherd and lives in Santa Ana, Calif. (6) Shirley Neal, the youngest, was born in 1935 and died in 1937. He is buried at Mt. Moriah.

LONNIE FREE was born April 21, 1896 and died in April, 1968. He is buried at Union Ridge. He married Mary Susan (Susie) Arnold (b. 1903), daughter of Silas and Mollie Clardy Arnold on Dec. 12, 1920 in Muhlenberg County. They made their home at Penrod, near the site of old Cedar Dale school. Their children: (1) Elmer Estil (Wessy) Free, (1922), married Virgie May Young. Children, Elmer Leroy, Tabitha May and Robert Thomas; (2) Thomas Chatman Free, (1924); (3) Leroy Free (1926) died in 1939; (4) Pauline Free (1928); (5) Denny Ray Free (1931), married Murriel Hunt, daughter of Willie and Minnie Hunt. They live at Penrod. Children are Dennis Wayne, John William, Lonnie Gale, Edward Bryan, Alisia Faye (Musselman) and Lisa Reannae (Farley); (6) Irene Free (1933), married Neal Napier. Children, Neal Ray, Darren Equard and Tracy Lynn (McDonald); John Lewis Free (b&d 1936); (7) Alice Free (1938), married Benjamin F. Wilson. One child, Frankie Lynn (Ashby); (8) Glendel Free (1940).

KATIE FREE was born May 8, 1899 and married Arthur Penrod Nov. 21, 1916. Their children were: George Arthur (1917); Raymond Lafayette (1919); Nannie Grace (1921); Robert Thomas (1925); Margaret Lee (1927); Jo Nell (1929); Bennie Wayne (1931); Barbara Katherine (1933) and Wilodine (1936). Arthur died Nov. 13, 1963. He is buried at Wyatts Chapel.

A half-brother, Robert Allen Hunt was born Jan. 10, 1907, and died in 1970. He married Feny Arnold on Jan. 2, 1927. Children were William Marshall and Frances Eardean.

* * *

ELISHA BRUCE FREE

Elisha Bruce (Lishe) Free, the youngest son of William C. Free was born in Georgia on April 14, 1861, according to family records. He married Georgia Elizabeth Shepherd on Dec. 2, 1886. Georgia was the daughter of William R. Nathaniel (Nat) and Eliza Jane Obediah Grayson, born in Logan County, Ky. Jan. 18, 1869. Elisha died Oct. 3, 1843 and is buried in the Methodist Church cemetery at Island in McLean County, Ky. Georgia Elizabeth died March 20, 1951, and is buried in the same cemetery.

Elisha and Georgia lived near Gus in their early life, and during and immediately after World War I, they were in the Graham area, where he was a coal miner. Daughter Flossie and niece Nadine Shepherd were enrolled at school at Corley's Chapel in 1918-19. Later, the family moved to Buttonsberry, near Island in McLean County, where they lived the remainder of their lives. He and his son, Ernest, operated a small country coal mine and store near Island.

Their children were:

* * *

ERNEST LEE FREE, born in Muhlenberg County Sept. 5, 1889. He married Eunice Nannie Taylor on April 20, 1927. Ernest died Feb.

22, 1968 in Daviess County. He is buried in the Island Methodist Church cemetery, as is his wife, Eunice, who died in 1978. Their children were: (1) Ernest Gene, born in 1928, first married Violet Greathouse. He remarried on Oct. 1, 1988. His second wife is named Jean; (2) James Ray, born in 1930, married Nelda Faye Holder; (3) Benny Bruce, born 1932, married Violet Bolton; (4) Eben Shelton, born 1934, married Linda Miles; (5) Alton Taylor, born 1937, married Melanie Frizzell; (6) Ora Elizabeth, born 1939, first married Kyle Wayne Capps and on Sept. 2, 1989, married James David Caudill, Sr.; (7) Eddie Clark Free, born 1946, married Adina Emerick on Dec. 22, 1972. Another child, Addie L. was born and died as an infant in 1941.

James Ray (Hammer) Free, the second child and wife, Nelda Faye, live in Livermore. James, an upholsterer, known for years as "Hammer" and wife, Faye have three children, Debra Kaye (1954); Tony Ray (1956) and Michael Lee, (1968). Michael Lee died shortly after birth. Tony Ray married Teresa Helen Clark. Debra (Debbie) married Kenneth Elliott Hinton in 1978 and lives in Livermore. She was part of the 1990 U. S. Census Bureau team in a multi-county area, and has been instrumental in preserving much of the Free and Shepherd history through her family research efforts. She and Kenneth have one son, Michael Joseph.

Ernest Lee Free also had a marriage prior to marrying Eunice Taylor. On Nov. 23, 1923, he married Florence (Tince) Huckleberry and was the father of a daughter by this marriage. Cordie F. (Tince) Huckleberry Free died Dec. 18, 1924 at the age of 19. Their daughter, Mildred, died Dec. 28, 1924 at the age of just a few months.

* * *

ERMA LOIS was born in Muhlenberg County July 31, 1893 or '94 and died in McLean County on Jan. 11, 1989. She married Fred T. Tucker (1888-1934). She is buried at Sacramento. Children include: (1) Eunice (1911), married Noble Decker and lives in Sacramento; (2) Pauline (1919-1980), first married A. L. Howell and then Stuart Duncan; (3) Esther (1915), married Maynard L. Shepherd, son of John Shepherd, who was a brother to Georgia Elizabeth Shepherd Free; (4) Verla (1918-1986), was married to Murty Iglehart who is also deceased; (5) Opal Lois (1920), also deceased, married J. W. Patterson; (6) Norman (1924) married Virginia George; (7) Ruby (1926) married James L. Garrett, and; Reba, born in 1929, lives in Sacramento, and was married to J. C. Hinton. He is now deceased.

* * *

FLOSSIE JANE was born in Muhlenberg County June 21, 1897 and married Walter Webb. Flossie died in 1972 and is buried at Old Salem Cemetery in Hopkins County. Their children include Naomi, who lives in Madisonville; Carolyn, who also lives in Madisonville and Leta, who lives near Madisonville.

* * *

Information other than public records, was provided by the papers of the late Lonnie Free, by records kept by the late Flora (Mrs. Willie) Free, both of Penrod, from June Crews McDonald of Beechmont, from Debbie Free Hinton of Livermore and from the Shepherd family Bible, owned by Darrell Williams. Correspondence may be addressed to the writer at 7965 Ridgewood Road, Goodlettsville, Tenn. 37072. Computer-generated copies of the Free family history may be obtained for \$4 each from the same address.

