

GRAY FAMILY HISTORY

The Ancestors and Kin of John Hulon Gray



Compiled by Glen Deas from 1985 until 2019

A Brief History of the Gray Family of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas

FORWARD

This is being written primarily for the descendants of John Hulon Gray and Eula Lee Gray, though other family members may find some of it useful and interesting. At the 1985 Gray Family Reunion in Monroe, LA, my Aunt Martha O'Dell Gray Sanders brought with her a brief history of the Kersh Family that she had obtained from a cousin in Arkansas. I realized that I knew little about my family history except for my grandparent's first names. I had never known my mother's parents since they died when I was a toddler. My grandmother Deas, who I had not seen since age 4 or 5, died in Mississippi in 1969, the very weekend that I went out to West Texas to look up my father that I had not seen since age 4. I saw my grandfather Deas only once, one weekend in 1973 at my Uncle Wayne's home in Houston, and he died 3 months later in California. Thus began my quest to discover my roots. I have researched as many of my lines on both sides of the family as I could, and continue to do so to this day. It took me 27 years to discover the resting place of my great-grandmother Deas. And only fairly recently did I discover that my grandmother Deas' grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins had moved from Meridian, MS to Caldwell Parish around 1894 and lived only 5 miles from where I now live. I had known for some time that our Lee and Wynn families had lived in Jackson Parish in 1910, but only recently established that where they lived was only about 5 miles from where I live in Ouachita Parish, and lived just down the road from the Wagoner family, and may have gone to church with them some 45 years before Mother and C.P. ever met. The research is somewhat easier (and less costly) with the advent of the Internet, but there is a lot of incorrect information out there and one is cautioned to take anything you read (including this) with a grain of salt. Most of my research was done in County and Parish courthouses and State Archives in Mississippi and Alabama. I was fortunate enough to be able to take off work for 4 years to do this and to visit actual home places and cemeteries, as well as visit with distant cousins I was unaware of all over Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas.

Along the way I discovered many inter-family relationships (my sister-in-law is also my mother-in-law, my half-brother is also my first cousin, my wife is my stepsister), so you really need a roadmap (genealogy chart) to see how people tie together. In Mississippi, 5 members of the Gray family married 5 members of the Kersh family, and brothers gave their kids the same names, so you could have 3 Richard Grays and 3 William Grays all living next to each other. Since much data available is just names on a Census record, it can take a while for a picture to emerge in order to understand the family relationships. I even met my wife Ann at a family reunion – I was 11, she was 10, and the niece of my future stepfather.

As a natural consequence of doing family research, one must necessarily get deep into history research. I had never been much of a history buff (this or that President, this or that War, this or that date), but when I was able to understand where our families were living and what was happening in the country, it took on a new meaning. I discovered much about our Confederate heritage, and even found a cousin in Houston who had a photo of my great grandfather in his Confederate uniform shortly after he enlisted in Mobile. I also learned of numerous family tragedies, some of which I will mention here. With a deeper knowledge and understanding, it even seems as though you are able to go back in time and be with our ancestors. Of course it is impossible to boil down boxes and drawers full of notes and photocopies into only a few pages as I present here.

Much of our Gray and Wynn family history goes back to Montgomery County, Alabama, and more research needs to be done there.

Glen Deas (grandson of John Hulon Gray)
West Monroe, LA
August 3, 2019

FIRST GENERATION

The earliest Gray that we have a record of is **James Gray**. What little information we have on him comes from the Orphans Court records in Montgomery County, Alabama and from the 1880 Census of Rankin County, Mississippi. The census record information given by his son William Foster Gray indicates that he was from England. He died in Montgomery County, Alabama in 1821 or 1822. There is no information on his possible wife or wives. He had at least 3 children: Mary, William Foster, and Richard. Our ancestor is Richard. It is possible that James may have had two other sons, Parker and Isreal Gray. Some information I got from the Archives in Jackson, MS dated 1955 states that Parker was a brother of William F. Gray and lived in the Montgomery – Wetumpka area at the time. That letter is attached and is the only evidence of such a relationship.

From the census records regarding the birthplace of William and Richard, it appears that the Gray family lived in Virginia and South Carolina in the years 1800-1820 before coming to Alabama likely around 1820. William Foster was born in Virginia, and Richard in South Carolina. There was a James Gray in Abbeville District, SC in the 1810 census on page 31, and he is a likely (though unproven) candidate for our original James Gray, and he was still there in 1820. Only head of household names were in the Census records prior to 1850. More research can be done along these lines.

DNA evidence appears to show that the children of James Gray all had different mothers and present new challenges to future family history researchers.

SECOND GENERATION

Mary was a minor at the time of James' death, so John A. Fulmar was appointed as her guardian to oversee her legal rights of succession. She married Joseph Hatch (erroneously given as Hatchett in some court records) in 1826. Joseph was from the nearby county of Dallas, which is where Selma is located. We have another connection to Selma, as will be addressed in a moment. Joseph obtained land in south Montgomery County, on or very near present day I-65. He is shown in the 1830 Census of Montgomery County, and that is the last record I have found for him or Mary.

Update Sept 2020: Thanks to Uncle Richard's great grandson Gary Gray, and Ancestry DNA we now know Mary's story. It seems that a year or so after the 1830 Census Joseph Hatch died and Mary got remarried to William Foster Bull, Sr. I have been unable to find a marriage record which may explain why it was so difficult to locate her. It is curious that her husband's first and middle name were the same as her brother, but not too surprising given the propensity of giving their children the same names. Mary had a son she named Joseph. At this point it is not clear if he was the son of Joseph Hatch or if he was actually the son of W.F. Bull and just named in memory of her first husband. Shortly after their marriage Mary and her brothers and other related families all moved to Fayette County, Alabama. Mary lived there for many years, then moved to Attala County, MS where many of the McCool, Lansdale, and Gray family members had moved to. She is last found in the 1880 Census of Montgomery County, Ark living in Gap, which I believe to now be called Caddo Gap. Gap was a little west of Hot Springs, so I am not sure if they may have moved there to be close to the treatments at Hot Springs, or possibly because silver and manganese ore was discovered in the area at the time.

Update October 2020: I made a trip up to Montgomery County, Arkansas visiting the courthouse in Mt. Ida and the cemetery there in Caddo Gap/Hickory Station where I believe it most likely that Mary and William Foster Bull, Sr are buried and posted some pictures on the findagrave.com web site. Though I did not find their exact stones, there are some 30 or so eroded and unreadable stones at the site. But since they lived only a mile west of the church located there and were known members, I think it most likely that they are buried there.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/217474101/mary-bull> . I plan a future visit to Perry County, Arkansas where many of Mary's descendants settled.

Richard was also a minor, so Isaac Lansdale, a Revolutionary veteran from Delaware was appointed as his guardian-ad-litem. Isaac was present in Montgomery the day the French General Lafayette came to town on his way to Washington in 1824, and Isaac gave a speech on the steps of the Capitol. **William Foster** would marry Isaac's daughter Rachel Lansdale. Richard married Sabra Williams, also from Dallas County. Her parents were William Williams and Rachel Nelson, and he had a plantation on the site of what is now part of the Selma Airport. William Williams died around 1836 and Rachel in 1855. His mother was Rachel Pike, and is thought to be related to Zebulon Pike of Pike's Peak in Colorado.

Around 1832 the Gray and Lansdale families sold their properties in Montgomery County and moved north to Fayette County, just above Tuscaloosa, settling in the southern part of the county near Newtonville. I visited their properties there and it is pretty rugged. I don't see how they could have grown much more than goats. Around the time of the move, Alabama revised some of their property laws, giving women certain rights. As a result, Isaac and his wife had to make a trip back to Montgomery for her to sign the sale documents. The families grew and prospered. In 1848 Richard was appointed Constable of the Hico Beat.

Richard continued buying land in Fayette County until 1858. In 1854 his brother William F. obtained 80 acres in Rankin County, Mississippi under a military warrant, and accumulated over 400 acres there in the years before the Civil War broke out. Most of the two families moved to Rankin County during the years 1855-1860, though some stayed in Fayette County. Robert Miles "Doc" Gray, the last child of Richard and Sabra, was born in Fayette County Aug.6, 1856. In August of 1858 Richard purchased 320 acres in Rankin County from William Myers. The property was near the Kersh estate and near the Shiloh Methodist Church south of Pelahatchie in eastern Rankin County.

One thing of interest to you is probably whether or not the Grays were slave owners. William Foster seems to not have owned any. However, our Richard did own slaves. The 1860 Slave Schedule of Rankin County (page 81) shows that Richard owned 9 slaves: 6 males ranging in age from 63 to age 10, and 3 females ranging in age from 61 to 31. That was a huge monetary investment, and with nearly a thousand acres between them you can be sure that before the War, the Grays were in very good financial condition. That changed drastically after the War ended. Our ancestor Allen David Kersh in 1860 owned 5 slaves: 3 females ages 35-16, and 2 males 18 and 12.

It seems that Richard and Sabra's son William M. Gray moved to Rankin County about the time that William Foster got his land there. He met and married Caroline Sarah Kersh in 1855. She was the daughter of Allen David Kersh and Sarah Regina Rhodes, and the sister of our ancestor Laura Ann Semantha Kersh Gray.

According to the family Bible, Richard died January 10, 1863. It is presumed that he is buried at Shiloh, but there are no markers and no proof of that. After his death, Sabra appears to have lived with their son William M. (John H. Gray's "Uncle Will Gray") until her death on Dec. 16, 1870. William Foster Gray in his later years moved around staying with one child or another in Texas, Mississippi, and possibly Oklahoma until his death on 7 Aug 1885 near Grapeland in Houston County, Texas. He had been staying with his son James Malachi Gray who had moved to Texas around 1850 (some of the Kersh family moved to that area around the same time). During the Civil War, James' Confederate unit (Company K, Texas 22nd Infantry Regiment) actually spent a few days in Monroe, and Texas Ave. is named for them.

THIRD GENERATION

Both Richard and William Foster Gray had large families, and I will not enumerate them all here. Rather, I will refer you to the Family Group Sheets for many of the details. However, there are some things that I will point out that you may not glean from them right away, and give a few particular details.

First, as I mentioned earlier, they gave many of their children the same names. They both had a James, William, Richard, and Sarah. James was their father's name. Sarah may have been their mother's name. Richard's daughter Sarah died in Fayette County in 1859 at the age of 16 from "the chills". George Harris Gray was the 6th child of Richard, and upon Richard's death in 1863 he became administrator of the estate. George lived in Raleigh, Smith County, MS, just to the south of Rankin. He ran a store there, and was the postmaster there for some time. He later moved to McGee and is buried there. Family rumor in Mississippi is that he was killed by a Negro, but I have not been able to confirm that.

UPDATE OCT 2020: Thanks to Wallace Smith, a G-G-Grandson of George Harris Gray, we now know that that rumor seems to be untrue.



I have not been able to discover much about Richard's first born, James. William Foster's son James Malachi Gray married Henrietta Williams, daughter of Sabra's brother William Newton Williams and moved to Texas around 1850. William Foster's sons Richard V, Wm F. Jr, and daughter Sarah Gray-Buckelew also moved to East Texas, and most of the Grays over there are of William Foster's lineage.

William Foster's daughter Ellender Elizabeth married Lafayette McCool. He died from measles in Tuscaloosa during the Civil War. Ellender died in 1869. They had a son, James Franklin McCool. James moved to Atalla County, MS where many of his McCool and Ray family members lived. He went to college, worked as a teacher for a while, then graduated from law school at the University of Mississippi. He worked for the railroad and the whistle-stop town of

McCool, MS is named for him. He also worked in the Chancery Clerk's office, was elected to the Miss. Legislature, and was a two time Speaker of the House. He was also a Mason, and was the Grand Master of the Mississippi Lodge.

Richard's son Richard L. Gray ("Little Richard"), married Laura Kersh's sister Mildred E. "Millie" Kersh. Not much was known about him when I began my research, but I discovered that he had enlisted early in the Civil War, was sent to Virginia and was killed in action at the Battle of Leesburg (aka Battle of Ball's Bluff) 21 Oct 1861. Another of the family tragedies. "Uncle Will" also served, and was captured at Port Hudson near Baton Rouge shortly after the fall of Vicksburg in July of 1863.

Two of William Foster's grandchildren married two of Allen David Kersh's children also. William Foster's daughter Sarah married Kennian (Kenyon, various spellings) Buckelew. Their son William Foster Buckelew married Mary Catherine "Mollie" Kersh, and Sarah's daughter Nancy Emma Buckelew married Richard Kersh. The Buckelew families eventually settled in Cherokee County, Texas. Some of their children moved to Fisher County, Texas, north of Tyler. Finally, our Robert Miles Gray married Laura Kersh and remained in Rankin County. Their homestead was near Johns, MS and near the old Kersh estate.

Laura Kersh Gray, John's mother, apparently suffered from mental illness and was hospitalized in the asylum in Jackson from time to time. Laura spent almost 17 or her 42 years of life in the asylum. She died from heart disease in the asylum 25 Jan 1905 and was buried on the grounds there. It took some time for the word to reach the family. In looking for her grave site, I discovered that the highway engineers had run I-55 right through the cemetery (who would complain?). Near the site of the old asylum I found a pile of old headstones, but I did not find one for her, if she even had one. In doing further research I also discovered that her father, Allen David Kersh had some problems and was committed for a while as a young man. The issues that have come down through the family appear to have its source there.

After Laura's death, Robert married Leah Vance Myers, widow of Walter D. Myers. Leah had two girls, Annie Vituria and Mary Katherine. Robert M. Gray died in 1936. He died on Jan 13, but his headstone says Jan 31. Either some mixup, a fear of the number 13, or a dyslexic stone mason?

FOURTH GENERATION

The number of fourth generation Gray family members is so large as to require an entire book. Therefore, this short history will only include the three children of Robert Miles Gray and Laura Kersh Gray. Perhaps someday either I or another interested family member will get all this data into a computer family history database and generate that book. "Doc" Gray and Laura had 3 sons that lived to adulthood. I have no definitive information on any children who may have died in infancy or been still born.

I was truly blessed to grow up knowing nearly all of my Gray family first cousins so well and being able to spend a lot of time with them. Regrettably, due to distance, I was not fortunate enough to grow up knowing my second cousins. In fact, to this day I have not met most of them. Most of my research interest has been in those generations before my grandparents, so there is much to be discovered with the help of those family members.

Luther Ezra Gray (20 Nov 1881 – 4 Oct 1961) was the first child of Doc Gray. He lived much of his adult life in the Vicksburg to Port Gibson, Mississippi area. He was in the lumber business. He married Alma Keen, and they had two daughters, Grace M. and Emmett Ruth. Emmett Ruth married John S. Roan, Jr., USMC in 1944. Grace married Byron W. Cook on Dec 24, 1939. I don't recall ever meeting Uncle Luther, and he died when I was a teenager while we were living in Kansas City. I did have the pleasure of meeting with Emmett Ruth on a couple of occasions at her home in Jackson when I first began my research, and she allowed me to copy with my good camera several of the old family photos which can now be found all over the internet, including the ones of Laura Kersh Gray and Robert M. and his 3 sons. Uncle Luther and Aunt Alma rest eternally in the Lakewood Memorial Park Cemetery in Jackson, Hinds County, Mississippi.

Richard Allen Gray (5 Jan 1886 – 15 Oct 1968) was the third son of Doc Gray. He grew up with his brothers on the homestead in Rankin County. Richard probably knew his stepsisters Annie and Katherine before his father married their mother Leah after Laura's death. The story goes that Richard snuck his stepsister Annie ("Aunt Terrie") out of the house in the middle of the night and ran off with her and got married. He was 21 and she was 13. He was working for the railroad at the time. I never knew her, but when I visited their son Walter in Puckett, MS I saw a photo of her and Uncle Richard (apparently a wedding photo) and was struck by her beauty even at that age. I was given the photo and held on to it for many years before giving it to cousin Wayne Gray. They had children Lester, Laura, Clyde, Marie, Walter, and Mildred. They were divorced in the 1920's, the story being that he left her alone too much while he spent too much time in the woods hunting. In 1929 (or so) James Lee, the father-in-law of John H. Gray died, leaving a widow Nancy Matilda Wynn-Lee with a house full of kids. She was 45 and Richard was about 40. Either because of true love, or a matter of convenience, Richard and Grandma Nanny got married, and remained so until her death. I believe they lived next to Uncle Ray and Aunt Martha for a time, and also back in Rankin County. She is buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery. After she died, Richard married Lillian White. They lived in Braxton, MS. She outlived Richard by almost 20 years, passing away July 7, 1987 at the age of 89. I was living in Brandon, MS at the time at the beginning of my 4 year hiatus to do genealogy research and just happened to see her obituary in the Rankin County News newspaper. Annie rests eternally in Bastrop, LA. Lillian is buried in the Puckett, MS cemetery along with Richard.

John Hulon Gray (5 Jan 1884 – 26 Oct 1947) was the second child of Doc Gray. Most if not all of us in attendance at the family reunions come down through him. He was, from all reports, a hard- working man who enjoyed dancing and an occasional sip of "the recipe", as they say on "The Waltons". He somehow managed to find his way to West Carroll Parish, LA, along with others from Mississippi who would marry into the family, I believe to cut timber for the railroad when they were doing so much land clearing in West Carroll. There he met and married Eula (possibly Eulala) Lee, who was born in Elmore County, Alabama, across the river from Montgomery. John was 35 and Eula was 18 – at least that is what the marriage record says. When she was only a toddler of 3 or 4 the Lee and Wynn families moved to Jackson Parish, Louisiana a couple of years after the 1900 Census. Land records there in Jonesboro indicate they may have lived in Ouachita Parish for a while. That is a subject of further research. Axiom Harrison Wynn, the father of Jim Lee's wife Nancy had been cut out of his father Elijah's will, everything going to his half brother's and sisters by his father's second wife (and Axiom's mother's sister – in other words, his stepmother was also his aunt, and his half brothers and sisters were also his first cousins).

John purchased 40 acres in northern West Carroll, a little west of Kilbourne and raised a large family farming and cutting timber. Their children were Ruby Laura, Martha O'Dell, Johnnie Kathleen, Elsie Mae, Anna Lou (who died at about 8 months of age), Homer Allen, Virginia Lavern, Betty Ruth, Luther Miles, Richard Hulon, and Rachel. The name Rachel has come down through the family for several generations, and John had Gray cousins in Mississippi named Homer and Luther. I had heard that during John's mother Laura's times of absence because of her illness and after her death, that a black woman had helped Doc Gray with the children. I discovered that her family name was O'Dell.

Grandma Eula died 11 Aug 1946 at the young age of 45, ostensibly from Bang's disease, one gotten from drinking raw, unpasteurized milk. But she had other health issues, some stemming from rheumatic fever at a young age. The official cause of death was listed as Endocarditis, which is an infection which spreads to the inner lining of the heart.

About 6 months after her death, with a house full of kids to take care of, a couple of them under age 10, John married Ellie Kersh, who reportedly divorced John's first cousin Fred Kersh in order to marry him. They were married for only a few months when John died from cardiac arrest 26 Oct 1947. Ellie got only a small inheritance, and went back to her former husband Fred.

The middle children lived with some of their older siblings who were already married. Virginia came to live with us. Although I loved all my aunts dearly, Aunt Ginny was always my favorite – maybe because she would make chocolate milk for me. Later, Betty would live with us for a while during the time she was attending college in Monroe.

The two youngest children, Richard and Rachel, went to live with Shaw Millikin and his wife Alma. They had a dairy farm on the outskirts of Oak Grove, across the road from the Oak Grove Cemetery. It was believed that the two children were going to be legally adopted, with the advantages of that adoption. But it seems that did not happen, even though they assumed the family name of Millikin.

In spite of the setbacks and hardships, the children of John and Eula Gray all went on to lead healthy, for the most part happy, prosperous, productive lives. Their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren have a lasting legacy and can be proud of their family heritage.

Media Links:

<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/ROBTGRAY.JPG>
<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/LAURAKERSH.jpg>
<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/R0bM-LE-JH-RM-Gray.jpg>
<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/RICH-ANNIE.jpg>
<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/JHGRAYKIDS.jpg>
<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/johneula.jpg>
<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/RCHD-NANCY.jpg>
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<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/caddogap.jpg>
<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/BullTAXrecord.JPG>
<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/WFBullWill.pdf>
<http://john-h-gray.tripod.com/webonmediacontents/famousrelatives.pdf>

NOTES and AFTERTHOUGHTS

1. Ellender and Lafayette McCool were living in Atalla County, MS in 1855 and there is a land record in Rankin County where they transfer some of their property there to her brother Isaac Gray. Also living in Atalla County was an elderly James McCool, age 70, who I believe to be the same James McCool found on page 55 of the Abbeville SC Census of 1810, age between 26 and 45 with 4 children under the age of 10. It is for this reason that I believe the James Gray found on page 31 to be our ancestor, because of his age and that of his children, and I think it likely that some if not all of the other Grays living there are also related. So there may be valuable information to be found there in Abbeville, if the court and other records survived the ravages of the Civil War.
2. Uncle Homer was curious about the family of his cousins Jeff and Merida Waters who lived near them in West Carroll Parish, so I did some digging on their family. I wound up getting in contact with some family members in East Texas and have included some info from the Waters family newsletter, which has the families of Nellie Gray Waters, a sister of our Robert M. "Doc" Gray. I have more extensive info on the family that I am not including in this brief history, primarily due to copying costs.
3. Robert M. Gray was nicknamed "Doc" not because he was a trained physician, but because he seemed to have some unusual power to heal burns, and people sought him out.
4. There have been MANY additions (and deletions) to our family since I first started putting our family information into a LDS data program back in 1990-91, and regrettably, I have not done a very good job of keeping it up to date. Please forgive the gaps that you will find in the descendants of Robert and Laura Gray, and hope that I with the help of other family members can fill in those gaps since 1990 – after all, that is only 30 years of begatting to take care of.
5. William F. Gray (age 68) and Rachel Gray (age 65) are shown in the 1870 Census of Sanford County, Alabama, Page 327, family #45. Sanford County was formed from Marion and Fayette Counties. It was renamed Lamar County in 1877.
6. The 1910 Census of Marshall Co., OK shows Wm Foster's son David Andrew living with his daughter Eliza J. and son-in-law Jno W. Kirtly. There he states both his father and mother were born in Virginia.
7. Regarding the letter from Mrs Robbs, Linnie Gray Till (10 Apr 1859 – 24 Apr 1932) married Thomas James Till in Rankin Co., MS 3 Dec 1879. He is shown on the 1870 Census with his parents on page 60 (stamped) family #391. The child Elizabeth shown with the family of William Foster's son Richard V. Gray is the right age to be Linnie Elizabeth Gray. The 1860 Census shows a M. E. Gray in Richard V. Gray's family, age 5 months, that is the correct age. She is shown as Elizabeth in the 1870 Census. "Linnie" may be a nickname (Melinda – Linnie ?). This is what makes genealogy so challenging.
8. In the 1910 Census of Cherokee Co., TX Richard V. states that his mother was born in South Carolina. Is it possible that the Lansdale and Gray families knew each other before coming to Alabama? A James Gray is on the same page as Isaac Lansdale on the 1790 Census of Fairfield District South Carolina.
9. Correction on Page 3. William Williams' mother was Rachel Pike.

This page revised 15 Aug 2019 ged