

CLAIMS OF CHOCTAW DESCENT

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

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It is said that any American who can trace their ancestry back to 1800, which I seem to be able to, has a 50% chance of having at least one ancestor who is Native American. I do remember my mom, Linda, telling me that Mamaw Lena possessed some measure of Indian blood. Mom thought that one of Lena's grandfather's was full blooded Indian, but it has come to my attention that Thomas Cobb, another grandchild of Lena's, believes that the ancestor in question was either a grandfather or great-grandfather and that the tribal affiliation was Choctaw.

Before I truly dive into the question, I would like to lay out what evidence I already have.

JOHN WEST

Lena's mother was Viola West (1877-1912). Viola's father was John Hamilton West. John was born in St. Claire County, Alabama¹ in September of 1833.² While St. Clair County was established in 1818, the land was official seized from the Creek Indians the year before John was born (1832). John's father John A Hamilton West, Sr., apparently came to St. Clair from coastal North Carolina sometime between 1820 and 1830; the earliest document showing John, Sr. is a 1830 Federal Census.³ That census shows that John with 8 other people. One male and one female under five years old, one male and one female between 5 and 14 years old and one male and one female between 30 and 39 are listed. In addition, one female slave between the age of

¹ Year: 1860; Census Place: , Clarke, Alabama; Roll: M653_6; Page: 583; Image: 31; Family History Library Film: 803006.

² Year: 1900; Census Place: Bethel, Wilcox, Alabama; Roll: 44; Page: 4A; Enumeration District: 0131; FHL microfilm: 1240044.

³ 1830 US Census; Census Place: , St Clair, Alabama; Page: 225; NARA Series: M19; Roll Number: 4; Family History Film: 0002331.

24 and 35 is listed in the census. John, Sr. shows up in the 1840 Census⁴ in Perry County, Alabama, about 100 miles south-west of St. Clair. Now he appears to be in or near Choctaw territory. There appears to be no mention of John, Jr., Lena's grandfather, only a male and a female ages 20 to 29 and a male and a female ages 20 through 39.

It is not fully known who John Junior's mother was, but John Senior claims a female of similar age on the 1830 and 1840 censuses. This, I will assume, is his wife, but I have some doubts about that John Junior's mother was Elizabeth Missouri Horton. I don't think this is the woman mentioned in the 1830 and 1840 census. Though, it could be. I have found no record of where Elizabeth comes from or Elizabeth, where she was born or when she died. Additionally, it appears that the Senior West married Elizabeth on 15 Jan 1857,⁵ nearly twenty-four years after John Junior was born. Possibly, they were remarried or had been living without benefit of marriage before that time, but, giving the times, I find it unlikely that Elizabeth was John Junior's mother.

Could John Junior's mother have been an Indian? That is an open question, there are some reasons to doubt his Indian ancestry. First, he named one of his children Andrew Jackson West. Andrew Jackson West (one of Lena's uncles) was born in 1869,⁶ and, I assume, was named after the famous Indian fighter and presidential author of the Trail of Tears. Many men of the time were named after the famous Tennessean, but this was done in commemoration of the defeat of the local Indians and in honor of the people's rugged perseverance the face of local dangers. This wouldn't be the act of someone who claimed, in any way, Indian heritage (unless, somehow, he actually hated or wanted to disguise the fact—which isn't implausible). Secondly, the one published image of John shows a slim man with facial hair; again, this doesn't disqualify him from being partially Indian, it simply mitigates away from that conclusion.

The fact, that I am not entirely sure who is mother is makes gives me some pause and is worth further investigation.

JOHN CHAMPION

Viola West's mother was Julia Minerva "Mae" Champion (1837-1903) and both of her parents are fairly well documented. Both come from out of Alabama, Viola's mother, Eliza Minerva Shaw (1816-1855) from Tennessee and her father, John James Champion, Jr. (1819-1892) came from South Carolina, locality unknown. The Champions were well-established in the New World, having continuous line back to Edward Champion, Sr. (1609-1668) who came to Virginia

⁴ Year: 1840; Census Place: , Perry, Alabama; Roll: 11; Page: 255; Image: 520; Family History Library Film: 0002334.

⁵ Ancestry.com. *Alabama, Marriage Collection, 1800-1969* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006.

⁶ Year: 1870; Census Place: Cane Creek, Clarke, Alabama; Roll: M593_8; Page: 20B; Image: 44; Family History Library Film: 545507.

from England by the mid-1630's.⁷ The Champions then settled into Carolinas some time before the Revolutionary War. Lena's grandfather, John James Champion, came to Alabama with his father in or before 1829 as a small child.⁸ They settled in Wilcox County by 1830 along with 9 slaves.⁹ So, I am assuming that John Champion was of some means.

John married Julia "Mae" Shaw in 1835 in Clarke County, Alabama.¹⁰ She, despite being born in Tennessee, came from full-documented Scotch-Irish families, with such traditional names as Finley, McLean, O'Neil and Paisley.

It is unlikely based on the evidence at hand that either John Champion or Julia Shaw were of Indian blood. Either way, it is extremely unlikely that they possessed Choctaw ancestry. Despite these initial finds, further research is not unwarranted.

THE MORGANS

Lena's father was Rufus Randalf King Henry Morgan (1869-1944). At some point, I noted that he had the nickname "Red", but cannot find the source for this. Who knows what that meant: red hair or red skin? This is something that needs to be tracked down.

William Goodman Morgan (1839-1925) was Lena's paternal grandfather, Rufus' father. He was born and died in Pine Hill, Alabama,¹¹ in the heart of Black Belt country, on the edge of former Choctaw lands. He was married at least twice, it appears, to Lucy C. Dobbs (in 1915) and to Nancy C. (in 1863).

Nancy C. (1845-1913) seems to have the Morgan maiden name and, if traced back, appears to belong the same extended family as William Goodman. I am not 100% convinced that Nancy's last name was Morgan and only proceed on this assumption as a best guess. The best evidence I have at this point, is that Nancy is the daughter of an early Alabama pioneer from North Carolina, a John D. Morgan. John D. appears to have come to Alabama around between 1829 and 1833.¹² Nancy's family is oft-mentioned in the records of the time.¹³ Her family lines intermingle as one would expect of "kissing cousins" and this sort of thing certainly was not

⁷ Gale Research. *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, 1500s-1900s* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc, 2010. Place: *Virginia*; Year: *1638*; Page Number: *63*.

⁸ Ancestry.com. *U.S. General Land Office Records, 1796-1907* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2008.

⁹ 1830 US Census; Census Place: , *Wilcox, Alabama*; Page: *185*; NARA Series: *M19*; Roll Number: *3*; Family History Film: *0002330*.

¹⁰ Recorded in Records of Wilcox County, p. 32. Married by H. S. Brantly, J.P.

¹¹ Ancestry.com. *Alabama, Deaths and Burials Index, 1881-1974* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011. See also, Alabama Department of Archives & History; Montgomery, Alabama; *Alabama Census of Confederate Soldiers, 1907 and 1921*; Roll: *Multiple Regiments (Wilcox County #66)*; Roll Number: *231*.

¹² *Heritage of Wilcox County, Alabama*, p. 142

¹³ My copy of *The Records of Wilcox County Alabama*, has many entries concerning John D. and his brother as well as William G.'s family.

unheard of. I am only keeping an open mind, at this stage; I would not be surprised if Nancy were, indeed, from another family altogether.

The one published photograph of William Goodman does not at all lend itself to the possibility that he has any Indian blood. He appears to me to be of typical Scotch-Irish descent, complete with a rather full beard and wavy hair. Again, this is not strong evidence, simply a guess. Nancy appears in the picture and, simply by a superficial glance, I could not rule out Indian features, but there is nothing that makes me think right off that she is Indian.

CONCLUSIONS

Lena's grandfathers and great-grandfathers certainly could have been Indian, but I do not see any compelling reason to believe that they were.

The next steps would be to search the Indian (specifically, Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw and, most importantly, Choctaw) databases for the men in question. Perhaps, something will show up. The discipline being a good historian/genealogist is to remain dogged to the trail and be willing to revise and revisit all data. Who know what we will find!

One interesting fact that I find interesting: Many, if not all of Lena's ancestors lived in or in the vicinity of a place called Thomasville, Alabama. Indeed, that is where John James Champion was buried.¹⁴ Thomasville was founded on the small town of Choctaw Corner, a town dating back to early Mississippi Territory days (before 1830's). It was not until 1888, that Thomasville incorporated Choctaw Corner. It appears that "Choctaw Corner" or "Choctaw" was often used by the locals to describe the Thomasville far after its incorporation.¹⁵ This is worth investigating as well and may be explanatory in some way.

¹⁴ The Records of Wilcox County Alabama, p. 154

¹⁵ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomasville, Alabama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomasville,_Alabama)