

The Woolsey Family

Nancy Jane Woolsey was the mother of Robert Hannah (see chapter 9). Her known lineage is extensive and deserves a book of its own. In fact several books and manuscripts have been written on the Woolsey family. *The Family of George Wood Woolsey and Wife, Sarah Nelson Woolsey* by Hester (Woolsey) Brewer, Tuttle Publishing Company, 1940, is a major reference work. Other sources known to the compilers are *A Woolsey Family of America, 1623-1975* by Donald C. Hart; *Climbing the Cherry Tree* by Mattie T. Logsdon, 1977; and *Part of the Thomas Branch of the American Woolsey Family from 1623 to 1982* by J. W. Woolsey, 1982. Most, if not all, books about Woolsey ancestry can be found in the Mormon Family History Library.

Through the efforts of these researchers and others our Woolsey line has been traced back to the late 1500s in England. Of course, each generation of Woolseys married into another family, so there are numerous related families in the lineage. Related families in our line include the Osbornes, the Livingstons, the Briggs, the Cornells (Cornell University) and others.

We will not attempt to duplicate the work of previous researchers and we have not tried to verify their findings; but we show, by means of the pedigree charts in chapter 3, the lineage of Nancy Jane as given by those researchers. We also relate some selected history of her ancestors.

Nancy Jane Woolsey

Nancy Jane was born February 19, 1850 in Pulaski County, Kentucky. Her parents were married in Pulaski County and the Woolsey family had lived in the area for over fifty years.

Nothing is known of Nancy's childhood except that her parents died while she was young. Her father, Richard F. Woolsey, died in 1858 when Nancy was only eight years old. Around 1863 Nancy's mother, Aritta (Osborne) Woolsey, took the family to Putnam County, Indiana to live near her brother Solomon Osborne. (See later in this chapter for a section on the Osborne family.) At the time of the move, Aritta's family consisted of Nancy and four sons, George, Richard, John and Samuel. Aritta died within three years, leaving Nancy an orphan in her mid-teens.

In those times, of course, a sixteen-year-old girl was considered a marriageable woman, and Nancy Jane married James H. Allen³³ in May 1866 in Putnam County, Indiana. He was a Civil War veteran said to have been a drummer in the Union Army. His military record indicates he served as a private in Co. D, 97th Regiment, Indiana Infantry, from August 16, 1862 to June 9, 1865. The 1860 census shows that the Allen family lived in Putnam County and were neighbors to Solomon Osborne, Aritta's brother.

James and Nancy had one child while living in Indiana, Amanda, born February 26, 1867 and died in Iowa in 1871. In 1868 they moved to Iowa where the rest of their children were born. The children were: Mary Catherine born January 10, 1869, died December 28, 1931 in Seattle, Washington; Dora Belle born February 7, 1871, married

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Philip Meek, died November 25, 1953 in Tumwater, Washington; Aritta Luceba (called Ceba in later years) born January 21, 1873, married John Brower, died in May 1947 in Tumwater, Washington; James born January 31, 1875, died about 1893; Minnie J. born May 18, 1877, married Charlie Dailey and lived in Missouri, death date unknown; Sally died in infancy, date unknown.

Nancy's husband, James, suffered some health problems as a result of his Civil War service. The family story that he was shot through the lung is not supported by the pension application. However, he died in 1879, only 41 years old, of consumption (tuberculosis) and/or diarrhea, leaving Nancy Jane a widow. She had five children still living, the eldest only 12 years old. She claimed a Civil War pension and the various application and pension papers are on file in the National Archives. Those records contain many details of her life with her husband, James Allen – several testimonials by relatives and friends, a record of their marriage, his enlistment, his disability and death, their move to Iowa, the names and birth dates of the children, and the date of her marriage to Joseph Hannah.

After James Allen's death Nancy remained for a time on their farm in Woodland Township, Decatur County, Iowa. Also living in Woodland Township by 1885 was the David Hannah family, including their son, Joseph, age 25 (see chapter 7). Joseph met and married Nancy Jane's daughter, Mary Catherine, and eventually became the husband of Nancy Jane herself. Chapter 8 tells what we know of Mary Catherine's and Nancy Jane's marriages to Joseph.

Nancy died in Tumwater, Washington, on April 27, 1919. The funeral service was conducted from her home in Tumwater, located at 6th and Grant streets, and she is buried in Tumwater in the Odd Fellows cemetery.

The Woolsey Family in America

The name Woolsey is ancient Anglo-Saxon and has many forms such as Wulsi, Wulsy, Wolsy, etc. The name occurs very early in British records and is a common name in Suffolk County in England. One of the earlier records is of Robert Wolsey of Ipswich, County Suffolk. He was the father of Thomas Wolsey (born 1471) who became Cardinal Wolsey under King Henry VIII of England. The American Woolseys are believed to be related to Cardinal Wolsy, but a direct line to our Nancy has not yet been substantiated. The Coat of Arms of the American Woolseys and that of Cardinal Wolsey are very similar.

In the late 1500s and early 1600s religious persecution was very common in England. Many people fled England to escape this persecution. One such group was the Pilgrims, who went first to Holland and later came to America, arriving in 1620.

Reverend Benjamin Woolsey, born about 1598 in Suffolk County, England, was among those who went to Holland in about 1618. He probably had very good reason to leave England since one William Woolsey of Cambridgeshire was burnt at the stake for his religious beliefs in 1557. Reverend Benjamin preached in Rotterdam for a time, but he and his son, George, (possibly a nephew rather than a son) emigrated to New Amsterdam in 1623. New Amsterdam became New York when the British gained

control in 1674. Our Nancy Jane Woolsey traces her ancestry directly to this George who arrived in 1623 in what is now New York.

The Woolsey family lived in and around New York for the next 150 years before Reverend Thomas Woolsey, great grandson of the emigrant, George Woolsey, became the first Woolsey to move west. He and his family settled on the Holston River in what is now Washington County, Virginia about 1770. This was true pioneering and the book by Brewer, referenced at the beginning of this chapter, speaks of Reverend Thomas and his congregation attending services carrying their rifles and other war paraphernalia. The Indians were still active and the settlers built a string of forts to provide refuge in case of attack.

Reverend Thomas and his wife Sarah owned large pieces of property on both the Middle and South Forks of the Holston River. They had 6 children and the family stayed in the area until Reverend Thomas's death. His will is dated February 1794 and he is buried at Riverbend Cemetery, Smyth County, Virginia.³⁴

One of the children of Reverend Thomas was Richard, who was born about 1765 before the family left Westchester County, New York to go to the Holston River area. Richard and his wife, Nancy Plumstead, became the next Woolsey family to move westward. Shortly after his father's death in 1795 he took his family through the Cumberland Gap to a new home along Clifty Creek near Somerset, Kentucky, an area which became Pulaski County in 1798. There the family settled for at least the next 50 years.

Three generations of our Woolseys were born in Pulaski County. Richard and Nancy had George, who married Jane Hall. George and Jane had a son, Richard F., who served in the Mexican War as a private in the 4th Kentucky Infantry at age 21. Richard F. married Aritta Osborn May 3, 1849 in Pulaski County, Kentucky.³⁵ Richard's name disappeared from the county tax lists of 1858, so we assume he died at that time. Aritta's name continued on the tax list for the same piece of property through 1863 when she moved her family to Cloverdale, Indiana to be near her brother, Solomon Osborne. Her daughter, Nancy Jane then met James Allen, married him and moved to Iowa as related above. Thus the westward migration of the Woolseys continued.

The Osborne Family

A recent book entitled *Osborne Family History* by Judy Kelley, 1995, relates some of the earlier history and activities of the Osbornes, but we have not verified any of the records related in the book. This book states that the name is an old English one, predating the Norman conquest of England in 1066. However, there is also a Norman name, Osbern. There are many other variations of spelling such as Osbourn(e), Osburn, Osband, etc.

Our connection to the Osborne family comes from the marriage of Aritta Osborne to Richard F. Woolsey in Pulaski County, Kentucky³. Although Aritta was no doubt born in western Virginia where the Osborne family had lived since the late 1700s, it is in Pulaski County, Kentucky where she met and married Richard Woolsey. Wood Osborne, father of Aritta, first shows as a taxpayer in Pulaski County in 1847 when he paid taxes on property on Pittman Creek, a short distance from the Clifty Creek home of the Woolsey family. The marriage two years later of Aritta and Richard

F. produced several children including Nancy Jane Woolsey who married Joseph Hannah (see chapter 8).

According to Kelley's book, *Osborne Family History*, our American Osborne family can be traced back to James Osborn, born about 1674 in England. He married Anne Carter and they lived in Warwickshire. James and his son, Jonathon, born 28 March 1697, are said to have come to America, date not given.

Jonathon married Gretta Holman at James City, Virginia in about 1721. Their offspring included Ephraim, born August 21, 1723 at James City, Virginia.

During the next several generations the Osborne families moved westward. Various families lived in Rowan, Yadkin, and Surrey counties in North Carolina. Then some moved into the western parts of Virginia to Montgomery County and on west to Grayson and Scott counties.

Ephraim, son of Jonathon and Gretta, married Elizabeth Howard and they had Solomon, a name that occurs many times in the records of the Osborne family. This Solomon married Nancy Davidson and they had James. Solomon was killed by Indians while on a hunting trip (see below) before his son, James was born. The widow Nancy then married Jonathon Wood, and when James had a son, he named him Wood Osborne to honor his stepfather, Jonathon Wood.

Wood Osborne married Catherine Livingston (see below) and they had a daughter, Aritta, who, as we learned earlier, gave birth to Nancy Jane Woolsey. Thus we have the complete lineage from 1674 to the present according to *Osborne Family History* by Kelley.

The death of Solomon Osborne about 1764 at only age 22 years is related in the book *Early Osbornes and Alleys* by Rita Sutton as follows:

Enoch Osborn and brothers, Solomon and Ephraim, went into what is now Watauga Co., N. C. on a hunting trip, deer being plentiful in that section. Getting wet by a shower of rain and wet bushes, they struck camp for the night and lay down to sleep, hanging their clothes by the fire to dry. The Indians surprised them by shooting into camp, and killing Solomon Osborn. An Indian chased Enoch some distance and lost him in the darkness. Ephraim, after fleeing from camp, crept back in the darkness to his horse, which had been fastened with a hickory bark halter, to a tree, loosed him and rode home. Enoch returned home without shoes and in his night clothing.

The Livingston Family

This family also lived in the western part of Virginia at the same time as the Osbornes (see above). Aritta Osborne's great grandfather was William Todd Livingston who died sometime before 1794. He had a plantation on the North Fork of the Holston River in what is now Scott County, Virginia, including, it is said, many slaves. While we have not researched this family, it provides us with an interesting anecdote of frontier life in the early days on the frontier. The following account gives reality to the story passed down by my mother, Ethel May (Johnson) Hannah that one of my ancestors had

been scalped by Indians. This story comes from the book *The Family of George Wood Woolsey and Wife Sarah Nelson Woolsey* by Hester (Woolsey) Brewer, page 47.

The following statement was made by Mrs. Elizabeth Livingston, wife of Peter Livingston, and certified April 15, 1794, by A. Campbell, who had many positions of exalted rank:

"About ten o'clock in the morning, as I was sitting in my house, the fierceness of the dogs barking alarmed me. I looked out and saw seven Indians approaching the house, armed and painted in a frightful manner. No person was then within but a child of ten years and another two, and my infant. My husband and his brother had just walked down to the barns at some distance in the fields. My sister-in-law Susanna was with the remainder of the children in an adjoining house. Old Mrs. Livingston (widow of William Todd) was in the garden. (Compiler's note: In another account of this incident it is said that widow Livingston, mother-in-law of Mrs. Elizabeth Livingston, was tomahawked and died four days later.) I immediately shut and fastened the door; they came furiously up, and tried to burst it open, demanding me to open the door, which I refused to do. Then they fired two guns; one ball pierced through the door, but did me no damage. I then thought of my husband's rifle, took it down, but it being double-triggered, I was at a loss; at length I fired through the door, but it not being well aimed I did no execution; however the Indians retired from that place and soon after that an old house adjoining was on fire, and I and my children suffered much from the smoke. I opened the door and an Indian immediately advanced and took me prisoner with two of my children. I then discovered that they had my remaining children in their possession, my sister, Sukey a wench with her child, a negro man of Edward Callihan's and a negro of our own about eight years of age. They were fearful of going into the house I had left supposing it had been a man that had shot at them, and was yet within. So our whole clothing and household furniture were consumed in the flames, which I was pleased to see rather than it should be of use to the savage. We were all hurried to a short distance, where the Indians were very busy dividing and putting into packs for each to carry his part of the booty taken. I observed them careless about the children, and most of the Indians being some distance in front, I called in a low voice to my eldest daughter, gave her my youngest child and told them all to run toward neighbor John Russell's. They with reluctance left me, some times halting, sometimes looking back, I beckoned them to go. Inwardly I felt pangs not to be expressed at our doleful separation. The two Indians in the rear either did not notice this scene, or they were willing the children might run back.

That evening the Indians crossed Clinch Mountain and went as far as Copper Creek, distance about eight miles.

April 7, set out early in the morning, crossed Clinch river at McLean's fish dam about 12 o'clock, then steered northwardly toward the head of Stony Creek. There the Indians camped carelessly, had no back spy nor kept sentries out. This day's journey was about twenty miles.

April 8, continued in camp until the sun was more than an hour high; then set out slowly, traveled about five or six miles and camped near the foot of Powell's mountain. This day Bengé, the Indian chief, became more pleasant, and spoke freely to the prisoners. He told them he was about to carry them to the Cherokee towns. That in his route in the wilderness was his brother with other Indians hunting so that he might have provisions when he returned. That at his camp were several white prisoners taken from Kentucky with horses and saddles to carry them to the towns. He made inquiry for several persons on Holston, particularly old General Shelby, and said he would pay him a visit during the ensuing summer and take away all his negroes. He frequently inquired who had negroes and threatened he would have all off the North Holston. He said all the Chickamauga towns were for war and would soon be very troublesome to the white folks. This day two of the party were sent by Bengé ahead to hunt.

April 9, after traveling about five miles which was over Powell's mountain, a party of thirteen men under the command of Lieutenant Vincent Hobbs, of the militia of Lee County met the enemy in front, attacked and killed Bengé the first fire, I being at the time some distance in the rear. The Indian who was my guard at the time at first halted on hearing the firing. He then ordered me to run which I performed slowly. He attempted to strike me on the head with a tomahawk, which I defended as well as I could with my arm. By this time two of our people came in view which encouraged me to struggle all I could. The Indian making an effort at this instant pushed me backward, and I fell over a log, at the same time he aimed a blow at my head, which in part spent its force on me and laid me for dead. The first thing I afterward remembered was my good friends around me, giving me all the assistance in their power for my relief. They told me I was senseless about an hour."

There are many such stories related in the histories of the colonial frontier during the mid to late 1700s.

The Murder of Rebecca (Briggs) Cornell

Every family history should have some mystery, intrigue, or some other kind of less than wholesome content. And in the Cornell family of the late 1600s we have just what we always hope to find - a dark and evil deed - or was it?

Our connection to this drama is Rebecca Cornell, seven generations before Nancy Jane Woolsey, subject of this chapter. (see pedigree chart in chapter 3). In 1638 our ancestor, Rebecca, came from County Essex, England, to America with her father, Thomas, her mother, Rebecca (Briggs) Cornell and five or six other children including a son, Thomas, the villain in this story. The family lived in Boston for some time, then at Throggs Neck near New York where they were driven out by Indians, and settled by 1654 at Portsmouth, Rhode Island. Thomas Cornell, the father, died in 1655 leaving a wife, Rebecca and about 9 children, three more having been born in America.

The murder (if it was a murder!) took place at the widow's Portsmouth home on February 8, 1673. The following excerpt was taken from the book *Climbing the Cherry Tree* by Mattie T. Logsdon, 1977. It in turn references the *American Genealogist* for the following:

From American Genealogist v. 35 p. 107 & v. 39 p. 2
Feb. 9, 1673

The Friends' records state:

Rebecca Cornell, widow, was killed strangely, at Portsmouth, in her own dwelling house, was twice viewed by the Coroner's Inquest, digged up and buried again by her husband's grave in their own land.

Her son, Thomas, was charged with her murder, but although the jury's verdict in regard to this affair was , that " he did murder his mother, Rebecca, or was aiding or abetting thereto" yet the evidence in the case would seem to have been in no way conclusive. There was much evidence taken. The son said in his own defense that having discoursed with his mother about an hour and a half he went into the next room and staid three quarters of an hour. His wife then sent his son Edward to his Grandmother to know whether she would have some milk boiled for her supper. The child saw some fire on the floor and came back and fetched the candle. Then Henry Straight , myself and the rest followed in a huddle. Henry Straight saw what he supposed was an Indian drunk and burnt on the floor, but when Thomas Cornell perceived by the light of the candle who it was, he cried "Oh Lord It is my mother." Her clothes and body were much burned and the jury found a wound on uppermost part of stomach. John Briggs testified as to an apparition of a woman that appeared at his bedside in a dream, and he cried out "In the name of God what art thou?" and the apparition

answered "I am your sister Cornell" and thrice said "see how I was burnt with fire."

John Russell, of Dartmouth, testified that George Soule told him (since the decease of Rebecca Cornell), that once coming to the house of Rebecca, in Portsmouth, she told him that in the spring she intended to go and dwell with her son Samuel, but she feared she would be made away with before that. Thomas, Stephen, Edward and John Cornell (sons of Thomas) gave testimony as to their grandmother's death, saying their father was last with her. Mary Cornell, wife to John, aged twenty eight years, testified that three of four years past being at her mother-in-law, Rebecca Cornell's, and meeting her on returning from the orchard to the house, she said to deponent that she had been running after pigs and being weak and no help and she being disregarded, she thought to have stabbed a penknife into her heart, that she had in her hand, and then she should be rid of her trouble, but it came to her mind "resist the Devil and he will flee from you" and then she said she was well satisfied.

John Briggs, brother to the dead widow, accused Thomas of killing her. He was tried and convicted and, on May 23, 1673, executed for the murder of his mother. Some historians believe the evidence was inconclusive and based more on witch-craft. And that he was innocent!

Cornell University

The ninth child of the murdered Rebecca was Samuel Cornell. The Abridged Compendium of American Genealogy traces the descendants of Samuel, son of Thomas and Rebecca Cornell as follows: "Samuel married Deborah..... ? and had a son, Stephen Cornell who married Hannah.....? and they had a son, Elijah Cornell, married in 1769 to Sarah Miller. Elijah and Sarah had a son, Elijah (1771-1862), married Eunice Barnard. One of their sons was Ezra Cornell (1807-1874), a pioneer in the development of the telegraph, a founder of Western Union Telegraph Company, member of the New York Assembly and Senate, founder of Cornell University - m. Mary Ann Wood."³⁶

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- ¹ Francis, Stewart, *The Hannays of Sorbie*, page 21
 - ² *Galloway Castles and Tower Houses: The Old Place of Sorbie*, Macleod, I. F., 1969
 - ³ From the cover of *Hanna of Castle Sorbie, Scotland, and Descendants*, The Reverend James A. M. Hanna, 1959
 - ⁴ Jack Jones and Mary Warren, *South Carolina Immigrants 1760 to 1770*
 - ⁵ Augusta County, VA deed book 2, page 290,
 - ⁶ Scott, W.W., *A History of Orange County, VA*
 - ⁷ The Virginia Historical Society, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 8, page 279
 - ⁸ Wilson, Howard McKnight, *The Tinkling Spring Headwater of Freedom*
 - ⁹ Chalkley, Lyman, *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia*, Vol. 2, page 264
 - ¹⁰ Rockingham County, VA Marriages
 - ¹¹ Pocahontas County, VA Records, Marlinton, WV
 - ¹² Price, William T., *Historical Sketches of Pocahontas County, West Virginia*, page 219
 - ¹³ Wilson, Howard McKnight, *The Tinkling Spring Headwater of Freedom*, page 475
 - ¹⁴ Bath County Marriage Records
 - ¹⁵ Mace, Raymond W., page 30
 - ¹⁶ Mace, Raymond W., page 31
 - ¹⁷ 1917 Draft Registration, National Archives, Seattle, WA
 - ¹⁸ Lewis, Billie Redding, *Some Early Southern Settlers*
 - ¹⁹ Chalkley, Lyman, *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia*, Vol. 1, page 374
 - ²⁰ Chalkley, Lyman, *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia*, Vol. 1, page 280
 - ²¹ James French Strother, Senator, *Records on the Alexander Byrnside Families of Monroe County, West Virginia*, a typescript document, LDS film 1017645 Item 7.
 - ²² Morton, Oren F., *Annals of Bath County, Virginia*, 1917, The McClure Company
 - ²³ Price, William T., *Historical Sketches of Pocahontas County, West Virginia* page 220
 - ²⁴ Augusta County court records, will dated 24 Nov. 1774,
 - ²⁵ Augusta County, VA probate court records, will book 6, page 535
 - ²⁶ Greenbrier County, VA Tax Lists, 1783, list #4
 - ²⁷ Unpublished manuscript by Bertha Lewis Clark found in the Family History Library, Salt Lake City, UT.
 - ²⁸ May, C. E., *My Augusta A Spot of Earth Not a Woman* page 75
 - ²⁹ Caldwell, Willie Walker, *Stonewall Jim, A Biography of General James A. Walker*, 1990
 - ³⁰ Greenbrier County, West Virginia will book vol. 1, page 147
 - ³¹ Bath County Marriage Bonds and Ministers' Returns, by Bath County Historical Society
 - ³² Price, William T., *Historical Sketches of Pocahontas County, West Virginia* page 211
 - ³³ Putnam County, IN marriages, Vol. D, page 690
 - ³⁴ *A Woolsey Family of America, 1623-1975* by Donald C. Hart, page 18
 - ³⁵ Pulaski Co. KY, Marriage Bonds Book 1 pg 223.
 - ³⁶ Logsdon, Mattie T., *Climbing the Cherry Tree*, 1977

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