

Robbins– Lawrence Family History
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The ROBBINS sisters, Ethel (1887--1918) and Ivan (1889--1977), married the LAWRENCE brothers, Horace (1882--1953) and Lee (1875--1950), in 1903 and 1906, respectively. Both marriages took place in Dover, Stewart County, TN, where Horace and Lee were born. How the two families became acquainted, though, is somewhat of a mystery, since the ROBBINS family lived in Parke Co., IN and had been living there for almost 100 years by that time!

The girls' father, Josiah ROBBINS (1852--1931), was the son of Francis ROBBINS (1828--?) and Eliza Jane KIBBY (1833--?). Francis was the son of Noah ROBBINS (1812--?) and Martha R. (Patsy) McVEY (1812--1856). A ROBBINS family from Randolph Co., North Carolina moved to Parke Co, IN in the late 1820's and early 1830's. I believe they brought Noah with them, and I am 90% sure his father was Daniel ROBBINS (b. 1785 Randolph Co, NC, d. 1870 Orange Co, IN). Eliza Jane was the daughter of Josiah KIBBY (1806 – 1843), from a line of KIBBYs that goes back to Edward (1611 England – 1694 Wakefield, MA), and Sarah DRIVER KIBBY McADAMS HARMAN (1814 – 1880). The KIBBY family had been in Parke Co, IN since the early 1800's, having migrated to the Salem MA area from England in the 1600s and helped to found Hartford CT before later generations continued westward.

Francis ROBBINS and Eliza Jane KIBBY married in 1851 in Parke Co., IN. By 1860 they had had four children including Josiah; Francis had “gone west” never to be heard from again; and Eliza Jane had remarried.

Josiah ROBBINS, who was 8 years old when his father “went west,” had four wives (not at the same time). He married the first three in Parke County, IN. His first wife was Louisa E. COX (1858 – 1889), daughter of Daniel COX (1834 – 188?) and Virginia Caroline LEAR (1834--1912). Josiah and Louisa had four children, including sisters Ethel and Ivan. There is no record of any children by his second wife, Sarah E. KENT, but there is evidence that his third wife, Jane (last name unknown), had at least one child. It appears that Jane married Josiah in 1898, died (possibly in childbirth) in early 1899, and that her baby died later that year.

Josiah's fourth wife was Jennie LAWRENCE (1859--1905), a sister to Horace and Lee. Thus, to Ethel ROBBINS LAWRENCE (my great grandmother), and her sister Ivan, Jennie LAWRENCE ROBBINS was a sister-in-law and stepmother at the same time! Josiah had four more children by Jennie, separated from his older children by a 10 year gap. All eight of those children lived to adulthood. Although none of them ever mentioned additional children by name, records indicate there were at least one, and possibly two more who died young.

Family tradition has it that the LAWRENCE family lived in a remote area of southwest KY and northwest TN called "The Land Between the Lakes" (LBL). Today LBL is a 45-mile long, 5-mile wide strip of land between Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley. At that time, however, it was still known as "The Land Between the Rivers." In 1945 the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) completed construction of the Kentucky Dam, turning the Tennessee River (to the west) into Kentucky Lake and flooding many small towns and cemeteries in the process. Later, in 1965, the Corps of Engineers built Barkley Dam, turning the Cumberland River into Lake Barkley (to the east).

The LAWRENCE family lived in Ft. Henry, most of which was later covered by Kentucky Lake. According to Mrs. Edith LAWRENCE HOWELL, her mother, Ivan ROBBINS LAWRENCE, was baptized there, on nearby Panther Creek. Jennie LAWRENCE ROBBINS' grave is located at Trinity Methodist Church, between Ft. Henry and Dover. At least two of Horace's and Lee's sisters (Lenna and Emma) married RUSHING brothers (James Henry and William) and many LBL landmarks are named after the RUSHING family.

An organized effort was made to relocate known cemeteries that were being flooded, and to identify the over 200 cemeteries on LBL. However, it is too much to hope that all graves were marked to begin with, much less identified and moved, or that accurate records were kept. Therefore, we may never know where the parents of Horace, Lee, Jennie and their other siblings -- James Henry LAWRENCE and Emma COOK LAWRENCE -- were buried. The entire LBL area has since been designated a national recreation area. Some of the LAWRENCE descendants (along with everyone else on LBL) were evacuated from Ft. Henry when LBL was established, and according to Kathleen RUSHING, who still lives in the area, they also used to live in a town called Stribling, which is now underwater. No wonder they've been so hard to trace!

Emma COOK LAWRENCE (18??--1883) died when Horace was a baby and his sisters raised him. His father, James Henry LAWRENCE (18??--1893), died ten years later. Little else is known about them. Judging from the number of children they had, and a few of their known birth dates, James Henry and Emma must have married sometime between 1855 and 1865. Mrs. Edith LAWRENCE HOWELL remembers James Henry LAWRENCE as being disabled, but whether that precluded him from fighting in the Civil War, or was a result of active duty, is not known. Ft. Henry and nearby Ft. Donelson (South end of LBL, near Dover) were Civil War sites, but all we know for sure is that, in 1875 he and Emma named Edith's father Robert E. Lee LAWRENCE after the famous Confederate general Robert E. Lee.

Horace LAWRENCE was born in 1882, and later married in 1903, both in Dover, Stewart Co, TN, which is just east of the southern boundary of LBL. The 1900 Stewart Co, TN census shows him at age 18 working as a day laborer for a Benjamin Dunlap. I have been unable to find any record of the LAWRENCE family anywhere in the year 1880, and sadly, the 1890 census for most states

was destroyed by fire. Later, brothers Horace and Lee lived and worked at a barrel stave factory in Murray, Calloway Co, KY, which is not far to the west of LBL.

Meanwhile, Josiah ROBBINS, still a resident of Parke Co, IN, was known to periodically pack up some, if not all, of his family members in a covered wagon (including daughters Ethel and Ivan) and make a trip of over 200 miles down to the LBL area. His daughter, Ivan ROBBINS LAWRENCE, told her daughter, Edith LAWRENCE HOWELL, that she never made it past 3rd grade due to being taken along on several of these trips down to Stewart Co, TN with her father. She also reported that on one trip they buried a baby that had died on the way. (This was probably 3rd wife Jane's child.)

Why Stewart Co, TN? We may never know for sure. Josiah's granddaughter, my grandmother Villa Mae LAWRENCE HANKINS (1904--1986), claimed he was a traveling salesman and credited him with her own wanderlust, which he may in turn have inherited from his father Francis, who "went west." However, others have assumed that he simply worked long enough to save up money for a trip. He was listed in various census records as a coal miner, a sawmill worker, and a farm laborer. He was eventually listed as a resident of the Parke County Poor Asylum for a few months in 1927. A historian I met in KY told me that the people on LBL were especially poor, and were famous for bootlegging moonshine! In any case, the ROBBINS family apparently met the LAWRENCE family on one of these trips.

In 1909 Horace and Ethel moved with their children, including Villa Mae LAWRENCE HANKINS, then age 5, from KY to Parke Co, IN. Here's another mystery: Villa wrote in her memoirs and on her marriage certificate that she was born in Melbourne, KY. Now, there does exist a Melbourne KY way over on the eastern side of the state. However, she also recalls having lived in Dublin and Arlington KY and moving between them in a covered wagon sometime prior to the move to Indiana. A look at a very good map, which lists every small town, shows one very close to Dublin and Arlington called Milburn (and another, farther away called Melber). In an attempt to settle the matter I sent to Melbourne (Campbell Co.) for her birth certificate. I was so excited to receive the official State of Kentucky envelope in the mail – imagine my surprise when I opened it up to see an affidavit of my grandmother's birth.... filled out in familiar handwriting....my grandmother's own! Since she had no birth certificate, she had filed an affidavit at age 65 in order to receive Social Security benefits. A check of Carlisle County (where Milburn is located) revealed that they had not started keeping birth records yet when Villa was born. So, I believe that she was born in Milburn, KY due to its proximity to Dublin and Arlington. I do not believe she was born in Melbourne. I also do not think Melber is a likely candidate due to the fact that is larger than Milburn and is therefore more noticeable on maps (and less likely to be overlooked as a potential birth place).