

Narrative of the Green Family
In Hamilton County, IL
By Steven Green

Family history, like history in general, is, if only a matter of names and dates, pretty dull stuff. Of course it *is* more than that, though imagination is required to grasp this. And imagination, like fire, requires fuel. When it comes to family history, the necessary fuel for most of us is stories, stories heard at our parents' knees about their own childhood, and at our grandparents' knees about what things were like "in olden times." What we wouldn't give now to turn back the clock and hear them once more, with tape recorder in hand to preserve what our fallible memories couldn't! As so often happens, our efforts to record our family stories started too late to bridge a span extending further back than just a few generations. Modest though it is, the effort was not wasted, in that most who contributed these stories are now gone. Happily, not all their stories have gone with them.

We began to collect these stories because we recognized that a family history is about more than names and dates—it is about real people and real places. They have their own stories which breath color and life into bare, gray fact. My aim here is to combine these into a narrative, a bigger story, which might fuel the imagination of others. My hope is that they will want to add to it, to increase and to preserve what we know and can learn about the heritage we share.

This is a narrative about a place and the people who came to it. We don't know for sure yet whom the first Green of our line was to move into the Illinois territory, and we may never have any specific stories to tell about him. The general place he came to was visited by a German, Ferdinand Ernst, in July of 1819 and described thus:

Not far from Carmi the road leads into a meadowy expanse (Big Prairie) in which, on account of its great fertility, a considerable number of settlers have already locatedAccording to the nature of their fertility [These prairies]) are covered with tall or short grasses and shrubs, and indeed, no more inviting thing can be imagined for a

stranger than to settle here and to live and move in this abundance of nature...But, alas, the good water is all too scarce...The rivers have no strong current, which circumstance, along with many others, produces each year many fevers; but one finds that this evil decreases in the same degree in which land is brought under more extensive cultivation. A number of these evils as flies, mosquitoes, etc., likewise disappear with increased cultivation.ⁱ

The first Green from our line may well have been among the settlers already located in the area Ernst traveled through after leaving Carmi. A few general remarks about the sort of stock he was from can be included here, even if nothing more definite is known:

...most of southern Illinois...was settled by immigrants from Kentucky, Tennessee, the Carolinas, and Virginia. Many of them were from hill regions, and they were slow to lose the peculiar characteristics of mountain folk. They were generous, hospitable, hardy, independent, brave and intelligent, but undisciplined by education. Their superstitions were many and strong, their prejudices deep and unyielding...

Almost without exception they were hot-blooded, proud, obstinate, jealous of family honor and quick to resent an insult.ⁱⁱ

The remainder of this narrative concerns one of the Green families descending from William Riley Green and Mary White of Hamilton County, IL. In the interests of narrative continuity it is more or less chronological, but it is comprised of the recollections of a number of people credited throughout and identified at the end.

William and Mary White Green

The earliest evidence we have of William and Mary in Hamilton County is their marriage license, dated 17 Jan 1833, although they, and most likely their parents, had lived there for some time. When William first moved to what is now the Blairsville area, it would have been heavily timbered bottomland. On their first trip to the cabin William brought Mary, the children, and a load of furniture and supplies. He had to leave Mary and the kids to go back and retrieve the family cow. Perhaps the babies would soon need fed. Mary probably began organizing her new home, which as yet had no door, but only a hide hung up in the doorway. Perhaps she began to cook dinner for her husband. At any rate something attracted the wolves in from the bottoms, for William returned to find his wife fighting them away from the door of the cabin. Perhaps that is how Wolf Creek, which ran just east of William's farm, got its name. (BC to TJG)

Family tradition has it that William had either gone out west or had brought from the east a Cherokee Indian wife that everyone called the old Indian woman, (BR and JG), though this does not square with his having married Mary “Polly” White in Hamilton County. Could it have been his father who did this?

Thomas and Abashaba Trammell Green

Thomas Green was born 14 Jul 1836, the third child of William and Mary. His future wife, Abashaba “Bashy” Trammell was born 20 Mar 1836 and may well have been another avenue of Indian heritage in the family. Bashy’s mother, Sarah Ann Munday was said to be part Cherokee Indian, though how great a part is unknown. But both her parents were from North Carolina, the original home of the Cherokee nation, and her brothers (or uncles?) served as spies in the Black Hawk War. “Aunt Bashy” loved to fish, a trait others attributed to her Indian blood. Even when she was well up into her eighties she could read the newspaper without glasses. (TJG) Another of her traits was a readiness to drop whatever she was doing and climb up into the wagon to go visiting or to town. In later years someone always eager to be on the go was said to like to “Aunt Bashy around” by those who had known Abashaba. (HN)

Bashy’s apparent Indian heritage led Thomas’ family to oppose their marriage. They gathered at the bridge over Big Creek to intercept the couple when they learned of their plans to elope. Undeterred, the couple eluded a confrontation by crossing on the Dahlgren road instead. They stayed with some kin of Bashy’s in Dahlgren that night, and the next day walked the rest of the way to Mr. Vernon, where they were married. (TJG and BR) The date was 28 Aug 1855. And in fact their marriage license is found on file in Mt. Vernon and not McLeansboro. Thomas cut a handsome figure on his wedding day, decked out as he was in purple pants, a copper shirt, and lindsey woolsey jacket and a crop of fiery red hair. (BC) In a charcoal portrait of Thomas (later destroyed in Bessie Claunch’s fire) one could see that his hair was curly and long, hanging down to his shoulders. As a farmer, Thomas raised sunflowers and castor beans. He would take them

to market in Shawneetown and use the money to buy corn. The oil from castor beans was used to lube steam engines and gave off a very pleasant smell when hot. (TJG)

Thomas' farm overlooked the Haw Creek bottoms. Deer would often wander out from these into the open. Thomas's grandson, Thomas Joseph, who was born on his grandfather's farm could remember him stepping out into the back yard to shoot them. Thomas Green died 8 May 1907. Bashy survived him by many years. She lived at various times with her children, George, Biathy, Lizzie and Adam, before her death 27 Jan 1924 at Adam's place. (TJG)

Siblings of Thomas Green

Thomas had several brothers and sisters. Aunt Becky Cannon seemed to have been quite a character, As an old woman she was something of a recluse. When working outside she wore bonnets so big some of the neighborhood children could never remember seeing her face. Whenever the schoolboys would walk by her place she would go out and sweep the easement along the outside of her fence. This was rather eccentric and they all thought it funny. (C&PW) Tillie Green sometimes spoke of an old woman that used to pick up sticks in the yard. Her habits were also so regular that one could almost predict the weather by them. Could this have been Aunt Becky? (EG) Another recollection of Aunt Becky was simply that she was a very sweet old lady. (BR)

Uncle Rich also cut an eccentric figure. Shortly after airplanes became a sensation, Uncle Rich, who apparently had been drinking a little whiskey, scoffed at the notion of needing an airplane to fly. Saying he would show everyone how to fly without a plane, he climbed up on the barn roof and with two oat bales under his arms, began flapping and jumped off. The fall broke his arm. Cecil and Pauline Weaver said that whenever they had to work in the oats after that, they always got a laugh thinking about Uncle Rich trying to fly that way. (C&PW)

George and Cordelia Jane Thompson Green

George Green was born 2 Nov 1865 in Hamilton County. He grew up on Thomas' farm, five miles north of Rally Hill School, in what was called "Old Dogtown". Like most of the Greens, George loved to hunt. He usually provided a wild turkey for the Thanksgiving dinner (RG) and was also said to be a good squirrel hunter. (TJG) On one of his hunting trips in the Aden bottoms George once had a brush with the darker side of life in the backwoods, for he saw one man kill another. He could never be persuaded to say who the men were. (RG) Later in life George was widely considered as a kind, good-natured man, (TJG) and a sweet, easy going fellow people called "Sappy." His grandchildren knew him as "Pa." (RG) Others recollected his enjoyment of babies, good-naturedly tossing them in the air. (AG)

Cordelia Jane Thompson was born 4 May 1874. The Thompsons were said to be from the Broughton area. George and Cordelia first met on their way back from Blooming Grove Church. They began to walk together, and by the time they got back to Dogtown, they were holding hands. They were married 1 May 1890. Years later Pa could show the grandchildren the exact spot where they met. (RG)

George and Cordelia lived for a time in McLeansboro, in a house still standing on North Pearl Street. George helped Joe Braydon in the monument business, and Cordelia was a milkmaid for Mr. Wright. The barn she worked in was on Washington Street, and is now a garage. They also once lived in a house on the road to McLeansboro. When folks traveling to town were caught short by darkness, they would stay with George and Cordelia. (RG)

George moved to East St. Louis to find work around 1917, because of the poor economy in McLeansboro. He was a brick mason, carpenter and jack-of-all-trades. He helped build the Broadview Hotel there. While in East St. Louis he also worked in the Swift Packing Plant (RG) and at Aluminum Ore. (TJG) He and Cordelia lived in three different houses on Millet Street. Cordelia died on 28 Apr 1930 while they were in East

St. Louis, and after this George moved back to Hamilton County to live with his son Jimmy. (RG)

Jimmy's children remembered him sitting out under the tree at Jimmy's listening to ballgames on the radio. (RG and EG) He would also talk for hours about his hunting dogs with any that would sit and listen. George had a stroke late in life and became bedridden before his passing on 5 Jan 1941. (RG)

Siblings of George Green

As a youth, Adam Green, one of George's younger brothers, had to feed a particularly mean dog of Thomas's. Though he had been warned never to get any closer than the end of its chain, he once failed to watch his distance and was grabbed around the head and nearly scalped by the dog. Years later his scars were still visible. Adam taught school at Dogtown for a year, writing to his new charges on the blackboard that he was indeed, a "damn Green teacher."

His son Thomas J. Green's earliest memory was of a shivaree, a raucous celebration for newlyweds, given for Henry Rose, which took place on the lane running down to the bottoms. The noise from the banging pans and fox horns was quite impressive. Play with chinquapins (dwarf chestnuts) brought by Southeast Missouri relatives was another early memory. (TJG)

John Wesley and Susan Rachel Upton Wheeler

Born 8 Sep 1861, John Wesley was orphaned and raised by his uncle. He hired out as a laborer to whoever would take him. He ended up around Blairsville, where he may well have done some work for the John H. Upton family. That would account for how he met Susan, his future wife.

When she was born 26 Sep 1866 Susan was called "Dollie," but it was said that she didn't like this and later had herself named Susan Rachel. (RG) Though once thought that Susan was disowned by her father, she was deeded some twenty acres near

the New Beaver Creek School in the settlement of her father's estate. Her daughter Matilda Florence, "Tillie", was born there, but they later moved to the farm at Aden. John Wesley became infirm in his declining years. He was bad to leave the farm and wander across the bottoms to Viola's, where he eventually passed away on 15 Oct 1944. Granny Wheeler preceded him on 30 Sep 1929. Her family bible and mantle clock survive and are some of the few remaining family possessions. The clock had not worked for some time while Tillie had it. She took a chicken feather soaked in kerosene and cleaned all the gears, after which it worked fine for years. It eventually stopped again and was retired to the brooder house, where years later it was rescued from sure ruin. After its repair in Wayne City it continues to run, despite being over a century old. (RG and EG)

Jimmy and Tillie Wheeler Green

Jimmy was born 9 Jun 1891 and grew up in Dogtown, not far from his grandfather's farm. He completed the third grade at the Maulding School (more commonly known as the Dogtown school). Jimmy helped his father farm before he was married, and until he was nineteen the work was done with a team of two oxen—Buck and Red. Jimmy used one of Buck's horns to make the fox horn—another surviving family relic. He also used to work in the fields for Elzie Redman to get enough money to buy clothes with. Born 20 May 1897, Tillie grew up near Bungay, and attended the Bunker Hill school. (RG and EG)

Jimmy and Tillie were married 14 Mar 1914 when she was still sixteen. That year or next Jimmy lost most of his corn crop to muskrats. He got even with them by trapping muskrats all winter. (JG) He had also worked on dredge boats that drained the bottoms around Blairsville. When Tillie was 18 or 19, he heard of work on dredge boats in Missouri, and took her and Wesley with him when he left Hamilton County. They wound up in Arkansas at a place called Tear-Blanket-Landing. Jimmy worked on dredge boats clearing the St. Francis River, while Tillie did her best to make a home. She said later that had it not been for flour gravy they would have all starved there. Beside hunger, the mosquitoes were also memorable. At night they were so bad sleep was

impossible without nets hung over the beds. When Jimmy and Tillie returned there years later while Emory was stationed at Blytheville, this had not changed. They were again swarmed by them. Tillie would ever after call the move a wild goose chase.

From Tear-Blanket-Landing they went to Cardwell in Dunklin County, Missouri where Rachel was born. They also lived in Malden, Missouri. Tillie eventually grew very homesick. When it became too much for her, she caught a train in Paragould, Arkansas with the children and went back to Bungay. After work on the dredge boats played out, Jimmy went to Stuttgart, Arkansas, where he worked on the rice dikes for a time. The snakes were extremely bad there. After Stuttgart, he went to East St. Louis to work with his father at Aluminum Ore. Tillie rejoined him there, and they lived in a house on 11th street. Allie was born while they were in East St. Louis. Jimmy was still working at Aluminum Ore when WWI ended on Nov. 11, 1918. He and a coworker climbed the huge smokestack at Aluminum Ore and hung out an American Flag.

One Christmas in East St. Louis brought better fortune than usual to the family. Rachel got a gold bead necklace and a doll on a green chair. Wesley, or "Bub" as he was called, received a wind-up train, in which Rachel's necklace got tangled up and had to be rescued. Dinner that day was the goose they had been fattening up for the occasion. The children may also have gotten treats from Miss Mandi's Candy Kitchen, a place that stood out later in their memory.

It was while he was in East St. Louis that Jimmy completed a correspondence course in tool making, acquiring skills that allowed him to become a blacksmith later. He had his palm read while he was in St. Louis, and was told that he would soon leave East St. Louis and start his own business elsewhere. At the time he said he had no intention of doing any such thing, but that is just what he soon did. Around 1920 he left East St. Louis and returned to Hamilton County, taking his family with him. Perhaps he had gotten missing his hunting and fishing too much. Wesley later returned to East St. Louis to go to high school and lived with Pa and Granny while there.

In the fall of 1920 Jimmy went in with Clarence O. Wisely at his blacksmith shop in Blairsville. Their home was on the Johnny Allen farm south of Blairsville. In 1921 he moved to Aden and opened up his own shop, which first stood where J.J. Clark's house now stands. 1924 brought better fortune than usual to the family, for it would be remembered thereafter as the "good Christmas." Jimmy got a new pump Winchester shotgun and Tillie received a new Singer sewing machine and a pair of full stockings.

Sometime after 1925 Jimmy bought an acre of land across the road, catty-cornered southwest from the Aden school. Here he ran his blacksmith shop until the early 40's, shoeing horses, making horseshoes, horse-drawn buggies, wagon wheels, axe handles, and the various other tasks demanded of a smith in a horse farming community. By 1929 the State required farriers to be certified. Jimmy received his certification in 1929. He finally closed his shop when the automobile and tractor ended the demand for his trade.

After this he began to run a sawmill, working the still plentiful timber in the Aden bottoms. The mill was mobile and relocated various places as a new stand of timber was worked. For a time it was located on the same lot as his blacksmith shop in Aden. Around 1942 Jimmy bought forty acres of timber near where the Aden road met the hard road. The forty acres near the Aden road just sat until 1955 or so when it was finally cleared off for farming.

Jimmy and Tillie lived in various places around Aden. Cordelia was born while they lived on the Charlie Hayden place, George at the Jeff Matthews's place, and Lucille at the Marlowe place. Shortly after Granny Wheeler died in 1929 they moved into her place, where James Lee was born in 1930 and Emory in 1936. During the winter of 1929 Jimmy, Pa, and Wesley cut mine props for fifty cents a day. To walk into the frozen bottoms to cut timber, they had to tie planks of wood with nails driven through them to their shoes. Jimmy hated to cut firewood in winter and rarely did. Working at the sawmill, he had access to an endless supply of wood. He kept a woodpile that covered the area where the shop and shed later stood.

In addition to his work in his shop and sawmill, Jimmy had income from other sources. He worked for a time pumping 3 or 4 oil wells in the area, transferring the oil when the tanks were full, and maintaining the pumps. He also pumped gas at his shop, and sold sandwiches and refreshments. For several years Jimmy also made a little money from hunting and trapping during the winter season

Amassing wealth was not, it is safe to say, one of Jimmy's priorities. Paying off the mortgage on Granny Wheeler's place certainly was, as he worked extremely hard to do so. His friends were more important to him than money. During the depression a lot of the work he did in his shop was either for barter or for free, as a good many of the accounts were closed unpaid. For some time he managed a local baseball team, into which he sunk much time and money. The pleasure he derived from the team and being with friends outweighed their cost. Another local diversion Jimmy helped provide were the dances he and Tillie put on at the homeplace. These became so popular for a time that they put in a wooden dance floor in the yard on the west side of the house.

Jimmy developed the reputation of one who was more than fair in business, who would always do anything for a friend, and who would never turn away a stray dog. Indeed, to his family it sometimes seemed that he treated his friends better than anyone else, including them. In his later years he was said to regret the sometimes hard circumstances of his family and of his wife in particular. His generosity to friends, however, never meant great privation to his family. His children could never remember going hungry, even during the worst of the Depression. Game and fish were plentiful in the bottoms, and food was never scarce for a family that thrived on taking them.

Hunting and fishing were chief sources of both sustenance and recreation for the Greens. Indeed, Jimmy loved to hunt and fish more than anything else. His rabbit dogs greeted any and all visitors to the farm in later years. He rabbit hunted with a lever action rifle, Emory got him in the 1950's while in the Marines stationed on Vieques Island, until he and Tillie moved into Carmi when he was in his 80's.

In earlier years, however, fox hunting was his passion, and often went to a thick stand of timber in the area called the Cabbage Patch after them. For fox hunting he kept quite a pack of foxhounds. Tillie like to tell a story about one that got into her chickens one day and killed several chicks. She dispatched the dog and laid him under the tree by the big pond. When Jimmy came in she told him what the dog had done, and he said, "You should have killed him." She said, "I already did. He's laying out there under the tree for you to bury." Jimmy was not at all happy to find his advice had been preemptively taken.

Hunting and fishing became times for socializing when Jimmy's sisters and their families often came to stay at Aden, times they were said to enjoy greatly. During these visits an already full house became even fuller. Pallets were put down in the living room for the guests, and some even slept out in the cars. But there was always food enough for all.

Company or not, Tillie always had a host to cook for. Each day she would make biscuits in a 30 biscuit pan, which did them for breakfast. Her oven would hold 11 pies, and frequently did. All of them had about one change of clothes, and that was it. But with as many as 13 at home at times, that was plenty to wash. (RG and EG)

Washing chores were no doubt compounded greatly the time the old house in Aden became badly infested with bedbugs. Everything had to be cleaned out, and each bedspring brushed by kerosene-soaked feather to clear them. The weather boarding in the old house eventually became so bad that in the winter it was not unusual to wake up covered with snow. (JG)

The house at Aden was redone around 1940, when it was re-sided and the floor replaced. The extra room was started around then, but not finished for some years. Eventually, Jimmy resumed his church going, becoming a deacon of the Friendly Zion Church. He was also a choir director for several years, owing, perhaps, to his fine singing voice. (EG and RG)

The stories assembled above were based on personal interviews as noted below:

TJG and AG Thomas Joseph Green and wife Aileen, McLeansboro, 29 Dec 1986 and 7 Jan 1987

BC to TJG Bessie Claunch as retold by Thomas J. Green

BR Bennie Rose, McLeansboro, 8 Jan 1987

RG and EG Rachel Green Hunt and Emory S. Green, McLeansboro, 30 Dec 1986, 10 Feb 1987

JG James Lee Green, Burnt Prairie, 31 Dec 1986

C & PW Cecil and Pauline Weaver, rural Blairsville, Jan 1987

HN Helen Muehlenbine Nelson, Decatur 5 Apr 1989

ⁱ Ferdinand Ernst, "Travels in Illinois in 1819," *Pioneer Life*, pp. 199-200

ⁱⁱ Paul M. Angle, *Bloody Williamson: A Chapter in American Lawlessness*, (University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1952), pp. 72-72.