

The Perplexing Problem of Jane Rainwater Rash, c1809-before 1900

Susan Chance-Rainwater, May 2019

Jane Rainwater Rash has frustrated Rainwater researchers for decades. Born c1809 in South Carolina, there are no records of her birth. Possibly married twice, there are no marriage records. Buried under a homemade headstone, there is no date of death. And that's not the perplexing part.

Jane was the apparent mother of five children – three sons and two daughters. Only one, her daughter Amanda, lived long enough to have generated a death record, but no death certificate was issued which might have supplied her parents' names.

So we're left with tradition and speculation, and the scant amount of actual evidence that might yield up some clues.

I want to acknowledge up front the extensive work of Kay Ohana and Oscar S. Brooks in the research of the Burrell Rainwater line, of which Jane is a part.

The evidence

Jane's passage through the world is marked by four federal census records, two church records, a Confederate pension application, and a homemade burial marker. These eight records contain everything we can say we know about her.

She was born between 1808 and 1810 in South Carolina. Based on her father Burrell's 1810 census record, Jane was probably born in Spartanburg. Her parents moved a lot, and by 1850, she had lived in South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia.

By 1845, Burrell Rainwater and some of his family moved to Cobb County, Georgia. This included Jane, who in November 1850, was recorded in the federal census. [6]

The 1850 census was the first federal census in which the names of all household members were recorded. The relationships were not recorded, but the enumerators were apparently instructed to follow a pattern, discernible to experienced census readers.

- Head of household
- Wife
- Unmarried children, eldest to youngest
- Married children
- Daughters and sons-in-law
- Grandchildren
- Other family members, and unrelated persons

So, in looking at the 1850 census record that contains Jane, we see the following:

Burrell Rainwater, age 68
Elizabeth Rainwater, age 58
Jane Rainwater, age 43
J. James Rainwater, age 15 (should say James T.)
John Rainwater, age 12
Joseph Rainwater, age 7

I read that record (and so does everybody else) as identifying Burrell and Elizabeth Rainwater as Jane's parents.

The enumerator for this district checked column 10 – married within the year – next to Burrell's name. This has led to some people, including me originally, to conclude that this is Burrell's 2nd marriage. Researcher Kay Ohana rightly notes that the enumerator checked this column almost at random, checking even 3-year-old children. Clearly then, it's not possible to take the check marks in this column as evidence of anything.

Ohana's detailed research uncovered church records from Yellow Creek Baptist Church in Hall County, Georgia in which Burrell and Elizabeth Rainwater were charter members. [2067] This is the clearest evidence that they were husband and wife. There is no marriage record, and if there were, it would likely be in South Carolina. Burrell, incidentally, made a lousy Baptist, and was excluded from membership several times on account of drunkenness and brawling. [2067]

The point, then, is that under a typical reading of this record, Burrell and Elizabeth are the parents and Jane is their daughter. It's worth noting that none of Burrell and Elizabeth's children lived past 1901, and therefore none generated a death certificate that might give us their parents' names.

The question then arises regarding the parentage of the other three children. If Elizabeth is 58, it's unlikely that John and Joseph are her sons, based on their ages. James could be, agewise, except for one thing.

In 1833, Jane and her mother joined New Hopewell Baptist Church in Benton County, Alabama. In September 1836, Jane was excluded by this church for fornication. Jane would have been visibly pregnant with her first son, James, who was born that month. [2067] While this is not absolutely certain proof, it certainly looks likely. The descendant of James T. Rainwater all seem to concur that he was born out of wedlock and that Jane was his mother.

The New Hopewell Baptist Church record also precludes the possibility that Jane was a recent Rainwater widow, the widow of one of Burrell's sons. [174]

In June 1860, Jane, still surnamed Rainwater, is listed heading her own household, with four children who are presumably hers. [7] The household includes sons John and Joseph, and daughters Margaret and Amanda, all surnamed Rainwater. This is important, because it's clear that Jane still isn't married, and has somehow acquired two daughters in the decade since the 1850 census. Also worth noting, her son James T.'s household immediately follows hers in this census.

If Jane had married Margaret and Amanda's father, whom we assume was surnamed Rash based on later records, the marriage should have occurred between 1850 and 1852. Yet there's no marriage record, at least not in Cobb or Paulding Counties, where we expect it to be.

On 5 Jan 1863, Jane Rash applied for a Civil War Confederate pension based on the service of her son John M. Rainwater. This is the first record we have where she calls herself Jane Rash. In the application, Jane identifies herself as the mother of the late John M. Rainwater, describes his Confederate service, and asks for pay, bounty, or land due her son at the time of his death. The application includes an affidavit from Margaret Rainwater Powell, who identifies herself as Jane's sister. [2897]

It's possible, therefore, that a marriage to Mr. Rash took place between 1860 and 1863. That would be the logical conclusion, but again, there's no marriage record to support this conclusion.

In June 1870 and again in June 1880, Jane, now surnamed Rash, is recorded heading a household containing one presumed daughter, called Amanda Rash in one record and M. J. (Mandy Jane) Rash in the other. [8] [9]

The 1880 census record is the last official record anyone has ever found. We do have second-hand evidence for her life after 1880.

Oscar S. Brooks, descended from Jane's son James T. Rainwater, corresponded in the course of his research with one of his cousins, Robbie Sutlive. Robbie indicated that Jane had moved with daughter Amanda to Prairie County, Arkansas around the time of Amanda's marriage to John Fort in 1885. Jane presumably returned to Paulding County, Georgia where she is known to be buried. [2373] [2312]

Finally, there's her headstone, a homemade concrete block engraved "Rainwater, old lady" in Mount Vernon Baptist Church Cemetery, in Paulding County, Georgia. This, according to a letter written by Hammett Paris, the cemetery's caretaker at the time, is the headstone of Jane Rainwater Rash. [2373] The marker lies between daughter Margaret Rash and son John Rainwater, whose headstones are also homemade concrete blocks. [750] [2312] Jane is presumed to have died before 1900, because she is not recorded in the 1900 census.

Jane's children

- James T. Rainwater, 27 Sep 1836 AL – 1 Mar 1905 AL
- John M. Rainwater, c 1838 AL – 14 Jun 1862 GA
- William Joseph Rainwater, c 1843 AL – 28 Oct 1864 GA
- Margaret Rash, c 1852 GA – before 1870 GA
- Amanda Jane Rash Fort, 16 Jul 1854 GA – 8 Aug 1926

A story without an end

Neither Ohana nor Brooks draws a definite conclusion and neither can I. However, it appears pretty clear to me that there are at least two fathers – one for the three Rainwater sons who were all born in Alabama and one for the two Rash daughters, both born in Georgia. The complete lack of marriage records in counties where records are available, and the long tradition of family stories, leads me to conclude that Jane never married her children's fathers.

I do hope some enterprising researcher will undertake DNA research on this line in the hopes of identifying Jane's children's fathers.

References

6: 1850 Federal Census

7: 1860 Federal Census

8: 1870 Federal Census

9: 1880 Federal Census

174: *The Rainwater Researcher*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, Apr 1996, pg 14, query from Obie Thurman, editor Robert Albert, Jr.,

750: *Cemeteries of Paulding County, Georgia*, Paulding County Historical Society, LaGroon Redmond, editor, Wolfe Publishing, Roswell, GA, 1995

2067: "Research into the Descendants of Burrell & Elizabeth Rainwater," Kay Ohana (kohana@pacbell.net), 16 Jun 2009, posted to the Rainwater Mailing List

2312: Find a Grave, <https://findagrave.com/>

2373: "The Rainwater Family Research of Oscar S. Brooks," Oscar S. Brooks, June 2009

2897: Affidavits of Jane Rainwater Rash and Margaret Rainwater Powell, for Jane's mother's pension based on the service of her son John M. Rainwater, 5 Jan 1863, Paulding Co., GA, transcription

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