

Jonathan Russell Rainwater aka John R. Rainwater, of Wood Co., Texas
wouldn't it be simpler for genealogists if people just stuck with their original names?

By Susan Chance-Rainwater, 22 May 2020

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Joseph E. Rainwater, 1824-1878, & Caroline Walton, 1829-1860

1. William Walton Rainwater, 1844-1889
 - John Calhoun Rainwater, 1871-1954
2. Robert S. Rainwater, 1847-1881
 - Jonathan Russell Rainwater aka John R. Rainwater, 1871-1943

THE CONFUSION

Between 1859 and 1860, Joseph E. Rainwater and his wife Caroline Walton moved to Texas. There were eight children, but we are concerned only with two of them, and only as it relates to the identity of two of their grandchildren.

The eldest son, William Walton Rainwater, married his first wife Pennie (surname unknown) before 1870. [565] They were the parents of one son, John Calhoun Rainwater, born after 1870, though his tombstone unhelpfully says 1865. [8] The informant for his death certificate, his daughter Eloise, was unable to name her father's parents and didn't know his correct birth year. [1824] All of John Calhoun Rainwater's census records support an 1870-1871 birth year. He married Benena Johnson. [546] These facts matter because they distinguish John Calhoun from his cousin John R. Rainwater. Because the two men share a birth year, it's possible to get them flipped, as I originally did.

Joseph and Caroline's second son was Robert S. Rainwater. Robert married Delilah Russell, also before 1870, probably 1865-1867, also in Wood Co., Texas. The county does not have marriage records earlier than 1879, so there isn't a record for either William or Robert's marriage.

On 9 May 1873, Robert S. Rainwater was committed to the Texas State Lunatic Asylum in Austin. The records state that he is a farmer, born in Georgia, who had experienced several attacks of homicidal mania. His father Joseph, the records note, suffers from the same condition. In May 1880, the records indicate a general decline in Robert's health, apparently from tuberculosis. He died on 2 Nov 1881 in Austin. [1285]

Robert and Delilah had children for whom the following evidence exists. These are:

1. A daughter Mary, who is listed in the 1870 census, and for whom no other records seem to exist. She is not mentioned in her grandfather's estate records and had apparently died before 1873. [1285]
2. A son, Jonathan Russell Rainwater whose identity rests entirely on a mention in his grandfather's final estate filing.
3. A son, John R. Rainwater, whose identity rests entirely on the names of his parents given in his death certificate. He is not mentioned in his grandfather's estate records.

Robert's father Joseph died on 1 Feb 1878 [565] and left no will. The eldest son, William, was made administrator. A final report to the county and a few vouchers are the only evidence of the estate. [1294] The critical voucher identifies one Jonathan Russell Rainwater – called Jonathan Rainwater in one document and Jonathan Russell in the other. Here's the text:

Voucher No. 9, filed Nov 20, 1879

*Quitman, Wood Co, Texas
April the 19th 1879*

Received of W. W. Rainwater, admin of the estate of Joseph Rainwater, deceased, ninety five dollars and thirty-three cents (\$95.33) it being the amount per Robert Rainwater in said estate and is a full and complete settlement with said administrator so far as I myself am authorized as guardian of the estate of the said Robert Rainwater [several words crossed out] or heir Jonathan Rainwater are concerned.

*J. Russell
by M. L. Russell*

So let's parse this. Robert isn't dead in 1879, but the estate's administrator is paying Robert's share of the estate to the guardian of Robert's son Jonathan. The guardian is M. L. Russell. No other children are mentioned.

Marcus L. Russell and his wife Emma are recorded in the 1880 census of Wood County, along with their 2-year-old son Jonathan Russell. I note this to make clear that Jonathan Russell is the wrong age to be Jonathan Russell Rainwater. If Robert Rainwater was committed in 1873, Jonathan Russell Rainwater has to have been conceived between 1870 and 1873, and born no later than 1874. He would have to be at least age 6 in the 1880 census.

There's another 1880 census record – the household of Dempsey and Margaret Richardson, which contains a J. Rainwater, who's listed as a nephew. Margaret's death certificate reveals

that she is also a Russell. When you work your way back through the census, it becomes clear that Delilah, Margaret, and Marcus are siblings.

THE RESOLUTION

So is J. Rainwater in the 1880 census Jonathan Russell Rainwater, or John R. Rainwater? In fact, he's both. This is a case of an individual who simply went by a different name in adulthood. It's why his grandfather's estate only mentions one heir of Robert S. Rainwater – there is only one. When I went back to his father's commitment papers, I found the final proof that I had overlooked – the line on the admission papers that said "Number of children – 1". [1285]

Once you know that, there's no confusion. Jonathan Russell Rainwater, in adulthood, used the name John R. Rainwater. He married Ellen Lucy Johnson and they had four children. The family lived in Wood County, and are buried in Quitman Cemetery. John's death certificate identifies him as the son of "L. S. [sic] Rainwater & Delilah Russell." [1807] His tombstone just calls him John Rainwater. [565]

Here are the records, namewise:

- 1880, marriage record, death cert – J
- 1900, 1910, 1930, headstone – John
- 1920 – John R
- 1940 – Jonathan
- Grandfather's estate – called both Jonathan Russell Rainwater and Jonathan Rainwater

SOURCES

1860-1940 Federal census records

546: Marriages of Wood Co., TX, Vols. A-D, 1879-1903, Ida Marie Turner and Adele W. Vickery, 1971, Mineola, TX

565: Cemeteries of Wood Co., TX, Vol. 3, Ida Marie Turner and Adele W. Vickery, Mineola, TX, 1971

703: Texas Death Record Index, 1941-1945, K-Z, Roll #9, Texas State Department of Health Records and Statistics, microfilm

1285: Records of Robert S. Rainwater, ca 1847-1881, State Lunatic Asylum, Austin, Travis Co., TX, photocopies of originals now held by the Texas Dept. of Mental Health and Retardation

1294: Probate records of Joseph Rainwater, 22 Sep 1879, Wood Co., TX

1807: Death certificate #10 171, J. Rainwater, 7 Feb 1943, Wood Co., TX

1824: Death certificate #37 060, John C. Rainwater, 20 Jul 1954, Wood Co., TX

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