

Reconsidering Thomas J. Rainwater and Horace Rainwater, Jr., with a deep dive into their natal family

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In 2009, I exchanged emails with Debbie Williams, whose husband is a descendant of Mary Lee Cameron and Mary Lee's first husband, who was a Rainwater. The question of which Rainwater – Thomas J. or Horace Jr. – is the object of this exploration.

Here's what Debbie said:

Thomas J. Rainwater became a farm hand for the Cameron family of Telfair Co, GA. He got their daughter, Mary Jane, pregnant when she was about 14. They apparently married. Three children followed. Somewhere along the line, Thomas assumed the name Horace, possibly outrunning trouble. By 1924, he had abandoned his family. [e]

In Debbie's understanding, Thomas and Horace were the same person. Thomas got into trouble and changed his name to Horace. I agreed with this interpretation until I began to accumulate a substantial amount of evidence indicating that Horace was not a pseudonym, but rather Thomas's brother.

My view now is that Horace, not Thomas, married Mary Jane Cameron. Horace, not Thomas, abandoned his family, and in all likelihood, Thomas died between 1910 and 1917.

When Horace died in 1944, his obituary named his surviving siblings, which means someone contacted the family, collected the information, and wrote the obituary. That bothered me. Were all of his siblings okay with Thomas pretending to be Horace, or was the person who died actually Horace? Was the "Thomas became Horace" story a red herring?

To explore this problem, I need to review the evidence for Thomas and Horace's natal family. From hereon, I need to refer to *this* Horace as Horace Jr. and his father as Horace Sr.

In 1858, Henry D. Smith applied for letters of guardianship for the minor children of Solomon Rainwater, Jr., deceased. [782] These children were Virgil and Horace Sr. In 1869, Cicero L. Rainwater, an older brother, applied for letters of administration for Virgil, who had now died as well. So three brothers – Cicero L., Virgil, and Horace Sr.

Horace Sr. married Mary J. Newsome in 1873 [a] and they proceeded to have an awful lot of children. In the 1900 census, Mary says she is the mother of 14 children, 12 living, 2 deceased.

Unfortunately, the family was not recorded in the 1880 census and there is no 1890 census. So we know the names of the children who were living at home in 1900, but not the children who had already moved out or had died. Among the children still living at home is Thomas J. Rainwater, born May 1885.

This is where the Ancestry.com database of city directories come in. [b] The city directories suggests that the family moved to Augusta in Richmond County, Georgia around 1890-1891. The 1892 directory, the first year that the family is recorded, lists only Horace Sr. The later directories are more thorough.

City directories list only adults, not minor children, and only sometimes list wives. The Augusta directories includes a home address, place of employment, and marital status, but not the wife's name. We can draw some inferences about how people are related if they live in the same household, but not with absolute certainty.

1895 Directory

- Horace (Sr), 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory, married
- Horace Jr, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- Andrew J, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- Thomas, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- Virgil, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- Marbury, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- Cicero, 10 Goss Alley, laborer, married
- Reed, 5 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory, married
- Miss Kate, 5 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory

I'd like to note that Cicero Rainwater is the brother of Horace Sr., mentioned earlier.

According to Cicero's Civil War pension papers, he died in 1896 in Augusta. [1641, 1642] The application says he has two sons, ages 17 and 13, and two daughters, ages 24 and 14. All of these children are identifiable (Sancil, Susan, Adam, Adolphus) and none of them are the individuals in the directory entry. His wife, Henrietta, is also not listed.

I think it's fair to say the everyone living at 3 Factory Row is part of the Horace Sr.'s family. The individuals living at 5 Factory Row clearly aren't Cicero's children, but there's not enough evidence to claim that they are Horace Sr.'s. I really don't know who Reed and Kate belong to.

I'd also like to point out that Thomas and Horace Jr. are living in Horace Sr.'s household. Their simultaneous existence proves they are not the same person, and suggests that they are his children.

For comparison, here's the 1898 directory entry:

- Horace (Sr), wife Mary J, 3 Factory Row, carpenter
- Andrew J, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- Miss Daisy, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- George L, wife Katie, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- Jack, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- Virgil, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory
- Warbury, 3 Factory Row, works at Augusta Factory

The 1898 entry identifies Horace Sr.'s wife as Mary J. which matches the marriage record for Mary J. Newsome.

So let's look at a table that compares this theoretical family over a period 28 years. I'm using "s" for recorded in same household and "o" for recorded in some other household that same year. 1900, 1910, and 1920 are census records. All of the others are from the city directories.

	1892	1895	1898	1900	1901	1904	1908	1910	1915	1920
	census						census			census
Horace Sr (<i>d. 1906</i>)	s	s	s	s	s	s				
Mary J			s	s	s	s	s	s	s	s
John A / Jack			s			s				
Andrew Jackson		s	s	s	s	s				o
Horace Jr		s			s	s	s	o		o
Thomas J		s		s	s	s		o		
M/Warbury (Mary)		s	s			o	o	o		o
George Lee			s	o	s			o		o
Virgil (<i>d. 1916</i>)		s	s	s		s	o	o		
Daisy				s			o	o	o	
Elizabeth				s				o		o
Benjamin F				s		s	s	s	o	o
Lucy				s			s	s	s	s
Ida				s			s	s	s	s

A couple of things I want to call out.

First, the individual called Marbury in 1895 and Warbury in 1898 is the same person. This is one of Horace Sr.'s daughters, Mary Walburke¹ Rainwater, who married in 1898, and therefore isn't listed as a Rainwater in directories after this year.

Second, Andrew Jackson and John A./Jack cannot be the same person because they co-exist in the 1898 and 1904 households. The same is true of Horace Jr. and Thomas. They co-exist in 1895, 1901, and 1904. In both cases, the two men are clearly different people. Also, note that in 1920, Horace is still recorded and Thomas isn't.

Based on a variety of records – census, death, headstone, marriage, and so on (not detailed here) – I can say that the following individuals are definitely the children of Mary J. Newsome and Horace Rainwater Sr. Some of the girls never appear in the city directories because they were minors, didn't work at the cotton mill, or married young.

1. George Lee Rainwater (1874-1943)
2. Nancy Jane Rainwater Wheeler (1875-1953)
3. Mary Walburke Rainwater Burch (1876-1958)
4. Horace Rainwater Jr. (1878-1944/5)
5. Andrew Jackson Rainwater (1881-1952)
6. Daisy S. Rainwater Benson (1883-1929)
7. Virgil Rainwater (1884-1916)
8. Thomas J. Rainwater (1885-before 1917)
9. Elizabeth Rainwater Byrd (1886-1968)
10. Benjamin Franklin Rainwater (1889-1960)
11. Lucy Rainwater (1889-1964)
12. Sarah Ida Rainwater (1892-1941)

Mary Newsome Rainwater says in both 1900 and 1910 that she is the mother of 14 children. So we've identified 12 out of 14 children. In theory, two of the remaining individuals might also belong to this family, but I simply don't have enough evidence to be certain about the following:

1. John A./Jack Rainwater, died before 1910
2. Reed Rainwater, the individual listed at 5 Factory Row, never listed again
3. Miss Kate Rainwater, also at 5 Factory Row

Now let's take up the Thomas vs. Horace Jr. problem.

THOMAS J. vs. HORACE JR.

Thomas J. Rainwater is listed in the 1900 census living with his parents. His occupation is recorded as mill worker and his date of birth is May 1885. He is listed in the Augusta directory through 1904, but no later. According to the family story, supported by the 1910 census, he took work as a farm hand with the Cameron family in Telfair County, about 130 miles from Augusta. That he moved so far away does suggest some kind of trouble at home.

Horace Jr. is listed in the Augusta directory through 1908, living in the family home. His occupation is recorded as mill worker through 1904 and carpenter thereafter. He is not listed at all in the 1900 census. In 1910, he appears to be the H. Rainwater boarding with the Whitmore family, but the evidence of that entry is so conflicted that I can't be certain. However, in 1918, he filled out a World War I-era draft card and gave his birth date as 16 Jun 1878. He listed his wife as Mary Lee and his occupation as "carpenter at Camp Hancock." [c] Camp Hancock was a World War I military intake center near Augusta. [d]

In Debbie Williams' story, Thomas J. Rainwater married Mary Lee Cameron, the daughter of the people he worked for, when he got her pregnant. However, it turns out that Thomas was living with R. D. Cameron, who was Mary Lee's grandfather, not father. He was not living with her immediate family, though her family is recorded on the same page of the census and was therefore nearby.

There ought to be a marriage record in about 1914 in Telfair County that would settle this question. The familysearch.org page for Telfair County points to Ancestry.com's marriage record search, but also mentions a courthouse fire in 1934. As far as I can tell, the county marriage records just stop at 1902.

On the 1918 draft, card Mary Lee's husband is named Horace, as he is in the 1920 census. There is no 1917-1918 draft card or later census record for Thomas.

So the question is who did Mary Lee Cameron marry – Thomas J. or Horace Jr.? If Thomas was the groom, he then changed his name, not in 1924 when he abandoned his family, but prior to filling out his 1918 draft card. He also, at that time, changed his date of birth from May 1885 to Jun 1878. [c]

I always like the simpler explanation and here it is. Thomas J. Rainwater went to work as a farm hand in Telfair County. Between 1908-1914, his brother Horace Jr. joined him. Horace Jr.,

not Thomas, married Mary Lee Cameron. Presumably Thomas died prior to 1918 because he filed no draft card, and is not recorded in any subsequent census.

Presumably there was an official divorce, though I don't have a record. I do have a record of Mary's second marriage, in 1929, to Walter W. Williams.

Horace Jr. returned to Richmond County, but not inside the Augusta city limits, so he was never again listed in the city directory. He lived in staff housing on the grounds of the Georgia Training School for Mental Defectives, where he was a carpenter and later a night watchman. [14, 15]

In 1929, Thomas and Horace Jr.'s sister Daisy Rainwater Benson died. In 1941, their sister Sarah Ida Rainwater died. In both cases, the list of surviving brothers includes Horace, but not Thomas. [g]

Horace Jr. died in 1944. Ironically, there's a question about this too. His burial record and obituary say he died on 4 Apr 1944. The Georgia death index says 4 Apr 1945. [h]

His obituary calls him Horace, and lists the following surviving family members: sisters Mrs Andrew Burch, Mrs C. E. (Nancy) Wheeler, Lucy Rainwater; and brothers A. J. Rainwater, Ben F. Rainwater. [f] For him to have changed his name from Thomas to Horace, started using his brother's birth date, and then somehow managed to get the family to perpetuate the lies into his obituary and burial records – how does that work?

The simpler explanation is that Horace is Horace and always was.

NOTES

¹ Mary Walburke Rainwater: The records don't agree on the spelling of her middle name. Warburt is the spelling from her son Frank's death certificate and Walburt is the spelling from her husband's draft card. She is called Marbury and Warbury in two pre-marriage city directories, and Walberg and Walburk in the post-marriage city directory listings. Walburke is the spelling from her obituary.

SOURCES

a: Ancestry.com. Georgia, Marriage Records From Select Counties, 1828-1978. Original data: County Marriage Records, 1828-1978. The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

b: Ancestry.com. U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995

c: Ancestry.com. United States, Selective Service System. *World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration.

d: Military Presence in Augusta, GA, <https://www.augustaga.gov/2189/Military-Presence-in-Augusta>

e: Email correspondence with Debbie Williams, March 2009. Debbie's information came partially from her own research and partially from her father-in-law Virgil Jackson (Rainwater) Williams, one of Mary Jane Cameron's Rainwater children. She had also corresponded with the late Glidie Rainwater Mobley about the fate of Horace and Mary Jane's children.

f: "United States, GenealogyBank Historical Newspaper Obituaries, 1815-2011." FamilySearch.org. GenealogyBank.com. <http://www.genealogybank.com>

g: FamilySearch.org's database of abstracts of obituaries on GenealogyBank.com

h: Ancestry.com Georgia Health Department, Office of Vital Records; Georgia, USA; Indexes of Vital Records for Georgia: Deaths, 1919-1998

11: 1900 Federal Census

12: 1910 Federal Census

13: 1920 Federal Census

14: 1930 Federal Census

15: 1940 Federal Census

782: Milledgeville, GA Newspaper Clippings (Southern Recorder), Vol. 10, 1857-1861, Tad Evans, 1995, Savannah, GA

1641: Civil War Confederate pension application of Cicero Rainwater, #1632, 29 Apr 1895, Richmond Co., GA, Roll #403 Orchard-Roney

1642: Civil War Confederate pension application of Henrietta Susan Rainwater, widow of Cicero, 14 Jun 1907, Washington Co., GA, Roll #470 Joyner-Ray

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