

The McClain family line has grown cold, up to this point, with JH McClain (my 2x GG). This is a recounting of the evidence that culminates in my linking him with "James Huston McClain" from Barbara Watson Bucknell's tree.

Previously Known Facts

I know that my GG was John Henry McClain (1881-1968). In the 1910 census, John Henry's mother is living in his home, and she is Martha A. who was born abt. 1843. My dad, Kenneth McClain, who lived with his grandfather for a period, thought that John Henry's father might also be named "John Henry," but he wasn't sure.

Looking through census records, I have found 3 records that are almost certainly 2x GG, whom I have identified as "JH McClain." One is a census record from 1880. He is listed as "JH" who is married to "MA." The county and the kids look right, and there are no other McClains in the county in that census. There is a farming record, also from 1880, that lists him as "JH McClain." In addition, there is a 1860 census record that lists a 25 year old James H McClain being married to a 17 year old Martha A. They have no children. This is the only record that lists anything other than "J" — it lists his name as "James H." This is not in accordance with my father's memory, but it is a very easy mistake to make. There is still no indication if what the "H" truly stands for.

With these records, there is no other hard evidence for "JH McClain" in Clay Co., Overton Co., or Jackson Co., TN. The birth and death dates present in so many family trees, all seem to come from a Civil War grave in Anderson, IN. As I look at the evidence that this is my ancestor (the one born in Anderson, IN), frankly, I can find none. I think somebody made the connection, and then a half dozen or so of us on Ancestry.com (including me) copied the error.

So, to this point, my best evidence indicates that "James H McClain" was born in 1834 or 1835.

Now, for the location of his birth. All census records indicate that he, his mother, and his father were all born in TN.

Trying to find some evidence, I was looking at the census records for his children. One of his daughters indicated on a census that her father was born in "East Tennessee." Up until now, this has been my only clue as to his origin.

As for a death date, Martha A. is listed as "widowed" in the 1910 census. I can find no other hard evidence that he died in 1903. I think that date also came from the Anderson, IN Civil War grave. He lived in Overton Co. or Clay Co., TN with there being no reason for a burial in Anderson, IN. But so far, I have not found where he is buried. Thus, the best we can say is that it is likely that was buried in or near Clay Co, TN sometime before 1910.

DNA Test Results

I recently took a DNA test from Ancestry.com. Barbara Watson Bucknell (BWB) popped up as a 4-6th cousin. Our only commonality is the McClain family line. She has it much farther back. There is 96% certainty, according to the DNA test, that our closest common ancestor is James Henry McClain (1807-1863) (possible 3x GG), Andrew Francis McClain (1774-1862) (possible 4x GG), or Robert Andrew McClain (1746-1807) (possible 5x GG).

The test makes Robert Andrew the least likely. Although he died in Knox Co., TN, it appears that he had his children before moving from Randolph Co, NC. Thus, it is likely that the closest common ancestor is one of the other two possibilities.

I like James Henry McClain as a "suspect" right off the bat because of his name. If he were my direct ancestor, then there would be three "JH McClains" in a row in our family tree. And depending upon what the H stands for, all three might have the middle name of Henry.

So, is there evidence that James H McClain (my 2x GG) is the son of James Henry McClain (1807-1863) who is listed in BWB's tree? Time to connect the dots.

She lists a "James Huston McClain" as a son of her ancestor James Henry. However, the dates appear to be somewhat wrong. She lists him as 1839-1880.

Enter the 1850 census. BWB connects this census to her family, and that connection looks right. In this census, "James H" is listed as being 16 years old, making his birth abt. 1834, which is exactly right. Based upon the census, BWB has apparently made a mistake in the birth date (which is not surprising for an uncle several generations removed).

What about other candidates?

There is a "John R," who is a sibling of "James H." Rs can look like Hs with some people's handwriting. John R is 10 years younger than his brother. In the 1860 census, "John R" is 15 years old and still listed in the home of his father in Knox Co., while "James H" is listed as living in Overton Co., and married to Martha A. This eliminates him as a candidate, and there are no other likely candidates among the sons of James Henry (1807-1863).

How about sons of Andrew Francis (1774-1862) other than James Henry (1807-1863)? There is one: "John M" (1826-1908). He was born in Knox Co., but is listed as having died in Texas. He also appears to be a little too old. While not ruling him out entirely, he appears unlikely.

So, from the information gleaned from the DNA connection to Barbara Watson Bucknell's family tree, it appears that my 2x GG was the James H McClain who was born in 1834 to James Henry McClain (1807-1863). If BWB's tree is correct,

she takes the McClain line all the way back to Scotland in the early 1700s, and solves this vexing mystery.

I still wonder what the H stands for in his name (James H b. 1834). BWB has it listed as "Huston." I am still looking for the source of this information. There is another record for a "James Huston McClain" who was born the same year, but was buried in the wrong part of TN, and his wife was not Martha A. So, I am not yet listing my ancestor as James Huston — just "James H" — until I find more evidence for this. I am guessing that Huston may be a mistake. If so, the H is likely to be Henry, just like his father and his son, and more in line with my dad's memory.

Also, I still do not have a hard date for his death. Just as the previous death date seems to come from the wrong grave (Anderson, IN), so may BWB's date of 1880. All I can prove at the moment is that his wife was a widow in 1910.

So, I am listing my 2x GG as "James H McClain" (1834-before 1910), and I am linking him to "James Huston McClain" (1839-1880) in BWB's family tree, and then I am going backwards from there.