

By: Jim Eldridge

It is possible that Joseph was married a third time, but this is somewhat of a mystery. After Joseph's death in November of 1879, Nancy (Rice) Edington, widow of Wade Edington, comes forward and publicly claims that she is married to Joseph and that she is his rightful heir and is entitled to his estate. She immediately files a claim in probate court. She was already embroiled in another estate court case when she made her claim for Joseph's estate. After her first husband Wade Edington's death on April 9th, 1870 in Dallas County, Nancy successfully filed a court petition to have the court appointed administrator removed and to have herself appointed the new administrator. Wade's estate was contested until 1883 a full thirteen years after his death and four (4) years after she claimed she was married to Joseph.[i] According to the newspaper accounts of the day, she had previously filed a petition in the county court of Dallas to have her first husband Wade Edington committed and to have herself installed as the administrator of his estate. This request was denied.

Her claim on Joseph's estate was examined and questioned by the local and state authorities as there was never any official record of this marriage and her claim for his inheritance was denied by the courts. Nancy and her attorney next legal maneuver were to file petitions to the U.S. War Department Pension Office. They filed several claims for surviving widow's pension in which she asserted to be the widow of Joseph C. Eldridge. However, she could not produce a marriage license and her claims were denied. She finally won approval in 1887 after she filled a very detailed claim which included many sworn affidavits. Chief among these was the sworn testimony from L.T. Satterfield MG. He swore that he had performed the marriage on October 10th, 1878 (a Thursday) thirteen (13) months before Joseph's death and that he (Satterfield) had filed it with the county clerk, although the document could not be found at the clerk's offices. October 10th is national squid and cuttlefish day, I guess because they are slimy. Can't make this up. John Humphrey and James Cheek, both longtime friends and neighbors of Joseph C. Eldridge, gave sworn affidavits that Nancy Rice Edington was a "truthful and honest person". Neither man swore that she was married to him, just that she was a "truthful and honest person", a very clever move by an attorney if there ever was one. Her claim for widow's pension was finally granted, eight years after Joseph's death, by the federal government in 1887. Once she had Federal recognition, the local and state authorities had no choice but to accept it. Once she received title of his land she immediately transfers them to her children by Wade Edington a legal maneuver which makes it very difficult to reclaim or claw back property. While the dispute is playing out, she lists herself and her children name as Eldridge in the 1880 census. This is the only census where her children use this name. Nancy dies April 7th 1889, just two years after her

claim for Joseph's pension was approved. She is buried under the name of Nancy Eddington.

According to the local paper when Joseph C. Eldridge returned home during the midterm break in April of 1873 he was in "feeble health". It's hard to believe that Joseph, a state legislator, did not leave a will. If he did it was never recorded or found.

Despite the sworn testimony of John Humphrey and James Cheek, both honorable men and close friends of Joseph, I feel that Joseph and Nancy were never married. The sworn affidavits of these men did not speak to the marriage, but only to the trustworthiness of Nancy. I believe that Joseph's close and lifelong (30 plus years) friends and neighbors would have known if he had remarried.

It is a bit ironic that had it not been for Nancy's detailed Claim for Widows' Pension, much of the important information about Joseph might have been lost.

[i] *Probate Court Minutes*, Dallas County Missouri, February 3rd, 1883