

## Spotlight

# Rebecca Jane Walker Personal Papers Collection<sup>1</sup>

*Including an account of the life of Daphney (Rice) Robinson, a former slave who cared for Rebecca's great-grandmother Rachel Coffey in Knob Noster, Johnson County, Missouri*

**Nanci Remington**

Many of you may remember our Spotlight (<http://www.gfo.org/library/Spotlight-June2014.pdf>) article from June 2014, which highlighted GFO's work on the Manuscript Collection project. We would like to bring our readers up to date on the progress we have made over the last two years.

Throughout 2014 to the present, our Manuscripts Committee, with the ever-generous help of our dedicated volunteers, has continued to organize, scan, and create finding aids for the collections. We have grown from an original count in 2012 of nearly 80 individual collections to just over 100 collections currently. At our Donor Appreciation event in early May this year, we were pleased to showcase not only the success of the scanning and cat-

aloging processes, but also our live Digital Manuscript Collections (<http://www.gfo.org/dmc/index.html>) website that has been delivering digital access to researchers around the country since the website went live in early 2014.

In the midst of our work on the project, many historical and genealogical treasures have been uncovered. These have kept our Manuscript Committee busy with research of their own—in our efforts to present comprehensible backgrounds for the collection materials. The following is one of our favorite found treasures, discovered and further researched by our Manuscript Committee leader, Nanci Remington.

—LauraDenise White

**T**he papers of Rebecca Walker (1927-2007) caught my interest because they contained a large collection of photographs. Even better, most of them were labeled. Rebecca had also tracked down copies of many primary sources back in the days when that meant writing letters and waiting for replies. But as I looked more closely at the papers it became clear that Rebecca was a genealogist who was also interested in the history of the people she was researching.

Rebecca's second great-grandfather, William Everett Walker (1808-1886), was an early Oregon pioneer who settled in Washington County in 1852. Both Walker Road and William Walker Elementary School are named for him. Born in Maryland, William and his wife Hannah Harlan/Harlem came to Oregon by way of Zanesville, Ohio, where they were married May 5, 1833,<sup>2</sup> and Missouri, where one of their three children was born. Students at William Walker School have created journals that detail the family's journey and their lives once they settled in Oregon. From them I learned of the illnesses suffered on the trail. At one point Hannah, after contracting cholera, "saw the elephant" and feared she

would die. I also learned that their son Archibald died in the Indian Wars in 1878, and that their daughter Maria died in California not long after her marriage.<sup>3</sup>

William and Hannah's surviving son, Robert Hales Walker, returned to Missouri for a visit and married Rachel Coffey, a woman who later recounted that she remembered the Walker family leaving for Oregon when she was a child. Rachel's parents, Asbury and Mary (Bradford) Coffey, had moved to Missouri from Tennessee in the 1840s. The Coffeys settled first in Pettis County where Rachel and her twin brother Henry were born, and by 1860 they had moved a few miles south to Knob Noster, Johnson County, Missouri.

Robert and his bride returned to Oregon and worked the farm that his parents had homesteaded, known as the Old Meadow Farm. They had five children. The youngest, Robert, died shortly after birth. Of the four remaining children, Mary Louisa died in 1905 at the young age of 29, and William Benjamin died in 1930 after a long illness. Their daughter Lauretta married Samuel Olds, and they lived the rest of their lives at the farm but had



*William Walker, the author of the diary.*

no children. Son Archibald had five children, including Robert Hales Walker, Rebecca's father.<sup>4</sup>

Because of their long history in Washington County, there are many articles about the family that include reminiscences of the pioneers and their children. Several in the family kept journals and pieces of them are included in the clippings collected by Rebecca. She also has a copy of a diary kept by her granduncle, William Benjamin Walker. William had contracted typhoid as a young man and later developed tuberculosis. He spent most of his adult life at his parents' home. Though physically weak, he was a steady presence in the lives of his family and managed the farm after his father's death.

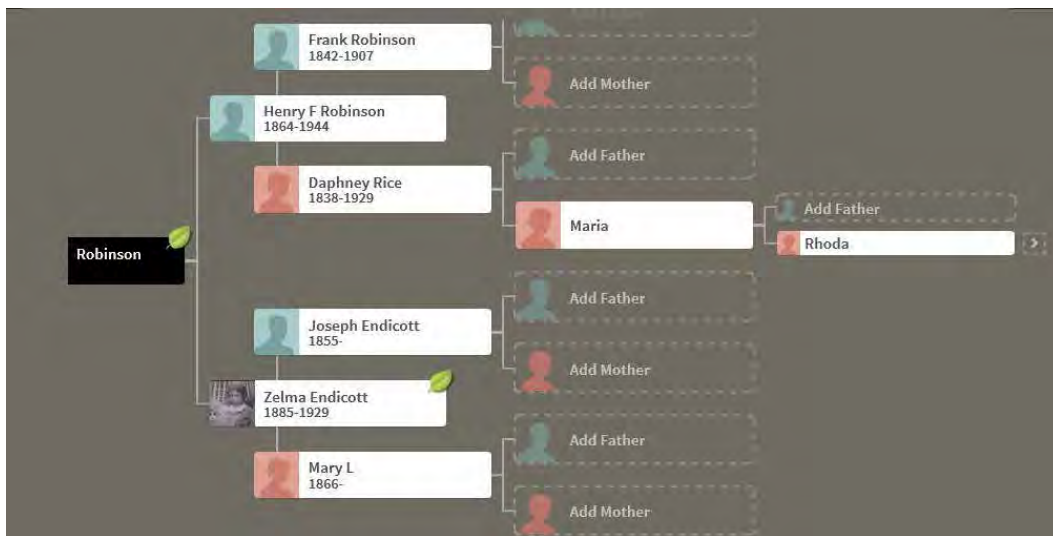
The pages of the diary in Rebecca's collection cover only a few weeks in 1929, from Friday, February 1st to Thursday, February 28th. William would have been 48 years old. He gave details on the weather, the state of health of himself and other family members, the chores performed around the house, visitors and the neighborhood news, business dealings related to the farm and city property, and trips to Portland. Of interest to genealogists are the elaborations William detailed

when notified about the deaths of acquaintances which include anecdotes, appearance, and details about their families. Of particular interest was the information about Daphney Robinson. [Transcribed as written.]

*DIED – MRS. DAPHNEY ROBISON (COLORED) at her home in Knob Noster, Missouri, Tuesday Feb. 12, 1929, at the advanced age of nearly 91 years. She was born April 19, 1838, near Athens, Tennessee, on the plantation of my great grandfather and great grandmother, Henry and Rachel Bradford, who purchased Daphney's grand mother, "Aunt Rhoda" in 1802 @ a price of \$300.00. Aunt Rhoda was given to my grand father and grand mother, Col. A.M. Coffey and wife Mary Bradford, daughter of Henry and Rachel Bradford in 1850 together with Daphney, who was then a delicate Mulatto in her 12th year. Daphney's mother was then deceased, having died while at the spinning wheel trying to do a little spinning. She was in poor health at the time.*

*DAPHNEY's father (white) was named RICE and because Daphney was a mulatto her grandmother, "Aunt Rhoda" was very abusive and harsh with her grand daughter, Daphney. Aunt Rhoda and Daphney were given to grandfather and mother Coffey, to aid in the caring for and raising of the "twins" which were, my Mother, Rachel (named for her grandmother Rachel Bradford) Francis (Coffey) Walker and twin brother Henry Bradford Coffey, named for his grandfather, Henry Bradford.*

*Daphney Rice's mother's name was MARIA, who died early in life. Great Grandfather, Henry Bradford and Miss Rachel McFarland were married in year 1799 near Athens, Tennessee, and Aunt Rhoda, grandmother of Daphney Rice was the only colored person greatgrandfather Henry Bradford bought. She was then, 1802, nine years of age. She married and had many children, all of whom were reared and lived and worked on the Henry Bradford plantation. "Aunt Rhoda" died in 1868 at the age of 75 years. She was cared for and watched over by the Coffey family for years. Aunt Rhoda became very weak mentally and physically, several years before her death and would wander away from my grandfather Coffey's home and my mother or some of the other Coffey children would have to go about the country side and find*



Missouri and for years he was principal of the Negro High School in Warrensburg, Missouri, but at present has been teaching in the colored school at Knob Noster, Mo. Ben and John died 30 years ago. John, Ben and Frank.

Daphney Robinson, had lived in Knob Noster, Mo. for years and years, on several acres of fruit land and had a

good home and living, and her son, Prof. Frank Robinson, Jr. and his wife also a teacher and their daughter, made their home with Daphney during the past few years. Prof. Frank and his daughter were very seriously ill with the influenza at the time of Daphney's death. So the paper, "Knob Noster Gem" which reached us today stated.

Mother, Aunt Mary and Uncle Henry Coffey, speak in the highest of terms about Daphney, her husband and son, Frank, as being honorable, up-right Christian people and TRUE FRIENDS. WBW

her and bring her home. She would put clods of earth in the stove, thinking they were potatoes that she was roasting, etc. Often have I heard Mother relate how they cared for the old Aunt Rhoda and how she cared for Mother and Uncle Henry and cooked corn bread and hoecakes for them when they were small, at her cabin close by their parents residence. Aunt Rhoda told the Union Soldiers during the Cival War, when the told her at Granfather Coffey's home that she was free and to pick up and leave, Aunt Rhoda backed up against the door of Grandfather Coffey's home with a big butcher knife in her hand and told the Union soldiers to "Go long and leave me alone, I'm freer now than you is" She and her grand-daughter, Daphney Rice were given their freedom during the Civil War, but Aunt Rhoda prefered to live on until death with Mother's people and Daphney only left them because the soldiers were going to do bodily harm to her husband, Frank Robison, so Grandfather Col. A.M. Coffey personally advised Daphney and her husband, Frank Robinson to leave, which they did and went to Warrensbury, Missouri, where Frank conducted a black smith shop. Daphney Rice helped care for Mother and Uncle Henry from the time they were 2 1/2 years and she was about 12 years of age until all were grown. She was married to Frank Robinson at the Col. A.M. Coffey home and given a big wedding supper etc. and made her home there until forced away as mentioned before. Daphney and Frank Robinson both deceased now had three sons, Frank Robinson, Jr. a large 6ft 6In colored man, whom they educated and he was the first negro graduate of the college in

The Walker family led lives that were at the forefront of the western movement. Rebecca's papers reflect the research that goes into documenting that history as well as that of their neighbors, friends, and in this case, slaves.



Frank and Daphney Robinson's grave marker. Photo courtesy of William Craven [WLC (#47397806) on FindAGrave]

There is much more to discover in this collection. The finding aid is available on the GFO website as are others that are waiting to be explored.

**Note:** If not otherwise cited, the information for this article came from the notes and research of Rebecca Walker. However, an effort was made to document the story about Daphney (Rice) Robinson. In 1850 there is a 12-year-old mulatto listed as the property of Henry Bradford in Polk County, Tennessee. She is one of twelve slaves that could be a family group with a 50-year-old female (Rhoda?) and possibly children and grandchildren.<sup>5</sup> In 1860 there is a 20-year-old mulatto and 60-year-old black slave listed as the property of A. M. Coffey living in Johnson County, Missouri.<sup>6</sup>

After the Civil War we can trace Daphney's family through census records. These show that Daphney and her husband, Frank, lived in Johnson County but were listed in the censuses using the last name Thompson.<sup>7</sup> After Frank's death in 1907,<sup>8</sup> Daphney used the surname Robinson, and it is the surname that son Frank used as an adult. Daphney appears on a land ownership map for Knob Noster in 1914.<sup>9</sup> She died there in 1929 and is buried in the Knob Noster Cemetery with her husband.<sup>10</sup> Her son was listed as a teacher on the 1910 census but later as a farmer. The 1940 census states that he had finished four years of college.<sup>11</sup> He married and had one daughter, who recently celebrated her 100th birthday. The information from the diary has been shared with the family.

## ENDNOTES

1. Rebecca Walker Collection, 1589-2004. Acc. 2012-32. Digital Manuscript Collections, Genealogical Forum of Oregon Library (Portland, OR).
2. Ohio, County Marriages, 1789-2013, vol. 1: p. 317 Walker-Harlan; digital images "Muskingum County Marriage Records 1804-1818," *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org : accessed 6 Jun 2016).
3. William Walker History, <https://www.beaverton.k12.or.us/schools/william-walker/news/Pages/William-Walker-History.aspx>
4. Rebecca Walker Collection.
5. 1850 U.S. census, Polk County, Tennessee, slave schedule, Sub-division 25, p. 147, Henry Bradford, slave owner; digital image, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 6 Jun 2016); citing National Archives and Records Administration microfilm M432.
6. 1860 U.S. census, Johnson County, Missouri, slave schedule, Washington Township, p. 16, A.M. Coffey, slave owner; digital image, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 6 Jun 2016); citing National Archives and Records Administration microfilm M653.
7. 1870-1900 U.S. censuses, Johnson County, Missouri, population schedules, Washington Township, Frank and Daphney (various spellings) Thompson; digital images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 6 Jun 2016); citing National Archives and Records Administration publications. The use of the surname Thompson was confirmed in an email from an Ancestry member with ties to the family.
8. *FindaGrave*, digital images (www.findagrave.com : accessed 6 Jun 2016), Frank Robinson, Memorial # 76030198.
9. Albert Volk, engraver. *Plat Book of Johnson County Missouri* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: A. R. Stinson, 1914); database with digital images, *U.S., Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860-1918*, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 6 Jun 2016).
10. *FindaGrave*, digital images (www.findagrave.com : accessed 6 Jun 2016), Daphney Robinson, Memorial# 76030199.
11. 1910-1940 U.S. censuses, Johnson County, Missouri, population schedules, Washington Township, Frank Robinson (various spellings); digital images, *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 6 Jun 2016); citing National Archives and Records Administration publications.

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