



Gertrude Sawyer, Hypothetical Daughter of Samuel and Ellen Sawyer

Samuel and Ellen Sawyer had three known children. However, the 1900 U.S. Census record for Ellen Sawyer indicates that she reported having given birth to a fourth child. Although I have found no further records about this child, my current working hypothesis is that she was a daughter named Gertrude.

The U.S. Census and Counts of Births and Children

Both the 1900 and 1910 U.S. Census asked women to provide the number of children they gave birth to, and how many of those children were still living at the time of the census. For example, in 1900, Hannah Gensicke reported having given birth to five children and that all five were still living: Edna, Henry, Carrie, Eldred and Esther. In 1910, this had increased to six in both counts with the addition of son Everett.

There were some surprises. For example, in the 1900 U.S. Census, John Wasson, Jr.'s widow Sarah reported she had given birth to six children, five of whom were still living. She repeated these numbers in the 1910 U.S. Census. We know of children Albert, Bertha, Arthur, John and Sarah (Sadie), but evidence of a sixth child has not yet turned up in any other records.

This was not unusual, especially for children who died very young in the 1800s. If they were born and died between census years, there may be no government record of them at all, although in some cases we may learn about them through other means. George Wasson, for example, didn't live long enough to appear in a census report, but he has a marked grave with his parents, John and Jemima Wasson, and he was mentioned by name in obituaries for each of his parents. I have not yet turned up comparable information for John and Sarah Wasson's sixth child.

Was a fourth birth possible? I haven't pinned down the exact year of Samuel and Ellen's marriage. They were wed sometime between 1855 and 1858. Daughter Carrie was born in 1860. Sons Elwin and James were born in 1863 and 1864. A fourth child could have been born either before or after Carrie or after James.

Where that child may have been born is more difficult to pin down. Carrie and Elwin were born in Ft. Edward, New York. But James was born in Brooklyn, New York. Samuel joined the Union Army early in the Civil War, and was injured early on. He spent the rest of the war in a Washington, D.C. hospital. His being hospitalized in Washington until 1865 didn't stop Ellen from becoming pregnant with son James. For a while during the war, Ellen lived in Brooklyn with her brother James, including when her son James was born. Available records for Ft. Edward, Washington, D.C., and Brooklyn do not report the birth or death of a fourth Sawyer child, but I have not yet found birth records for the three known Sawyer children either.

Baby Names as Evidence

Samuel and Ellen's daughter Carrie married Joseph Wasson, and Joe and Carrie had three children: Ellen (Ella) Jemima, Jessie (Jeannette) Gertrude, and Duncan James.

Ellen (Ella) Jemima was named after her two grandmothers, Carrie's mother Ellen Sawyer and Joe's mother Jemima Wasson.

Duncan James was named after Carrie's uncle Duncan McNeil, who was killed while serving in the Union Army in the Civil War, and James Wasson, Joe's brother who died the year before in Jones County, Iowa.

Jessie (Jeannette) Gertrude was named after her aunt, Joe's sister Jeannette Sim. Although I have not found any records that explicitly refer to Jessie as Jeannette, "Jessie" in those days was a routine nickname for "Jeannette". There are a handful of other Jessie/Jeannette (and their variants) women in our family tree.

So, where did "Gertrude" come from? There are no earlier known people named "Gertrude" in our family tree that Joe and Carrie could have been inspired by. And of course, it is possible that they just liked the name.

But if Ellen Jemima was named after a grandmother on each side of the family, and Duncan James was named after an uncle on each side of the family, then it is reasonable to think that Jessie Gertrude was named after an aunt on each side of the family, with Jeannette Sim fitting the bill from the Wasson side.

If Samuel and Ellen Sawyer had a fourth child, a daughter named Gertrude who died young, Gertrude would fit the bill as an aunt from the Sawyer side.

Discussion

When I came across Ellen Sawyer's information in the 1900 U.S. Census, I looked for records that either supported or rejected this information, but I did not find any. I was already wondering where Gertrude came from for Jessie Gertrude Wasson, given that the five other first and middle names that Joe and Carrie Wasson used for their children came from close relatives. If indeed Samuel and Ellen Sawyer had a daughter Gertrude who died young, that would address both of these questions.

However, there is a lot of speculation here, so this remains an open question for future research should new information become available.

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