



Introduction to the Wasson Family History

The Ancestry of Duncan J. Wasson

A family history is more than a collection of the names, dates, places and cemeteries listed in typical family trees. Here is some of the history associated with the Wassons and our ancestry through Duncan J. Wasson.

From the perspective of my generation and even more so the next generation, the branches of our family tree trace back to a number of different countries. However, our Wasson line itself traces back to Scotland, and specifically to Dailly Parish, located in the Carrick District of Ayrshire, a historic county now part of the Strathclyde Regional Council in southwest Scotland. Through marriages, our Wasson ancestry ties us to families in other parts of southwest Scotland as well as to England.

Our connection to Dailly, and more broadly to Scotland, comes through John and Jemima Russell Wasson, Iowa pioneers who with their children settled in Jackson County, Iowa in 1854, and then in neighboring Jones County near present-day Onslow by 1860.

Census reports at the time indicated that they had been born in Scotland. [The History of Jones County, Iowa](#) (1879) includes a short biographical profile of John and Jemima Wasson, providing the dates and places of their births, connecting them to Ayrshire. However, even as Scottish parish church registries of births, marriages and deaths became available online, not a single record matched the information in that profile. Even the “Wasson” name itself is rare in these records – “Watson” and to a lesser extent “Wason” are far more common in Ayrshire, and “Watson” is one of the most popular names throughout Scotland.

Eventually, a record for the baptism of their son John, born aboard a ship on the Atlantic Ocean and baptized in Canada in 1842, connected our John Wasson to New Daly, the village and parish of Dailly, Ayrshire. The best-fitting match to John Wasson in the Dailly Parish records was a John Watson, the sixth of eight children born to a John Watson and his wife Jane Lambie of Dailly.

Further research based on additional family ties, a will, and old Jones County newspaper articles confirmed that this John Watson was our John Wasson, this in spite of all the differences with the earlier available information. The six lines of The History of Jones County, Iowa profile on John and Jemima Wasson actually include at least six and likely seven relevant errors.

Once John and Jemima were correctly identified in Scottish birth records, it was then possible to identify John's direct ancestors back to the early 1700s and some of Jemima's ancestors as far back as the late 1600s. Tracing their ancestors in Scotland depends heavily on birth, marriage and death registries maintained by local parish churches that have been preserved over time. To a lesser extent, maps, an understanding of traditional Scottish conventions for naming children, other regional traditions, name variations and nicknames, and an understanding of the evolution of the "Wasson" name itself were also helpful.

The quality and completeness of parish registries vary widely across parishes. Many records simply have been lost over the centuries. Where records survive, sometimes only the father's name was included in a child's baptism record, or only the marriages and deaths of more elite members of the community were recorded. Some people married in a parish outside of the one where they lived. Even the temporary absence of someone at the church to document births, marriages and deaths left gaps in the records.

Birth, marriage and death records in Scotland became much better and more complete when Scotland switched to statutory recordkeeping in 1855. This, unfortunately, was after John and Jemima emigrated to the United States. These records do provide information about some of our distant cousins, and in rare cases family trees focused on those relatives have provided limited insight into our own family history.

Once in the United States, the story of John and Jemima and their descendants is documented through census reports, news articles, historical plat maps, wills and probate documents, family recollections and photos. A number of the sources I used are documented separately.

This is a collection of articles about our Wasson family history, especially focused on the Wasson line that came from Scotland – the ancestry of my grandfather, Duncan J. Wasson. It includes articles about the people, associated places, the times in which they lived, anecdotes about their lives, and assorted research notes. These are intended to complement a traditional family tree, revealing more about their lives and not simply listing names, dates, places and cemeteries.

Please alert me to misspellings, typos and more serious errors and inconsistencies, so that I can correct them. If you have information, anecdotes, photos or documents that would make useful additions to future updates and/or to our family history archives, please pass along copies.

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