

[There is available on the Internet a biography of James F. Lankford that was published by William Travis in 1909. That biography contains numerous errors. This research note by Barry Wood discusses the biography]

Email from Barry Wood, March 4, 2004

Biography of James F. Lankford

It was, probably, William Travis who interviewed James F. Langford for this history. Travis was probably cranking out a dozen of these biographical sketches a day. Accuracy was not the prime objective -- getting the subscriber's money to buy the book in advance was.

This is the very bio. that gave Mom decades of grief in her Langford search, as it sent her on a North Carolina wild goose chase, and described Walker in a fashion that is incompatible with the contemporaneous record in original sources in Kentucky.

First, the proposition that James F. Lankford's great grandfather came from Scotland is doubtful. I don't dispute the possibility that the Lankford immigrant was Scottish, but I suspect that the immigration occurred at least a generation further back. James F.'s great grandfather would have been Joseph Lankford / Langford. Martha Green, at least, feels strongly that the Langfords had been in Virginia two generations or more in back of Joseph.

I am very skeptical that Walker was born in North Carolina. I think this myth is the product of one or both of two things: First, when Walker was growing up, the family lived in Pittsylvania County, Virginia on a tract of land whose southern boundary was the North Carolina border. That's clear from the land patent in the Virginia State Library & Archives. Second, the family's seat prior to their stay in Pittsylvania County, Virginia was in Caroline County, Virginia, now the site of Camp A. P. Hill. I can easily see a reference to "Caroline" in the writer's notes evolving to "North Carolina" when Travis (or whoever else wrote this sketch) got to penning his flowery prose.

Walker was indeed left an orphan, though not as a baby, when his father Joseph died. In those days, you were an orphan if your father died, even if the mother was still alive. Whether he was apprenticed to a wood worker I have no idea, but it seems plausible.

Then the author's notes must have hit a gap or a spasm of illegibility or some other problem, because the Seminole War reference and courtship of Miss "Folly" Williams makes no sense as applied to Walker. Clearly Walker was then too old to go running off to war. As he was first taxed in 1790, we may assume that he was born no later than 1769, which would make him at least 49 years old at the time of the alleged military adventures.

As pointed out in Mom's book, at page 66, Walker could not have contracted

his first marriage after the Seminole War, because his child Harvey Langford, in this very same bio., is shown as having been born in 1816, before the war. For that matter, Fielding Langford himself is not accounted for in this theory at all, as he was born in 1804, over a decade before his father supposedly went traipsing through the Everglades and courting the daughter of Alabama slave owners.

Mom also demonstrated that the story of Walker bringing six slaves into Kentucky is inconsistent with the tax records, which do not show Walker owning any slaves. Frankly, I think the whole Seminole War story really belongs to someone else altogether. In other words, Travis probably had some notes about the service by a different settler of Clay County under Andrew Jackson, and it was this person rather than any Lankford who courted the fair Polly Williams. Travis evidently just mistakenly attached that sheet or card of notes to the Lankfords, and thus this disinformation shows up in the Lankford biography.

Just as an aside, I note that the bio. is inconsistent in asserting that Harvey Lankford was born in 1816, but that he was 22 when the family came to Clay County in 1832.

Mom also found numerous independent sources for the proposition that the wife of Walker Langford was Mary Warren, not Mary Williams. Best of all is the actual marriage bond, 9 Sept 1800, for Walker Langford and Mary Warren (Charles Warren, surety). The evidence is summarized in Mom's book at pages 58 and 65-67.

Now as to "Folly" Williams -- that seems to be the product of someone's scanner. In the printed biography, transcribed at page 65 of Mom's book, it's "Polly."

This is what the family needs to rely on, not some myth about Walker hunting a wife at age 50 in the plantations of Alabama.

Hope this helps the clan keep the difference between fact and fantasy straight.

Barry