



(L to R: Martha J Harris Thompson, Brewer Thompson, Thomas Jefferson Thompson)

Martha Jane Harris

I never met Martha Jane Harris but earlier generations who did described her as a serious, deeply religious person with lots of Harris kin that she loved to visit. The family stories about her life mostly came from her and were never complaints about the difficulties she had to endure. She was generally known as Jane but I have used her full given name in this narrative.

Martha Jane was born 12 March 1835 to Thomas M Harris and Martha M Almand. Thomas was the son of Isham Harris and Mary Lansford and Martha was the daughter of Thomas Almand and Nancy David. Martha Jane's grandfather Isham Harris died ten years before she was born and she was eleven when her grandfather Thomas Almand and her grandmother Mary Lansford Harris died. Her grandmother Nancy David Almand did not die until 1875.

Martha Jane Harris always said that she was born in Harris County, Georgia but the County was not named for her family. The tombstone record for her sister Polly who was four years younger says that she was born in Harris County, Georgia. So, it is probable that the family moved after 1830 from Newton County near her mother's parents to Harris County and then back by 1840 to adjacent Jasper County where her father's mother lived. Martha Jane had a bible that she received for Christmas in 1842 and, based on the entries, she started making family records in her bible at that time. Her records show that the name was originally Harriss and later research confirms the name ended with a double "s". This bible is an important source of family information but

unfortunately one or more pages of family records were lost. Martha Jane later gave a bible to her daughter-in-law, Ora, in 1901 and made the first family records in that bible.

Martha Jane had fourteen brothers and sisters. The youngest two were twins that were born 14 July 1848 and the only ones born in Alabama. One year later on 4 July 1849, her brother John Henry Harris died of dropsy (edema) at age twelve and a half. One expects to lose grandparents but this was the first of many family tragedies for Martha Jane.

The Thomas Harris family settled near Milltown in Chambers County, Alabama about 1847. Thomas and his wife lived in this area for the rest of their lives. They were likely members of the Mount Hickory Church at Milltown which was Primitive Baptist. Some have said that Thomas was a minister there. Martha Jane's mother is buried in the church cemetery and an open space next to her grave is the probable grave of her father Thomas. The church records were lost in a fire in 1880 and the church itself burned in 1944. The family did not have much money and it appears from land records that the family farm had to be mortgaged just before her parents died.

Martha Jane married Nathaniel David Seay at her parents' home on 1 May 1860. The first family records by Martha Jane show the name as See, the same as marriage, census and military records, but later entries show it as Seay which their descendants use today. Martha Jane was about five years older than her husband. Their daughter Julia Ann Christina Seay was born 18 March 1861 and their son John Nathaniel Seay was born 2 June 1862. Two months before their son John was born, Nathaniel had already enlisted for service as a private in the Confederate Infantry. Nathaniel then died on 30 July 1862. Martha Jane recorded in the bible that she gave Ora that he had died "in the service of his country."

The War also took a toll on her parent's family. A casualty list posted at Milltown on 10 July 1863 included Martha Jane's brother Isham David Harris and brother-in-law Elbert Harris (from another Harris family). Elbert was wounded at Missionary Ridge and later lost his foot from the wound. Isham was taken prisoner on 4 July 1863 at Gettysburg and died four months later of chronic diarrhea at Hammond General Hospital in Maryland. The pension application papers of Isham's wife Julia Megginson indicate that she never knew what happened to Isham, only that "he was supposed to have been killed in 1864". I found that his records had been filed under J D Harris rather than I D Harris. Martha Jane's younger brothers Charles Campbell Harris and Milton Thomas Harris were also wounded in the War. Milton was wounded twice.

On 26 September 1867, Martha Jane's daughter Julia Ann Christina died at age six and a half. Martha Jane recorded in the bible that she gave Ora "may she ever rest in peace."

In 1870, Martha Jane and her son John lived on a farm with the John B Slay family in Chambers County. The Slays were active in the Mount Hickory Church. Also farming on this land or nearby was the Leroy Thompson family which was headed at that time by his wife Matilda. Leroy Thompson and Matilda Hubbard were married 21 August 1843 in Troupe County, Georgia and moved to Harris County before the War. It is not known

when they moved to Chambers County or what happened to Leroy. The Thompsons were very poor and working as a farm hand to help support the family was a son Thomas Jefferson Thompson who went by TJ. According to Martha Jane's writing in the bible given to Ora, TJ and Martha Jane were married 6 June 1870. However, Chambers County marriage records show their marriage date as 4 September 1872. Martha Jane said that it was necessary for them to marry a second time because her first husband had not been legally declared dead at the time of the first marriage. It's easy to suspect the earlier marriage date but we should give her the benefit of doubt.

Martha Jane was twelve years older than TJ who was born 12 June 1847. Their only son Andrew Jackson Thompson was born 5 April 1872 according to Martha Jane's entry in Ora's bible.

TJ and Martha Jane were always poor. TJ was a farmer but never owned any land. He also worked in a flour mill. The family moved to Talladega County and then to Clay County. In later life, Martha Jane's son John complained about how poor the family was. John never liked his stepfather but was very fond of his half brother Andrew who was known as AJ. John married Fanny Walker Pace on 7 October 1882 and AJ married Ollie Bell Ray on 3 October 1897. TJ and Ollie Bell had a daughter Brewer who was born 9 August 1898 and then Ollie Bell died 10 May 1899 of typhoid fever. During Ollie Bell's illness, her younger sister Ora Florence Ray took care of her and the baby. After Ollie Bell died, AJ and Ora eloped to Georgia and were married. This upset TJ and Martha Jane and they took Brewer to live with them. In fact, they moved to Texas without telling AJ and Ora where they were going. AJ and Ora found out and followed them to Texas. They all then moved back to Clay County near the little town of Delta. When Brewer was seven, Ora started to discipline Brewer in front of Martha Jane and Martha Jane decided that Ora could handle Brewer and it was now time for her to live with AJ and Ora.

One time in earlier years of farming, TJ hit a stump with the plow which injured his leg, The injury did not heal properly and TJ later became a cripple. As a result, he and Martha Jane moved in with AJ and Ora about 1907 when they were living in Lineville, Clay County. The leg continued to get worse and caused him a lot of pain. The infection from the leg injury is believed to have been the cause of his death around 1909. No records of his death have been found.

Martha Jane continued to live with AJ and Ora. She also continued to be active with her Primitive Baptist faith. After the family moved to Mt Pinson near Birmingham, AJ would hitch a team of horses and send a person with her to attend church revivals near Lineville. She would stay with her brother's family who lived in the area. It was on one such occasion around 1914 that she died. No records of her death have been found. AJ and Martha Jane are buried in unmarked graves at the Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church near Lineville. This was recorded, but undated, in the bible of Ora Florence Ray Thompson.

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