



TARRANT COUNTY TXGENWEB

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Civil War Veterans of Northeast Tarrant County

Rufus Charles Whitley

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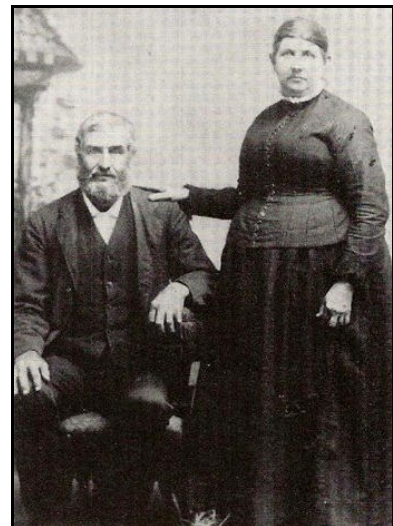
Rufus Charles Whitley arrived in northeast Tarrant County shortly before the War with his wife and three of her brothers, two of whom brought their wives with them. He served in the Confederate Army and spent the rest of his life in this community.

Several family genealogists have posted information on Mr. Whitley's family at ancestry.com. Those sources say he was born in Tazewell County, Virginia on February 8, 1827, and was a son of James Whitley (1797-1845) and his wife, Sarah Lain Moore (1804-1890).

Mr. Whitley married Elizabeth Holland Gregory, a daughter of John Keatts Gregory (1782-1843) and his wife, Elizabeth Holland Corder (1800-1886). Her birth and death dates, as shown on her headstone in Smithfield Cemetery, were June 19, 1834 and October 5, 1901. Family genealogists say she was born in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. They told the census taker in 1900 that they had been married forty-nine years, hence they must have been married about 1851.

When he registered to vote here on August 5, 1867, he said he had been a resident of Texas and Tarrant County for eight years, and a resident of Precinct 1 for two years. One of Mr. Whitley's granddaughters, Cora Whitley Bertram, wrote an account of the family in 1988. In 'Trek to Texas: Gregorys and Whitleys by Wagon,' she wrote: "*At Tazewell County, Virginia, in the summer of 1859, my grandparents, Rufus C. and Elizabeth Holland Whitley, along with Lewis Corder and "Aunt Bett" Gregory, Dr.*

Clayton Gregory (single, age 17) and James Madison and Barbara Jane Whitley Gregory, packed their wagons with provisions and small children and headed for Texas. About the same time, Rufus



Mr. and Mrs. Rufus C. Whitley

C. Whitley's three brothers and William Whitley (age 15), along with their mother, my great-great-grandmother, Sarah (Sally) Laine Moore Whitley (widow of James Whitley who died in 1845 and is buried in the Whitley-Peery Cemetery at North Tazewell), and one sister Matilda B. Whitley and her husband William P. Maxwell and their children were all doing the same, with a destination of Missouri. Time-wise, it seems that R. C. and Elizabeth took their wagon the long way around, by Grundy County, Missouri, to see his mother, brothers and sister settled.

"It is noted in records that Rufus C. and Elizabeth H. Gregory Whitley, with their six-year-old Mary Lain and my grandfather, Charles Tiffany, a babe-in-arms born 27 Feb 1859 in Tazewell, arrived in Birdville, Texas in the fall of 1859. Birdville, located just east of Fort Worth (now a part of the Richland Hills area), was the county seat of Tarrant County until the 1856 election when it was voted to move the county seat and build the court house in Ft. Worth. They all probably wintered at Birdville until early spring and purchased land within five to eight miles of each other. R. C. and Elizabeth settled at Zion (now Smithfield) about five and a half miles northeast of Birdville on a parcel of land that, compared to Tazewell's mountains, was FLAT. They built a log cabin first on top of a small hill from which they could view all of their property just by turning around. They had some trees, live oaks and cedars, but only in small groupings and few compared to Virginia's. I have wondered what they really felt, standing there looking over it the very first time.

"They eventually built a nice-sized ranch style home there with porches on all sides. Lumber was accessible in this part of Texas, but panes of glass for windows, nice sturdy planed doors, nails and specialty items they did not make for themselves had to be shipped in, either the long way by water to the Gulf Coast or to Jefferson, near the Louisiana border, which had a port at that time. In those early years, the river that runs up the eastern border of Texas from the Gulf was deep enough for small steam boats to navigate and the last port was in Jefferson—a long trip from Smithfield but safer from the scattered bands of Indians.

"I was told by family that Granddaddy R. C. went by wagon and picked up supplies to build their home—almost two hundred miles. When I was a little girl, my Gran Whitley told me of the barbeques, picnics, dances and societies that were had in the home as my Graddaddy Charlie T. was growing up. They worshipped in the church at Smithfield and for some time the children were schooled at Birdville. Later a school was held during week in the church. For higher education, my grandfather was sent to Missouri for a year or so.

"All these activities were put on hold during the Civil War and everyone concentrated on simply surviving. When I think of my great-grandmother Elizabeth, I always think of the story told after the War. She hadn't heard anything about or from great granddaddy R. C. So, of course, she was worried that something awful had happened to him. The children were out in the yard, one day several weeks after the end of the War. They started running to the house, yelling, "Mother, there is a dirty old tramp coming up the road." She ran out to see, looked for a few seconds, gathered up her skirts, ran across the yard, jumped the rock wall, and flew down the road, reached up and gathered him off the old bony donkey and helped him to the house. R. C. was half-starved, dirty and sickly, but she had him home. He did make a quick recovery and was a hale and hearty happy man. He so loved life and people and stayed that way until he died at the age of ninety-one. No one ever

asked how he acquired the old donkey after having to walk for weeks—everyone thought he deserved it no matter the circumstances.

“Elizabeth and Rufus C. Whitley had four children. Mary Lain was born in 1853 in Tazewell, Virginia and married T. E. McMurry in 1869 in Smithfield, Texas. Eight children were born to them. Four are buried with her and E. T. in the Smithfield Cemetery. I believe that four lived to adulthood. They all moved away and I have never known what happened to them. Mary Lain died in 1888. The second Whitley child was Charles Tiffany, born 27 Feb 1859 in North Tazewell. He married Nancy Emeline “Nanny” Meacham 9 Oct 1887 at Keller, Texas. Charlie T. died there 19 Aug 1911 and is buried in the Whitley family plot at Smithfield, near his mother, small brother, and four of his own small children. Four of their children lived to have families of their own,; my dad was the youngest. James Rufus, the third Whitley child, was born 16 August 1867 at Smithfield, and married Mary J. Chesser in 1889. They had eight children and all but two (Cora, for whom I am named, died as a teenager) had large families of their own. Their youngest son, Paul, born in 1904, still lives in west Texas. James and Mary are buried in Belview, Texas, in Clay County. John L. was the fourth Whitley child, born 1876 and died 1877. He is one of the oldest graves in the Smithfield Cemetery.

“Grandmother Elizabeth died in Keller in 1901 and was buried with her baby son, John L., daughter Mary L. Gregory McMurry, and eight small grandchildren. R. C joined here there in 1918. Gran was put there to rest beside Charlie T. in 1938, the last space in the Whitley plot.

“It was often mentioned that Grandmother Elizabeth always regretted the fact that there had not been enough room in the wagons for her to bring all her furniture and dishes that she missed so much. She said so much room had been taken by the many barrels of maple syrup, use for sweetening...

“Uncle Lewis C. Gregory’s land was nearer what was later to become Keller, five to eight miles northwest of the Whitley place. Gran always called Uncle Lewis’ wife “Aunt Bett.” Her name was Mary B. Gran loved her very much and said that she was one of the sweetest women she ever knew. She died in the late 1880’s and was buried on their property.

“James Madison and Barbara Jane Whitley Gregory were married in Tazewell when they were about 18 years of age. They had two daughters. James M. was hardly settled in Texas when he went to the Civil War. I don’t know if they even had their own place. One of my cousins, W. R. Whitley, has a Confederate pass issued to “Rufus C. and sister for safe passage to Little Rock Arkansas, 17 July 1862.” The only sister it could possibly have been was Barbara Jane. She probably got word that James M. was hurt or very ill.

“Barbara Jane Whitley Gregory was a younger sister of my great-grandfather Rufus C. Whitley. After the death of James M. Gregory, she married Robert Crews and had several children. The Gregory children were Sarah A., born 1859, and Rosa T. born 1861. They both used the name of Crews until grown and even then, Sarah married by the name of Crews. Rosa married in 1875 to Dr. N. A. Guice and moved to Claiborne County, Mississippi. She had seven children. Sarah, nicknamed “Pink,” ran away to marry George Turner, an Englishman, in 1876. They lived in

Nebraska and never had children. Barbara Jane died in 1884 and is buried in the cemetery at Grapevine, Texas, in Tarrant County.

“Dr. Clayton Gregory, “Dock,” may have died in Harris County, Texas, near Houston, after 15 Aug 1864 and before 29 Nov 1864. I have letters written on these dates to great grandmother Elizabeth. The first was written by “Dock” himself; the latter by Robert Crews, new husband of Elizabeth’s sister-in-law Barbara Jane, referring to the loss of her brother. “Dock” never married. Ed. Note; The previous account was written by the author, a resident of Fort Worth and occasional Tazewell visitor, in 1988.”

One R. Whitley served as a soldier in Co. E, 24/25th Consolidated Texas Cavalry. *It has not been determined whether or not this was Rufus Charles Whitley.* The scarce information remaining in this man’s military records file in the National Archives gives no clue to his given name, age, or residence.

R. C. Whitley appears in the 1865 tax list of Tarrant County, Texas. He did not own any real estate at that time, but owned eight horses worth \$128 and fourteen cows worth \$86.

When the 1880 census was taken, Mr. and Mrs. Whitley were enumerated with their two surviving sons in Precinct 4. The names of their neighbors would seem to suggest that they were living in the general area of Smithfield.

When the 1900 census was taken, Rufus and Elizabeth Whitley were living at Keller in the home of their son, C. T. Whitley. Mrs. Whitley said she had given birth to four children, two of whom were still living. C. T. Whitley’s home appears on the Sam Street Map of Tarrant County made in December, 1895. In modern-day terms, it sat in the old residential area of Keller, along the west side of Highway 377 (Main Street), between Main Street and the railroad, somewhere near where Pecan Street now enters Main Street from the east.

Whitley told the 1910 census taker he was a veteran of the Confederate Army. Rufus C. Whitley died in 1918 and lies buried in Smithfield Cemetery. His death does not appear in the Texas death records. The 1918 death certificate recorded in Tarrant County for R. E. Whitley does not apply to this man.

Mary Lain Whitley was born June 10, 1853 in Tazewell County, Virginia. She was married in Tarrant County, Texas in 1869 to Thomas E. McMurry (1845-1892). She died on May 10, 1883. Both of them lie buried in Smithfield Cemetery.

Charles Tiffany Whitley was born February 27, 1859. He died August 19, 1911. He married Nancy Emeline Meacham (1866-1938), a daughter of William H. Meacham and Martha A. Brown. All four of them lie buried in Smithfield Cemetery.

James Rufus Whitley’s death certificate says he was born at Birdville, Texas on August 26, 1866. He died in the Clay County Memorial Hospital in Henrietta, Texas on October 10, 1953 of pneumonia and congestive heart failure. He was buried in Bellevue Cemetery in Clay County. Clay

County records say he married Mary Josephine Chesser on September. 26, 1888. She was born in Brazoria County, Texas on April 20, 1872, and was a daughter of G. W. Chesser and Rinsey Lee. She died on July 16, 1969 in the same hospital as her husband.

John L. Whitley was born January 11, 1876 and died November 11, 1877. He lies buried in Smithfield Cemetery. His headstone is no longer to be seen with the other family members there.

