

## **THE STORY OF HENRY COWLEY (1849-1920)**

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As early as 1820 many white European Cowleys had settled in North America at South Carolina and lived in places such as Spartanburg, SC, York, SC and Chester, SC where they bought land, owned slaves and farmed that land. As was the cases of Robert Cowley, John C. Cowley and several other white Cowley slave owners. These are the conditions under which Henry Cowley's parents lived and toiled as slaves. His father was born in South Carolina and mother in Virginia. Some of the slave owners decided to migrate to Mississippi where land was cheap, plentiful and treaties had been negotiated with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians. So they left South Carolina many by covered wagons with slaves such is the case with Robert Cowley and John C. Cowley who by 1850 had located in the town of Smithville in Monroe county Mississippi (according to the 1850 census of Monroe county Mississippi). Slaves were not listed by surname on the United States census sheets until 1870 only white males and slave owners were. Slaves were listed on slave schedule sheets showing the number of slaves, their age, sex and color. The slave schedule was occasionally used to determine taxes because slaves were counted as property. In 1850 the schedule 2 – slave inhabitants in the eastern division in Monroe county Mississippi showed Robert Cowley owning the following slaves: (1.) age 23, male, black, (2.) age 15 female, black, (3.) age 15, male, black; John C. Cowley owned: (1.) age 26, male, black, (2.) age 17 male, black, (3.) age 25, female, black, (4.) age 3 yrs., ,male, black, (5.) age 9 months, male, black.

Henry Cowley was born 1849-1851 in Mississippi the best ascertained location – Monroe County (per conversation Murlen Cowley of East St. Louis, IL 1998). Henry Cowley was born a slave and stayed a slave until at least the Civil War was over in about 1865. As slaves were bought and sold during and prior to the time Henry Cowley was born, it was extremely difficult to know the names of Henry's father and mother and other siblings because many records simply did not exist for black slaves in North America. Many are isolated in content; many reliable older people that could witness or attest to some facts are now long deceased. Still there is the plausibility of deductive reasoning given certain facts that are impossible to disprove and the glimmering hope that parts of the puzzle fit. One fact is that Henry Cowley did have at least one known brother and his name was George Cowley. He was born in the

year of 1845 and was slightly older than Henry and was born in Mississippi in the county of Itawamba according to the United States census of 1920.

George Cowley was 75 years old; a widower who worked as a porter and was listed as living with a white family whose head of household was Jetty b. Lindsey whose wife was Hattie Lindsey. We do not know who George Cowley's wife was or if they had any children. What we do know is that there were generations of George Cowley's names after this one starting with Henry Cowley naming one of his sons George after his brother in 1922, then Noah's son George named his son George Jr. and one daughter Georgia Mae Cowley and the Georges go on for more generations to come.

Looking back at Monroe County, which is Aberdeen, Mississippi and reviewing the slaves that were listed on the slave schedules that were held by the slave owners, Robert Cowley and John C. Cowley, the time was 1850. John Cowley had of his slaves 1 age 26 male black and 1 age 25 female black. Could they have been Henry and George Cowley's parents? Notably, one slave was age 9 months old black male. Could that have been Henry Cowley who was born roughly a year earlier in 1849? Also, there was one slave age 3 years old. Could that have been George Cowley who was slightly older than Henry? Is that possible? What is your deductive reasoning? Is there a glimmer or hope that this part of the puzzle fits? I personally say this is possible. I went to the Chancery Clerk Office in Aberdeen, Mississippi where they have records and old wills that date back to former slave owners by name. The names were clearly recorded of these slave owners. The probate Wills/Records were there for John C. Cowley. I was there in April 2004. The will information is as follows: Name: Cowley, John C., County: Monroe, Will number and book page I.11-487, year 1855. Packet #739 was filed in the basement cabinet file of 832.739. In finding out about African American ancestry, one have to examine the wills of former slave owners, if possible, to see if any names exist of slaves that were sold, exchanged or given away to the slave owners' family members by name when the slave owner died.

Henry Cowley could have had several brothers and sisters; another plausible person is Taylor Cowly spelled this way on the 1880 census of Beat 3, Monroe county, Mississippi and in 1880 is 25 years old, a farmer laborer married to Alice White Cowly 25 years old with three children Robert Cowly 7 years old, Queen Cowly 5 years old and May Cowly 2 years old living in Aberdeen, Mississippi (Monroe County). There are a lot of others as well who could be the siblings of Henry Cowley and possible parents as well. Take for example, Jeff

Cowley, the U.S. census of 1880 shows that in the next county west of Monroe County, which is Chickasaw county, volume 3, Enumeration District 36, sheet 12, line 25 that Jeff Cowley is 48 years old and was born in South Carolina in 1832 and is a black male; old enough to be Henry Cowley's father because 30 years earlier in 1850 Jeff Cowley would have been 18 years old, roughly the same age as the 17 year old slave held by slave owner John C. Cowley in Monroe county. Another example is William Cowley who in the 1910 census of Bolivar County in the Mississippi delta, Enumeration District 22, sheet 6, William is 65 years old. He was born in Alabama, the neighboring state to Monroe County in Mississippi, about 1845; his wife, Fannie Cowley (born 1856) and he were the parents of 6 children with 2 living in 1910.

Then there is Annie Cowley listed on the United States census of 1920 of Bolivar County, volume 7, ED7, sheet 16, line 67. Annie was born in Georgia; her age was 70 years old, born 1850. Next, there is Sallie Cowley who was 23 years old in the 1880 US census volume 5, ED19, sheet 11, line 22 for Copiah county, city of Beauregard, Mississippi. Sallie was born in Mississippi in the year of 1857; she and Annie could have been Henry Cowley's sisters.

The many other possibilities have yet to be figured out and may very well never be due to the reality of the institution of American slavery. Fortunately as time went on better records were kept after slavery of succeeding African American generations; there are military files for the North called United States colored troops; for the South called Confederate states of America colored troops; there are the Civil War pension records; there are the records of the Freedman Savings and Trust (1815-1874); a federal banking system set aside for freed slaves that was allowed to collapse where most all the black Civil War soldiers and black investors lost their money. But records of deposit ledgers exist showing names of depositors, their known relatives and other personal information. As far as can be determined Henry Cowley did not fight in the Civil War. He was only 14 years old when blacks were allowed to join in 1863 and 16 years old when the Civil War was over in 1865.

Henry Cowley later met his first wife Hannah Lyles and they married most probably 1870-1872. Hannah was born about 1853 in Mississippi. Her mother was Caroline Lyles born in North Carolina about 1830. Hannah had a sister named Ammie Lyles born March 1861 and a brother named Ike Lyles born in 1864. Ammie Lyles on the 1900 United States census Lee County, ED50, sheet 1A, line 46 was the mother of 9 children with 5 still living. She was a widower by then and 39 years old, who 3 years earlier in 1897 was the mother also

of Sherman Lyles Sr. a child she had who's father was Jerry Burch, born in 1870 (a descendant of President Thomas Jefferson). Sherman Lyles later married Earline Sargent, born 1901 and Jerry Burch later married Anna Schumpert (27) born February 1894 in Itawamba county Mississippi. With Sherman fathering at least 16 children, Earline Sargent was the daughter of Oliver L. Sargent born about 1867. Oliver was the father of one of Henry Cowley's wife (Hannah) children named Fletcher Sargent born about 1888.

Fletcher Sargent married Willie Jones Sargent, whose father was Ben Jones and mother Emma Bonds. Ben came to Itawamba County from Alabama. Willie ('Aunt Willie' as she was called) was born May 8, 1893 married Fletcher when she was 15 years old in 1878; she had about 20 brothers and sisters. She lived to be the age of 105 and died on December 25, 1998. Willie Sargent was the mother of 15 children, 55 grandchildren, 91 great grandchildren, 47 great great grandchildren and 6 great great great grandchildren.

Henry and Hannah Cowley were living in Itawamba county Mississippi, by 1870 they had their first child Lucy (1872); their other children were Fannie (1873), George (1875), Noah (February 1876), Henry Clay (June 1878) aka 'Hunts', Rosetta (1882) aka 'Dump', Josie (1884), Aaron (1887) aka 'Chuff', Alvin (1898), Edna and stepson Fletcher Sargent (1888).

According to the United States census in June of 1880 Henry Cowley was head of household living with his wife Hannah and family including his mother-in-law Carolina Lyles age 50 and his brother-in-law Ike Lyles age 16 all in Itawamba county Mississippi.

A few children later and within the next 6 years some events occurred between Henry and his first wife Hannah. He then married his second wife Mary E. Jones on December 21, 1886 in Itawamba county Mississippi. This marriage was witnessed by Robert Shumpert whose name is on their marriage license. Henry and Mary became the parents of several children; some of the children were in her last name of Jones. They even helped with the raising of a few other children. Years later they had a rocky marriage and by June of 1900 some 14 years after getting married, they were separated and living in separate households. Some of the known children associated with Henry and Mary are James A. Cowley (1882), Richard B. Cowley (1887), Idella P. Cowley (1890), Cass H. Cowley Jones (1891), Gew Jones, Pearl Estes (1884), Elbert Estes (1888).

On the United States census sheet of June 1900 of Itawamba county beat 3, district 39, sheet 7, line 37, Mary E. Cowley indicated that the number of years she had been married was 12 years and that she was the mother of 9 children with 7 still living. She was head of

household at the time living with her sons James A. (17 years old), Richard (19 years old), Cass (9 years old) and her granddaughter Willie E. (5 years old). The same census year in June 1900 Itawamba county, volume 21, sheet 3, ED 39, line 29, shows Henry Cowley head of a different household living with children by his first wife Hannah, Rosetta (18 years old), Josie (16 years old), Idella, Aaron and Alvin.

By the year of 1910 May 13 United States census Itawamba county, beat 3, E. District 17, sheet 32A, line 1, Mary E. Cowley is now listed as Mary E. Jones, head of household, 57 years old living only with her son Cass Jones (20 years old) and his wife Frankie (19 years old). Mary indicates on the census that she is the mother of 9 children but that only 6 are living. One has apparently died since the last census taken 10 years ago, census taken every 10 years.

By March 1920 the United States census Itawamba County, volume 20, sheet 21, district 17, line 41, shows Henry Cowley now 71 years old living as head of household with his daughter Rosetta only, who is 32 years old. Henry is listed as a widowed.

It is believed that Henry Cowley died sometime between 1920 and 1930 in Itawamba county Mississippi. Henry is buried at the Pleasant Grove cemetery in Nettleton, Mississippi a few feet from one of his sons Noah H. Cowley, next to the Pleasant Grove Church. There are numerous other relatives buried there. Henry's grave marker has worn away, but his legacy of life lives on everlasting through his bloodline of countless descendants. Henry never went to school and could not read and write, it was thought of that if slaves learned to read and write they would become unmanageable, so the penalties were severe if they were in many cases caught with a book.

Today is a different world from Henry's time and Henry's descendants have excelled in all areas of American society. Today we are college graduates, educators, military experts, medical experts, social workers, computer workers, law enforcement experts, ministers of the gospel, factory workers, mechanics, transportation workers, white and blue collar workers, etc. and with more opportunities as the future look promising.