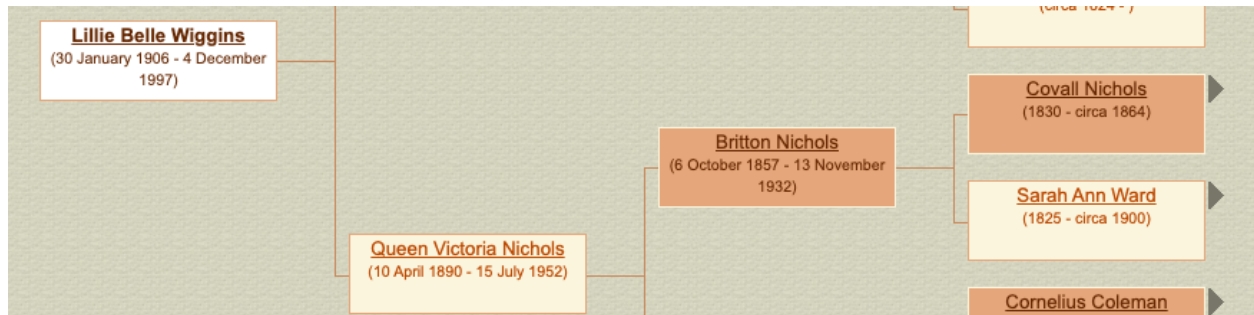


I once heard our grandmother, Lillie Belle Wiggins O'Farrell, mention that she attended the "Wardville School". A little recent curiosity about that statement led me to an unexpected discovery about our family. The Wardville School is mentioned in [this online article](#) as a predecessor to Bratt School. That seems reasonable. There are still many members of the Ward family living in Northwest Florida, so the name makes sense, too.

I also knew from my genealogy research that our ancestors include members of the Ward family. Grandmother's family history includes this branch:



<u>Sarah Ann Ward</u> b. 1825 d. c 1900	<u>Elijah W. Ward</u> b. 1779 d. c 1865
	<u>Sarah Anne (Sally) Cochran</u> b. 1799 d. b 1860

So, Grandmother's mother was Queen Victoria Nichols (How cool is that name? One of our younger cousins needs to step up and name a daughter after her.) Queen's grandparents were Covall Nichols and Sarah Ann Ward, and Sarah's father was Elijah W. Ward. That's all the information I've had on that branch of the family for a long time.

Today, my curiosity about the Wardville School led me to a document I hadn't seen before. Before we reveal the document's purpose, here are some interesting things I found there:

- The document says Elijah Ward was born in North Carolina in 1776 (instead of the 1779 I had recorded), and that he married Sarah Cochran in 1816. They had, however, lived together for a few years and had a son who was born before they were married. *Elijah and Sarah were two of my 64 great-great-great-grandparents.*
- According to the Mississippi Territory 1816 census of Monroe County (Alabama didn't become a state until 1819), they owned seven slaves. *That is the first instance of slave*

owners I have found in our family. I think most of our ancestors were much too poor to own slaves.

- The family moved to Walton County, Florida (near Milton) in 1821.
- Elijah enlisted as a private in the Florida Militia in 1837 to help fight during the Second Seminole War, and eventually received a land grant for that service and moved to Crestview. The family's slaves were often hired out to help build the railroad in northern Walton County, Florida.
- When Elijah died, his son Teen became the family leader. *Teen was my great-great-great-great grandmother's brother, and my great-great-great-great grandfather, Coval Nichols's brother-in-law.*

Here is a quote from the document:

"According to family history, after Andrew and John Ward (Teen's brothers) freed a slave they owned, Elijah's son-in-law, Coval Nichols and his family caught the slave and tortured him. Andrew and John tried to defend the slave but were hung by Coval, his father and his brother. It was decided by the family that Teen, as a member of the victim's family, would ... assume responsibility to avenge his two brothers' deaths. Teen shot and killed Coval and his father. Coval's brother (Austin Nichols) survived, although he was also shot during the altercation. Teen immediately left the area. The year was 1865. He was not prosecuted by the law. It is also stated that after the Ward's freed their remaining slaves, there was a massive riot and all of the cattle and property of the Wards was permanently destroyed. Teen, his newly widowed sister, and all members living with Teen moved back to the original homestead on the Yellow River. By 1872, Teen and his family had moved to Wardville (now Davisville) near Bratt Florida." (A small piece of the quote was omitted in order to preserve the big surprise.)

So, my great-great-great-great grandfather, Coval Nichols, and his father, my great-great-great-great-great grandfather, Samuel Nichols, hung two of Coval's brothers-in-law and were subsequently shot and killed by another.

My great-great-great-great grandmother, Sarah Ward Nichols, whose husband killed two of her brothers and was killed by a third, and who would become the grandmother of the oh-so-awesomely-named Queen Victoria, moved, along with the extended family, to Wardville, where Grandmother eventually attended school.

That is an amazing story to add to our family history, and goes a long way toward answering the questions I had about Wardville. But, that's not the end of the story. Besides this

gem of family folklore, the document contains more genealogical information that I had not seen before. Here's what it says:

"The Ward family can be traced to John Ward I, an Irish immigrant who settled in Berkley County South Carolina, during the later part of the seventeenth century. His last will and testament, recorded in 1719, named his sons Jonathan, Jona, and John II as heirs to his property rights and other goods. Thirty-nine years later, his son John Ward II, filed a will in Berkley County, dated May 17, 1758 which listed his wife, Sarah, and his children: Mary, John III, Joshua, Daniel, and Benjamin as his heirs. John Ward was also enlisted in the revolutionary army."

The document continues:

"John Ward III and his brothers raised cattle which were driven from the Virginia/Carolinas to Alabama and Louisiana by way of Columbus, Georgia. During one such crossing, John Ward III met Nancy Knight.... The Knight family lived on the banks of the Chattahoochee River near old Fort Mitchell, Alabama. After his marriage, John Ward III, his wife, and brothers continued in the cattle trade. Children of John and Nancy were listed as Tarleton, Nancy, Elijah, Moses, Patrick, Henry, Daniel, and James Benjamin." (A little more of the quote was omitted.)

So that branch of our family goes back to an Irishman who came to America in the late 1600s. John I gave us John II who gave us John III. I will say that they had excellent taste in first names. John Ward III was Elijah's father, giving us a connection back to John Ward I, my great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather. Since John I served in the revolutionary army, that should be sufficient for membership in the Sons (or Daughters) of the American Revolution (though we also have a Wiggins ancestor for that).

Now it's time to fill in the pieces I omitted from the quotes. Here's the first one:

"John Ward III and his brothers raised cattle which were driven from the Virginia/Carolinas to Alabama and Louisiana by way of Columbus, Georgia. During one such crossing, John Ward III met Nancy Knight, the daughter of Creek Indian, Jackson Knight, who was a blacksmith by trade and a Creek. The Knight family lived on the banks of the Chattahoochee River near old Fort Mitchell, Alabama."

And the next:

"It was decided by the family that Teen, as a member of the victim's family, would keep with Creek custom and assume responsibility to avenge his two brothers' deaths."

And one more:

“By 1872, Teen and his family had moved to Wardville (now Davisville) near Bratt Florida. Wardville was a small thriving community of Creeks.”

So, according to this document, Nancy Knight, who was one of my 128 great-great-great-great-great grandparents, was Creek. Based on my red hair and freckles and near-transparent complexion, our native American heritage may have been obvious to some, but it was a surprise to me. And Wardville, the community where Grandmother attended the Wardville School, was, at the time when her great grandmother moved there, a “thriving community of Creeks”.

The document containing all of this information is a partition submitted by the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians in 1995 asking the United States of America to grant them a petition for acknowledgment through the Department of the Interior. The group has since changed its name to the Muscogee Nation of Florida, and the petition is still under consideration. It contains references and citations that appear to support the genealogical information it contains, though its arguments supporting the group’s native American heritage claim are still up for debate.

You can find the [document here](#), if you’d like to read it.