

THE BENJAMIN GRAYSON MYSTERY

A large number of Grayson descendants have been able to trace their ancestry to a Grayson family that migrated from Wilkes Co., NC to various counties in Tennessee between 1790 and 1810. This soon proves to be a dead end as to date no one has been able to establish the origin of the most likely patriarch of the family, a Benjamin Grayson. It is widely believed that this Benjamin Grayson came from Virginia. The problem is that there are several Benjamin Graysons in Virginia and it is not clear which of these, if any, went to North Carolina and Tennessee where there are also multiple Benjamin Graysons. Finally, it is not certain that all of the Graysons of interest are sons of Benjamin; some may be brothers or cousins. In order to resolve this problem we have been attempting to assemble the known information about the various Benjamin Graysons in North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. The present document summarizes information we have found, much of which has not been widely known to previous researchers of this line. Unfortunately, the results remain inconclusive, though we are able to propose some new theories and clear up some of the mystery. Hopefully, future research will fully resolve the matter.

The puzzle begins in Wilkes Co., NC which was formed from Surry Co., NC in 1777. A Benjamin Grayson entered 400 acres of land adjoining Edmond Tilly in 1779 on Kings Creek on the border with Burke Co., NC. This is the first known mention of a Grayson in Wilkes Co., NC. Shortly thereafter additional Graysons appear in Wilkes Co., NC and various counties in TN. These Graysons include William, John, Benjamin Jr., Joseph, Wren, Nancy and Jesse. Later descendants can be attributed to one of these but none have been traced further back. It seems likely that some and perhaps all of these other Graysons were Benjamin's children. To begin with we have used census and poll tax records to determine the probable ages of these early NC/TN Graysons. Originally, individuals between the ages of 21 and 55 paid poll tax in TN. This law was changed in 1801 such that free males over 50 were exempted. The likely ages deduced from poll tax and census data are as follows:

Benjamin Grayson Sr. (on poll tax list 1797&99 -with 1 poll in 1797 and 0 poll in 1799 No record exists for 1798)	Born between 1742-1744
William Grayson (1850 Census, Monroe Co.,TN)	Born 1767
John Grayson- (first pd poll tax 1789 Wilkes Co., NC)	Born June 1767-June 1768
Joseph Grayson-(first pd poll tax 1794 Wilkes Co., NC)	Born June 1772-June 1773
Jessee Grayson-(first pd. poll tax 1797 Wilkes Co., NC)	Born June 1775-June 1776
Benjamin Grayson, Jr.(first on poll tax-list-1799)	Born June 1777-June 1778
Wren Grayson (1850 census- Decatur Co., IN)	Born 1782
Nancy Grayson Crouch (1850 census-IN)	Born 1782

Recently, Orvan Edmonson has located the graves of John Grayson and his wife Nancy in a Yarnall cemetery in Knox Co., TN. The marker indicates he was born on May 2, 1766. This is in decent agreement with what is argued above and therefore suggests that the other estimates are likely reasonable as well. Benjamin Grayson, Sr. is on all available Wilkes Co., TN poll tax lists from 1785 to 1798 with one poll. There is no list available for 1798 and the maximum age was changed was still 55 in 1797 (it was changed to 50 in 1801), hence the minor ambiguity in his deduced birth year. He is old enough to be the father of all the others but there is no guarantee that this is the case. William, John, Joseph and Benjamin Jr. are all closely associated with Benjamin and emerge into manhood from his household in Wilkes as one would expect if they were his sons. Letters passed down to Myna Grayson and brought to genealogical attention by the efforts of Dr. Richard R.

Grayson prove that Joseph and Wren were brothers. Further evidence for this is provided by a document brought to our attention by Donald Hooper. In this court statement relating to application for bounty land, Wren informs Justice of the Peace Joseph Merryman of Decatur Co., IN on November 2, 1850 that he gave his discharge papers to his brother Joseph Grayson. Jesse signed the 1822-23 will of Joseph and therefore they are very likely closely related as well. Given their birth dates he is most likely another brother of Joseph. Nevertheless, the age differences between William and John compared to the others is suspicious and, especially in the case of William, there is uncertainty as to his true relation to Benjamin.

In the first Wilkes Co., NC census in 1787, Benjamin is listed with 1 male 21-60, 5 males under 21 (most logically John, Joseph, Jesse, Benjamin Jr. and Wren) and 3 females (his wife, Nancy and one other). In 1790 there were 3 males over 16 (John, Joseph, Jesse !?), 2 males under 16 (Benjamin Jr. and Wren) and 2 females (Nancy and ?). Who is the missing female? Several possibilities exist. By 1800 there is 1 male over 45, 1 male 16-26 (Wren), and 1 female over 45. This record demonstrates that Benjamin's wife was likely still alive in 1800 and she is thus unlikely to be the missing female. Therefore, assuming accuracy of the records, a daughter likely either died or left the household between 1787 and 1790. If the latter, she would have been born in approximately 1770. It is usually argued that this additional daughter is the Stacy Grayson that married William Brown in Roane Co., TN in 1805, though there is no direct evidence for this.

By 1805/6 many of the Graysons had left Wilkes County, NC. Nancy's husband, John Crouch, is on the tax rolls in Scott Co., KY in 1796. Wren first appears on the Scott County tax list in 1805 and his first son, John Wren, was born there on November 2, 1805. Jesse is found on the Wilkes tax roll for 1805 and sells his land there in November of 1805. He is next found as a tithable on the 1806 tax list of Knox Co., TN. Only William was still in Wilkes Co., NC after 1806. The remaining Graysons were in Knox Co., TN or Roane Co., TN before 1800. Benjamin presents a special problem in that he appears to be in both places over an extended period of time.

A Benjamin Grayson witnessed wills for James McCarty in 1792 and Lantos McCarter in Knox Co., TN in 1793. A Benjamin Grayson is also listed for jury duty in Knox Co., TN five times during Jan., Feb., and Mar. of 1793. A Benjamin Grayson was in court 1797 with William Pruitt in Knox Co., TN. Was this the Wilkes Co., NC Benjamin? Co-incident with these Grayson entries in Knox Co., there were no Graysons on the 1792 tax list in Wilkes Co., NC. However, district 11 where Benjamin was usually found is not available for 1792 and he is on both the 1791 and 1793 tax lists. It seems certain that the Benjamin of Wilkes Co., NC stayed in Wilkes until at least 1801 and his presumed son Benjamin Jr. did not come of age until 1798. The data thus strongly suggests that there were actually three Benjamin Graysons in NC and TN in the 1790's. Who was this additional Knox Co., TN Benjamin?

A Benjamin Grayson continued to be listed on the tax list for Knox Co., TN in 1802, 1806 & 1807. He paid poll tax in 1802 & 1806 but not in 1807. This Benjamin Grayson likely did not pay poll tax in 1807 because he had reached 50 years of age. If so, he was born between June 1756 and June 1757 which distinguishes him quite clearly from the Benjamin Graysons of Wilkes Co., NC. Benjamin Sr and Jr both disappear from Wilkes records after their purchases from the Ann Wisdom estate, which were recorded in November of 1801. Beginning in 1802 a new Benjamin Grayson is found in Roane Co., TN. The last record of a Benjamin in Roane County is for membership on a jury in 1807. A similar migration to this region of TN was seen earlier for John and Joseph. Although these TN Graysons initially appear to be scattered in three counties but they are in fact possibly not far apart. The Knox Co., TN Benjamin was living next to a John Grayson who owned 200 acres on Beaver Creek in District 9 in the lower part of southwestern Knox Co., TN near Clinch River. Joseph lived on Popular Creek by 1802-1807, which ended up being in the newly formed Anderson Co., TN and he is also near Clinch River, He was the first coroner in Anderson Co., TN from 1801-1807. Although we do not know where the Roane Co., TN Benjamin lived, he was one of 37 men in Capt. James Walker's 5th District Militia Company. Captain Walker himself lived in the northeastern part of Roane Co. near Popular Creek. Earlier, a John Walker lived near the Graysons in Wilkes Co. A reconstruction of where each lived shows John and Benjamin in the southwest corner of Knox Co., TN adjoining the boundary with Anderson Co., TN where Joseph lived and the boundary with Roane where the second Benjamin lived. Since the Roane Co., TN Benjamin paid poll tax in 1805 he is likely Benjamin Jr. rather than Benjamin Sr. Benjamin Sr. may nevertheless be living with Benjamin Jr. Thus, in all probability all of these Grayson's were closely affiliated by 1805 when a Stacy Grason (a possible sister of Benjamin Jr.) and William Brown married in October of 1805 in Roane Co., TN.

From their outpost in the Knox Co., TN area, many of these Graysons apparently moved further South to Bledsoe Co., TN in 1807:

(Bledsoe Co., TN is just South of Roane Co., TN) where they were joined by brother Wren. A Benjamin, Sr., Benjamin, Jr., Joseph, Wren and another Grayson (probably Jesse- signature is partially blotched) all signed a petition to the Tennessee General Assembly dated 26 Feb. 1809 in Bledsoe Co. "This petition showed citizens who settled in the Indian boundary line before it was run and who left their improvements asking that some provision be made to restore their property when the Indian title is extinguished". Wren is known to have previously been in Scott Co., KY as he states in an January 3, 1853 affidavit relating to a Revolutionary War pension claim of the widow of Harraway Owens that "John Owen and Wren Grayson in said county, ages 69 and 72 respectively, state they were well acquainted with Harraway Owens and Elizabeth Owens his widow; they were both present in Scott Co., KY when they were married; 1802 or 1803". Later census records show that Wren stayed in Scott County until at least 1805 as his first son, John Wren Grayson, was born there. In fact, John Wren wrote a brief autobiographical sketch, which was published by the Madison Indiana Courier on February 1, 1882. Therein he states, "In 1807 when I was two years of age, my parents moved to Tennessee and settled in Bledsoe County. There I grew almost to manhood". All of Wren's remaining children were born in Tennessee (the youngest in 1824) and his name appears on the Bledsoe Co., TN 1815 tax list along with that of a Benjamin Grayson. Presumably Benjamin Sr. died between 1809 and 1815. Since most Bledsoe records were destroyed in a courthouse fire, it is not surprising there is no record of this. Nor is it certain that Jr. and Sr. on this petition are the Benjamins of Wilkes as such usage in 1800 did not always imply relationship. The third Benjamin, Benjamin of Knox Co., TN also left TN in approximately 1807. Evidence described below suggests he went to Montgomery Co., Alabama. He, nevertheless, may have stopped in Bledsoe on the way. However, given that he was on the Montgomery County tax roll in 1809, it is perhaps less likely he is on the Bledsoe petition in 1809 as well. Apparently John never went to Bledsoe as he continues to be on the Knox records in later years until his death in December of 1848. Joseph is subsequently found in Marion Co., which was formed from Bledsoe. Jesse joins him there. Wren returns to Scott County, KY in the 1820's and subsequently migrates to Indiana between 1827 and 1829.

Two of the Graysons did not go to Bledsoe Co., TN. Nancy Grayson is believed to have married John Crouch Jr. and gone to the Scott Co./Harrison Co. region of Kentucky before 1800 and apparently never left, though at least several of her children went on to Indiana and Iowa. It is possible that Wren and his wife may have traveled to Scott Co. with them. We have been unable to locate definitive evidence for this Grayson/Crouch marriage but the Crouch family historians we have encountered accept it. One of these, Laura McCoy, has provided us with a transcript of a Clinton County, Iowa biography of Richard J. Crouch in which it is stated that "Our subject's paternal grandmother was a Grayson, and came of the old Scotch stock." According to the 1828 will of John Crouch Sr., John Jr. was already deceased which is consistent with the fact that Nancy's husband apparently died in Harrison County, KY before 1820. Nancy lived past 1860.

There is likewise no evidence that William joined in the migration to Bledsoe Co., TN. He is in fact consistently in the records of Wilkes Co., NC until approximately 1821 and other younger Graysons that are in the Wilkes records during that period are presumed to be his children. William's wife Emily is shown by an 1828 will to be a daughter of John Crouch Sr. who died in Wilkes Co., NC. William is subsequently found in Monroe County, TN where he appears on the 1850 census. This document establishes that he was born in 1767 in Virginia. It should be noted that there is a William on the tax rolls of Scott Co., KY in 1794 and 1795. It therefore it is remotely possible he initially went there with his new wife (she would be too young if she was born in 1778 as Crouch researchers suggest) and was followed soon thereafter by his sister Nancy and her new husband, John Crouch Jr. If this is the case William would have returned by 1799 when he purchased 200 acres from William Johnson in Wilkes Co., NC.

What is the evidence that Benjamin of Knox Co. TN, went on to Montgomery Co., AL? The essential lead here is a marriage record of a Benjamin Grissom who is listed as having married on November 6, 1788 a Mary Privett in Greene Co., TN. In addition, Catherine Grissom married John Dotson on November 7, 1788 and a Sarah Grissom married a Robert Mansfield on October 16, 1788. These marriages were also in Greene Co., TN and this coupled with the timing suggest that Benjamin, Catherine and Sarah were siblings. Was this Benjamin actually a Grayson? This seems almost certain. A Benjamin Grayson and Mary Ann Pruitt were on the 1809 tax list in Madison Co., Ala and it has been well established by both Pruitt and Grayson researchers that this family came to Alabama from Tennessee. This Benjamin was listed on the 1810 Alabama census as having nine persons in the household-4 males less than 21, 1 male over 21, 3 females less than 21 and 1 female over 21 and 11 slaves. Two of the sons were Ambrose born 1797 in TN and John Fuller born 1798 in TN. After his 1788 marriage, this Benjamin Grayson was possibly living in Greene or Knox Co, TN. He is believed to have gone to Madison Co., AL. in 1808 with several

members of the Pruitt family including Mary Ann's father when the Indian Territory was cleared up. He died in 1820 in Madison Co., AL. His descendents are subsequently found in Marshall Co., AL. It is therefore almost certain that this is the Benjamin that was in Knox Co. TN, in 1792, 1793 & 1797 along with many Pruitts. It remains unclear if he was affiliated with the Graysons of Wilkes in any way and the TN/NC/AL data alone offers no clue as to his Virginia origins. Nor do they argue that he had a daughter named Stacy.

Although we have outlined a reasonable migration history for the various Graysons associated with Benjamin of Wilkes we are not much closer to understanding his origins. In this regard, our NC/TN research has uncovered an intriguing clue in a historical sketch of a Levi Laxton, born 1768, which was published in the Lenoir News and obtained from the Caldwell Co., N.C. library. Caldwell Co., NC now encompasses the King's Creek region of Wilkes County where Benjamin Grayson originally settled. Based on the 1790 census, Levi Laxton was a close neighbor of Benjamin and John Grayson. According to this biographical sketch, Levi entered the Revolutionary War at the age of 13. He was in the Battle of Kings Mountain where he served as a sword bearer to Col. Cleveland. After the battle, "Levi Laxton found one of his uncles, William Grayson, among the British wounded, procured a wagon, and started to bring him to his mother who lived on Kings Creek". But his uncle died on the way. If Levi was transporting William to his own mother rather than William's mother (the sentence is ambiguous as written) then this would suggest William was a brother of Levi's mother and that William's family was not nearby as otherwise he would presumably have been taken there. Levi subsequently married Nancy Tilley (likely a descendant of Edmund Tilley whose property adjoined Benjamin's) and continued to live on Kings Creek in Wilkes Co., NC. Levi's father was Thomas Laxton, Sr. Thomas was on the tax lists of Surry Co., NC in 1774. It is not known with certainty who his wife was. Laxton researchers have suggested both Jane Wilson and Sarah Grayson. It is known from later census records of Levi's children that Levi was born in South Carolina. There is at least one early Grayson lineages in South Carolina that came from Europe via the West Indies rather than Virginia. It therefore is possible that the Laxton/Grayson connection is purely fortuitous and has no relevance to the Benjamin Grayson puzzle. Nevertheless, the possibility that Levi's Uncle William was a brother or cousin to Benjamin Grayson of Wilkes must be considered. This hypothetical Uncle William might have had one or more children, e.g. especially a William, that were subsequently raised by Benjamin. Wilkes County Orphans' Bond records exist for the period 1778-1801 and no such entry is found. We had for some time suspected that Ananias Allen was in some way related to Jesse Grayson as he appears as a witness on Jesse's 1796 land purchase. We recently learned that Ananias was married to Elizabeth Laxton, a sister of Levi Laxton.

Another possibility is that Joseph Grayson of Rutherford Co., NC and Benjamin Grayson of Wilkes Co., NC may have been brothers. Joseph, who was born in approximately 1754, entered 100 acres of land in Burke Co., NC on the Little Broad River on December 31, 1778. This land was issued on October 28, 1782. Benjamin entered his land grant on Kings Creek in 1779, which was, then on the border between Wilkes Co., NC and Burke Co., NC. These two properties are approximately sixty miles apart. However, it has previously been overlooked that in March of 1779 a Benjamin Grason purchased 100 acres on Lower Creek next to Sam Allen (a possible relative of Arantias Allen of Kings Creek!?) In Burke Co., NC. This property is much nearer Joseph's property. Joseph's descendants also believe he was from Virginia. His children were Benjamin, Joseph, Susanah, Issac and William. In addition, he also apparently had a sister (or daughter?), Elizabeth, who married William Franklin Whitesides, son of Davis Whitesides of Goochland Co., VA. The name Benjamin is prominent in Joseph's line and as in the Wilkes line the name Ambrose is never seen. The occurrence of the name Joseph in both lines is rather unique as the earliest known Joseph in Virginia was born in 1784. The similarity of names and the proximity of arrival in both time and location argue strongly for kinship between Joseph of Rutherford Co., NC and Benjamin of Wilkes Co., NC.

Since it is generally believed that the NC/TN Graysons originated in Virginia, we have therefore extended our research to Virginia in the hopes of finding the Benjamin Grayson that moved to North Carolina. In fact, at least seven Benjamin Grayson's lived in and left records in Virginia prior to the 1780's. Of these, all but two have been adequately researched and can be excluded from consideration here. The two of relevance are a Benjamin Grayson who was the son of Ambrose Grayson and Alice James (nee Sharpe) and Benjamin, the son of Stacy Ellzey Grayson. According to the minutes of the Vestry of Pohick church Stacy was born in 1734. What we know about Stacy after that comes almost exclusively from the very long and detailed October 1, 1786 will of her father, Lewis Ellzey. (Fairfax Co., VA, will book E).

Lewis Ellzey states in his will that his daughter Stacy Grayson had received what was intended to be her part of his estate when she married Burgess Berkeley. Burgess died before May 20, 1755 when the administration of his estate was granted to Statia. In 1762 an entry in

the Loudin Co., VA Clerk's fee book mentions "Benjamin Grayson and Stacy his wife Admrs. of Berkley". According to the Ellzey will, Benjamin was squandering Stacy's inheritance and Lewis had asked Benjamin Grayson, Gentleman (brother of Ambrose) and Charles Tyler to provide counter security for the estate. Both died, and no security was provided to Stacy as her husband, Benjamin Grayson, continued to go thru her assets and abandoned her sometime after 1762. Lewis Ellzey therefore makes detailed provisions to provide Stacy with a new inheritance, which will be hers even if her husband should return. Three Benjamin Graysons are mentioned in Lewis Ellzey's will, Benjamin Grayson, Gentleman who provided security, Benjamin Grayson, husband of Stacy, and their son Benjamin likely born between 1755 and 1762. It is well known that Benjamin Grayson, Gentleman died in 1757 and had a son Benjamin Grayson jr. (1731-1763) who married Elizabeth Osborne. They in turn had a son Benjamin Grayson III born ca 1758 who married Ann Bronough. None of these Benjamins went on to live in NC or TN.

Important information can be deduced about these Benjamin Graysons by monitoring the extant lists of Tithables for Loudin Co, VA from 1758-1786. In 1749 a Ben Grayson quarter (meaning he is not resident) is on the 1749 Fairfax County list of tithables (part of Fairfax became Loudin) with an indication he is actually a resident of Prince William Co., VA. This is Benjamin Grayson Gentleman. In the 1758 and 1759 listings, an entry for Benjamin Grayson Gentleman dec'd is found with 10 Negroes. This is consistent with his known death in 1757. This group of tithables can be followed through the Loudin Co., VA records. Benjamin Grayson "jr" son of Benjamin Grayson Gentleman inherits a portion of the estate by 1760, dies before 1768, the estate is inherited by his wife Elizabeth and held by her to at least 1772. In 1778 the estate is listed as "Benjamin Grayson's orphans" with Negroes Peter, Davy, Prince, Dinah and Pegg as Elizabeth has apparently died. The 1780 records show for the first time Benjamin Grayson III who is now apparently of tithable age (16 years old) and living with John Orr (husband of Benjamin Grayson "jr." sister, Susan Monroe Grayson). The entry for Benjamin Grayson's tithes reappears in 1782 with Negroes David, Prime, Dinah and Pegg.- clearly the same property now occupied by Benjamin Grayson III. Benjamin Grayson Jr. cannot be the Benjamin Grayson that married Stacy Ellzey because (1) he was married to Elizabeth Osborn during the 1760's and (2) he was deceased at the time Lewis Ellzey wrote his will and hence there could have been no concern about his possible return.

In contrast to the continued ownership of property in Loudin Co., VA by Benjamin Grayson Gentleman's line, there is briefly a second Benjamin Grayson in Loudin Co., VA. He first appears in 1760 on Fielding Turner's list with a Thomas Hayes and Negroes Lennon and Hannah. The data is very incomplete for 1758 and 1759, so his absence in those years is uninformative. The entry on Joseph Hamilton's 1761 list and James Lane's 1762 list is for Benjamin Grayson and Reubin Grayson with Negroes Lannon and Hannah. We believe this Benjamin was the actual husband of Stacy Ellzey. That he was the son of Ambrose of Spotsylvania Co., VA is deduced by the presence of Reubin who was the youngest son of Ambrose who was born in 1743. He would thus have just turned 16 in 1760 when he first appears. Other than Ambrose's son, no other Reubin Grayson has been found in early Virginia records. That Benjamin and Reubin are sons of Ambrose would also likely explain Benjamin Grayson Gentleman being asked to give security. Benjamin Grayson Gentleman was Ambrose's brother and both Ambrose and Ambrose Jr. died before 1755. Where and when did Benjamin Grayson son of Ambrose and husband of Stacy Ellzey go? An enticing hint is given by the Loudin County's Clerk Fee book for 1764 and 1765 where in each case a single entry for "James Mills Assee of Benja. Grayson of Essex" is found. We have not found any evidence of a Benjamin Grayson in the limited Essex Co., VA records of this period that are available to us. The "1787 Census of Virginia" lists three Benjamin Graysons, 2 in Loudin Co., VA (presumably Benjamin Grayson son of Stacy Ellzey and Benjamin Grayson III son of Benjamin Grayson Jr.) and one in Mercer Co., VA (now KY). Although the subsequent whereabouts of Ambrose's Benjamin remains unknown, it is unlikely he was the Benjamin Grayson of Wilkes Co., NC or Knox Co., TN as his birth date, 1733, is not consistent with the tax roll data for these counties.

Because of Stacy's misfortune, Lewis Ellzey left a new estate to her in his will of October 1, 1785. Shortly thereafter, Stacy's health apparently declined as Lewis added an amendment to his will on October 1, 1786 which clarified that Stacy's share was for as long as she lived and thence to be divided between "her four youngest children (not youngest Grayson children as some have reported) namely Benjamin Grayson, Susanna Grayson, Sarah Grayson and Anne Grayson". Benjamin Grayson, son of Ambrose & Alice James nee Sharp may have married Stacy Ellzey as early as 1755. They apparently lived with her until at least 1762 when they are listed together on the court record relating to the Burgess Berkeley estate, having at least four children, one being another Benjamin. By 1764, Stacy's husband, Benjamin son of Ambrose, was likely in Essex Co., VA.

This statement also implies Stacy had at least one child by Burgess Berkeley but an alternative explanation is that there may have been an older Grayson child that was already taken care of. Suggesting this is an uncertain, but clearly special, connection between Thomazin Ellzey (son of Lewis) and an Ambrose Grayson of uncertain parentage. Perhaps this Ambrose was unofficially “adopted” by Thomazin after the departure of Ambrose’s father. This Ambrose named a son Thomazin Ellzey Grayson and his wife received an inheritance from Thomazin after Ambrose’s death. Most of Ambrose’s records are in Hampshire Co., VA (now West Virginia) where he died. Later census records show that William, grandson of this Ambrose, was born in North Carolina in 1803. Following the death of Lewis Ellzey, beginning with Benjamin in July of 1788 each of Stacy’s four Grayson children disposed of their share of the Lewis Ellzey estate. Since the children had already inherited by 1788 one must infer that Stacy died either shortly before or after Lewis Ellzey, e.g. in approximately 1787. She can therefore not be the Stacy Grason that married a William Brown in Roane Co., TN in 1805.

What does seem reasonable is that following his sale of the inheritance (witnessed by Ambrose) to Marmaduck Brokenburrow Beckwith, Benjamin may have left VA (there is in fact no further record of him there) and moved to TN where he would then be the Benjamin “Grissom” that married Mary Privett in Greene Co., TN in November of 1788. Their first child might then have been named Stacy, after his recently deceased mother, which would make her approximately 16 when she married in 1805. Other researchers have speculated that Stacy is the “missing” daughter of Benjamin of Wilkes but the year of the marriage is not consistent with her departure from the Wilkes household. In any event, Benjamin and Mary were apparently living next to John Grayson in Knox Co., NC from 1802-1807. The poll tax data suggests this Benjamin was born between 1757-1758, which is entirely consistent with the likely date of birth deduced from the VA history (1755-1762). We have thus amassed considerable evidence that it is Benjamin, son of Stacy Ellzey, that is our mystery Knox Benjamin who moved to Montgomery Co., AL between 1807 and 1809. Does this outline fit all the facts? Unfortunately it may not. If Stacy’s Benjamin and Benjamin Grissom are the same person then it is unlikely that Catherine and Sarah Grissom could be his sisters. The marriage records of Stacy’s three known daughters by Benjamin Grayson are well established by the land transactions wherein they liquidate their shares of the Ellzey inheritance in VA. They were not in TN. It is remotely possible, that the other two “Grissoms” were nevertheless half sisters, e.g. actually daughters of Burgess Berkley or daughters of Benjamin by an earlier marriage. Alternatively, perhaps Benjamin was erroneously recorded as a Grissom because of the existence of a Grissom family in Greene Co., NC. Perhaps the name was simply erroneously recorded in the abstracts (we have not seen copies of the original marriage records).

Who then is Benjamin of Wilkes? One hypothesis is that he is the son of Ambrose and husband of Stacy Ellzey. In this view, Stacy’s son perhaps went to TN to reunite with his half brothers following her death. This would explain the proximity of the Benjamin in Knox County, TN to John, Joseph and Benjamin Jr. It should be noted, however, that although we have proximity there is no documented record of association such as witnessing transactions for one another etc. and the Knox Benjamin seems to have gone his separate way in the 1807-1809-time period, e.g. his movements are with the Pruitts not the Graysons. More importantly, the dates of likely birth of the Wilkes Benjamin and Ambrose’s Benjamin simply do not match and the complete absence of the name Ambrose from the line argues against this as well. Finally, it seems unlikely that if Benjamin had started a second family that he would name another child Benjamin.

Clearly a better hypothesis is that Benjamin Grayson of Wilkes is simply not one of the known Virginia Benjamin Graysons. There are certainly several lines stemming from Ambrose that could account for an additional Benjamin, e.g. none of the children of Thomas have been identified with certainty. The Douglas Register records Goochland Parish Va. marriages between James Grayson and Mary Christian in 1770 as well as a marriage between Sarah Grayson and Benjamin Ainsley in 1769. The Register also lists a 1756 baptismal record for a Thomas Grayson with parents James Grayson and Elizabeth Williams. None of these individuals are in established genealogies of Virginia Grayson’s and they may be relatives of Benjamin of Wilkes and/or Joseph of Rutherford. At the least, their presence demonstrates that much remains unknown about early Grayson genealogy in Virginia. The Levi Laxton account suggests that he may have come to North Carolina with an older brother named William. Perhaps a more promising inference is that Joseph of Rutherford Co., NC, Benjamin and possibly William were brothers who all came to North Carolina together. The absence of the Ambrose name from both lines perhaps argues for descent from a John or William rather than an Ambrose or Reuben.

This is in fact an important component of a popular hypothesis that was originally put forward By Capt. Edward R. Dittmer, USN in the Wilkes Co., NC heritage book. He argues that Benjamin may have been born in Orange Co., to either John Grayson, the eldest son of

Ambrose, or alternatively, John's brother William. This John was married in about 1745, and is known to have had two sons before 1748. He died in early 1755 and consistent with the dates developed here, possibly had additional children, e.g. Benjamin in 1749 or 1750 and Joseph of Rutherford Co., NC in 1754. According to Capt. Dittmer, John's brother William also was likely living in Orange Co., VA during this period. At this point we don't believe there is convincing evidence either for or against the Dittmer hypothesis.

In the end, considerable progress has been made in sorting out the early Grayson records of Wilkes Co., NC and east TN. We have established a migration pattern consistent with essentially all the facts. We have provided a probable identification for the previously mysterious Benjamin Grayson found in Knox Co., TN in the 1790's and early 1800's and have succeeded in tracing his ancestry to Ambrose of Spotsylvania Co., VA. The origin of Benjamin Grayson of Wilkes Co., NC nevertheless remains uncertain.

This manuscript was prepared from joint research and discussion by James Grayson , 312 Seven Oaks Trail, Knoxville, TN (McCainBJ@cs.com) and George E. Fox, 3802 Holder Forest Drive, Houston, TX. 77088 (fox@uh.edu) . Interested parties may address questions or comments to either of these parties. The version of the manuscript presented here (5.1) was prepared on October 20, 1999 as a revision of an earlier December 1998 document and includes minor corrections including some made at the advice of Virginia Redden on June 23, 2000. A change relating to Benjamin's birth date was made on 2/20/2001.