

FROM THE UC TO D.C.

ANCESTOR OF PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA BURIED IN COOKEVILLE FAMILY CEMETERY

[Elizabeth Ayres](#)

Herald-Citizen Staff, Cookeville, TN
Sunday, Feb 22, 2009



Genealogy points that **Obediah C. Wright**, who is buried in Phillips Cemetery here in Putnam County, is a **distant ancestor to President Barack Obama**. Herald-Citizen Photo/Camille Fliss-Mayberry

COOKEVILLE — A tree grows in Overton County — a family tree, that is — with branches that reach all the way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Several **ancestors of President Barack Obama, on his mother's side, have connections to Overton County, with more than one buried just north of Cookeville.**

Lewis Matheney, formerly of Cookeville and currently of New York City and Chicago, has family members in Tennessee who are unofficial family historians who can break down their family's connection with the 44th President of the United States. Several of their ancestors are buried in Phillips Cemetery just north of Cookeville, including **Obediah C. Wright, who is Obama's great-great-great-great-grandfather. Wright had eight children, and his only daughter, Obama's great-great-great-aunt, is buried in the cemetery as well, along with her son.**

The family tree grows as such:

- **Obediah C. Wright** (May 9, 1787-March 3, 1876) married **Malinda Jones** (died before 1850). The pair had eight children, a daughter and seven sons, one being Joseph Samuel Wright (1819-April 29, 1894), an Overton County farmer.
- **Joseph Samuel Wright** married **Frances Allred** (1834-after 1880). The two had Margaret Belle Wright (Aug. 11, 1869-Nov. 28, 1935).
- **Margaret Belle Wright** married **Thomas Creekmore McCurry** (Jan. 1850-1939), and the two had Leona McCurry (May 1897-after 1930).
- **Leona McCurry** married **Rolla Charles Payne** (Aug. 23, 1892-Oct. 1968), and the pair had Madelyn Lee Payne (Oct. 1922-Nov. 2, 2008).
- **Madelyn Lee Payne** married **Stanley Armour Dunham** (Mar. 3, 1918-Feb. 8, 1992). Together they had a daughter, Stanley Ann Dunham (Nov. 29, 1942-Nov. 7, 1995), named after her father. (Madelyn, better known as "Toot" by her grandson, and her husband raised Barack Obama in Hawaii during his teenage years while his mother worked abroad.)
- **Stanley Ann Dunham** married **Barack Hussein Obama Sr.** (1936-1982), a Kenyan government official, in 1960, and together they had **Barack Hussein Obama** (b. Aug. 4, 1961), **who currently serves as the President of the United States.**

Another Overton County connection: **Sarah Wade Ray** (1793-1874), who was born in Overton County, married **Nathaniel Bunch** (April 23, 1793-Feb. 16, 1859) on Nov. 15, 1810, in Overton County. The two had a daughter, **Anna Bunch** (March 27, 1814-June 21, 1893), who married **Samuel Thompson Allred** (Oct. 6, 1809-Nov. 4, 1857) and produced **Frances Allred** (1834-after 1880). Allred was married to **Joseph Samuel Wright, which connects the Wright family with the Ray, Bunch and Allred families.** Sarah and Nathaniel Bunch, President Obama's great-great-great-great-great-grandparents, also had a son who served the Confederacy as a captain for the Arkansas Infantry during the Civil War.

In addition to the Overton County connection, Barack Obama's family lineage is spread throughout Kentucky, Arkansas, Ohio, Kansas and Missouri. An Internet link which graphs Barack Obama's family lineage may be found at [www.suntimes.com/ images/cds/special/family_tree. html](http://www.suntimes.com/images/cds/special/family_tree.html).

Lewis Matheney's family is distantly related to the president by way of **Obediah C. Wright's** only daughter, **Arminda Wright**.

"Obediah Wright would be my grandmother's grandfather, or my great-great-great-grandfather. With Obama, it's four 'greats,'" he said. "Jane Anna (Phillips) Vailes, my cousin and our unofficial family genealogist who lives in LaVergne, wrote a letter to President Obama letting him know that he had an ancestor buried in our family cemetery in Tennessee, and he wrote her a nice letter back," he said.

Matheney is very proud of his lineage, not only for the fact that he is distantly related to the president.

"I live in New York City and Chicago mostly, but I grew up in Cookeville where my father and many of my relatives still live," he said. "My grandparents, **Jarvis Matheney** and **Susie Phillips Matheney**, are both buried at Phillips Cemetery, which is our family cemetery — my grandmother's maiden name. My grandfather was once one of only two mail carriers for the entire city of Cookeville. He was also the sole mail carrier for Dixie College/TPI, now TTU.

"The property just to the right of the cemetery as you drive to it on Phillips Cemetery Road was at one time the property where my grandmother and all her family lived. The buildings which stood on it were burned to the ground by an arsonist during the bicentennial summer of 1976, at which point the property was sold and moved outside of the family's ownership. The cemetery is all that remains of 'the old Phillips home place,' as it was once called."

<http://www.ajalmbert.com>

Source: Putnam County Tennessee Cemeteries by Maurine Ensor Patton, pg. 389
PHILLIPS CEMETERY, Putnam Co., TN located on Phillips Road, turn right just after you cross Hwy 111.

Obadih Wright, b. 9 May 1787, NC – d. 1 March 1876, Putnam Co., TN
(*Obediah C. Wright, h/o Lavonia Malinda Jones, died before 1850*)

1850 census Bledsoe Co., TN

Dwl: 216

Obediah Right 63 M W Farmer NC

Lenuna Right 59 F W SC

Aminda Right 20 F W TN

1860 census Bledsoe Co., TN

Dwl: 430 Family: 430

Josh Smith 32 M W Farmer VA

Arminda Smith 29 F W TN

James Smith 4 M W TN

John Smith 2 M W TN

Martha A. Smith 5/12 F W TN

Obediah Wright 73 M W NC

1870 census, Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 56

Arminta Smith 40 F W Keeping House TN

James Smith 14 M W TN

John Smith 12 M W TN

Martha Smith 10 F W TN

Obediah Right 83 M W NC

***John J. Wright**, b. 29 January 1822, Bledsoe Co., TN – d. 28 January 1898

(*John Joiner Wright, s/o Obediah Wright & Lavonia Malinda Jones*)

***Matilda (Price) Wright**, b. 29 October 1823, TN – d. 24 September 1897

Census Place: 1880 District 15, Putnam Co., Tennessee

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 131B

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
John WRIGHT	Self	M	M	M	W 58	TN
	Occ:	Farming	Fa: NC	Mo: TN		
Matilda WRIGHT	Wife	F	M	M	W 56	TN
	Occ:	Keeping House	Fa: ---	Mo: ---		
Joseph WRIGHT	Son	M	S	M	W 23	TN
	Occ:	At School	Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Jessee WRIGHT	Son	M	S	M	W 22	TN
	Occ:	Not At Home	Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
James WRIGHT	Son	M	S	M	W 17	TN
	Occ:	Farming	Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Dock WRIGHT	Son	M	S	M	W 15	TN
	Occ:	Farming	Fa: TN	Mo: TN		

Amanda H. (Wright) Smith, b. 8 August 1830, Bledsoe Co., TN – d. 8 August 1894
(*Arminda/Amanda Harriet Wright md Josh “Joseph” Smith in Bledsoe Co. TN. He was born ca. 1828, VA and died unknown in GA. Amanda is the d/o Obediah C. Wright & Lavonia Malinda Jones*)

Jesse Phillips, b. abt. 1780 – d. in 1860s (Came to TN 1830)

***John Phillips**, b. 18 July 1812, NC – d. 10 January 1888

***Irene (Burroughs) Phillips**, b. 27 January 1812, NC – d. 22 March 1904

Census Place: 1880 District 15, Putnam Co., Tennessee

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 131B

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
John PHILLIPS	Self	M	M	M	W 68	NC
	Occ:	Farming	Fa: NC	Mo: NC		
Irena PHILLIPS	Wife	F	M	M	W 68	NC
	Occ:	Keeping House	Fa: NC	Mo: NC		

***John Benjamin Phillips**, b. 1 March 1850, TN – d. 27 January 1936, Putnam Co., TN, s/o
John Phillips & Irene Burroughs. (*John Benjamin Phillips DC #1717, Putnam Co., TN*).

***Martha Ann (Smith) Phillips**, b. 6 January 1860, Bledsoe Co., TN – d. 6 January 1926, Putnam Co., TN
(*Martha Ann Smith, d/o Josh “Joseph” Smith & Arminda/Amanda Harriet Wright*)

Census Place: 1880 District 15, Putnam Co., Tennessee

Source: FHL Film 1255275 National Archives Film T9-1275 Page 131A

	Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
Benjamin PHILLIPS	Self	M	M	M	W 30	TN
	Occ:	Farming	Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Martha A. PHILLIPS	Wife	F	M	M	W 20	TN
	Occ:	Keeping House	Fa: TN	Mo: TN		
Florence PHILLIPS	Dau	F	S	M	W 1	TN
			Fa: TN	Mo: TN		

Ridley Marvin Phillips, b. 13 August 1881, TN – d. 12 November 1905, h/o Lillie May King
(*Ridley Marvin Phillips, s/o John Benjamin Phillips & Martha Ann Smith*)

Beulah Phillips, b. 25 May 1896, TN – d. 20 May 1981
(*Beulah Phillips, d/o John Benjamin Phillips & Martha Ann Smith*)

***Henry Lonnie Phillips**, b. 20 October 1884, TN – d. 20 November 1971

(Henry Lonnie Phillips, s/o John Benjamin Phillips & Martha Ann Smith)
***Bertie "Bernice" (Matheny) Phillips**, b. 6 August 1881 – d. 5 July 1957

***Harvey Edgar Phillips**, b. 17 October 1887, TN – d. 4 May 1969
(Harvey Edgar Phillips md 1st Ovella Ruth Ford – md 2nd Minnie Love McCawley)
***Minnie Love (McCawley) Phillips**, b. 26 December 1891 – d. 13 July 1918, Putnam Co., TN,
d/o J. P. McCawley & Mary Hix) (Minnie (McCawley Phillips, DC #536, Putnam Co., TN
***Ovella Ruth (Ford) Phillips**, b. 9 May 1899 – d. 5 December 1984

Ridley Bedford Phillips, b. 20 May 1918 – d. 14 June 1918, Putnam Co., TN,
s/o Edgar Phillips & Minnie McCawley. (Ridley Bedford Phillips, DC #524, Putnam Co., TN)

1900 census 15th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 94

Benjamin Phillips Head 50 M W b. March 1850 (25 yrs. md) Farmer TN NC NC
Martha A. Phillips Wife 40 F W b. January 1860 (25 yrs. md) (8 children born, 8 children living) TN TN TN
Florence Phillips Dau 21 F W b. December 1878 Single TN TN TN
Ridley M. Phillips Son 18 M W b. August 1881 Single TN TN TN
Lonna H. Phillips Son 15 M W b. October 1884 Single TN TN TN
Edgar H. Phillips Son 12 M W b. October 1887 Single TN TN TN
Susie Phillips Dau 10 F W b. March 1890 Single TN TN TN
Bird W. Phillips Son 7 M W b. May 1893 Single TN TN TN
Beulah Phillips Dau 4 F W b. May 1896 Single TN TN TN
Burney L. Phillips Dau 1 F W b. December 1898 Single TN TN TN
Anna Phillips Mother 88 F W b. January 1812 Widow (8 children born, 8 children living) NC CT NC

1910 census 15th Civil Dist., Algood Rd., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 32

Benjamin Phillips Head 60 M W Married (35 yrs. md) Farmer General Farm TN NC NC
Martha A. Phillips Wife 50 F W Married (35 yrs. md) (9 children born, 8 children living) TN TN TN
Lonnie A. Phillips Son 25 M W Single Farmer General Farm TN TN TN
Edgar H. Phillips Son 22 M W Single Farmer General Farm TN TN TN
Susie Phillips Dau 20 F W Single TN TN TN
Byrd W. Phillips Son 17 M W Single TN TN TN
Bulah Phillips Dau 13 F W Single TN TN TN
Byrnie L. Phillips Dau 11 F W Single TN TN TN
Fred E. Phillips Son 8 M W Single TN TN TN

1920 census 15th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 170 Family: 181

Benjamin Phillips Head 69 M W Farmer TN NC NC
Martha A. Phillips Wife 60 F W TN VA TN
Bernie Phillips Dau 21 Single Teacher Rural School TN TN TN
Fred Phillips Son 17 Single Farm Laborer House Farm TN TN TN

1930 census 15th Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN

Dwl: 112 Family: 112

John B. Phillips Head Widow (24 yrs. old 1st marriage) (sic) TN TN TN

Children of Obediah C Wright and Malinda Jones

[James M Wright](#)+ b. c 1812, d. b 1900

[Pleasant Wright](#)+ b. 21 Jan 1813, d. b 1890

[Joseph Samuel Wright](#)+ b. c 1819, d. 29 Apr 1894

[John Joiner Wright](#)+ b. c 1822

[Arminda Wright](#)+ b. c 1830

<http://www.ajlambert.com>