

## PIONEER CRONK FAMILY (#390)

**Source:** Heritage of Putnam County Tennessee – 2008 by Putnam County Heritage Book Committee and County Heritage Inc.

Pgs. 124-125: The first Cronk family of Putnam can be traced back to 1826 with the birth of William Alexander Cronk in Tennessee. There is a growing body of circumstantial evidence that William's parents were in Tennessee for a substantial amount of time before he was born.

While Cronk (with an "o") is the least common spelling of the Crank, Cronk, Crunk trilogy, the spellings were frequently interchanged throughout early Tennessee history. The earliest accounts document Richard and William Crunk in Robertson County in the 1790's with a Crunk community established between Nashville and Springfield. Between 1790 and 1820 there were an increasing number of Crank, Cronk and Crunks from Virginia and North Carolina in Robertson, Lincoln, Marshall, Smith, Sumner and Williamson counties. Many of these families are interrelated but we have not yet been able to link William to any of them.

Going forward from 1820 and geographically closer to **William A. Cronk's** homestead, we find a small number of "Cronks" in Smith, White, and Jackson counties including a William (born before 1776) Jacob, Isaac, Sally, and George W. In 1830, **Elizabeth Reaves (Cronk) Barr** died in White County. "There is also a **Melvina Cronk** (1819-1854) buried in the Roberts Cemetery at Hickey. We speculate that since **William Alexander married a Roberts, and had a daughter named Melvina**, there is some connection.

Although we know **William** was born in 1826, the first time, we know any details of his life is on May 19, 1845 when he married **Malissa B. Roberts**, born about 1830, the daughter of **Joseph Roberts** (1797-1854) and **Rachel (Smith) Roberts** (1797-1842). They were wed in the home of **Snodon Maddux**, a Justice of the Peace in Smith County. **John Wesley Lee** and Malissa's sister **Violet Roberts** witnessed the marriage. John and Violet married a few years later.

We find William and Malissa in the 1850 census of Jackson County along with two sons **Joseph S. Cronk** was born abt 1848 and died on 28 October 1873. He married Mary Maynard (sic). Their only child, **Laura (Cronk) LaFever**, was born October 22, 1873. Joseph died six days later. **George W. Cronk** was born on 27 November 1849. We know little of George other than he appeared in the 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 censuses, living with Malissa.

The decade of the 1850s was a period of significant events for William and Malissa. **Melvina Cronk was born 23 September 1850 and died about 1892**. Strangely, she appears in no census but is listed in Malissa's pension application in 1880. She had seven children. **Mary M. Cronk was born on 3 July 1852 and died after the census of 23 June 1880**. We know little of Mary, other than she appears in three censuses with Malissa.

On December 13, 1854, Malissa bought the rights to her sister's portion of Joseph Robert's estate. According to a deed recorded that day: *I Sarah (Roberts) Lee...have this day bargained and sold...to Melissa Cronk...for the consideration of one hundred and fifteen dollars...all my right title and claim in all Joseph Roberts land estate it being about one thousand acres by estimation...*. (Malissa's father Joseph died 1 April 1854).

Following the land acquisition there were more children. **Nella Jane Cronk** was born on 3 July 1856. She married McDonald "Pink" Wallace and had eleven children with him. She died 12 March 1924 and is buried in the Wallace-Anderson Cemetery near Silver Point. We know little of the next three children. **Millard F. Cronk** was born on 29 December 1857 and died after the census of 23 June 1880. He was cited on three censuses. **William A. Cronk** was born about July 1859 and died August 1859 of cholera. **Sarah M. Cronk** was born on 28 March 1860 and died after the 23 June 1880 census.

The youngest child, **Violet Louella Cronk**, was born on New Years Day 1863. She was only 10 months old when her father was killed during the Civil War. She married **Jack Rodgers** on 1 September 1881. They had at least eight children. Violet died 11 April 1936.

As with most families in the Upper Cumberland, the Civil War brought heartache and tragedy. In 1863, **Captain F. M. Anderson** was recruiting for the Union Army in Putnam County, a dangerous thing to be doing since Putnam was in the control of rebel "guerilla" or from a few men to a couple hundred. Capt. Anderson was persuasive. William decided to join, along with Malissa's younger brother, **Joseph Denton Roberts** and her brother-in-law, **John W. Lee**. On October 8, they gathered their "...best in the way of guns we could get and started for Nashville to be mustered in to the service." to join Company C, 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment, Tennessee Mounted Infantry, Volunteers. Even though they tried to..."keep secluded, our movements were carefully noticed by the enemy...directly after we started those guerillas waylaid (sic) us on the road...fired into us,...we gave them the best fight we could for a time but finding ourselves out numbered by men and every advantage we had to take care of ourselves the best we could having no ammunition we could do but little but during the fight **William Cronk was captured by the enemy and inhumanly slaughtered he was shot six or eight times killed dead upon the spot.**" (March 10, 1870). Joseph W. Lee & Joseph D. Roberts. Sworn to and subscribed to before me the day and date above mentioned and I certify I have no interest in this claim. Witness JM Hollis C & M of DeKalb Chancery Court) Joseph Roberts and John Lee eventually made it to a mustering point and enlisted.

By the end of 1863, both of Malissa's parents and her husband, William, were deceased. She found herself with the responsibility of protecting and providing for eight children who ranged in age from infancy to 15 years old. Compounding her problems was the fact that the war was still raging. The area was virtually lawless. Bushwhackers from both sides fought each other and pillaged farms and homes for valuables, animals, food and crops throughout the remainder of the war and for years afterwards. Yet the family survived.

On 23 July 1870, Joseph, George, Mary, Nella, Millard, Sarah and Violet appear in the Putnam County census living at home with Malissa. (Melvina does not appear). Two weeks later, Malissa retained **Charles Tucker** as her attorney in Washington D. C. and S. H. Smith as her agent in her home town of Laurel Hill to prosecute a Union pension application for \$25 to be paid upon successful completion. Only the four younger children appear on this application. The application was denied because William was killed before his name could appear on a muster roll.

On June 14, 1880, living in Pine Fork, Malissa again filed with S. H. Smith her agent after the pension laws were modified. She listed (George) Wash, Melvina, Millard, Sarah and Violet as living "with mother" and Mary J. (sic) living in "Putnam County". Only six days later, the 1880 census shows George (Washington), Mary M., Millard, Sarah and Violet in the same household with Malissa. Melvina is not listed. Nella Jane is married to Pink Wallace and is listed in that household. In December of that year, Malissa's second application for a pension was denied.

**About 1892, Melvina died, apparently leaving all seven of her children with Malissa**, who was 62 years old at the time. By 1900, eight of Melvina's brothers and sisters have died as well. The remaining three are no longer living with Malissa. In the 1900 census, at age 70, Malissa is a widow living in the 13<sup>th</sup> Civil District, still caring for four of Melvina's seven children: Joe Fred (19), Lou E. (16), Thomas aka Tinker (14), and Martilla aka Tillie (11). Richard (23) and Mary Alice (Cronk) Kinnaird (22) are married and gone. The remaining four all marry in swift succession between late 1906 and early 1908. Like her mother Melvina, a generation earlier, **Vada aka Vadie** (13) isn't mentioned and doesn't appear in any records until we discover her in her marriage to **Jessie Davis** in 1908. (her sister **Tillie** married Jesse's brother **Henry P. Davis** in 1907).

The last record we have of Malissa (Roberts) Cronk involves the sale of a small piece of land for \$61.50 in the 13<sup>th</sup> Civil District to C. M. Wallace on December 31, 1906. No grave has been found.

While **Malissa (Roberts) Cronk** disappears from the records on New Years Eve 1906, her "second family" thrives over the next 100 years. She passed down her perseverance and unconditional dedication to

family. Focusing only on Melvina's seven children, we find well over 50 great grandchildren. One of whom, **Archie Cronk** (son of **Joseph Fred Cronk** who was with Malissa in 1900), just celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in Dayton, Tennessee. Joining the celebration was Archie's cousin, Everett Davis of Cookeville (son of Tillie who was also with Malissa in 1900). Both great-grandsons are very religious. Both, in the spirit of Malissa, actively share their love of family and the word of God with those who follow.

**Post Script: There is evidence to suggest that Mary M. Cronk and Melvina Croak (1850-1892) are sisters. There is also evidence to suggest they are the same person.**

*Submitted by: Joyce (Stewart) Joseph Great great granddaughter of William Alexander and Malissa (Roberts) Crook, 1830 Long Pointe Drive, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302-0741; Compiled by: Joyce and Jim Joseph, 1830 Long Pointe Drive, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302-0741.*

<http://www.ajlambert.com>