

## **GROSSES PRECEDED STATEHOOD: SEVERAL REMAIN ACTIVE IN AREA**

Pioneer Families  
by John Wilson  
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Members of the Jacob Gross family were pioneer settlers at Birchwood, and Jacob lived to be well over 100 years old. Several of his sons chose the Union side in the Civil War, and the youngest was killed in the *Sultana* steamboat disaster.

The Grosses were originally in Virginia, but they were among the early settlers of the future Tennessee. William Gross in 1788 paid Archibald Fisher "130 pounds cash" for 300 acres in Hawkins County. William died in 1827, leaving a wife, Nancy, and children Catherine Murphy, Mary, James, William Jr., Cornelius and Sally Gilliam. A son, John, had died earlier. The grandchildren included Lewis and Margaret, who made their way to Hamilton County. Margaret married John Roark.

Jacob was born in Tennessee just before it became a state and made his way to Washington in Rhea County by 1820 along with George Gross Sr., who was born in the 1770s. He and Jacob were on a jury in August 1821 that heard petit larceny charges against Dempsey Hillburn. George Gross Sr. in 1831 contributed \$1 in trade toward building the Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington.

George Gross Jr. married Lucinda Johnson in 1835. William Gross, who was apparently also a son of George Sr., married Mahala Sexton in 1833. They later moved to Hamilton County. George, a son of William, was killed at Fort Donelson in the Civil War. He was with the Confederacy's 26th Infantry.

Jacob Gross married Polly McClanahan in Rhea County in 1820. One of their sons was named Mason "Mace" after her brother, Mason McClanahan. The other children included John, Francis Marion, George, James Pleasant, Jacob Jr., Margaret, Catherine and Alexander R.

Jacob Gross farmed in Meigs County for many years, and he later lived at Birchwood with his daughter, Catherine, who had married James Witt. Jacob died in the early 1890s.

John married Eliza Jane Bare, while James Pleasant married Mary Ann Dyer. Francis M. married Mary J. Guess, and Mason "Mace" married Letitia "Tish" Guess. Jacob Jr. married Mary Jane Holiday and moved to Fort Scott, Kan. Margaret married Maximillian "Mack" Conner. Alexander married Jane Martin.

The brothers, John and Pleasant Gross, went to Decatur on March 2, 1862, to enlist with the Union's Company E of the Fifth Tennessee Infantry. They marched to Barboursville, KY. John served the unit as a cook and Pleasant as a blacksmith. They served through the rest of the war before being mustered out at Nashville in April 1865. John, who was in his 40s, was sick in a hospital at the war's end. Alexander was 22 when he went to Decatur in the heat of July in 1863 to join the Union's Company G of the Third Cavalry. He was captured by the Confederates at Sulphur Trestle, Ala. on Sept. 25, 1864, and was held until his release at Vicksburg on April 21, 1865. He was among those crowded on the *Sultana* steamer, which blew up on the Mississippi River near Memphis on April 27 as Alexander headed for Birchwood.

John's children included Emily Ann who married John G. Lane, Altamira who married John McClanahan, and Jacob who married Sarah Jane Samples. Jacob was postmaster of Norman's Store. His children included Evalena who married Thomas Jesse DeFriese, James Arthur who married Annie Page, Chester Ulysses "Ulus", who married Ida Azalea Legg, Jesse Franklin who married Jessie England, Martha Jane who married Fred Nicholson, and Gladys Thelma who married William John Ritch. Hele, a daughter of Ulus, has researched the family, and she married E. B. "Red" Etter, legendary Central and Baylor coach.

Francis M. died during the strife-torn Civil War period, leaving his widow to raise their children. They included James, Andrew LaFayette, Zachary Taylor who married Nancy Cross, Catherine, John H., Francis M. Jr., Samuel J. who married Dolly Moore, and Julia E. who married William Willhoite. John H. married Nancy Airhart. Their children included Benjamin Harrisons Gross, who was the first principal at Birchwood School. A World War I veteran who was wounded in action, he studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. His son,

Dr. Benjamin H. Gross Jr., was a Guerry Professor at the University of Chattanooga.

Francis M. Jr. married Jeannette "Nettie" Martin, and she had 21 pregnancies, with 10 of the children living to be adults. The eldest, Alfred Warner, was born at Sale Creek in 1880. He became the physician for the James Coal Co. at Bakewell and the Dayton Coal and Iron Co., then was a doctor in Chattanooga. He married Anna Cappinger.

Other children of F.M. Jr. included Harry Arthur, Moad Arnce, Marcellus, Wheeler Zachary who married Eva Dowlen, Cora Ethel who married F. Adolphus Grubb, Francis Grover who married Mabel McKenzie, Robert Bascom who married Dora Lewis, Worth Lee, and Suda Evelyn who married Irvin N. Shipley.

R.B. Gross had five sons, and they were reunited for the first time in a decade in 1973. R.B. Jr. was a lieutenant commander in the Navy. George Franklin was a Combustion Engineerg superintendent in Derby, England. Living in Chattanooga were F. Martin, Marvin, and Lewis.

Marcellus, who was a carpenter, married Mary Elizabeth Mae Nance. Their son, Marcellus Jr., was born in 1913 in Meigs County. M.C. Gross started his own play store in his basement whe he was 8, and he was manager of an H.G. Hill store in Highland Plaza [\*note should be Highland Park\*] by the time he was 18. He went into the grocery business for himself in 1841 on McBrien Road. M.C. Gross later was foreman of the Hamilton County Grand Jury.

George (son of Jacob) and his wife, Amanda, lived in Meigs County.

Children of James Pleasant Gross included John Pleasant Gross. He married Lucinda Cameron and was the first ordained minister of the Baptist Curch at Birchwood. John P. and Lucinda died of pneumonia within a week of one another in 1912. A son, Thomas Johnson Gross, farmed at Birchwood and later worked with the railroad and the Stanley Co. in Chattanooga. He married Stella Pierce. Another son of James P. was William Pleasant Gross who married Nancy Elizabeth Witt. Their large family included Ada Ann who married T. C. Bright, Arizona "Zona," Gilbert Hoyt who married Ruby Goss, Martha, James, Mary Elizabeth, William Ray, Esther Lee, George Dewey, and Luther Houston. Another son was Wylie Watson Gross who married Willie Louise Simmons. Their son, Wylie Gross Jr., was on the Hamilton County School Board.

Mace and Tish Gross were among the founders of the Birchwood Baptist Church. Their children were Jackson who married Harriet Zigler, Hattie who married Henry Starnes, and Alice who married Joe Conner.

Absalom Gross was another early Hamilton County settler. His son, Richard, married Elizabeth Wallin.

Evalyn Yamenaka of Santa Clara, Calif., wrote a book on the Grosses of Hamilton County.

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