

Grigsby's Who Helped in the Formation of Shreveport, Louisiana

The following talk was given at the National Grigsby Family Society meeting in Bossier City, Louisiana in June 2000. It was compiled from materials in the NGFS archives, local history books, and an interview with Eric Brock, north Louisiana historian.

Shreveport, named in honor of Captain Henry Miller Shreve, was a planned land development rather than an area that naturally attracted settlers. The developers called themselves the "Shreveport Town Company" when they began working together in 1836. Bushrod Jenkins, married to Edith Marie Grigsby and partner to her brother Lewis Kemp Grigsby, was one of the original members. The land needed for the town site was acquired from Larkin Edwards, a much loved Caddo Indian interpreter who had been given a grant for his service by the Indians in a treaty. The Shreveport Town Company founders convinced him to take his grant out of the high land which is now downtown Shreveport. This location was attractive as a logical place to cross the Red River and was deep enough for steam boat traffic; however, water traffic was impeded by a tremendous log jam. Captain Shreve made the Shreveport Town Company's plan work when he cleared the "Great Raft" so boat commerce was possible.

Shreveport in Bushrod Jenkins' day was a wild frontier town. There were many rough river men, few women, and little culture. By his death around 1850 the town had grown to 1000 inhabitants including some professional people, several churches, a courthouse, schoolhouse, and a jail.

This part of North Louisiana first began to be settled in the 1830s. People were moving west to find good land to raise cotton on and to locate a reliable water source to ship the cotton to the sales point in New Orleans and receive supplies in return. The goal of most aspiring planters in the first half of the nineteenth century was to get more acreage, obtain more slaves to work it, and grow more cotton for sale. The invention of the cotton gin helped cotton become a reliable money crop. This was the path to wealth since agriculture was the cornerstone of the economy.

Bushrod Jenkins was formerly from Fayette County, Kentucky, where he also partnered with Lewis Grigsby. He married **Edith M. Grigsby** in July 1830 in Clark Co., KY. Their children were Anne, James, Mary, Thomas and William Washington. One son drowned when the family was crossing Bayou Pierre and the ferry boat overturned. Bushrod and Edith built a plantation home near Shreveport at Anderson Island then called "Grigsby Island." There he operated a plantation and cotton gin, and raised cattle and cotton. The Bushrod Jenkins house also figured

in parish history. Documents show that it was used on occasion as a meeting place during the organization of the parish government. Jenkins performed the office of treasurer for the Shreveport Town Company. Unfortunately, he was assassinated Mar. 26, 1846.

The 1850 census shows Edith Grigsby Jenkins as a widow living with her children James, 17, and Mary, 4. Her property was valued at \$3,000. She indicated that all the family members were born in Kentucky.

Living next to her at Anderson Island was her brother Lewis Kemp Grigsby who was also her husband's business partner. Lewis was born in 1801 and died right after the Civil War in Clark Co., Kentucky. He married Frances "Fanny" Bush who by 1850 was deceased. Living with him were his children Amanda and Braxton, all from Kentucky. His oldest living child, John Vivian, was probably living then in Wilson, Tennessee. Lewis is listed as a trader, probably of slaves. His property was valued at \$10,000.

Living nearby was Washington Jenkins, brother of Bushrod Jenkins, listed as a farmer from Kentucky with his wife Olivia Ruffin Battle from Georgia and their children Charles, Virginia, and Charleton all born in Louisiana. Washington Jenkins was the first Caddo Parish judge. His home was purchased by the police jury for use as the first courthouse for \$8,000. It was on the corner of Market and Crockett Streets. A note in the 1850 census shows that Washington Jenkins had lost money on his property. This probably refers to the sale of his home to the parish--they had not paid him in full and he had to sue for the balance of money owed him.

Oral history has it that Bushrod Jenkins was related to **Bushrod Washington**, born in Westmoreland Co., Virginia in 1762 and died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1829. He was the nephew of George Washington, first president of the United States. In fact, he supervised the writing of John Marshall's Life of Washington. A graduate of William and Mary College, Bushrod Washington fought in the American Revolution. He studied law and set up a practice in Virginia. A member of the Virginia Constitutional Radification Convention, he was appointed to the Supreme Court by President John Quincy Adams. Since George and Martha had no children together, after Martha Washington died, he inherited Mount Vernon. Records show that Bushrod Washington died with no legitimate issue which makes his connection with Bushrod Jenkins difficult to establish.

The Shreveport Town Company was inspired and fostered by Angus McNeil--he brought the stockholders together and acquired the land from Larkin Edwards for \$5,000. Other notable

founders of the Shreveport Town Company, in addition to Capt. Shreve, were Thomas Taylor Williamson who was nominated for governor and a staff member for General Kirby Smith during the Civil War. James H. Cane, another important founder, lived and worked in Bossier City which was known until the turn of the century as "Cane City." The Shreveport Town Company shareholders were required to live in the area, build a "house for public entertainment," install a steam saw mill, and create other improvements as needed to attract settlers. They leased a ferry across the river to the highest bidder. By March 1839 Shreveport became a town under the State, and the Shreveport Town Company was dissolved after the property had been split up.

Probably none of the Shreveport Town Company shareholders really profited from the venture. Bushrod Jenkins was forced to sell his interest in the Company, and, after his death, his debts were attached to his partner Lewis K. Grigsby. Apparently Lewis Grigsby was also forced to sell his land, except for a small portion where he lived. According to the records, Ruben White received the Anderson Island property, \$100,000 in cash, some jewels, and 28 slaves. Sometime later, Lewis went back home to Kentucky.

Lewis Kemp Grigsby's son, Lewis Braxstone Grigsby, commanded the Union 24th Kentucky Infantry during the Civil War and later ran the luxury Phoenix hotel in Lexington, Kentucky with a his wife's brother. Within two years he had lost his investment and moved to Denver, Colorado. Presumably to pay off a debt he owed her, he sold land in Shreveport inherited from his father to his sister, Amanda Cocke.

Lewis Braxstone Grigsby had two children by his wife, Susan Burbridge. His daughter, Emily Grigsby, became internationally famous as a wealthy socialite. Emilie (she changed the spelling of her name) was the adopted ward of Chicago mass transit system tycoon Charles T. Yerkes, Jr. Yerkes tried to improve his public image by donating funds to provide the University of Chicago the world's largest telescope, but finally lost his railway franchise due to poor service and high fares.

Emilie inherited a great deal of money from Yerkes and frequently visited England where she became a friend of the Duchess of Windsor. Wallis Simpson, the duchess, and the Duke entertained intellectuals and artists of the day after he lost his crown when he chose to marry a commoner. She probably visited the lavish Windsor Villa in Paris, France, which was later purchased by Mohamed Al Fayed, father of Dodi, Princess Diana's boyfriend. Emilie created sensational press coverage by attending the coronation of King William and Queen Mary (she was a friend of the governess), and by declaring \$800,000 in personal jewelry at New York customs on her return voyage from England. In 1912, Emilie sold her Park Avenue house (the

newspapers called it “The House of Mystery”), an extensive art and manuscript collection, and expensive gifts from admirers and went to India for a time. Later, she lived in England. A photograph taken of Emilie by Carl Van Vechten in his “Creative Americans” series is on file at the Library of Congress website. Emilie’s obituary in the New York Times quotes the London Times: “[Emilie is] an Edwardian hostess [who] may be unnoticed but deserves memory in any record of Mayfair in its last brilliant phase.” Emilie patronized poets Rupert Brookes and William Butler Yeats, and was a friend of novelist George Meredith.

Yerkes and Grigsby attracted the attention of social activist and novelist Theodore Dreiser. He wrote a fictional trilogy about a ruthless industrialist modeled after Yerkes. These novels, The Financier, The Titan, and The Stoic, are said to factually portray the Grigsby family. Emilie tried for many years to suppress their publication.

For those of you interested in your family connection, here’s what we know of Edith Marie Grigsby’s background. Her father was Lewis Grigsby. Lewis was born in 1769 and died in 1816 in Winchester, Clarke County, Kentucky. He married Charlotte Floweree and owned about 1000 acres in Winchester. It has been noted that this part of the Grigsby family probably was involved in the slave trade. Lewis’ brother Bailis freed a large number of slaves at his death in about 1848. Both Lewis and his brother Nathaniel married Floweree sisters.

Lewis Grigsby’s children were William F., Bailis B., John “Jack” Vivian who married Sarah Jane Duncan (his son James Lewis was a surgeon), Lewis Kemp who married Frances Fanny Bush, D. F., Nathaniel T. who married Sarah B. Couchman, Susan who married Benjamin Hieronymus and Wilson Hampton, Martha Catherine who married Ben Turner, and Edith Marie Grigsby who married Bushrod Jenkins.

Lewis Grigsby’s father was John Grigsby born about 1735 and died before June 1799 in Fauquier, Virginia. We do not know who he married. His children were Fanny, Winifred, Edith, Lewis, Bailis, and Nathaniel.

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