

THE GRIGSBYS OF NAPA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

by Olive Grigsby Bush

The common denominators of the Napa County families are Aaron - born 1752/53 in Stafford Co., Virginia - and his wife, Phoebe (Harrison?). Aaron died in Giles County, Tennessee about 1841. No mention of his wife was made at that time, so it is assumed she was dead.

From Virginia to Tennessee

To our knowledge, the first of Aaron's family to move west was my ancestor, George Grigsby, who was living in East Tennessee before 1804. All of George's children were born in East Tennessee - some in Blount, some in Roane, and some in Monroe Counties. In 1808-10, Aaron and his family came west into Giles County, Tennessee. His son Amos and his youngest son, Samuel Harrison, were in this group.

From Tennessee to Missouri

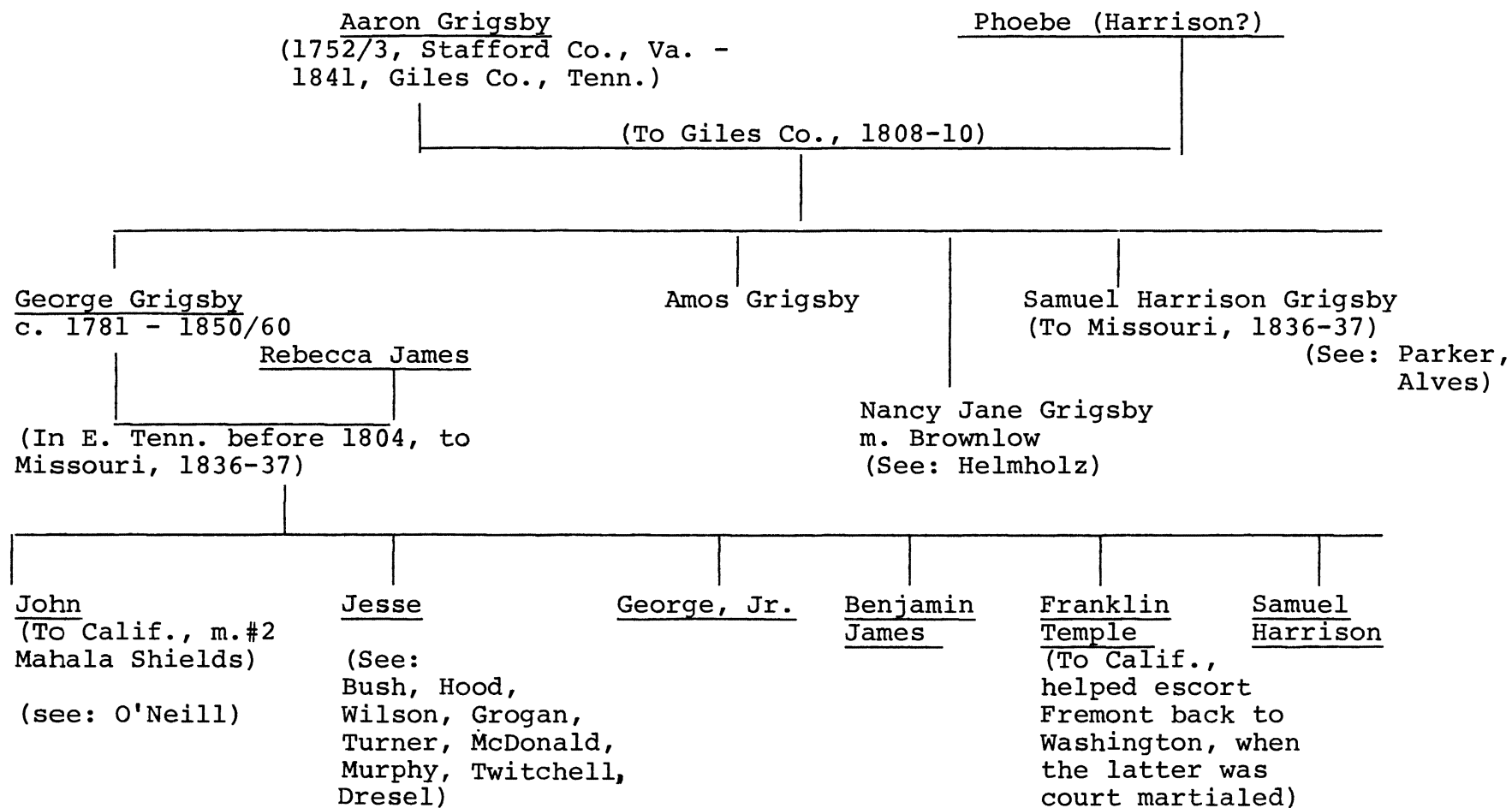
Between 1836 and 1837, groups of the family moved into Laclade, Green, Gasconade, Pulaski, and Polk Counties, Missouri. Those who migrated were Samuel Harrison, his grown sons and daughters, and grandchildren, as well as the following children of Samuel's brother George: John, Jesse, George Jr. Benjamin James, and Franklin Temple. (As with Samuel, many of George's children were grown and themselves the parents of small children.) George himself did not leave Monroe County, Tennessee, until later. However, by 1850, he was living in Polk County, Missouri with the only known son of his who stayed in Missouri, Samuel Harrison, II.

From Missouri to California

In May of 1845, four emigrant groups gathered in Missouri to start west. In the total of about 100 wagons, only 15 were going to California. The rest were headed for Oregon. The wagons used by the group heading for California were not the heavy Conestoga, which was too heavy to get over the mountains, but rather a covered wagon of a lighter build.

Included in this group of 15 were John Grigsby, son of George, and grandson of Aaron, with his second wife, Mahala Shields, and children from both marriages. Also with them was John's youngest brother, the then unmarried Franklin Temple Grigsby.

PARTIAL FAMILY CHART FOR THE GRIGSBYS OF NAPA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



### The Route

This large group came by the Green River route and South Pass of the Rockies into Green River, southern Idaho, and Fort Laramie and Fort Hall in Wyoming, where John Grigsby was elected captain of the train prior to its branching off to California. At Fort Hall, where the Oregon and California Trails branch, many other wagons decided to go into California instead of proceeding into Oregon.

In the group of about 60 men with wagons who decided not to go to Oregon, was William B. Ide, a part time carpenter and teacher, with his wife and daughter. Ide, a New Englander, had long been interested in the westward movement, and so had joined the trek. He became well known as the scribe of the journey. He was a good writer who left reams of material for later genealogists - though how factual some of it was is still being debated.

After leaving Fort Hall, the California Trail continued south through Pomintory, Goose Creek, and into what was then called Marys River, but is now known as the Humboldt River in Nevada. This led into the Truckee River, through Donner Pass, and by Donner Lake into Bear Valley, and so on into the Sacramento Valley of California.

(Just one year later the ill fated Donner Party perished in the Donner Lake area on this same trail.)

Once in Nevada where they no longer feared the Indians, this large group broke into separate units. This led Irving Stone, in his Men To Match My Mountains, to call it the "rugged individualists train." Most of the emigrants headed for Sutters Fort in the Sacramento Valley, but none of the original 15 California-bound wagons stopped there. They came directly into Napa Valley. It is not known for certain, but it is assumed that they were friends of two of Napa County's earliest American settlers, Joseph Chiles and George Yount, since they had all come from the same area of Missouri.

### Later Grigsby Arrivals

John and Franklin Grigsby were the forerunners of later "waves" of this family who came into Napa County. The last arrived about 1853. Six or seven of this last group died of "camp fever" - probably typhoid - and were buried in Bear Valley, near Tahoe. Later members of the family went after the remains, and they are now interred in the Yountville Cemetery in Napa County.

By 1853, the following descendents of Aaron Grigsby had come overland to Napa County, California:

Samuel Harrison, whose wife died a few days after arrival in the county, and these of their children:

Terrell Grigsby, with family  
Achilles Fine Grigsby, with family  
John M. Grigsby, with family  
Lillard Harrison Grigsby, who with his wife, died in Bear Valley

Samuel's brother George's sons:

John Grigsby and family  
George Grigsby, Jr. and family  
Jesse Grigsby and family, (the line of Olive Bush)  
Benjamin James Grigsby and family  
Franklin Temple Grigsby and family

(Members of these families raised the children of those parents who had died on the trail.)

#### Why Did They Move West?

Why seems to be the question. Why would these people, who were land owners, mostly married and with small children, undertake to come overland to a wilderness? Why should the wives leave the comforts of their homes, even though it be just a frontier home, and embark upon a six months "walk" to California? And walk they did, to arrive with men and boys barefooted, and the women with skirts tattered to their knees. It took considerable money and effort on their part to equip a wagon, buy food for six months, carry food for cattle, see that everyone had clothing for all seasons, etc.

There would seem only two logical explanations. One is that Missouri, in those days, was a very fever ridden area, and they may have decided to leave for health reasons. The other possibility seems more in the nature of these people. They had the pioneer spirit. One definition of a pioneer is "one who goes ahead and prepares the way for others." This spirit would seem to fit these people. They were from families who, in less than a hundred years, had crossed the continent, mostly on foot. They were firm believers in the right to open the west so that the nation could grow.

#### How Did They Travel?

All of them came the first time by wagon train, though some of the men who had come without their families went back once or twice. Sometimes they recrossed the plains, other times they went back by the Isthmus of Panama. On the return trip to California, most of them acted as wagon masters or guides.

Irving Stone, in Men To Match My Mountains, tells of the very first Sierra crossing by these wagons. Level places were found between the cliff ascents where teams, if led up one by one, could stand and haul up the wagons by pulley and tackle. The group untied their wagons while men carved out a road six or seven feet wide, cutting down trees and hauling rocks out of the way. When the road was ready, each ox was led up the cliff by ropes. When five or six oxen had been assembled at the first level, each wagon was hauled up the side of the cliff. Each wagon up one hitch, block the wheels, back the teams, take another hitch, move forward a few feet, block the wheels, etc. Within forty eight hours the entire train had reached the summit, the men exhausted and the oxen bleeding.

On the plains, there were Indians to contend with - one girl was being carried away by attacking Indians, held only by her foot, and was saved when her shoe fell off. There was sickness, and there were deaths, and there were births. My greatgrandparents took and raised an abandoned Indian girl. She was named Rose Grigsby, and upon her marriage was deeded land in Napa County.

#### Where Did They Go In California?

Upon arrival in California, the Grigsbys did not go into Sutters Fort, but continued on about sixty miles into Napa County. Here they settled and became farmers and land owners. As suggested in the Bible, they "went forth and multiplied." By 1860, when one old timer was asked about the residents of the county, he said that they consisted of Grigsbys, Whittons, and ground squirrels.

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(I would like to acknowledge the information given me by one of my favorite Grigsbys. Mrs. Barbara Grigsby Bickford was kind enough to "introduce" me to my family when I really had no knowledge of them.)

(EMN: Olive Bush also sent the following article from the Napa County Record Tourist Guide)

Early Day Food List

Striking Difference to Modern Dining

Early day adventurers who wished to leave the settled East and travel west to California, were cautioned by those who had been there and returned, just what supplies they should take along on their perilous journey. Following is a list, made up by one of the traveling "experts" on the subject: (spelling his alone!)

Bacon -- is not used in very great quantities

Dry or Sea bread -- one is apt to get tired of, but take;

Coffee and Tea -- are used freely and are indispensables  
sugar -- should be taken in pretty large quantity as it is a real and very desirable luxury.

Brown sugar to last to the S. Pass would answer well - after that the hot sun would make it run, so part of it at least should be crushed sugar

Cheese -- is excellent and should be taken

Vinegar -- some vinegar is needed for it prevents scurvy, and one has appetite for it on the plains

Dry Fruit -- apples and peaches should by all means be taken as you are cut off from all same or vegetables

Flour and Cornmeal -- are indispensable

Beans -- are good and should be taken in moderate quantity

Molasses -- is excellent and can be taken

Salerates -- enough to last all the way as the salerates of the plains is not very good in its natural condition

Pepper -- and a little spice are wanted

Bologna Sausage -- or good smoke sausage would be good and handy

Beef -- jerked before starting would be excellent dry beef would be best and handy

Crackers -- and Boston cracker would be good for a part of the bread stuff

Butter or Good Lard -- would be desirable closely put up