

THE VOICE

of the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society and
Cobb Memorial Archives

HOW THE FAMILY HISTORY OF A BOY FROM FAIRFAX INTERSECTED WITH THE CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE IN ALABAMA AND THE MAKING OF A MOVIE

Presented by Jim Patterson, United States Diplomatic Service

Writer/speaker Jim Patterson has many interesting stories to tell ranging from describing boyhood in an Alabama textile mill village, to traveling worldwide as an economics and political officer of the United States Diplomatic Corp, to being an actor in a movie which portrayed his father's role in the Alabama National Guard during the Civil Rights struggle in Alabama. Ever mindful of public service by members of the Patterson family, Jim was motivated to a career in public service and now is inspired to describe his family's historical intersection with the Civil Rights struggle in Alabama. His father James Glover Patterson (b.1933 d.2003) served in the nationalized Alabama National Guard during three significant historical events: the Cuban Missile Crisis, the integration of the University of Alabama, and the Selma March. Jim's interesting family story animated him to seek to re-enact his father's roll as a National Guardsman during the Selma March in the making of a movie. He will describe his father's nationalized guard duty in the 1960's and how those experiences affected the Patterson family and Jim's values. In an attempt to memorialize his father's public service in the Alabama National Guard, Jim describes

his effort to project himself into commercial film making, into acting in the award-winning film, *Selma*. Although Jim has lived away from the Valley and Alabama since he finished his education, he acknowledges that he has lost his southern accent, but his core values have always been rooted here in the Valley and Patterson family history.

Jim Patterson was reared in the Valley town of Fairfax, graduating in 1973 from Valley High School and later from Auburn University. Following university, he moved to Washington, D. C., where he began his career as a Foreign Service Officer at the United States Department of State. Jim has served as a US Diplomat in Mexico, United Kingdom, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France and the Netherlands. He is currently stationed in Washington, D.C. He is a contributor to *The Foreign Service Journal*, *The Hill* and other publications. His graduate education includes continuing studies at Georgetown University, the Graduate School, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Foreign Service Institute.

Jim enjoys public speaking on US foreign affairs, family history and on his life experiences. He is a member of the Sons of the American Legion, Associate Member of the Korean War Veterans Association, Life Associate Member of the Vietnam Veterans Association, The US Philippine Society, Friends of Israeli Defense Forces, Donor/Member of Helen Keller International, Life Member of the American Foreign Service Association. He is a member of the Auburn University Alumni Association, Alabama's State Society, and the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society. He is a formerly elected official in Indianapolis, Indiana, and in Washington, D. C.

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Alabamian Jim Patterson with Albert Patterson in Montgomery.

THE CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY MEETING

Sunday, January 26, 2020 3:00 p. m. EDT

*The Lanier Room, Bradshaw Library
Valley, Alabama*

*Members of the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society and
the general public are invited to attend this program.*



Dear Mr. Patterson,

It has come to my attention, via Ms. Stillwell in our casting department, of your family history in Selma, Alabama. It is always wonderful to hear the many stories we have encountered over the many years, months and days in preparing for our film, *Selma*.

While we encourage participants in our filming endeavors, we must make the rules and regulations with filming clear to all who work with us.

Ms. Stillwell has opened up a place for you as a background performer for this Saturday, June 14. The scene will be on the set of the Alabama State Capitol steps, as Gov. Wallace addresses the press about "not allowing the march from Selma to Montgomery." The press will not be speaking - only listening and writing notes as the Governor makes his statement.

You will be in a crowd of approximately 50 background performers - dressed in period clothing selected solely by our costume department. The work will require you to come in for a fitting this Friday, and you will be notified regarding where and when by our production staff. For the work on Saturday, you will be given a call time with instructions for where to go. When you are not directly participating in the scene, you will be held in an area off set with the other background performers, and will only go to set and be released from set by the associates handling the background for the production. All background will be paid, and Ms. Stillwell can give you all the details required for the payment process.

We do NOT allow any photography or social media to happen on set - this is a requirement for all who participate.

If you would like to participate as a background performer on Saturday, we would love to accommodate your request. I completely understand your desire to honor your father and your family history during a time of turmoil in our country, and a turning point for American Civil Rights.

Sincerely,

Nan Morales
Exec. Producer

Letter of invitation for Mr Patterson to participate in the production of the movie, "Selma."

The VOICE is a quarterly newsletter of the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society, Inc., P.O. Box 718, West Point, Georgia 31833

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Find us on Facebook and visit our website at <http://cvhistoricalsociety.org>

MISSION STATEMENT: As a non-profit membership organization, the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society seeks to preserve and promote the history and heritage of Chambers County, Alabama, West Point, Georgia, and the greater Chattahoochee Valley area. CVHS produces and sells historical books and media, publishes a quarterly newsletter, and presents programs with speakers on historical topics of local and regional interest.

VISION STATEMENT: Having been in continuous operation since its founding in 1953, the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society strives to uphold the vision of its founders while posturing the organization for growth in the 21st century.

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *by Malinda Powers*

TWO FATHERS, TWO COUNTRIES, AND THE TEXTILE HERITAGE THEY SHARED

As president I receive correspondence from time to time concerning various aspects of our local history. Recently, I received an email from Mr. Mike Gee of Manchester, England, presently on extended stay in Florida. Mr. Gee had in his possession three booklets published by West Point Manufacturing Company, circa 1949, and was offering them to our Society. I have excerpted portions of his letter, my response, and his follow-up letter.

I am 78 years old and when I was 8 years old my father, who worked in the textile industry in Lancashire U.K., came to the USA on a fact-finding mission. This was in 1949. One of the places he visited was the West Point Manufacturing Company in Georgia. Being young I do not remember much of what he described to our family when he returned home but I do recall him saying he had never been anywhere so hot and humid, it was July 1949 after all.

My father died in the late sixties and in sorting through his effects I came across three booklets which presumably were given to him during his visit to West Point. The booklets have the following titles : *Living and Working in The Valley*, *Who's Who in the Fifty-Year Club*, and *The West Point Manufacturing Company*

They will all date from 1949 and appear to be company produced literature for employees, stockholders etc. They have some interesting pictures showing the extent of what must have been a thriving textile business community. The Fifty Year Club brochure is fascinating as it details some employees who had started work before the turn of the twentieth century, and also gives an insight into the paternalistic approach that employers took towards their employees in those far off days.

The purpose of my writing to you is to ask if you and the Historical Society would like to have these documents. I have long thought that they should go back to where they came from and in any event there is probably only myself in our family who has any idea of how they came to be found in an old trunk in Manchester UK.

My daughter, who lives here in Florida, has a property in Georgia and we will be taking a trip up to your State fairly soon. I would like to visit West Point and see 'the Valley' if possible.

You may not be aware, but, Manchester UK and more particularly Lancashire where I was born, was the home of the British Textile Industry for 150 Years until its decline in the late twentieth century. Just like your area we have seen a vast transformation away from textiles and into high tech industries. A few of the old cotton mills remain but almost all are converted into apartments blocks and penthouses. Quite a change, I don't know what my father would make of it!!

Please let me know if you would like the booklets, I look forward to hearing from you.

Best Wishes,
Michael Gee



W. J. S. (Jack Gee) was a Senior Manager with Fothergill & Harvey Ltd, textile manufacturers of Manchester, England.

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Hello Mr. Gee,

So nice to hear from you! You and I have a common heritage. My father, like yours, was a “textile man”. His parents both worked as hourly employees at the Langdale Mill, one of the two original mills of West Point Manufacturing Company (circa 1869). This mill was named for Englishman Thomas Lang, who was brought here in the 1880’s by the Lanier brothers to head up their manufacturing operation. After serving in the U.S. Marines for a few years, my dad attended Auburn University (Auburn, Alabama) on the G.I. Bill and as part of the “co-op” program at West Point Manufacturing Co. When he retired he was the fifth ranking executive at West Point Stevens...

Good to hear that many of your old mills have been re-purposed and continue to stand as a testimony to their original function so many years ago. There is now only one local mill here left standing, and CVHS has been a lone voice clamoring for it to be saved. It was sold two years ago to a demolition company, yet the oldest buildings still stand today. And, as long as it stands, there’s still hope...

Our organization would be honored and delighted to be the recipient of the booklets that your father preserved...

Malinda Powers
CVHS President

Dear Malinda,

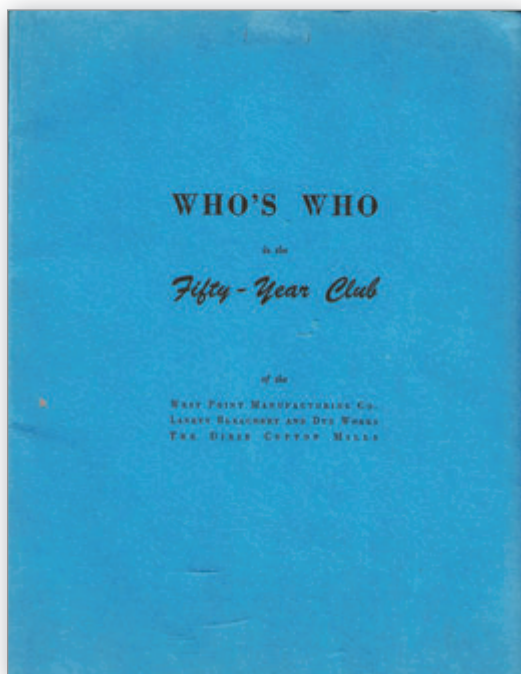
I’m pleased to let you know that I have mailed the three booklets to you and they should arrive in the next couple of days...

Thank you for your interesting history of the West Point Company. We do, indeed, share a common textile heritage. I am not sure quite why my father visited the US in 1949. He was here for about two months and travelled to various locations visiting textile plants. As it was only four years after the war maybe it was part of some US Martial(sic Marshall) Aid programme. I do know that Fothergill and Harvey, the company he worked for, were one of the first in the U.K. to pioneer synthetic textiles after the war. Maybe West Point were doing the same sort of research and they had a common interest in its future development.

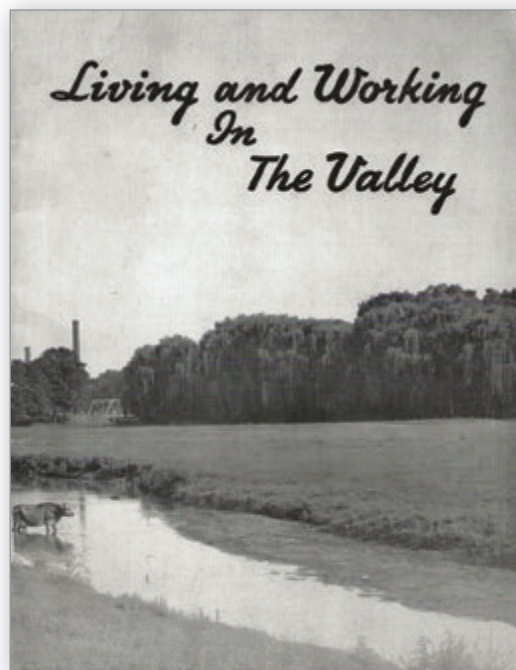
I would be delighted to take up your offer of a visit to your area. As I mentioned previously, my daughter has a property in the mountains in North Georgia and my wife and I hope to take a trip up there sometime in the new year. When we have our plans finalized I will be in touch.

Meanwhile, my best wishes to you and your Society.

Kind Regards,
Mike Gee



Booklet - "Who's Who in the Fifty-Year Club," Vol. 2



Booklet - "Living and Working in the Valley"

Foreword reads,

"On the following pages you will find some of the advantages and opportunities of 'Living and Working in the Valley' as well as some of the responsibilities. It is hoped that in reading this brief pictorial booklet you will develop and sustain that feeling of pride and satisfaction so characteristic of those pleasantly associated with their work."

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TO OUR STOCKHOLDERS

THIS IS YOUR BOOK. We hope it will bring you, as one of the owners of the West Point Manufacturing Company, some realization of the value and extent of your property.

Your money helped to build the mills and plants and office buildings shown here. Your money makes possible their continued profitable operation. Their growth and development are tangible evidence of the fundamental soundness of your faith in the American way — the way of private initiative and free enterprise.

We wish we could introduce you to the men and women who work in these buildings. There are about 10,000 of them. We would like you to know them because they, rather than bricks and mortar and glass and steel, are the

West Point Manufacturing Company. Fundamentally, it is upon the skill, experience and loyalty of these fellow workers that the quality and saleability of our products depend.

We, your managers, as trustees of your property, will continue the policies proved so successful in the past. We will insist on a strict adherence to the highest standards of quality in the merchandise we produce. Sales and promotion principles will be based on fair play and conservative good sense.

It is only thus that we can assure the continued prosperity of our company and the security of every individual engaged or interested in our business.

The West Point Manufacturing Company

Booklet - "The West Point Manufacturing Company" - Report to the Stockholders and introduction page

Mr. Gee's assumption that his father's visit concerned the new development of synthetics in textile manufacturing was very intuitive. Both Shawmut and Lantuck mills would soon afterwards begin the transformational move to "non-wovens". As a young man, my father was assistant manager at Lantuck Mill. I recall his trips to England, and in particularly, Manchester and Lancashire. Small world!



THE ARCHIVES REPORT *by Robin Brown*

The December 1919 flood that devastated West Point dampened everything - even Christmas. In a letter to Santa, published in the *Chattahoochee Valley Times News*, little Earnest Tyson shyly asked for a writing desk, a gun, and some candy, "if it is not asking too much as I know a lot of your goods have been washed away."

Rain began falling on Sunday, December 7, 1919. A warning issued from Atlanta weathermen, forecasting a possible flood of 31 feet, garnered little attention as their dire predictions rarely materialized. The rains continued on Monday, and by Tuesday afternoon the "floodgates of heaven were turned loose," according to Trox Bankston, editor of the *West Point News*. The three days of rain swelled the river until it burst through West Point and Lanett. Waters crested at 29.2 feet, more than ten feet higher than flood stage.

"The Chattahoochee had left them nothing," a Georgia newspaper reported in December 1919. Estimates of the damage ranged from one to three million dollars or \$15-45 million in today's currency. The bridge connecting the east and west side of West Point was partially washed away, along with the water main which supplied clean water to the east side. A current swept through downtown West Point, and left standing water five to ten feet deep. Automobiles were rendered useless. Daring rescue attempts meant crossing the streets by boat. Joe Barrow, West Point native, recalled that his father returned soaking wet from an attempt to rescue a woman stranded in a flooded house. His boat capsized, leaving him clinging to a telephone pole until he was the one rescued.

Other cities along the Chattahoochee River experienced similar floods. General Pershing, victorious leader of the American Expeditionary Forces, spent part of 1919 touring military bases. Visiting Fort Benning on December 9, he



Five photos from the Archives' collection taken during the 1919 flood.

noted the high waters in his diary. In Columbus, Georgia, the 1919 deluge was dubbed the "Pershing Flood."

The torrent of water affected Alabama, too. Employees at Langdale Mill used a swinging bridge to go to work. High waters caused power outages and shut down work. Flooding destroyed outhouses and left behind the possibility of typhoid. For six days, the high waters remained. When they finally receded, mud, several inches deep, coated nearly everything. Sam Hayes, superintendent of Lanett Bleachery and Dye Works, reported that the waters reached 42 inches inside the office, damaging the

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furniture but only destroying a handful of records. In the bleachery, water reached seven feet and soaked 300,000 yards of material. At 2:00 p.m. on December 9 water infiltrated the engine room, leaving the bleachery without power for the next week.

Almost as swiftly as the water poured in, so did relief from neighboring cities. Just three hours after learning of the disaster, the Red Cross sent a train from Atlanta stocked with blankets, socks, lamps, candles, stoves, and clean drinking water. The *Atlanta Journal* extensively covered the situation at West Point and sent \$250. The Opelika Red Cross delivered a supply of bread, and the city's Rotary Club offered aid. Even Congress moved speedily to authorize the War Department to construct a pontoon bridge to replace the damaged one in West Point.

By January 1920, the Valley was drying out after this area's worst flood in recorded history. Preserved in Cobb Memorial Archives are several minutes of film footage believed to be taken shortly after the 1919 deluge. The lens captured roads turned into waterways and workers hurrying to salvage bales of cotton. A brief clip is available on the Archives' Facebook page.

For more information about the 1919 flood, please visit Cobb Memorial Archives, call us at (334) 768-2050, or email robinbrown@chamberscountylibrary.org.



WHO WAS JACOB DENNIS? by Stephen Johnson

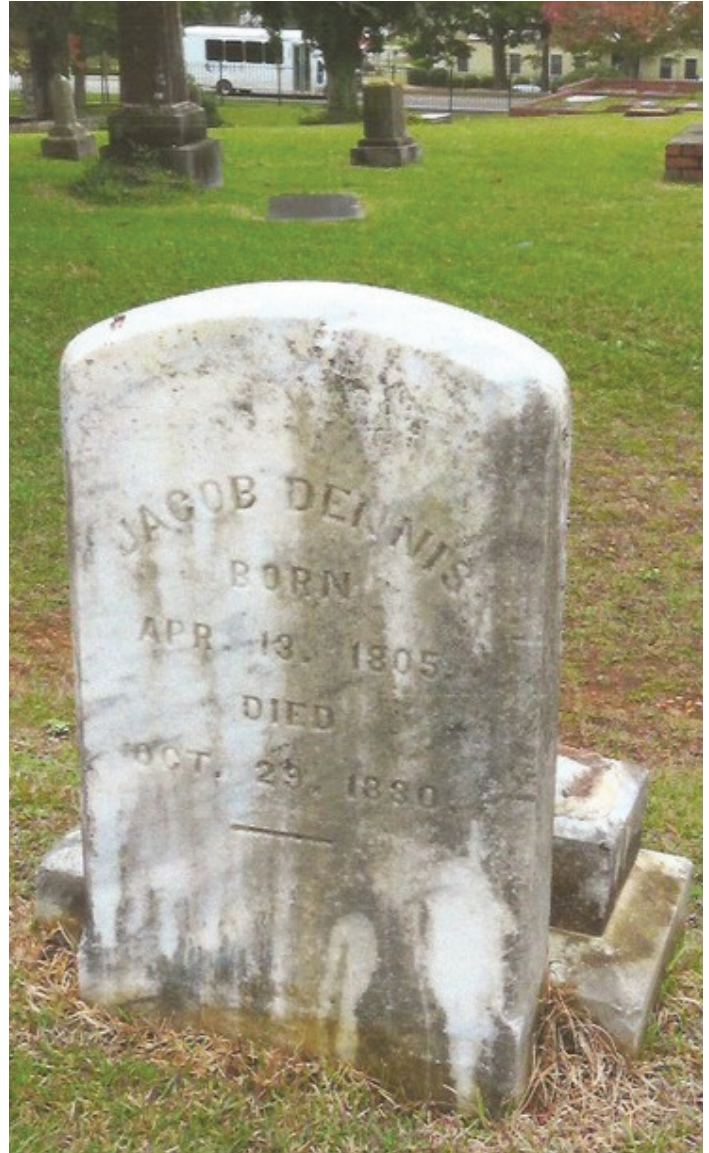
Our friend and longtime member, A. Stephen Johnson continues to dig into the little mysteries which abound in our communities such as where orphan or lonely graves indicate someone's life ended in our early town but the knowledge of who they were and how they died is long forgotten. We appreciate Stephen's continued social research.

In the oldest part of West Point's Pinewood Cemetery there is the gravestone of Jacob Dennis. No other gravestones are located close to it, and he is the only Dennis buried in Pinewood, at least the only one with a gravestone.

The Dennis family is related to me through marriage: two of my great-aunts married Dennis brothers, and this Jacob Dennis was their uncle. The two sisters, Mary Jane and Edna Adelle Johnson taught at Hamilton Female College in Hamilton, GA in the 1880's. Another faculty member, Miss Annie Dennis, introduced them to her two brothers, and two marriages resulted. Mary Jane married John Henry Dennis and Edna Adelle married Peter Edward Dennis. Incidentally, Annie Dennis wrote a cookbook, *The Annie Dennis Cook Book*, which became a best-seller and is now out of print and a collector's item.

Mary Jane (Mollie) Johnson is buried in Pinewood. She had a tragic life. She was a gifted artist, and taught art at Hamilton Female College. One of her paintings is now in the Columbus (GA) Museum. She had 2 children who died young in the 1890's and she herself died of tuberculosis at age 40 in 1901. Adelle (called Sis Delle by her brothers and sisters) moved to Macon with her husband, who was an architect. He founded the firm of Dennis and Dennis, Inc. and they designed several buildings in West Point, including the Public School on the hill which is now low-income Senior Residencies. They also designed many public buildings all over Georgia, such as court houses and churches.

The youngest child of Peter Edward and Adelle Dennis, Ward Dennis, compiled a Dennis Genealogy. In both his genealogy and in CVHS's Pinewood Cemetery book, Jacob Dennis was born April 13, 1805, and died October 29, 1880. There is no other Jacob Dennis in the descendants of the earliest Dennis in the Genealogy. Ward knew about Jacob Dennis' stone, and said he did not know why he was buried in West Point, since all the rest of his family had lived in Putnam County, Talbotton, or Macon.



Jacob Dennis' gravestone had become very dirty with mold and soot over time, so I told my cousin Helen Dennis, Ward's daughter, that I would clean it. To clean the stone, I used an alkaline solution called D/2, available from Bicknell Supply Company (www.bicknellsupply.com). You just spray it on the stone, wait a few minutes, then scrub it with a soft brush. A toothbrush works best for cleaning out the engraved letters and numbers. After scrubbing, you rinse with water, or you can just leave it there and wait for

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the rain to wash it off. I have made several marble stones look good as new with this method, and the D/2 solution does not erode the marble as acid does. You should never use any kind of acid solution to clean any gravestone, especially marble. Do not use Clorox, even though it is a relatively weak acid. Many old gravestones in New England have become completely unreadable from acid rain over the years. The D/2 solution also works well for cleaning bathroom tile.

After cleaning the stone, I took a close look and got a surprise. The date of death on the stone was 1830, not 1880. Could this be correct? West Point was founded only in 1826, and Jacob Dennis is not listed among any of the early settlers of West Point. Also, the stone does not look like gravestones from the 1830's. Gravestones from this period are almost always upright, rather thin, tablet stones, or box tombs. Jacob's gravestone was 3 inches thick, more like stones from the Victorian period. This meant some further research was needed. I first looked in William Davidson's book, *A Rockaway in Talbot*. It did not mention Jacob Dennis; it only dealt with the next generation, the children of Peter Early Dennis, including John Henry, Peter Edward, and Annie. Next I looked in Talbot County(GA) wills at the Georgia Archives. I found the 1844 will of Peter Dennis, which named four sons, Jacob, John, Thomas, and

Peter E. So, Jacob was alive in 1844, which means the 1830 date on the Gravestone must be an error. If the correct date is 1880, then Jacob Dennis must be in every Federal Census from 1850 through 1880.

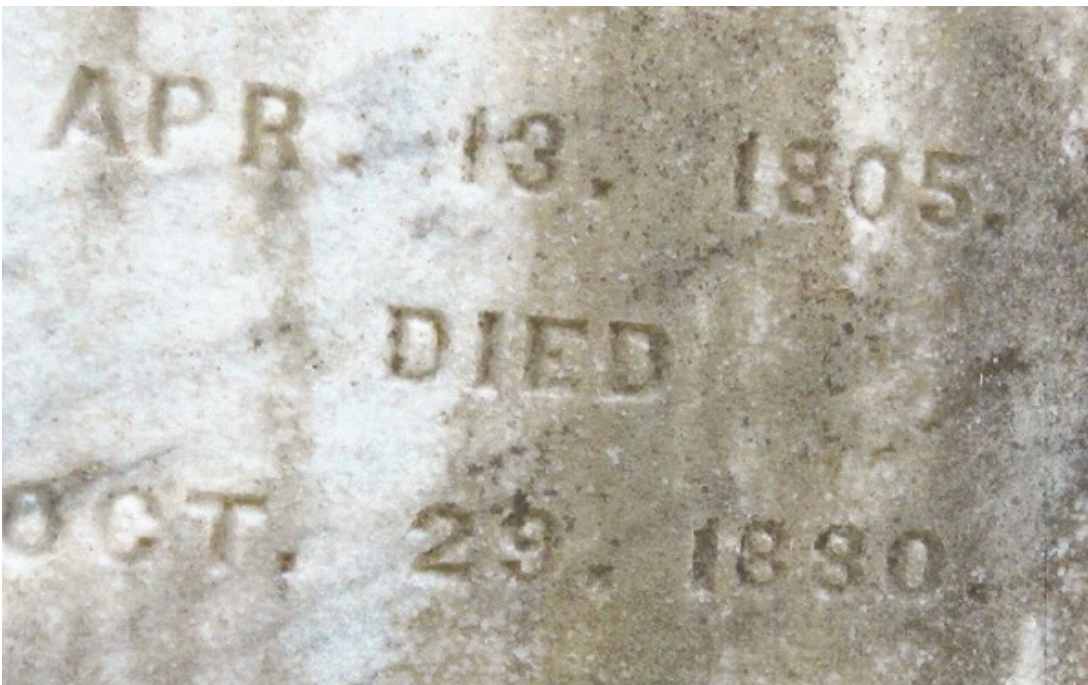
Using [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) at the Georgia Archives (this is a subscription website, but most Archives including the Cobb Archives, have it for use by patrons with no charge). I looked up Jacob Dennis in each census. The best fit was a Jacob Dennis, age 45, in Paulding County, GA, with a wife Elizabeth, age 32, and four children. In the 1860 and 1870 censuses, the same family is shown living in Polk County, GA. Then the 1880 census shows them living in Troup County, GA, in the LaGrange District.

Still this did not answer the question, why was Jacob buried in West Point, and none of his family are buried with him? A visit to the Troup County Archives and a look at their LaGrange newspapers on microfilm might give his obituary and shed some light on the West Point connection. Unfortunately, the Troup County Archives had no newspapers from 1880, and no record of any of his family members being buried in Troup County. So it is still a mystery why he was buried in West Point.

All of my above described experiences illustrate the importance of checking multiple sources when researching

a particular person.

If the gravestone had been the only source of information, one could have constructed an incorrect genealogy and reached the wrong conclusions about this man, Jacob Dennis.



MORE WEST POINT NEWS ITEMS *by Stephen Johnson*

Dawson Weekly Journal, December 5, 1872: “From the West Point News we cull the following affectionate gem: Eloped---My wife, Mrs. Emma F. Shaw, all of whose wants I have supplied, except the want of a young man, and I forbid any one trusting her on my account. This 22nd day of November, 1872, (Signed) Joseph Shaw”

The Hamilton Journal, April 18, 1876: “Bennie Gibson, A little boy about nine years old, swung on the coupling pole of a wagon to ride, and had both thighs dislocated. Happened in West Point.”

“A burglar went to the house of Mr. Miller, of West Point, during his absence, and knocked at the door for admittance. Mrs. Miller informed him that she was at home by raising the window and firing a pistol at him.”

Ibid, July 19, 1878: “*A Thing of Beauty*. Mr. Henry McCauley has just finished a monument for Mr. A. M. Eady, of West Point, to be placed over the grave of his daughter, Mattie, which is indeed a thing of beauty. The monument is about ten feet high and weighs three and a half tons...The base is of a beautiful red granite from Mr. McCauley’s quarry in north Alabama. This Mounted by a subbase pure white marble, with heavy Corinthian moulding; this by a plinth, executed in Gothic style, adopted with wreaths of roses; this is surmounted by a side with raised panels, which bear appropriate inscriptions in gilt letters, and the cap of which is finished Ionic(sic); on top is a magnificent Urn entwined with flowers.”

(Note: This monument is shown on page 213 of CVHS’s 2012 *Pinewood Cemetery* book, Lot #113.)

Ibid, May 8, 1884: “Henry and Frank Lanier and Judge Eady left here Sunday afternoon on their bicycles for LaGrange, and returned early Monday morning on the passenger train. It is told on them that they hired a wagon from Dr. Cook, at Long Cane, and rode to LaGrange from there.

Ibid, October 23, 1884: “A mad dog was knocked down on the street Monday morning by a drummer and afterward shot by the city marshal. It is thought the dogs must go.”

“A lady in West Point has a perfectly white rat, said to be quite gentle and is an excellent mouser. He is said to be “rough on mice,” as well as a terror to his fellow rats of color.”

“The stable of Mr. Harrington was destroyed by fire in early Sunday morning. A lot of grain, some cotton, and a mule were burned. Loss about \$450, no insurance.”

“West Point, having more than 3,000 inhabitants, has had but five funerals since January, and three of these have been of persons sent here for burial. A more healthy place is not to be found, unless is be some lonely desert where no one lives.”

Hawkinsville Dispatch and News, Pulaski County, Georgia, June 16, 1908:

‘Blind Tom’ FAMOUS NEGRO MUSICIAN: NATIVE OF GEORGIA. New York, June 14---‘Blind Tom,’ the famous negro musician, marvel of three generations of playgoers, died yesterday in Hoboken, N. J., where he has been living for years in retirement and subsisting on charity. **Thomas Wiggins** is the name given in his burial certificate, but the surname was one which the famous pianist adopted. He was born a slave near Columbus, Georgia, about 1850.

In early childhood, Tom, who was born entirely blind, and more than half idiotic, showed himself remarkably imitative, frequently stealing into the house of his master to reproduce on the piano forte pieces he had heard played by others. In 1861 he became so proficient on the instrument that he was taken to New York and exhibited as a phenomenon and later was widely heard in the United States and Europe.”

(Note: Thomas Wiggins, above, was born a slave May 25 1849 and died June 13, 1908. He was buried at Evergreen Cemetery, Brooklyn, N. Y.)

■

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