

The Story of J. J. Poill (1836 – 1928)



Jonathan Jackson Poill
(1836 – 1928)

We've recently made a major, major breakthrough on Jonathan Jackson Poill which allows us to piece together his life. He is my Great-Grand Father, and the father of Lulu Poill Miller who is my mother's mother. We affectionately refer to him as "JJ". It is our theory that JJ is actually John H. Pyle who committed murder in California in 1870 and fled to Oregon to escape from the law hiding his identity. Also, it is our theory that JJ was the son of Nicholas Pyle and Mary Ann Westbrook. Nicholas Pyle was the son of Samuel Pyle and Charity Eason. If our theories can be proven then it will end our greatest genealogical mystery and be a fitting reward to over 15 years of research on this incredibly elusive ancestor.

John H. Pyle lived in Tulare Co, CA in 1870 where he had a family of 4 children and a wife named Amanda Barnes Pyle.

Our recent major breakthrough is that we discovered that Amanda divorced John in 1874 because John deserted his family on 3 Sept 1870. According to the divorce papers, he had stabbed a man and killed him and then fled deserting his family without further support. At that point, John H. Pyle disappears from the genealogical record.

Fleeing to Oregon

It is our theory that, after the killing, John H. Pyle fled to Oregon and assumed the name Jonathan Jackson Poill to hide from the law. This is the first known appearance in the genealogical record of anybody named J. J. Poill. In fact, there has never been any other Poills anywhere west of the Mississippi except this family and only a handful elsewhere in the world all of whom are clearly not the same family.

On 15 Aug 1872, JJ committed bigamy by marrying the fifteen year old girl Mila Ann Eaton. They were married the week that Mila Ann turned 15 - that is, JJ and Mila Ann were "dating" when she was 14! We think there may have been a child born early to them that died. We think this alleged child may have been the reason for their hurried marriage. In the old family bible that Mila Ann maintained there is a very provocative entry of the death of a child named something like "Niphisten Poill" (the first name is difficult to decipher) on 11 Sept 1877. We think that the child that died was their first child and was born shortly after they were married (i.e., less than 9 months after) and died in 1877 at about the age of 5. Also, J. J. Poill's obituary supports the contention that there was a first son born and died. The obituary published in the Eugene Register Guard on 25 Dec 1928 states that there were 2 sons born to J. J. Poill and Mila Ann (as well as three daughters). The known son was Eddie who later died of Tuberculosis in 1902.

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The Pyle Connection

The major evidence that John J. Poill is actually John H. Pyle is because he gave an interview to the newspaper in 1924 stating that he was a Southerner born in Mississippi. In the interview he stated that "I was born ... in Mississippi. My father's name was Nick Poil (sic). He married Mary Ann Westbrook." We were able to find a "Nicholas Pyle" and "Mary Ann Westbrook" in the genealogical record who were married in 1831 and lived in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. Nicholas Pyle (1804 – 1867) was the son of Samuel and Charity Pyle. Nicholas and Mary Ann Pyle had about ten children, the first three being Everett Pyle (1832, GA), Nicholas H Pyle (1833, GA), and a John H. Pyle who was born in Mississippi sometime after 1834.

This John H. Pyle was a violent person. In 1853 at the age of about 17 he and his brother Nicholas H. Pyle were involved in an assault and battery case for nearly killing a man in Shelby Co, AL. In the trial evidence, the older brother Nicholas H. Pyle had been the ring leader and was found guilty. His brother John H. Pyle was found innocent. Their father Nicholas Pyle and their brother Everett Pyle arranged to pay Nicholas H Pyle's \$15 fine but there was a lot of evidence presented in the trial that John H. Pyle had participated in the fight and had stabbed the guy.

The Barnes' of Tarrant Co, Texas

Where did Amanda Barnes, the wife of John H. Pyle, come from? She was the daughter of James Barnes and Mary Ann Sportsman. The family was in Linn Co, MO in the 1850 census where Amanda was born in about 1843. The Barnes' moved to Tarrant Co, TX sometime in the 1850's. We suspect that Amanda and her family migrated to El Monte, CA in 1859. The reason why we think this is that a person by the name of Larkin Barnes and his family migrated from Tarrant Co, Texas to El Monte California on a large 110 wagon train in 1859. His interesting story is well-documented on the internet. The wagon train took the route of the so-called Butterfield Trail, the name now associated with the southern migration route from Missouri via Texas to California.

We have never been able to prove that this Larkin Barnes was any relation to Amanda Barnes but suspect he may have been her uncle. At that time, El Monte, CA was the destination of many Texans migrating to California. Many Barnes' were in El Monte California in the 1860 census living near each other. In particular, Amanda Barnes and John H. Pyle were living in El Monte, CA in the 1860 census (no children yet.)

Westward Ho

In the 1924 newspaper interview, J. J. Poill stated that he had been a "Texas Ranger" and had escorted wagon trains from Texas out to California. In the interview he mentioned many place

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names along the trail such as "Deadman's Hole", "Concho", and "Texas Hill". These place names are along the Butterfield Trail, the same route as the Larken Barnes wagon train. The Butterfield Trail ran from Missouri to California via Texas and Arizona. In Texas it followed the old Texas-California Cattle Trail. Actually the name comes from the famous Butterfield mail stages that operated over this route in 1858 – 1862. JJ's 1924 story was detailed and specific as it relates to place names along the Butterfield trail in Texas, Arizona and California so we're certain he was actually on the Texas – Arizona – California part of the Butterfield trail sometime in his past.

The Butterfield trail took the travelers through Tucson, Arizona (then a territory). Guess where Amanda E. Barnes and John H. Pyle were married according to the divorce papers: you guessed it - Tucson, Arizona Territory on 17 Aug 1859. So we think that both Amanda Barnes and John H. Pyle were on that 1859 wagon train recounted by Larkin Barnes. An interesting sidelight is that wagon trains that traveled the Texas to California part of the Butterfield Trail would start the voyage from eastern Texas in April and arrive in Tucson in mid August which fits perfectly with Amanda and John's marriage on August 17, 1859. This is further circumstantial evidence that John and Amanda were on the Larken Barnes wagon train of 1859.

So the conclusion is that John H. Pyle (aka JJ) either escorted the wagon trains (thus supporting JJ's tall tale that he was a "Texas Ranger") or at least was a passenger on that 1859 Larken Barnes train. Our theory is that during that 1859 voyage from Texas to California he took up with Amanda and married her along the trail in Tucson on 17 Aug 1859. In particular, our JJ picked up enough information and facts about the route to tell his stories in 1924 in the newspaper interview. A few facts go a long way when you're telling "tall tales."

Kaufman Co, Texas Connection

There is no evidence that John H. Pyle and Amanda Barnes knew each other prior to the overland trip. But here too we have a peculiar connection. John H. Pyle's father, Nicholas Pyle, appears to have left his wife Mary Ann Westbrook and his children sometime around 1858 then living in Shelby Co, AL (family desertion seems to run in this family.) Nicholas had a brother, John Pyle (there's a lot of Johns in this story), a farmer living in Kaufman Co, TX. Nicholas appears in the 1860 census living with his brother John in Kaufman Co. So Nicholas deserted his family and went out to Texas to live with his brother. Kaufman Co, TX is near Tarrant Co, TX. Tarrant Co is on the west side of Dallas Co (location of Dallas, TX) and Kaufman is on the east side of Dallas Co. Nicholas' brother John had several children, among them a son named Jonathan Jackson Pyle and hence the cousin of John H. Pyle.

The peculiar connection is that J. J. Poill throughout his life went by the name of Jonathan Jackson Poill! Here's our theory: A few years after the assault and battery case (1854), John H.

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Pyle took the trip with his father Nicholas Pyle out to Texas probably in 1858. Then John H. Pyle, being in the vicinity of Tarrant Co, got on that 1859 wagon train of Larken Barnes which left from Tarrant Co in April 1859. Later, when John H. Pyle committed murder in California and fled to Oregon, to hide his identity he changed his name to Jonathan Jackson Poill, a name he knew, that of his cousin Jonathan Jackson Pyle.

Henson McCoy Connection

Getting back to John H. Pyle and Amanda Barnes, the newlyweds then settled in El Monte, Los Angeles County where they were in the 1860 census. Then according to John and Amanda's divorce papers, they migrated up to Oregon and were there for over 2 years from 1860 to 1862. There is a very compelling connection here too. One of the children of John and Amanda was a son named Henson McCoy Pyle born in 1868. It so happens that living near them in the 1860 census of El Monte was a Henson McCoy. Tracing this character further, we discovered that Henson was married to Amanda's half sister Clarissa so Henson was Amanda's brother-in-law. Henson and Clarissa and their family lived in Tarrant Co, TX in the 1850's and had voyaged across the plains to California by ox wagons in 1858 according to his biography in the Wasco Co, OR county history where he settled later. We suspect that this date of 1858, given after his death, might be wrong and that he too was on the 1859 Larken Barnes wagon train that brought Amanda, John, and the Barnes' to El Monte!.

The 1860 census of El Monte, CA brings together all these characters. First there's our John H. Pyle and Amanda. Then we have Amanda's mother Mary Any Barnes, Amanda's brother William, Larken Barnes and his family, not to mention Henson and Clarissa McCoy.

Yamhill Co, Oregon Connection

Henson and Clarissa moved to Yamhill Co, OR in the early 1860's according to his biography and property records. So our theory is that John and Amanda moved with them and were in Yamhill Co, OR in the later 1860 to 1862 period to account for their own voyage to Oregon mentioned in their divorce. This would also correlate nicely with one of JJ's stories in the 1924 newspaper interview. He stated that during the Civil War, he had organized a company of militia known as the Oregon Guerillas in Yamhill Co and that the company had marched down to Texas to participate in the war on the side of the Confederacy. Even to this day, Yamhill Co still has vestiges of southern symphonies such as pickups sporting Confederate flags. Our conclusion is that he was in Yamhill Co when the Civil War started and being a Southerner, he may have at least done some rabble rousing for the Old South, enough to tell a vivid tale in 1924.

Everett Pyle Connection

We next have a record of John H. Pyle and Amanda Barnes living at Tule River, Tulare county,

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California by the 1867 Great Register and the 1870 census. Also Henson and Clarissa were living nearby too in Tulare county. John and Amanda had four children, among them an "Everett Pyle". So this is additional circumstantial evidence that John H. Pyle, son of Nicholas Pyle and Mary Ann Westbrook, is the same John H. Pyle married to Amanda Barnes living in California (i.e., he gave one of his sons the same name as his brother Everett.). Also, California John H. Pyle was born in Mississippi according to the 1860 census and Alabama John H. Pyle was too. So our conclusion is that he is the same John H. Pyle who was the son of Nicholas Pyle and Mary Ann Westbrook!

Married, Divorced, Remarried

J. J. Poill was divorced then remarried to Mila Ann Eaton They were originally married on 24 Aug 1872 then divorced 31 Oct 1891 then remarried on 6 Mar 1895. The deposition that Mila Ann gave for divorcing JJ makes fascinating reading. He abused her mentally and physically and was given to flashes of anger, whipping her with a buggy whip or threatening her with a revolver. He deserted her for a year and a half in 1882. At the time, Mary Ann had two children under the age of 5. These characteristics of JJ are very compatible with those of John H. Pyle who had stabbed a man in 1853, killed a man by stabbing in 1870 then deserted his family without further support. Why did Mila Ann remarry JJ in 1895? She probably felt sorry for him and took him back.

JJ Was Always a Mysterious Character

According to Grandma Gale, her grandfather "J J Poill" was always a mysterious character and seemed to have something to hide. With her twin sister, Willetta, they used to joke that he was actually John Wilkes Booth hiding out in Eugene Oregon. They weren't serious but it shows how mysterious "J J Poill" was for them to make up this joke about him.

So that's a summary of our 15 year research into J. J. Poill. He was a liar, bigamist, wife abuser, family deserter, and murderer.

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Proof that John H. Pyle of CA is J. J. Poill		
Category	John H. Pyle - CA	J. J. Poill
Genealogical	Born in Mississippi around 1836..	Born around 1836. "I was born...in Mississippi."
Psychological	Violent person – killed a man by stabbing in 1870.	Violent person – Physically and mentally abused his wife Mila Ann on many occasions.
Family Relations	Disserted family in 1870. Amanda divorced him in 1874.	Deserted family in 1882; Mila Ann divorced him in 1891.
Migration Patterns	Moved to Yamhill Co, OR 1860 – 1862	Told story of being involved in Confederacy efforts in Yamhill Co, OR during Civil War.
Westward Ho	Married in Tucson, AZ territory 17 Aug 1859 on wagon train from Texas to California on the Butterfield Trail route.	Told stories with many details and accurate place names of the wagon train route from Texas to California coinciding exactly with the Butterfield Trail.
Genealogical Record	No record of him after 1870.	No record of him before 1872.

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Proof that John H. Pyle of AL is J. J. Poill		
Category	John H. Pyle - AL	J. J. Poill
Genealogical	Born in Mississippi after 1834. Proven son of Nicholas Pyle and Mary Ann Westbrook.	Born around 1836. "I was born...in Mississippi. My father's name was Nick Poil (sic). He married Mary Ann Westbrook."
Psychological	Violent person – involved in a stabbing in 1853	Violent person – Physically and mentally abused his wife Mila Ann on many occasions severe enough for her to divorce him in 1891.
Genealogical Record	No record of him after 1854.	No record of him before 1872.

Proof that John H. Pyle of AL is John H. Pyle of CA		
Category	John H. Pyle – AL	John H. Pyle - CA
Name	Name of John H. Pyle.	Name of John H. Pyle.
Genealogical	Born in Mississippi after 1834. Had a brother named Everett.	Born in Mississippi in 1836. Named a son Everett..
Psychological	Violent person – involved in a stabbing in 1853.	Violent person – killed a person by stabbing in 1870.

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Important Dates:

1936 (speculation – birth of J. J. Poill (aka John H. Pyle)

6 Sept 1853 (Assault and Battery case against John H. Pyle and Nicholaus Pyle, Shelby Co, AL)

20 Aug 1857 (Birth of Mila Ann Eaton, Kansas City, MO)

17 Aug 1859 (Marriage of John H. Pyle and Amanda E. Barnes, Tucson, Terr. of Arizona)

3 Sept 1870 (Desertion of John H. Pyle after killing a man, Tule River, Tulare Co, CA)

24 Aug, 1872 (Marriage #1 to Mila Ann Eaton, Lane Co, OR)

31 Oct 1891 (Divorce of J. J. Poill and Mila Ann Poill, Lane Co, OR)

6 Mar 1895 (Marriage #2 of J. J. Poill and Mila Ann Poill, Lane Co, OR)

24 Dec, 1928 (Death of J. J. Poill)

20 Oct 1937 (Death of Mila Ann Eaton Poill, Eugene, Lane Co, OR)