

Fifth Generation - Joseph R. Hannah and Nancy Jane Woolsey

Joseph R. Hannah was born Dec. 23, 1859 according to birth records in Pocahontas County, West Virginia. His father, David, and mother, Sarah (nee McClure), lived near the Greenbrier River on land that the Hannah family had lived on since about 1782. Joseph was the fourth child born to David and Sarah.



Joseph ca 1911

Joseph went to Iowa with his parents about 1869, when he was still a young boy. We can only imagine the sense of adventure that a nine-year old boy must have felt moving to the "wild west". They settled in Taylor County, bought a farm, and there Joseph grew up.

Unfortunately we have no records or personal knowledge of Joseph's childhood. By the time our interest in our family history had blossomed in the 1980s, Joseph was long dead (1943) as were his children; so the opportunity to learn of Joseph's childhood and of his life had passed. We know that his father sold a substantial farm in West Virginia before moving to Iowa, so we suspect that the family was well enough off. However, farm life has never been easy, so hard work and long days were probably the rule when Joseph was growing up.

By the time he was 25 years old, the family had moved about 50 miles east from Taylor County to Woodland Township, Decatur County, Iowa where the 1885 special census shows Joseph living with his parents. The 1880's was the time of the cowboy, the gunfighter, cattle drives, high adventure! We can never know, but we can speculate that Joseph was a part of that romantic era and witnessed at first hand what we have only seen in the movies of our time.

At this same time Nancy Jane (Woolsey) Allen, a widow with five children, was living nearby in Hamilton Township. Her husband, James H. Allen, a Civil War veteran (Co. D, 97th Regt, Ind. Inf.) had died in 1879. So now the scene was set for Joseph to meet the Allen family and both of his future wives.

Somehow Joseph found his way to widow Nancy Allen's farm where he met and married Mary Catherine Allen on Aug. 15, 1886 at her mother's home in Spring Valley, in Hamilton Township. Mary was 17 and Joseph was 26 at the time of their marriage.

One child was born to this marriage - Stella May - on March 27, 1888. "Aunty May" (as she was known to us) later married John Goudy. They had two children, Albert and Esther; and after John's death Stella May married a Mr. Braun in Olympia, Washington.

Joseph and Mary Catherine's marriage did not last very long. Mary Catherine (or Kate, as she was called) met a railroad man, family tradition says, and she left Joseph and Baby Stella May. Presumably there was a divorce. Mary Catherine had at least two more marriages - one to a man named Mondt and another to a man named Benson. She lived in Seattle and in 1919 when her mother, Nancy Jane, died, the funeral notice listed her name as Mary Catherine Benson.

After Joseph's marriage to Mary Catherine broke up, he apparently stayed at the farm, or at least returned there. Eventually he married his mother-in-law, Nancy, who had already borne 7 children by James Allen including Joseph's first wife, Mary Catherine.

The circumstances of the marriage of Joseph and Nancy are not at all clear. The only record of the marriage we have found is a date given by Nancy in her pension application papers. In 1897 Nancy applied for a Civil War pension benefit for her daughter, Minnie and listed her marriage date to Joseph as March 11, 1891. Because Minnie was still a child of about 13 when Nancy remarried, she was eligible for some of her father's -- James Allen's -- pension benefits.

If it were not unusual enough that Joseph should marry his own mother-in-law, he apparently also fathered his own sister-in-law!! Joe and Nancy had a daughter, Audry, who was born in January 1889 -- not too many months after Joe's and Mary Catherine's daughter Stella May was born, and well before Joe's marriage to Nancy.

Audry would have been conceived within weeks of Stella May's birth, perhaps while Joe and Mary Catherine were still married. (Is it any wonder Mary Catherine may have sought solace in the arms of a railroad man?) The delay of the marriage of Joseph and Nancy may have been simply that she would lose the pension granted her when her Civil War veteran husband, James Allen, died.

Many years later when we first began gathering family history, we found that this subject was taboo among family members who might have had some knowledge. It undoubtedly was scandalous for the time, at least within the family, and may well have been the cause of the divorce between Joseph and Mary Catherine. Of course, we have no proof, just some fascinating speculation!

Joseph and Nancy had 3 children:

Audry T. Hannah was born in January 1889 in Iowa, probably in Decatur County. She married Burt Barnes, at one time fire chief in Olympia, Washington, and they had one child, Charles Robert Barnes April 20, 1908. Audry died in January of the following year, 1909. Nancy raised her grandchild, Charles, until she died in 1919.

William Roy Hannah was born near Sidney, Fremont County, Iowa, on June 15, 1892 according to his 1917 draft registration record, or June 15, 1891 according to the 1900 census. He married Alice Dell Adams and had five children - Florence born in 1912, Clyde and Clarence, twins born in 1913, Howard born in 1917, and Ralph born in 1926.

Robert, the third child, is the subject of chapter 9.



Nancy Jane Woolsey

A Hannah Family of West Virginia

An 1890 Civil War veterans and veteran's widow's census shows Nancy was living in Lindley Township, Mercer County, Missouri; but by 1892 Joseph and Nancy were living in Fremont County, Iowa, where William was born. They were there again when the 1900 federal census was taken. A search of the land and deed records in Fremont County did not show that they had bought land; so the family story that they cared for farms for absentee owners is probably true.

Joseph and Nancy moved their family to Thurston County, Washington in 1904 according to the obituary of Joseph. In 1911 they bought the house that is now located on the NE corner of 6th and Grant streets in Tumwater. This was home to various members of the family until 1926 when it was sold to the Turner family. The house is still standing in 1999.



Joseph, second from left

As far as any of the descendants know Joseph never had a trade and he is listed as a laborer in several instances. In his later years, after Nancy died in 1919, he lived in several different places in Thurston County as a caretaker of other people's property. I saw very little of my grandfather Joseph after the divorce of my parents in 1936, so I know very little about him. Only one picture has been found which we believe to be Joseph, and

it is a group picture on a post card written by him to his son, Robert in 1911. The group of five men are sitting in a 1911 Cadillac Model 30 Demi-touring car and the postcard is postmarked 1911 in Stevenson, WA. We believe one of the men in the picture, reproduced above, to be Joseph, but we can not be sure. The picture of Joseph shown at the beginning of this chapter is taken from the group above. We don't know where the men were going or for what purpose; but Stevenson, a few miles east of Vancouver, would have been on the automobile route to eastern Washington. The mountain pass highways over the Cascade range had yet to be built.

Nancy, Joseph's wife, died April 17, 1919 in Tumwater. Her funeral procession from her home to the IOOF Cemetery included five automobiles, the rest were horse and buggy. "Relatives left" according to the mortuary record included her husband, children Will, Robert, Dora Meek, Ceba Brower, Mary Benson of Seattle, Minnie Dailey of Nebraska, and May Goudy of Tumwater (actually a grandchild).

Joseph died Feb. 12, 1943 and is buried in the IOOF cemetery in Tumwater, Washington next to his wife, Nancy.

A Hannah Family of West Virginia