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All the Wight Connections: A History of One Branch of the Wight Family

Martha Wight

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ALL THE WIGHT CONNECTIONS

A HISTORY OF ONE BRANCH OF

THE WIGHT FAMILY

(1635 TO 1992)

BY

MARTHA WIGHT

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P R O L O G U E

Much of this material has been gleaned from William Ward Wight's genealogy book of 1890, The Wights, Vol. I. The Lincoln Library of Essential Information was used as a reference and also Brian Burns' Sturbridge. Other data has been gathered from various and sundry reading and from the recollection of stories that have been stored in the memories of my kin and me.

Although this is the story of the American Wights, it should be known in regard to our English ancestry that William Ward Wight delved deeply and extensively into historical records and pedigrees of the Wights in Scotland, Ireland and England. The family was traced back to about 1274 in England where they lived for about two centuries at Wight's Manor in Surrey. After that they were traced to Wimbledon, Ormiston, Berkshire, Essex and the Isle of Wight off the southern coast of England. Traditions were traced that linked the Wights to William, Prince of Orange and to the discovery that "the earliest Wight of the Isle of Wight was a natural son of one of the Stuart kings of Scotland," whose reign began in 1374.

Ultimately it was established that Thomas Wight, the first in the family to come to America, "was a native of the Isle of Wight and was driven from his country by the religious persecution of his time."

A friend of mine asked me a rather puzzling question: "Was the Isle of Wight named for the Wights, or were the Wights named for the Isle?" Who knows? Not I.

It is the purpose of this chronicle to trace a direct and complete line of descent (through the male line as most of the females had name changes by marriage) from the first generation of Wights in America in the 1600's down to the present generation in Seminole County, Florida -- a period of over three and a half centuries.

Martha Wight
Tenth Generation
Sanford, Florida

December 25, 1992

*Joyce - This is the
all trace but for the
last 2 pages
Merry Christmas!
With love,
MOT*

Wight Coat-of-Arms
Registered in London, 1588
Translation: "Fortune follows the bearer".



ALL THE WIGHT CONNECTIONS

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST GENERATION: THOMAS WIGHT (1594? - 1674)

Our story begins in New England in the 1630's with the first-known Wight man to step foot on these American shores -- Thomas Wight, the big daddy of us all.

Was Thomas among the Pilgrim Fathers ^{ON THE "MAYFLOWER"} who landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620? Nah, probably not, but close. More likely he arrived in John Winthrop's Puritan Migration of 1630. This was a company of selected colonists who came to New England and founded several towns in the neighborhood of Massachusetts Bay. Among them was Watertown, where Thomas was known to have been in 1635. Another was the town of Dedham where Thomas settled in 1637. Just how long before 1635 he'd already been here we can't say because no records have been found to pinpoint exactly when he arrived or what ship he sailed on to get here.

There was the story of a romance about Thomas that was handed down by his descendants. It was said that as an adventurous young man in England he met a lovely young lady by the name of Alice Roundy and they fell madly in love with each other. But, alas, her stern father, who was a very wealthy and stubborn man, refused to let them

see each other, much less marry, because young Thomas was not a man of worldly means. Poor Thomas could see no way of becoming prosperous enough to suit Mr. Roundy and win the hand of his daughter, so, rebuked and forsaken Thomas made his way to America, hoping to mend his broken heart and find a new way of life. But back in England spunky Alice was determined not to be outdone by her domineering father. She loved Thomas and couldn't care less whether he had a red hot pence, so one day she sneaked out of the manor, sold all of her jewels, booked passage on the next ship and followed ^{THOMAS WIGHT} ~~him~~ across the sea. They were overjoyed when they found each other in America and were immediately married. Together they began their new life as waifs of the wilderness in this primitive new land. Some years later old Mr. Roundy relented and bequeathed to Alice a large sum of money. But woe, because she now was far across the ocean, the required records of her marriage and her heirs were not available in England, and her inheritance had be foregone.

When the young Wight family was first known in New England, it consisted of Thomas, his beloved Alice and four children, and when they moved from Watertown to Dedham two more sons were born. It is a matter of record that in July of 1637 Thomas was "duly sworn and certified by the magistrate, and having subscribed to the covenant was admitted an inhabitant of Dedham in the Province of

Massachusetts Bay."

Children of Thomas and Alice Roundy Wight:

1. Henry Wight, (no record of birth)
2. John Wight, (no record of birth)
3. Thomas Wight, (Jr.) (no record of birth)
4. Mary Wight, (no record of birth)
5. Samuel Wight, (born 01-05-1639)
6. Ephraim Wight, (born 01-27-1645)

In this new world many of the early settlers had dreams of comfort and wealth, but once they turned a spade in the stony terrain their hopes were dashed. Help was hard to come by. The settlements were isolated and the forests were almost impenetrable. The soil was unyielding and the growing season short. Only the most hardy could eke out a living, and the winters were so long and severe that many did not survive.

In the early days of the colonies there were five classes of people:

1. Gentlemen, who were called master.
2. Skilled Artisans, who were called Goodmen.
3. Unskilled Laborers, who were called by their first names.
4. Servants, who were called to serve.
5. Slaves, who were called anything.

(AND ALL THOSE OTHERS WHO WERE CALLED WOMEN.)
Because Thomas was a certified citizen and a Freeman, he was most likely classified as a gentlemen.

At least we like to think so.

It was the colonial custom for the townships to allot lands for homesteads to a certain class of married men who also must be bonafide church members. Thomas qualified and it is recorded in Old English that he received "twelwe acres more or lesse made up good by an enlarget rune in amongst ye rockes, woodes and timbr." So it was on this land grant, "removed from the turmoil between Charles I and his embittered subjects" that the Thomas Wights feathered their nest on their very own plot of the New World.

The first Wight homestead in Dedham was nestled at the foot of a little rise bound by a babbling brook to which they had an easement for water. The original house was described as "a primitive little house, slender of material and thatched." This was later replaced by a more substantial dwelling that was improved upon through the years.

After Thomas had been received into the Dedham Church, he was made a Freeman which allowed him certain privileges in the colony. He was also made a Selectman, a sort of city father, and because he busied himself in political, religious and public endeavors, his name frequently appeared in the early historical records of Dedham.

Thomas was fourth on a roster of citizens who were instrumental in the promotion of education "by taking into consideration the greate necesitie of providing some meanes for the education of ye youthe." These men voted to tax themselves, resolving to raise twenty pounds per year. This resulted in the establishment of the first tax-supported free school in Massachusetts, and hopefully all six of the Wight children benefitted.

Another project that Thomas was involved in was his working with the Indians (then referred to as Endians or aboriginies). It is well known that the Indians were the first farmers on this continent and maize (Indian corn) was their primary crop. This was lucky for the colonists, many of whom would not have survived without the maize (which is a word from the Indian language meaning life-giving). Not only did the Indians teach them how to plant crops, but also they shared their skills of hunting for game to provide food and trapping to provide furs and skins for warmth. But as time passed, many of the Indians became susceptible to the diseases brought here by the white man. They became weak and destitute and needed help themselves. This was when Thomas and some other townsmen pitched in together and built a new village for the Indians at Natick which was nearby. Together they built shelters, cleared lands for planting, introduced to the Indians crops from England,

and taught them new medical treatments.

As Thomas could afford to, he continued to acquire woodland, meadows and planting grounds in the area. In 1649 he became interested in dividing the town of Dedham. He headed a committee to "assist the measuror in the laying out of lots" and establishing the lines that divided the town in two and thereby gave birth to a new town which was named Medfield. The Wight family then moved there and became among the original thirteen settlers in this new spin-off town of Medfield. The oldest son, Henry, however, remained with his young family at the Dedham homestead.

In the new municipality of Medfield, every grantee of lands was taxed and directed to pay one shilling for every acre. Thomas Wight was chosen to be said Collector. Just how this may have affected his esteem among his peers is a moot question.

There was a street in Medfield that became known as Wight's Lane which led to the lands granted to Thomas and his son, John. This was near North Street, later known as Green Street. (Hopefully, some day some of us descendants might visit this area and search for any landmarks of the Wights that might still exist).

Some of the official positions that existed in those early days may sound strange to us now. For instance, there were the Fense Viewer, the Measuror of Lots, the

Sealors of Leather, the Surveyors of Lumber and the Burnors of Woods. There was an item in the Medfield archives showing payment to Brother Wight "For the Making of Bell Ropes," and as a Lumber Surveyor he was requested to "Procure sleepers and planques for the Meeting House, either by procuring or purchasing sawen planques for the Towne." As a Fense Viewer he received a grant for "Such timbr for fensing as shall make three hundred rails, with postes for it, as shall be set by Brother Wight".

The early meeting houses of New England served the townspeople as both church and town hall and little separation existed between church and state or religion and politics.

In the new Medfield Meeting House, it became the duty of Thomas Wight "to assist in the Seating of People." Can't you just picture him -- lean and straight, dashing about to meet his fellow townsmen -- a serious but smiling figure with brown eyes, his salt and pepper hair drawn back into a ponytail, or perhaps wearing a proper white wig. A-la-Pilgrim, he sports a black suit set off by a big square collar. Black buckled shoes topped by long white stockings^{which} rise up to meet his knickered trousers. Thomas was in his element, both as a townsman, where he kept one hand on the pulse of the community, and as a countryman where he kept the other one on the plow.

By 1652 Thomas had managed to become "the wealthiest man in Medfield". He served his community as a Selectman for twenty-five years.

All of the Wight children, except Henry, lived out their lives in Medfield. Son John was the first to die of the 13 original Medfield settlers. He was about 24. Thomas (Jr.) and his family became victims of an Indian raid. Although their lives were spared they lost their home which was burned to the ground, their cattle which were burned in their barn, their horses which were stolen, and all of their possessions including their clothing. Evidently Tom, Jr. was able to reverse these losses as his estate was substantial when he died. Mary, the only daughter, married Thomas Ellis and moved into his home in "Bachelor Roe" on North Street. They had nine children and as of over 230 years later in 1890 this property was still owned by their ^{WIGHT} descendants. The youngest son, Ephraim, inherited the Thomas Wight home. He was one of a dozen citizens who accepted the offer of the town to give them 50 acres of land on the Charles River in nearby Medford for the purpose of building a much needed mill. This became the first grist mill in the area. Henry became a large landowner in Dedham and was involved in politics there, and more about Samuel is coming up in Chapter II.

Thomas, Sr. was very active in the Medfield Church and in 1667 became a Deacon. The denomination of this church was not specified but no doubt the Puritan views were embraced.

Thomas lost his beloved Alice on July 15, 1665 after a long, happy and fruitful marriage. By the time she died all of their children were grown and had become productive citizens in general. In particular they'd been productive in begetting thirty-eight grandchildren for Thomas and Alice. And added to that, Thomas became the stepfather of nine more children, and no telling how many grandchildren, when he later remarried.

The widow Lydia Eliot Penniman of Boston became the second Mrs. Thomas Wight on December 7, 1665. She was the sister of John Eliot, the Apostle to the Indians. He was known in Colonial history for his translation of the Bible into the Indian language. His mission was to spread Christianity to the Indians and to protect them from being exploited, sold into slavery and banished to the West Indies. His hopes failed later due to King Philip's War in 1675-76. This was a war between the colonists and a confederation of Indians which will be further referred to in the Second Generation.

In referring to Lydia Eliot who became Thomas's second wife, there is an interesting footnote that came out of the Roxbury Church records. It said that "This is

not the Lydia Eliot of whom it was written the following:
Anno 1665, 26d, 6m, Lydia Eliot, being convicted of theft
and lying and pride, all which became famous and
notorious, she was cast out of ye Church. Her theft was
ye taking away of lace from one shoppe in Boston, & neer
ye space of a year after, stealing away a Tiffany Hood
out of another shoppe and being charged with these things
by ye owners, she denyed againe & againe, but was after
found out & made restitution. She stole also a skaine of
yarn of halfe a pound wich was found out after her
excommunication, 2d, 9m, 1665. Upon her humiliation
Lydia Eliot was received againe & ye Church confirmed
their love to her." No, this notorious Lydia - though
somehow remotely connected with John Eliot, the Apostle
to the Indians - was most certainly not to be confused
with our lady Lydia Eliot, the refind widow who later
became the wife of our Puritan ancestor, Thomas. Heavens
above!

At the rate the Wight family had reproduced it was
no wonder they had become so interested in the promotion
of education -- not only in Dedham and Medfield but also
in Cambridge. In this involvement came the Wight
connection to Harvard. It is recorded that "Thomas Wight
and all his surviving sons and his son-in-law subscribed
for building the new brick college at Cambridge" (now
known as Harvard University) by giving the following:

Thomas Wight, 4 bushelles of Endian corne,
Ephriam Wight, 2 bushelles Endian corne,
Samuel Wight, 1 bushelle Endian corne and a halfe,
Thoams Ellis, 1 bushelle Endian corne and a halfe,
Thomas Wight (Jr.), 1 bushelle Endian corn."

In those bygone days, commodities such as corn served as media of exchange. Compared to today's standards of abundance, the monetary value of a bushel of corn back then must have been considerable for it even to have been mentioned in the history of the founding of Harvard.

On March 17, 1674, after an adventurous and illustrious life, Thomas Wight passed away. In his will he wrote, "First give and commit my soul to Jesus Christ, my dear Redeemer, and my body to the earth from whence it was taken...."

His will, which was written in 1672, had in it a stipulation that precludes the fact that prenuptial agreements are by any means a modern instrument because it contained the clause that "whereas my present, dear and well-loved wife, did before my marriage with her, make an agreement with me that in case of my departure out of this natural life before herself..., and so forth which resulted in Lydia Wight being disinherited by her husband.

The bulk of his estate, of course, was left to the Wight sons. This included all of the lands -- woods, swamps, meadows and farms, all of the buildings -- the houses, out houses, barns and stables, and all of his wearing apparel -- linens, woolens, boots, shoes and hats. But to his only daughter, Mary, Thomas bequeathed only "the furniture in the parlor chamber and one-half all such pewter, brass and iron pots as I shall leave at the time of my decease." It goes without saying that such inequity as this preceded by centuries anything remotely touching upon the equality of women's rights.

Among some of the items of antiquity appraised in the inventory of Thomas' estate were his "feather bed, a Cup Board, 31 pieces of yerne, andirons, firepan, tonges and hakes, bellows, combs, hourglass, shears, mortor spitt, lumber, flax, a spinning wheel, a tub of lard, pork & suet, saddles, horse furniture, cart, grindstone, musket & pike, plough, chains, hookes and ropes. Two cows, 2 oxen, 1 yearling, 1 calf, 5 sheep, 2 swine, hay ladder & pitchforke." Along with the buildings and about 400 acres of land, the grand total of the estate of "the wealthiest man in Medfield" was appraised at 465 pounds, 10 shillings. Debts to be paid out of this were 2 pounds, 18 shillings.

The homestead in Medfield was to remain in the Wight family for four more generations. The original homestead

in Dedham was passed down from son to son, and of the eventual successor, Joseph Wight, it was written, "Here he was born, here his twelve children were born, and here he died in 1826." Later, around 1830 it was written that "This ancient dwelling, the home of six generations of Wights was taken to pieces." Some years later, on the spot where the hearthstone once stood, Dr. Danforth Phipps Wight planted an elm tree, and 50 years later yet, it was said that same elm tree "now flourishes, may it ever flourish in remembrance to the common ancestor of us all -- Thomas Wight".

Regarding Thomas' age, we'd judge he lived to a ripe old age because the first we knew of him in 1635 he was already married with a good-sized family and must have been in his 40's. We've covered what we could of the next 39 years so he must have been around 80 when he died in 1674.

Thus ends the first generation, and as we reflect on it, we can all breathe a prayer of Thanksgiving to the soul of our founding father, Thomas Wight, who started it all. It was only through his pioneeing spirit that we, his descendants, were all lucky enough to be "Born in the U.S.A."

CHAPTER II

THE SECOND GENERATION: SAMUEL WIGHT (1639 - 1716)

Our next progenitor in this branch was Samuel, the fifth of the six children born to Thomas and Alice Wight.

By the time Samuel came along, the town of Dedham had started keeping the Record of Births, Marriages and Deaths. His older siblings were born too soon to be listed in this register, but in 1639 in the following style, it shows that "Samuell, the son of Thomas & Alice Wight was borne the 5 of the 12 mo." Also from old church records we quote, "Samuell, ye sone of our brother Thomas Wight was baptised ye 15th of ye 7 month, 1640."

In 1662 when Samuel was 23, the Medfield annals reflect that Henirry Smith, John Bowers and Sameruell Wight are chosen to burn the woodes in there severall parts of the towne." The trees were so dense that the New England earth could be exposed to the sun only by girdling and burning the trees and clearing the thick undergrowth. This was necessary to allow for farming and pastures and growth and development in general. The frontier life was harsh and it was hard for the settlers to eke out enough food for their own subsistence as well as that of their livestock.

Samuel spent his boyhood in Dedham, and later in Medfield where he was married. Some 200 years later, an old Family Bible turned up in Marietta, Georgia in the possession of one of his descendants, Martha Gibbs. This ancient Bible recorded Samuel's marriage as follows: "Mr. Samuel Wight and Miss Hannah Albee, of Medfield, Province of Massachusetts Bay in New England, were married by the Rev. Mr. John Wilson of the towne aforesaid, on the 25th day of March, 1663", Samuel was 23 years old.

Children of Samuel Wight:

1. Hannah, born 03-25-1664,
died the same year
2. Samuel, born 11-11-1665
3. Hannah, born 02-04-1667
4. John, born 05-22-1670
5. Nathaniel, born 10-11-1672, died at age 3
6. Benjamin, born 02-10-1674
7. Abigail, born 11-08-1676
8. Joseph, born 09-07-1679
9. Jonathan, born 09-11-1682

The first of their nine children was a little girl, Hannah, named after her mother. The baby died during her first year. Next came a son, Samuel, Jr., born in 1665, who later became a weaver by trade and also was a selectman. Another daughter, also named Hannah, was born

in 1667. Then came a son, John in 1670, and another son, Nathaniel in 1672, who died at the age of three. Benjamin, who came along in 1674, later moved away to Rhode Island. Abigail, born in 1676 married Stephan Randall and also went to Rhode Island. Joseph, born in 1679 later moved to Bellingham, Massachusetts, became a deacon and was one of the first members of the Bellingham Baptist Church. This was the first of a particular denomination mentioned in this Wight history. At the tail end of the family came offspring number 9, Jonathan, the baby who was destined to become next in propagating this line of the family.

But going back to Samuel, Sr., he had been made a Freeman in 1672 and a Constable in 1673.

This was also the year the family finally had realized their dream of moving into their new home in the north of Medfield. But just three years later, in February of 1676, this new home was destroyed by King Philip's Indians. That name may sound like an English monarch, but the fact is, King Philip was the nickname given to the Indian, Metaconet, leader of the powerful Wampanoag people. They were joined by the Nipmuck and other tribes of New England. There had been a peace treaty of 50 years standing made by King Philip's father, the great chief, Massasoit of the Pokanoket people, but now there were so many economic, religious and cultural

differences between the Indians and the English settlers that the treaty was violated, and a massive Indian uprising resulted which was led by King Philip, the son of the great peace-maker. Their raids were targeted at Groton, Deerfield, Medfield and other settlements in the area. The massacres were atrocious and close to a thousand white settlers "bled beneath the hatchet and scalping-knife in the natives' attempt to drive the English into the sea." The death of King Philip in the war he had created finally ended the conflict.

Everything Samuel owned - his house, barn and fields had been leveled, burned or stolen. Because of these dire reverses poor Samuel was unable to follow through on his subscription to "the new brick college" at Cambridge. Furthermore, he found it necessary to petition for relief from paying taxes until he got on his feet again. (And incidentally, this was four years after the death of his father, Thomas, who had been the Tax Collector, not that it would have made any difference.) The records of the General Court, May 9, 1678, show the following: "Samuel Wight of Medfield, having suffered great loss by fire by the indian enemy, brought very low, humbly desires the favor of the Court to remit him the rates, about three or four pounds, already due for the last year, hoping God will enable him to pay rates again in the future." This request was granted to him by the Court.

But Samuel was not a man to be easily defeated. Through perseverance and dedication he again became prosperous and was able to rebuild the home for his large family on the same site on North Street where they all rejoiced in moving in once again.

Samuel's name appeared several times on the early lists of Dedham and Medfield taxpayers and he and his wife, Hannah, were listed among the members of Medfield Parish Church in 1697. He was also shown to be among the proprietors of the "Black Swamp" in Medway.

In 1716, at age 77, Samuel Wight died in Medfield. His widow, Hannah continued to live on in their home until her death 7 years later.

CHAPTER III

THE THIRD GENERATION: JONATHAN WIGHT (1682 - 1779)

Jonathan Wight was born September 11, 1682, the youngest child of Samuel and Hannah Wight and the grandson of Thomas Wight. A Medfieldite through and through, Jonathan was born, raised, schooled, married, fathered nine children, died and was buried there.

At 22 he married Margaret Fairbanks and they settled in northwest Medfield on the road to Death's Bridge near the railroad crossing. (Note: Regarding the Fairbanks name, I can remember my grandmother, Bubba Wight, saying that way back in our heritage somewhere there was some connection with the famous actors, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. and Sr. She showed me some of her antique china which was decorated with the Fairbanks coat-of-arms. Perhaps this Fairbanks link came through Margaret or maybe her great-niece, Miriam Fairbanks, who also married into the family when she married Daniel Wight in 1778. If, indeed there is some remote kinship with the actors, this must have been it).

Like his father and grandfather before him, Jonathan was a Selectman of Medford. Also like his father, he, too, had a family of nine children.

Children of Jonathan Wight:

1. Jonathan (Jr.), born 10-11-1705



Fairbanks

2. John, born 08-12-1708
3. Samuel, born 11-03-1711
4. Phebe, born 12-14-1712
5. Asa, born 11-18-1713
6. Benjamin, born 06-05-1720
7. Aaron, born 11-13-1722, died at age 13
8. William, born 11-02-1725
9. Margaret, born 12-16-1729

The oldest boy, Jonathan, Jr. became a carpenter and worked hand in glove with his brother John, who owned a sawmill. The third son, Samuel, moved to Wrentham and then to Bellingham. A daughter, Phoebe married Eleazer Allen and they lived in Dedham.

Asa, the fifth child died at 29 and probably never married. Benjamin didn't marry until he was 56. He and his wife had no children and they both died as paupers in Dedham. There was no explanation of how this could happen in such a large, seemingly well-to-do family.

The seventh child, Aaron, lived to be only 13. Then there was William who lived on Canal Street in Medfield and later moved to Natick, where about 100 years earlier, his great-grandfather, Thomas Wight, had helped build the Indian Village.

The youngest daughter, Margaret, married Joseph Fisher and moved with him to Wrentham.

Jonathan and Margaret Wight had been married for 75 years, their Diamond Wedding Anniversary, when he died at the age of 97. Margaret lived on for 8 more years until she was 103 years old.

The estate of Jonathan Wight was inventoried at 823 pounds, pretty good for those days, so considered.

CHAPTER IV

THE FOURTH GENERATION: JONATHAN WIGHT (JR.) (1705 - 1782)

The oldest of nine children, Jonathan Wight, a great grandson of Thomas Wight, was named for his father. He, too, lived his whole life in Medfield, Massachusetts. At 27 he was married to Sarah Plimpton by the Rev. Mr. Baxter, who at the same ceremony also performed the marriage rites of Sarah's widowed mother, Mary Plimpton, and Lieut. Jabez Pond.

Jonathan bought a tract of land from David Ellis known as the old Partidge Estate at the corner of North and Railroad Streets. Later, in 1746, he bought from Edward Partridge more of the old estate, including buildings which abutted his property to the north. Here he and Sarah built their home and moved in with their large but still growing family.

By trade Jonathan was a carpenter, and he became the fourth generation of Wights to become a Selectman in Medfield.

He had the reputation of being a good businessman, and it was said of him "a thrifty man he must have been, for he brought up a family of 12 children and sent at least three of them to college." Actually he and Sarah

had 14 children but two of them, Moses and Simeon, died as infants.

Children of Jonathan Wight (Jr.):

1. David, born 08-16-1733
2. Jonathan, born 11-09-1734
3. Sarah, born 01-04-1736
4. Simeon, born 10-25-1737, died at 2 weeks
5. Lois, born 10-11-1738
6. Eunice, born 07-09-1740
7. Moses, born 02-24-1742, died at 7 months
8. Aaron, born 02-24-1742
9. Silence, born 12-11-1743
10. Moses, born 10-30-1745
11. Thankful, born 12-08-1747
12. Simeon, born 03-20-1750
13. Henry, born 05-26-1752
14. Job, born 03-09-1755

Another son, also named Simeon studied medicine at Harvard University. He served his country as a surgeon during the American Revolutionary War. He survived the Battle of Bunker Hill, but later, while engaged in battle with a British ship, he was killed at Chatham near Cape Cod in 1777. He was 24 years old.

The longevity of the 11 remaining children in the family was considered remarkable and was commented upon in several New England journals at the time their various

deaths occurred. Their ages aggregated 893 years, an average of over 81 years each. Sarah lived to be 98, Jonathan to 96, Lois to 93, and the ages of the others dwindled on down to their 80's and 70's.

To relate some of the comings and goings of this clan, David, the eldest, became an innkeeper and operated a house of public entertainment including a pub "on the great public road in Medway." Such a house in those days was not the kind of house you might think, but was a house of genteel entertainment. Anyway, he sold out later and ventured through the wilds to the banks of the Quinebaug River at Sturbridge where he negotiated to buy 1,000 acres of land for \$4,500. But he became ambivalent about this when he saw other available lands in an area that was later known as the town of Holland. Unable to make up his mind, he rode back to Medway where his resourceful wife, Catharine Morse Wight, decided that she should inspect both tracts of land. So she got on her horse and took off alone, taking enough provisions to camp along the way. The so called road was a mere pathway, and the fact that this was a wilderness full of wild animals and Indians did not deter the spunky Catharine. When she finally reached the Quinebaug, she took one careful survey with her eyes of both tracts and immediately decided to locate at Sturbridge and make this their future home. It took 4 weeks for her to complete

this mission but she made it back to Medway without mishap. The family then set out for their new site with all of their possessions loaded onto ox carts. En route one of the carts turned over and landed on top of Alpheus, one of the children. From beneath bundles and cartons and pots and pans he was finally extricated unhurt. The family's first night in Sturbridge, May 12, 1774, was spent in a crude little makeshift hut, and this area they pioneered later became known as Wight Village. Since the time they had first negotiated for their acreage, the economy had been adversely affected by the Revolutionary War and prices shot sky-high. The depreciation of the paper money they'd planned to use for the purchase of the land left David in a predicament of financial embarrassment. But the day was saved by his son, David, Jr. who had bought a \$10 ticket in the Harvard lottery. As luck would have it, he hit the jackpot, winning \$5,000.00. Talk about spreading your bread across the waters, maybe the sharing of corn with Harvard by his forefathers came back now to David some hundred years later. At any rate, this windfall enabled both Davids to settle all notes and claims on the land. The Sturbridge Wights became operators of grist mills, saw mills, cotton mills and tanneries. Little Alpheus who was nearly killed by the ox cart became known for seeing the potential of harnessing the energy of the

Quinebaug. A system of canals and dams was built and an industrial surge, powered by water, was generated in the Sturbridge area.

The next son, Jonathan, was drafted into the Continental Army to meet the Medfield quota of eleven men to fight the British Redcoats in the American Revolution.

There was a sad note about the daughter, Lois. She stumbled into a well as a little girl and her mind was affected permanently from the injuries she sustained from the fall. She lived out her life in Medfield until she died at 93.

Aaron was the twin brother of Moses who died when he was 7 months old. Aaron enlisted in the French and Indian War of 1765 - 1760 when the French and the Indians were allies of the Colonists against the English. While serving in New York, Aaron became desperately sick. He was found unconscious in a deep forest by a squaw who nursed him back to health. He later became a doctor and often spoke of her, calling her his "Indian Mother" and they kept in touch for many many years. Aaron worked with a hospital established for the treatment of smallpox and finding an inoculation against this dreaded disease that took the lives of so many young people. Later Aaron became a celebrated surgeon and also an artist of some note. He taught all of his 12 children how to treat minor ailments and to dress wounds. It was said he

formulated a salve of "wonderful healing properties", but the method of its preparation was disclosed only to his children. He instructed them to hand the secret down through their children, and this "injunction was implicitly obeyed." (I wonder if it's still a secret among Aaron's descendants.) One of his granddaughters related that his house was very large ... it was crowned with a belfry, and whenever his boys and girls wished for a good time, they would swing on the bell and soon the house was alive with the joyful laughter of young people who were summoned to play from all over town.

Jonathan and Sarah had a daughter named Silence and another named Thankful. And they are mentioned merely because Silence and Thankful were their real names.

After the Revolution, Sgt. Moses Wight, the 10th child returned to Medfield, and feeling hungry for outside news of current events, he became one of a group of ten to "indent and engage to enter our names for the Newes Papers printed in Boston." They arranged for the first weekly delivery of the Boston newspapers to Medfield and outlying towns, thereby enabling the spreading of the word of the free press and improving upon the lack of communication with the outside world that existed at that time. This was in 1777.

The son, Henry, is the subject of our next chapter as he was to become next in line on this branch of the

family tree.

The youngest boy, Job, served as a drummer in the Company that marched from Medfield after Paul Revere had spread the alarm on his midnight ride in Lexington that "The British are coming!" There the first battle of the Revolution was waged. When Job returned from the war, he studied Divinity at Harvard and became a Congregational missionary in New York. Perhaps he'd been shell-shocked or maybe he was just a little quirky, but it was said of Job, who must not have had patience, that "his eccentricities greatly impaired his usefulness and rendered almost valueless his respectable talents and learning." He died as a bachelor at age 54.

Jonathan and Sarah Wight with their large family had done more than their share in the propagation of the family tree. He died in 1782 at age 77 and she in 1798 at 87. Jonathan's estate totaled 392 pounds, 16 shillings, 6 pence.

CHAPTER V

THE FIFTH GENERATION: HENRY WIGHT (1752 - 1837)

The first of this Wight branch to bear the name Henry was born in Medfield, Massachusetts, May 26, 1752. He was a great, great grandson of Thomas Wight. As a young man Henry's studies at Harvard were interrupted by his serving in the Continental Army during the American Revolution. He was 24 years old when the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776 and our country became free from England.

After the war, Henry taught school for a while at the North School in Medfield. Later he returned to Harvard and finally graduated when he was 30, and then went into graduate studies for the ministry. When he finished, his ordination was performed in conjunction with a newly found house of worship, and the sermon by Rev. Thomas Prentiss, D.D., was published in Providence, Rhode Island. It was entitled "A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of Henry Wight to the Pastoral Care of the Catholic Congregational Society in Bristol, Rhode Island, January 5, 1785."

One cold night in January during the first year of Henry's ministry he rode horseback all night from Bristol, Rhode Island to Medfield, Massachusetts as fast as he could in order to get there in time to help

celebrate the birthday of his dearly-loved grandmother, Margaret Wight. For this very special occasion many friends and relatives had gathered at the Medfield Meetinghouse and Henry surprised and delighted his grandmother by preaching a sermon in her honor. It was her 100th birthday. (But not her last as she lived on to be 103.)

At 37 Henry married Alice Burrington of Tiverton, Rhode Island in June of 1789. She was 10 years his junior but died after only eight years of marriage during which time she bore him his first three children - John Burt, Henry, Jr. and a daughter Adeliza who died at six months. Alice must have been a lady of large proportions, or at least her tombstone must have been, because it was inscribed with the following:

Kind stranger, stop, let reason be the clue
To moralize, while this cold stone you view,
Here death in icy arms confines that fair
Who once was lovely as the angels are.
But think not, stranger, ever to behold
A Christian's worth on sculptured marble told;
Ah, nor suffice it, if one mournful tear
Shall mix with mine in tender sorrow here.
Be silent, grief, my faith in Christ replies,
Behold, I see the sleeping dust arise!
That happy day shall banish all my pain,
Then shall we joyful meet, nor part again.

This tombstone still remains in a cemetery in Bristol.

Henry was married a second time in 1799 to Clarissa Leonard. She was nineteen years younger than he and bore him seven more children - six daughters but only one son, William Osborne, who died as a baby of 8 months. All told, Henry had ten children, all of whom were born in Bristol.

Children of Henry Wight:

1. John Burt, born 05-07-1790
2. Henry, born 11-05-1791
3. Adeliza, born 04-08-1794, died at 5 months
4. Alice Burrington, born 02-10-1800
5. Abigail Alden, born 10-21-1802
6. Charlotte DeWolf, born 02-01-1805,
died at 4 years
7. Martha Gibbs, born 07-25-1807
8. Clara Leonard, born 07-31-1812
9. William Osborne, born 08-13-1818,
died at 8 months
10. Fanny Leonard, born 09-17-1816

Clarissa was known to be a great lady of "strong intellectual bias." Before she married Henry, she promised her father that she would always devote a minimum of one hour every day to reading. She kept this promise and maintained a continuing education for

herself. It was unusual for a woman in those days to take such an active interest as Clarissa did in politics and the affairs of the colonies. It was also written of her that she fulfilled the exacting duties of a minister's wife with the most untiring fidelity and zeal. She gave delightful joy to her children and to gatherings of all kinds by reciting long passages from the old poets and quotations from the Bible. She outlived Henry by 27 years. On her 70th birthday she sailed south out of New York down to Georgia where she joined some of her children who had moved there earlier. Clarissa lived on 23 more years in Lawrenceville, Gwinette County, Georgia, about 25 miles northeast of Atlanta, until her death at age 93.

Going back to the distinguished life of Rev. Wight, he was a Fellow at Brown University for 40 years during which time he received a degree there of Doctor of Divinity.

He traveled to Wayland, Massachusetts in 1815 to preach the sermon at the ordination of his oldest son, John Burt Wight. On the way he stopped at Sturbridge for a visit with his brother, David, and his family of whom we wrote earlier.

In the American Quarterly Register, referring to his 52 years in the ministry, it was written, "The labors of Dr. Wight were blessed in this town. He was a man of



The Reverend Doctor Henry Wight
1752--1837
The Fifth Generation

amiable disposition and devoted piety. He retained the affections and the confidence of the people until his death, and his grave was bedewed with the tears of many who were brought into the Kingdom of the Redeemer under his ministrations."

Other flowery kudos published in his day spoke of Dr. Wight as representing the highest type of New England character -- physically, mentally and morally. He was described "as having a fine face, good features, clear complexion and handsome dark eyes. His figure was erect, his bearing noble and dignified, his manners kindly and courteous, and, in habits of work he was industrious and methodical. He was a good Greek and Latin scholar, a fine mathematician, an excellent singer and a constant reader."

Dr. Wight, though not a doctor of medicine, had a vast amount of medical knowledge, and visiting among his people he often ministered to their bodies while counseling to their souls. In his own parish and others as well, he was known to help the poor with food and medicine, the ignorant with knowledge, and the afflicted with comfort.

For 70 years "Parson" Wight kept a complete daily log, faithfully recording everything to his knowledge. His diary was famous as a reference for settling certain disputes, pinpointing dates and places of events, and

describing the history of Bristol as it was in the making. One entry detailed what was apparently a total eclipse as follows: "The dark day of May 19, 1780 -- some rain, smokey and a very dense fog or vapor which caused an uncommon phenomenon: As the sun advanced to his meridian altitude, ye darkness increased 'till about 12 1/2 o'clock, when it was not as bright as good moonlight. We were obliged to eat our noonday meal by candle-light after which ye darkness dispelled by degrees 'till sunset, and ye darkness came on again, which, added to ye night, was truly like Egyptian darkness. All nature seemed to be covered by a silent gloom and was amazed at ye phenomenon!"

Another entry of note which really dated the period said, "Drank tea with C. M. Gray. We disputed whether it is of advantage for a student at college to be civilly conversant with the fair sex or not. We supposed it was."

Of Henry's children, the oldest, John Burt Wight was ready for college when he was 12 but was refused entrance due to his tender age. He did manage to graduate at 18 from Brown University at the head of his class, went on to Harvard for his Masters and became a minister of the Congregational Society and later preached the Unitarian and the Trinitarian doctrines. A venerable clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Wight also served in the Massachusetts

legislature. He authored a bill in 1851, the first of its kind in this country, which was passed "with great approbation and almost entire unanimity" and which authorized cities and towns to establish and maintain public libraries. Thus his name is said always to be honorably associated with the diffusion of knowledge.

Alice, the oldest daughter, was the first to be born in the new century on February 10, 1800. She married the Rev. Charles Henry Alden of the Episcopal Church. (I remember my grandmother speaking of the Alden name and a possible family connection reverting back to John Alden who was immortalized in Longfellow's famous poem "The Courtship of Miles Standish." This was the Why-Don't-You-Speak-for-Yourself John Alden who was said to be the youth who sprang from the bow of the Mayflower and was the first to touch New England soil in 1620.) Alice Alden Wight was described as "one woman in a thousand for mental and physical energy and large heartedness."

The daughter Abigail married Byron Diman, quite a wealthy and influential gentleman from Bristol. He was a senator, a lieutenant governor, and in 1846 was Governor of Rhode Island. He was rightfully proud of his lovely wife, Abigail, who was considered the most beautiful woman in Rhode Island and her character was always "altogether lovely."

Another daughter, Martha Gibbs Wight, was known as everybody's "Aunt Martha." We spoke of her in the second generation as being the descendant in Georgia who possessed the 200 year old Bible which recorded the marriage of her ancestor Samuel Wight in 1663. Martha lived with her sister Fannie and husband Mathis Cleveland in Marietta, Georgia. They lived a life of dignified ease until the Civil War when the family became "much broken and financially injured by the way in which their sympathy and activities were enlisted upon the Southern side." Indeed, they were bound to have had torn feelings of loyalty with their family connections being both in the North and the South during this heart breaking conflict.

The next daughter, Clara, married William Maltbie Rowland and moved to Augusta, Georgia. He was a merchant and also was connected with the Iron Steamboat Co. which later yielded to the superior speed and convenience of the railroads. "It may truly be said of Clara that she was the embodiment of unselfish love - in her tongue was the law of kindness, and in her heart the charity that thinketh no evil."

The number two son, also named Henry, was to become the next link in this Wight chain.

Henry, Sr., our illustrious ancestor died and was buried in Bristol. On his headstone is his epitaph:

"With long life was he satisfied, and his end was peace,"
and below that, "Remember the words that I spoke unto you
while I was yet with you." The latter, of course, were
the immortal words of Jesus Christ, but perhaps there
were some folks in Bristol who remembered also the
sermons of the mortal Rev. Dr. Henry Wight.

CHAPTER VI

THE SIXTH GENERATION: HENRY WIGHT, (JR.) 1791-1885

Henry Wight, named for his father, was born in Bristol, Rhode Island on November 5, 1791. Going back to Thomas Wight, Henry was a great, great, great grandson. It was through him that our branch of the Wights left New England and ventured into the South. Our nation was young and free and Henry wished to spread his wings. He was engaged in mercantile and marine pursuits in Rhode Island when he married Abby Wardwell in Bristol. They had three children when they decided to spread their roots of six generations in New England by sailing south to Georgia. This was in December of 1829 and they had no regrets about never again experiencing another New England winter.

Henry, Abby and the children settled in Sofkee, Decatur County, Georgia where two more children were born.

Children of Henry and Abby Wight:

1. William Henry Wight, born 12-11-1817
2. Abby Wardwell Wight, born 09-14-1819,
died at 13 months
3. Samuel Bowen Wight, born 04-01-1821
4. John Bowen Wight, born 02-20-1823
5. Byron Diman Wight, born 12-29-1830

6. George Alden Wight, born 02-13-1834

Henry made his living by teaching, farming and merchandising. The family became members of the Presbyterian Church. In all of his endeavors, Henry was said to have gained "the universal respect of his neighbors."

Their oldest son, William Henry, moved back to the North where he became a hardware merchant in New York, but he died there as a young man of only 27.

The next son, Samuel stayed in Georgia, opening a country store which prospered. When the War between the States broke out he enlisted in the Confederate Army to fight for his adopted Southland. He rose to the rank of Colonel, was captured by the Union Army and spent 9 months as a prisoner of war confined to Johnson's Island at Lake Erie. Following the war he returned home and later moved to West End, Georgia where he became Mayor of the town.

John Bowen Wight, the third son, moved to Early County, Georgia, where he became a merchant. He died in Savannah at age 31. Another son, Byron also died young at age 23. He'd also started out as a merchant in Newton, Georgia.

The youngest son was George Alden Wight, my great grandfather, and the next in line of this account.

Some years after the death of his wife, Abby, Henry moved to Cairo, Georgia. As an old man when he was in correspondence with our genealogist, William Ward Wight, Henry wrote him the following: "It is with a sense of gratitude that I can say that within my knowledge, not one of the many who have descended from my father's family, has in the least degree cast a blemish upon his good name."

Henry lived to 93. He died February 6, 1885 in Cairo, Georgia.

CHAPTER VII

THE SEVENTH GENERATION: GEORGE ALDEN WIGHT (1834-1920?)

Born February 13, 1834 in Sofkee, Decatur County, Georgia, George Alden Wight was Thomas Wight's great, great, great, great grandson. He first went into business at age 19 as a merchant. In 1861 he enlisted in the Southern Army during the Civil War. Except for this branch of the Wights, most of the Wight family still remained in the North at the time of the American Civil War. There is little doubt that there were many Wights fighting for both the Union and the Confederacy. It was a dreadful, heart-rending war, and if there was any direct personal conflict between the Northern and the Southern Wights we haven't heard about it. We hope that all the bitterness that may have existed has long-since been buried in the past.

After the war George Alden's business interests took him to ^{THE THEN} Thomas County ^{NOW GRADY COUNTY,} and to the town of ^{CAIRO,} ~~Calico~~, Georgia, where he and his family settled. There he opened and successfully operated a hardware and farm implement store.

George's first wife, Julia Florence Herring, died in 1860 less than two years after their marriage. Their only child was John Byron Wight. George's second wife, Margaret Louisa Powell bore him nine more children, ~~and~~

of whom were born in Decatur County which is near the southwest corner of Georgia just above the Florida Panhandle.

Children of George Alden Wight:

1. John Byron Wight, born 09-28-1859
2. Henry Wight, born 12-25-1862
3. Kedar Powell Wight, born 05-04-1864
4. William Samuel Wight, born 11-16-1865
5. Carrie Bell Wight, born 11-18-1868
6. Thomas Wight, born 10-21-1870
7. Walter Lee Wight, born 10-09-1872
8. Alice Pearl Wight, born 07-16-1875
9. George Alden Wight, born 12-21-1878
10. Margaret Augusta Wight, born 08-22-1880

(Aside from my grandfather, Henry Wight, whom I remember quite vividly, I can also recall a little about some of his siblings though none lived close by. Great Aunt Gussie (Margaret Augusta) lived in an old fashioned Victorian-like two story wooden house near downtown Tallahassee, Florida, when I went to college there 1942-46. I remember her red hair and her easy laughter. Some of the others I can recall from visiting Cairo, Georgia as a child were my widowed Great Aunt Pearl Clower and her maiden sister, Great Aunt Carrie who lived together. I spent the night in their old two story frame house and remember climbing a big tree in the yard where somebody

took a snapshot of me sitting out on a limb. I visited the hardware store downtown and the Wight Nursery out from town and can vaguely remember meeting my great uncles, Byron, Kedar and Walter. I remember thinking it strange that people as old as my grandfather could have brothers and sisters just as children do.

The oldest son, John Byron Wight, graduated from Emory College and later earned his graduate degree in Theology at Vanderbilt. It was in the field of horticulture, however, that he distinguished himself. His book, Tobacco, Its Use and Abuse, was well received. He had recognized tobacco abuse ages before the surgeon general's warning that tobacco "could be hazardous to your health." John Byron was considered somewhat of a genius as a nurseryman. Among other crops he introduced to the area was the tung oil nut tree from China. This adapted well, and extensive tung oil groves thrived in South Georgia and in the Florida Panhandle. The oil from this crop was widely used in the manufacturing of paint. John Byron also did much for the pecan industry by developing improved strains of this delicious nut. The Wight Nursery which he founded in 188~~0~~⁷ is still thriving in Cairo.

(Surely there are many Wights still living in Cairo and Thomasville, Georgia, but much to my regret we've all

lost touch in the past few decades.)

Later in life George Alden Wight moved from Cairo down to White Springs, Florida where he became owner of the then-famous health resort, the White Springs Hotel, which was located on the Suwannee River. The hotel was a large wooden structure with wrap-around piazzas encircling the clear, bubbling natural springs. People came from far and wide to bathe in the health-restoring waters, to enjoy the old-fashioned Southern hospitality of the hotel and to savor the sumptuous meals in the dining room.

George Alden Wight was my great grandfather. His second son, Henry my grandfather, is featured in our next chapter in generation number 8.

P R O L O G U E II

John and I met Martha Wight in Highlands, N.C. the summer of 2011. She is his cousin but I didn't try to figure the number. They have the same great grandfather, George Alden Wight. She had lived most of her life in Sanford, FL, but is now 86 years old and living in a retirement village between Highlands and Cashiers, N.C. Martha had lunch with us one day and brought a book she had compiled; ALL THE WIGHT CONNECTIONS. She was delightful and we thought her writing was clever and a good read with anecdotes and personal stories. She and daddy share the same ancestors through seven generations, so we asked permission to copy that part of her book. She wrote some about the first John Byron Wight, daddy's grandfather, and I will add a little more information on him and the next two generations.

Beth Wight

Wife of John Byron Wight, Jr.

Tenth Generation

Cairo, Georgia

December 25, 2011

CHAPTER VIII

THE EIGHTH GENERATION: JOHN BYRON, WIGHT (1859 - 1935)

Born August 28, 1859, at Softkee in Decatur (now Grady) County, GA, he was the son of George Alden Wight and his wife Julia Florence Herring. Julia died in 1860, less than two years after she and George married. Byron was the great, great, great, great, great grandson of Thomas. His early life was during the time of The War Between the States and reconstruction. Sometime during Byron's youth, George moved his family to Cairo and built a home there. This house is referred to by Martha Wight on page 42. It is still standing and has been restored by Ellen and Tommy White (Tom McKenzie's uncle). The tree is a huge camphur tree which is still standing, and both daddy and I have memories of climbing in it many times. The lower limbs were so wide you could walk on them.

From the rural schools, Byron entered Emory College, graduating in 1881, with a degree of A.B. He taught school briefly in Sofkee before attending Vanderbilt University to prepare for the Methodist ministry. After graduating in 1884, he served three churches, Trinity Circuit, Darien Station and Eden Circuit - all in Georgia. He was principal of the Macon District High School at Snow. After one year, he returned to Cairo and was principal of Cairo High school for eight years.

In 1887, he established Wight Nursery and Orchard Company which became Wight Nurseries, Inc. Around this time, he attended Cornell

University to study horticulture. His first interest was pecan tree production on a commercial scale for Grady County and South Georgia area. To people who worried about over production, he answered in a publication; _____ "with a product as nutritious and palatable as pecans" _____ and, "our physicians and scientists are telling us that if more nuts and fruits were eaten and less meat, that we would be healthier, and if healthier, then happier". He also produced fruit trees - sell the product! His book "The Use and Abuse of Tobacco", published in 1889, was also ahead of the times in thinking.

He also introduced the first tung oil trees from China into the United States and had a close friendship with Dr. David Fairchild, a world renown horticulturist. On a later visit to Wight Nurseries at John Byron Wight, Sr.'s home, he presented an autographed book on insects to John Byron Wight, Jr.

Byron married Alice Slater in 1888. Alice was born June 20, 1864, in Bullock County, GA, daughter of John G. and Susan (Cone) Slater.

Their seven children are:

1. George Ward - 4-23-1889
2. John Slater - later changed to James Slater - 11-15-1890
3. Robert Pratt - 10-12-1892
4. Laleah Adams - 2-15-1895
5. Warren Candler - 4-5-1897
6. Edward Allen - 8-10-1899
7. John Byron - 2-2-1905

CHAPTER IX

THE NINTH GENERATION: JOHN BYRON WIGHT, JR. (1905-1969)

Born in Cairo, GA, February 2, 1905, John was the youngest of Byron and Alice's seven children. We need to clear up a little name confusion about the three John Byrons. Sr. always went by the name of Byron. When their sixth son was born, Byron and Alice decided they wanted to have a junior. Older son John Slater's name was changed to James Slater and the sixth son named John Byron, Jr. When daddy was born, he was named John Byron Wight, III, but the hospital mistakenly recorded him as Jr. His Emory diploma is III, our marriage license is III, but when he joined the miliary, they go only by the birth certificate. Daddy becme Jr. thereafter and granddaddy Sr. Maybe daddy and I aren't legally married?

John grew up in Cairo in the family home on 2nd St., SE right behind the house George Alden built that has the big camphur tree. After high school in Cairo, he attended Emory University and after graduating, went to GA TECH for a year. About this time, Mr. Flagler had just completed the rail line down to Miami, FL and Miami was booming. John and a friend decided to go down and make their fortune. While there, he met a beautiful young lady - Elizabeth Allen - from Little Rock, AK. Lib, as she was called, was visiting her older sister Mary, who was working there. Mary had met Russ Campbell, a reporter for a newspaper, and because of his job had an entree to hotel and restaurant openings and other big events. The four of them were having a ball, but Lib's mother, Gretchen Allen, known to us as Mamie, decided it was time

for her younger daughter to come home. She went to Miami on the train to get her. Remembering "Mamie" and how cute and lively she was even in much older years, I wonder if maybe she didn't want to see a little of the excitement herself! During this period sometime John was hit by a car going the wrong direction and had a fractured leg. We aren't sure of the time frame of events, but sometime after Lib returned to Little Rock, John returned to Cairo. From there he went by train to Little Rock, and upon arrival announced he wasn't leaving until he married Lib and she went back to Cairo with him. They were married on May 24th, 1927. On the society page of the Arkansas Democrat, it was written "A surprise wedding at 4:30 Tuesday afternoon" _____ at the home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. P. Allen and performed by Bishop James R. Winchester. The story goes that John's brother met the train when John and Lib arrived in Cairo. It was dark and they took them on a twenty minute ride which should have taken five. She was shocked at the actual size of Cairo the next day!

John joined his father in the nursery business and started adding ornamental and landscape plants to the pecans, pears, plums, figs, and citrus collection. The nursery was wholesale, mail order and retail at this time and was growing. Everything slowed down during the depression, but after World War II in 1945, there was emphasis of beautification of homes, businesses, parks, etc. and growth began again. John introduced container growing and in the early 50's, the nursery discontinued the retail and mail order operations. John was president from incorporation of Wight Nurseries until 1965. During his career, he was active in

business organizations and served as President of the Southern and American Associations of Nurserymen. He established the Slater Wight Award in the SNA, the most prestigious award given, in honor of his brother. His brother, Slater, was active in the nursery for a time and in the pecan and tung nut industry. John was also active in church and civic affairs. He died of cancer in 1969. A few years after his death, Lib moved into town and lived a very active life until the last few of her 91 years. She was a lovely lady.

Children of John B. and Lib Wight:

1. John Byron Wight, born 6-13-29
2. Elizabeth Allen Wight, II, born 7-28-36

CHAPTER X

THE TENTH GENERATION: JOHN BYRON WIGHT, III (LATER - JR.)

John was born on June 13th, 1929, at Archbold Hospital in Thomasville, GA. There was a time difference of one hour between Cairo and Thomasville at this time. Because of this, he was born on his mother, Lib Wight's birthday, and they shared many celebrations together. The family was living at 204 4th Avenue, SE at this time. The house had been built by Louise Slater, John, Sr's aunt. "Ease", as the family called her, was living elsewhere, and she was very partial to her nephew, and later to his family. She would not let John, Sr. pay her rent and this bothered him, of course. When John, Jr. was about five, they moved to a small house on the nursery. They added to it and remodeled through the years and it became a charming home in a beautiful setting. Young John grew up loving the woods and hunting and fishing. The first bird he killed alone, he put in a Vicks Salve box and ran over to the nursery office to show his dad. When he opened the box, the little bird flew! (I used to call him "Nature Boy" in later years, because of his knowledge and awareness of nature). When John was seven, his little sister was born, Elizabeth Allen Wight, II. Now the family was complete.

John went to grammar and high school in Cairo, graduated in 1946 with honors, and started college at Emory at Oxford the fall of that year. He was not too fond of the strict rules at Oxford - had to work off many demerits rolling the tennis courts ___ and transferred to Emory University in Atlanta for his sophomore year. He joined Phi Delta Theta fraternity

as his father and grandfather had, majored in business and graduated with a BBA in June, 1950. The cost of his four years at Emory was five thousand dollars. After graduation, he worked for Semmes Nursery in Mobile, AL. On August 19th, 1950, John and Elizabeth VanLandingham (Beth) married at the Methodist Church in Cairo, and started life together in a little apartment on Ann St. in Mobile. The summer between his junior and senior year, he had worked at Ilginfritz in Monroe, Michigan. These jobs were to give him some "basic training" in preparation for joining his father at Wight Nurseries. The Korean War and Uncle Sam interrupted these plans. The war was going badly, more troops were needed and he had a very low draft number. The draft method of recruiting men was still in effect from World War II. John and a friend he had grown up with, Ed "Sonny" White (another uncle of Tom McKenzie) enlisted in the Air Force together and left for basic training of a different kind, in San Antonio, Texas in March of 1951. Beth grew up in Cairo also and she stayed there with her's and John's family. When he was assigned to Shepherd AFB, Wichita Falls, TX, John's mother drove Beth to Texas to join him. His tour of duty was four years. They were at Shepherd the entire tour, and their first two daughters, Mary and Sally, were born at the base hospital.

After discharge from the Air Force (honorable), John, Beth and girls came back to Cairo and moved into 204 Fourth Ave., SE, the same house in which John had begun life. His great aunt "Ease" had died a few months before and left him a portion of her house and he bought the other portion. The family lived there from 1955 to 1975 and added three more daughters: Gretchen, 1957; Lib, 1960; and Louise 1964, to their family. It was an area of sidewalks and great neighborhood play.

They built their new home in 1975 and moved in three days before Christmas! John said it would be sad to be the last Christmas in the old house but exciting to be the first Christmas in the new house. He was right. We moved just the essentials, had no curtains or pictures hung and Louise's mattress was on the floor, but it was a "Merry Christmas". The children finished growing up on Pine Circle, NW. Mary and Sally had already graduated from Cairo High (with honors) and Gretchen, Lib and Louise over the next six or so years graduated from Brookwood School in Thomasville, only twelve miles away. In both these homes, these were great active years filled with competitive swimming, diving, basketball, cheerleading, hunting, fishing and a lot of beach time at Alligator Point. As the girls left for college, the nest gradually emptied. It still refills on occasions with all the "boot" (grands and great grands) and these are happy times.

John joined his father in the nursery and the expanding years continued. John, Jr. introduced a profit sharing plan for employees in his early years. He was sales manager among many other duties. John, Sr. started enjoying a little time off and spent a lot of time at their St. Teresa beach house. Sadly, he was diagnosed with cancer in 1965 and battled it for five years. He died at age 64. John, Jr. became President and had a very successful career. Like his father, he was active in the nursery organizations in the industry, serving as GA Association President, received the Slater Wight Award from the Southern Association and was made an honorary member of the Southern, was on the board for four years, then President of the American Association of Nurserymen. He and his father were two of the three

Georgians to hold his office. After retiring, he was inducted into the AAN Hall of Fame.

In 1987, the nursery celebrated its centennial - with two very large occasions. The employees were honored with a party featuring "The Manhattans" and other entertainment at Cairo High School. Then a party including the nursery management, customers, suppliers, dignitaries, and friends was enjoyed by 1,000. Entertainment, hot air balloon rides, lunch, circus performance, seated dinner and dance with a big band, and a grand finale of a Gouchie Fireworks Extravaganza. The nursery was sold to Monrovia Nurseries in 2001.

John also had a career in banking. He was a Director of First National Bank of Grady County. When the President at that time had a heart attack, the board discovered unlawful banking operations and loans in the bank between a loan officer and an insurance agent. Jimmy Carter was President, the economy was bad and several banks had failed. Carter did not want another failed bank, so, somehow, during the audits and investigating, John was approached about a solution for the bank. The fact that the nursery had a large balance in the bank due to it being the end of the big spring sales, may have had some bearing. Regardless, John, the special investigator, Lou Frank, a Cairo lawyer and CPA traveled to Washington and met with the comptroller of the currency. It was arranged for John to form a holding company, and the company would own the bank ___ such as it was. The group flew back home that same day, not even spending the night.

Determined to rebuild the bank, and insure that everything was

"straight as a string" ___ his words ___ he hired a young man who was a bank examiner as President. John served as Chairman of the Board, and served is the right word, because for many years, he did not take a dime from the bank. First National grew to be Grady County's largest bank, and John sold the bank to Capital City Bank Group in 1999.

John was also active in church and civic activities. He was a long time member of the church board and served as Chairman, Rotarian, and served as President, Chamber of Commerce member and served as President, named "Man of the Year" by the Chamber in 1981. He served as Chairman of the Library Board during a major renovation to the building.

John served on the board of Thomas University for years during its time of great growth and change. He was given the Forbes Award - the top service award from the university. He made a donation of many trees and plants to landscape the university campus. The university created the "Wight Garden" and dedicated it to John and Beth Wight. This plant material came from Windmill Nursery in Louisiana, which is operated and partially owned by Todd Ellefson, grandson.

Children of John and Beth Wight are:

1. Mary Elizabeth, born Nov. 10, 1951
2. Sally Louise, born Oct. 19, 1953
3. Gretchen Allen, born July 1, 1957
4. Elizabeth VanLandingham, born Sept. 21, 1960
5. Louise Slater, born July 26, 1964

