

PRECIOUS SIBLINGS

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Last week, instead of spending my four hours per week (see “Genealogy on Four Hours per Week”) transcribing great-aunt Dottie’s memoirs as I should have been, I decided to do a little electronic searching to see if it would help with an old problem. I grabbed the nearest phone cord, plugged in my laptop, and began searching for a Precious sibling (see “Seeking Siblings”).

A decade ago I had made a breakthrough by noticing an unusual given name in an ancestral family. An 1886 county history gives the basic clues on this family. “William Jones is a native of Logan County, Illinois, born May 29, 1834. His parents, William and Phoebe (Brown) Jones, came from Kentucky to Illinois in 1828, locating near Springfield, where they lived until 1830 when they settled in Logan County. They had a family of ten children, of whom five survive—Samuel, a resident of Missouri; Freeman and Annie L., of Illinois; Larkin, of Kansas, and William. The names of the deceased are—Sarah, Margaret, Polly [my ancestor], Pheba and Precious.”

Even back then, I understood the importance of whole-family research. My goal was not so much to add to a pedigree chart as it was to fill out a family group sheet. When I searched the censuses in 1850 and 1860, I sought entries for all of William and Phebe’s children—including any family unit with a Phoebe or Precious, since I didn’t know the names of all of the daughters’ husbands.

Thus it was that I noted (probably accidentally) an entry in 1850 for Precious Raymour. At 69 she was clearly not a daughter or granddaughter of Phebe, who was 64, but she was only three households away. Both women were widows, Precious born in South Carolina, Phebe in North Carolina. But in 1860, Phebe was listed as born in South Carolina (a common switch in censuses).

Anyone who has researched Jones or Brown families will understand the glee with which I latched onto the sibling-in-law name of Raymour. I revisited Kentucky records and soon found the marriages of both Brown sisters in Ohio County, Kentucky. I also began collecting women named Precious, hoping this might produce clues allowing me to extend the Brown family backwards. Who could blame me? It had worked once.

Most of my finds were sheer serendipity, but I had done some searching in the early Internet days. With more options on current search engines and dramatically more data to be searched, I hoped that a new effort would yield success. In addition to working on my own line, my academic curiosity wanted to know the geographical distribution of the given name. It was tricky. Precious as a given name was spelled a variety of ways. Furthermore, it is a real word. Even a search for “Precious Brown” produced an annoying number of references to darling birds and cute furry mammals. I found several “pun” names, such as Precious Jewell, Precious Stone, and Precious Ruby.

I have a dial-up line, an overloaded ISP, and a short attention span, so after finding many more mentions than I

expected, using Google, the IGI, and Ancestry.com, I logged off. Something bothered me. Again and again Precious (Brown) Raymer [the more common spelling] was said to be the daughter of Jonathan Brown.

Jonathan? That didn’t sound right. I did what I should have done to begin with. I went upstairs and retrieved the Brown, Jones, and Precious folders from the depths of my file cabinet. Together, they were a satisfying inch thick—and quite disorganized. I rearranged pages and sat down to examine my ancient research. I had been thorough, working on both the siblings and the neighbors. For example, I had searched all the Brown marriages in Ohio County (yes, I looked up all 80 female Brown entries in the index) and hypothesized that the following marriages (based on a variety of reasons that will not be presented here) were likely siblings of Phebe and Precious. I am showing limited data here because of space.

- 10/19 December 1800. Precious Brown & Michael Raymer. Bond: Jonathan Brown
- 16 December 1800. Jonathan Brown & Elizabeth Anderson. Consent: Reuben & Anna Brown.
- 19 January 1803. Henry Brown & Hannah Anderson. Bond: Henry Brown
- 10 October 1804. Phebe Brown & William Jones. Consent: Reuben Brown, William Jones
- 5 July 1806. Reuben Brown & Mary Bozarth. Bond: Jonathan Brown, Henry Brown
- 30 September 1809. Sally Brown & John Troxel. Consent: Reuben Brown. Bond: Henry Brown
- 14 September 1812. Joshua Brown & Nancy Wilcher
- 11 March 1818. Anna Brown & Josiah Hedges. Bond: Joshua Brown

Was Jonathan the father of Precious? The records for the siblings tell a different story. Marriage bonds could be given by anyone. Here we see siblings providing the bonds. Consent, on the other hand, was given by the father or parents under normal circumstances. Reuben gave consent three times. Jonathan, who married the same month as Precious, could hardly have been her father. Reuben Brown was the father of Precious (Brown) Raymer and Phebe (Brown) Jones.

Tax records confirm the likely family structure. Reuben appeared on Ohio County lists in 1799. Jonathan was added in 1801, Henry in 1803, Samuel in 1809, and Joshua in 1813. They also tell us that Reuben was alive in 1812, when both Reubin Senr and Reubin Junr are listed (and in 1813 when Reuben Sr bought land), but dead by 1814, when Ann appeared on the tax list. To learn more about tax records, see my article, “The Taxman Cometh,” *Ancestry* magazine, July/August 2003.

Federal land records (now on the Internet, but not when I did the original research) also tell a story about siblings relocating en masse. In the 1820s and 1830s Joshua Brown, Josiah Hedges husband of Anna Brown, William Jones husband of Phebe Brown, Henry Brown,

and Reuben Brown all bought land in Sangamon County, but each in a different township. Also, a Samuel Brown bought land in Logan County and a John Troxel in adjoining DeWitt County. By understanding the sibling migration, we now have a family of real people, rather than [incorrect] names in an electronic database.

PS: Please don't send me any Preciouses—I have dozens now, and I really need to get back to great-aunt Dotie's memoirs. But if you know someone who thinks they are descended from Jonathan, you just might want to e-mail this article to them so they, too, can learn how precious siblings are in genealogical research.