
George Washington Cottrell of Texas: One Man or Two?

By Judy G. Russell, JD, CG, CGL

One set of records ends in 1848. Another begins in 1850. Do they identify one man or two?

George Washington Cottrell arrived around 1842 in Colorado County, Republic of Texas. Six years and several indictments later he disappeared, seemingly into nowhere.

In 1850 George Washington Cottrell arrived in Tarrant County, Texas, seemingly from nowhere. He paid taxes, settled in nearby Parker County, married, fathered children, acquired land, served in the home guard during the Civil War, and registered to vote. He followed his children to another county where he died and was buried.

At first glance, the records identify two men with the same name. One was troublesome, ultimately leaving the county one step ahead of the law, a murder indictment over his head. The other was a family man and property owner with no hint of scandal.

Yet, deeper study suggests one George, not two. Late in life, George of Parker County filed a pension application for military service he did not perform. The document links the two identities and connects their disparate times and places.

COLORADO-WHARTON GEORGE

George Washington Cottrell appeared in Colorado County on 17 September 1842, when he secured a license to marry. “G. Washington Cotrell” and Mary Gilbert—widow of Preston Gilbert—married on 20 September 1842.¹

That marriage led to George’s first known encounter with the law. In 1843 Colorado County indicted George and his wife, “Mary Rodgers,” for bigamy and

© Judy G. Russell, JD, CG, CGL, 593 East Woodbridge Avenue; Avenel, NJ 07001; legalgenealogist@gmail.com. Ms. Russell is a trustee of the Board for Certification of Genealogists and course coordinator for the Institute on Genealogy and Historical Research, Genealogical Research Institute of Pittsburgh, and Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy. She also teaches at the Midwest African-American Genealogy Institute and the Genealogical Institute on Federal Records. George Washington Cottrell was her great-great-grandfather. Referenced websites were accessed on 16 August 2017.

1. Colorado Co., Tex., Marriage Book B:38, Cottrell-Gilbert marriage license and return, 20 September 1842; County Clerk, Columbus, Tex. For Preston Gilbert, see Colorado Co., Probate Minute Book B:140, order for “Mary Cottrell formerly wife of said Preston Gilbert deceased” to make title to land she and Preston Gilbert had agreed to sell, [illegible day] August 1844; Probate Court.

adultery.² The court issued warrants for their arrests.³ When in March 1844 the prosecutor moved to dismiss Mary's indictment, the court threw out both cases.⁴ The file does not survive, leaving unknown why the case ended. Other records show George involved in more routine activities in Colorado County:

- On 24 October 1843 he was named overseer of a road project.⁵
- In March 1844 he served on civil juries.⁶
- In December 1844 he was on a list of jurors summoned.⁷
- In 1844 he was assessed for taxes.⁸
- In 1845 his wife Mary was taxed for the same property.⁹

In 1846, when Wharton County was created from Colorado County, a debt suit George had filed against James Osburne was transferred to Wharton.¹⁰ George subsequently created records there:

- On 30 November 1846 he became administrator of his wife's estate. With Abner and Virgilia Woolsey and William Bridge as sureties, he executed an administrator's bond of seven thousand dollars.¹¹
- In December 1846 George witnessed a deed by Abner and Virgilia Woolsey for part of a tract that had been granted to Sarah Gilbert, mother of Preston Gilbert and Virgilia (Gilbert) Woolsey.¹²
- In 1846 and 1847 George paid a poll tax in his own right and property taxes as administrator for Mary's estate.¹³

2. Colorado Co., District Court Criminal Case File no. 251, Republic of Texas v. George W. Cottrell, Indictment, September term 1843; District Court Clerk, Columbus. Also, *ibid.*, no. 252.

3. Colorado Co., District Court Minute Book A:336, warrant issue, September 1843; District Court Clerk.

4. *Ibid.*, A:383, dismissal of charges, March 1844. Also, *ibid.*, A:382, "indictment quashed."

5. Colorado Co., County Court Minute Book A:93, road order, 24 October 1843; County Clerk, Columbus.

6. Colorado Co., District Court Minute Book A:373–74, jury service, March 1844.

7. *Ibid.*, A:451, jury list, December 1844.

8. *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/search/film/004616022>), digital film 004616022, image 61, Colorado Co., Tax Rolls, 1844, fol. 2, G. W. Cottrell.

9. *Ibid.*, image 74, 1845, fol. 2, Mary Cottrell.

10. Colorado Co., District Court Minute Book A-B:309, order transferring case, 9 October 1846. Also, *The Laws of Texas, 1822–1897*, vol. 2 (Austin: Gammel, 1898), 1344–45, "An Act To create the County of Wharton," 3 April 1846.

11. Wharton Co., Tex., Probate Record Book A:12, administrator appointment and bond, 30 November 1846; County Clerk, Wharton, Tex.

12. Wharton Co., Deed Book A:63–64, Woolsey to Mills, "part of the League of land Granted by the Mexican Government to Sarah Gilbert . . . which fell to Virgilia Gilbert now Virgilia Woolsey as one of the Surviving heirs of the Said Sarah Gilbert," [blank] December 1846; County Clerk, Wharton. Sarah's heirs included Virgilia Woolsey and Preston Gilbert. See Colorado Co., Probate Minute Book B:3, partition of estate, 28 December 1840.

13. *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/search/film/004653725>), digital film 004653725, image 61, Wharton Co., Tax Rolls, 1846, Wharton Co., Tax Roll, 1846, sheet 1, G. W. Cottrell. Also, *ibid.*, image 24, 1847, p. 1, Geo. W. Cottrell.

- On 1 April 1847 George registered his cattle brand, “a swallow fork in the left ear and a split in the right ear, and his brand the figure five (5).”¹⁴

In 1847 George also continued administering Mary’s estate. On 6 March 1847 James Osburne, John T. Copeland, and Abner Woolsey inventoried the estate and swore to it on 29 March. On 1 April George swore it was a true inventory and asked for funds for clothing and schooling Mary’s Gilbert children. The court allowed the sale of all property “except the Land, Negroes, Cattle, & such articles as may be necessary for the use of the family.”¹⁵

The bigamy and adultery case was not George’s only run-in with the law. He was charged in Wharton County with minor offenses like gambling.¹⁶ On 20 December 1846 he was involved in assault and battery on Frederick Kayser in Colorado County. He was indicted in March 1847.¹⁷ He was indicted separately for a December 1846 assault and battery on August Rolf.¹⁸ Colorado County issued arrest warrants in both cases and reissued them in 1848 and 1849, noting that the case was “continued—no service of process having been had.”¹⁹ The sheriff had not found George, who was in worse trouble in Wharton County:

[On 11 November 1847] G. W. Cotrell of Wharton County, killed Abner Woolsey. They were living together, and Cotrell performed the diabolical deed by poking a musket through the crack of the door and shooting Woolsey while sitting at the fire. Woolsey’s wife is said to be the cause of the murder, and she is now in the custody of the law. Cotrell has fled, but as the spirited citizens of the neighborhood immediately subscribed \$500 for his apprehension, it is to be hoped the murderer may yet be brought to justice.²⁰

All the players knew one another. Abner Woolsey’s wife was Virgilia (Gilbert). Her brother, Preston Gilbert, had been the first husband of George’s late wife, Mary.²¹ Abner and Virgilia stood surety for George as administrator of Mary’s estate. George had witnessed a deed for the Woolseys less than a year before killing Abner. Virgilia had filed for divorce from Abner in 1845 but had withdrawn her

14. *Ibid.*, A:57, cattle-brand registration, 1 April 1847.

15. Wharton Co., Probate Record Book A:13–15, court orders, 1 April 1847.

16. See, for example, Wharton Co., District Court Minute Book A:68, 20 October 1851, and 74, 23 October 1851, gaming-charges dismissal; District Court Clerk, Wharton.

17. Colorado Co., District Court Criminal Case File no. 488, *State v. George W. Cotrel*, 30 March 1847.

18. *Ibid.*, no. 489, *State v. George W. Cotrel*, 30 March 1847.

19. Colorado Co., District Court Trial Docket Book, 1844–49, State Docket, fall term 1847, cases 5–6, *State v. G. W. Cottrell*. Also, Colorado Co., District Court Minute Book A-B:356, 8 October 1847; 375, 9 April 1848; and 401, 19 October 1848; continuances.

20. “From Texas,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 22 December 1847, page 1, col. 4.

21. Sarah Gilbert’s heirs included Preston Gilbert whose administratrix was Mary Gilbert. See Colorado Co., Probate Minute Book B:3, partition of estate, 28 December 1840.

case.²² A personal issue might have triggered the murder, or it could have been a random incident. Violence was common in Wharton County at the time.²³

In January 1848 Mary's estate records show that George had absconded. The county appointed Mary's brother, William Newman, as her estate's administrator.²⁴ Newman also assumed responsibility for Mary's children.²⁵ Attorney-in-fact John T. Copeland executed a bill of sale for sixteen cows and calves.²⁶ Only a biography of Wharton County sheriff Jess Griffin says George was arrested.²⁷ Griffin might have billed the county for the costs of making an arrest in April 1848.²⁸

On 13 October 1848 George was charged with murder.²⁹ John J. Lackey posted a five-hundred-dollar bond, promising to "appear . . . and . . . give evidence on behalf of the State of Texas in Indictment₃₁, The State of Texas v George W. Cottrell, and not depart without leave of the court."³⁰

The case progressed no further. On 11 April 1849 the court issued a second arrest warrant and continued the case.³¹ On 11 October of that year, it issued a third

22. Colorado Co., District Court Trial Docket Book, 1844-49, Appearance Docket, case no. 63, fall term 1845.

23. Annie Lee Williams, in *A History of Wharton County, 1846-1961* (Austin, Tex.: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1964), 122 and 127, writes "Everyone carried guns and they were used at the slightest provocation, or no provocation at all save a few drinks and perhaps a difference of opinions. . . . Murder was prevalent on the streets, in the saloons and elsewhere. Arguments were settled with the gun. The quick-tempered resorted to it as a panacea and grudges frequently were evened with murder. . . . The gun was the answer to arguments and disagreements, and incredible as it seems, many fully expected to die by the gun. For many years after the turn of the century there was at least one killing almost every Saturday night in Wharton."

24. Wharton Co., Probate Docket Book A-1:21, estate of Mary Cottrell, January 1848; County Court, Wharton; microfilm 1,012,394, item 4, Family History Library (FHL), Salt Lake City. For Mary's maiden name, see Wharton Co., Deed Book A:129-30, Newman to Osburn, [blank] February 1849. William Newman, administrator of Mary's estate, sold "Mary Gilberts portion of the League of land granted to her father Joseph Newman by the Mexican Government." Also, Coleman Conway Newman and Annabel Tidwell Newman, *From the Monongahela to the Colorado: A History of a Segment of the Rabb, Newman Families* (Granbury, Tex.: privately published, 1989), 52, 60-63, 65-67. The book includes an copy image of Joseph Newman's will naming William and Mary among his children.

25. 1850 U.S. census, Wharton Co., Tex., population schedule, Wharton Dist., fol. 324r, dwelling/family 48, M. Gilbert, 19, and W. Gilbert, 14, in W^m R Newman household; microfilm 432, roll 916, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

26. Wharton Co., Probate Docket Book A:108-9, sale bill, January 1848.

27. Janet Barrett Hobizal, "Jess Griffin, 1846-1848, First Wharton County Sheriff," June 2007, *Wharton County, Texas, Site* (<http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~barrettbranches/sherriff/jessgriffin.html>).

28. Wharton Co., Criminal Docket Book 1:1, George W. Cottrell, April 1848; Wharton County Historical Museum, Wharton.

29. Wharton Co., District Court Minute Book A:9, murder charge, 13 October 1848.

30. *Ibid.*, A:12, appearance bond.

31. *Ibid.*, A:19, arrest warrant and continuance, 11 April 1849.

arrest warrant and again continued the case.³² On 21 March 1850 the court issued yet another warrant and continuance.³³ Thereafter the court issued continuances at every court term for years.³⁴

Meanwhile, Colorado County pursued George's assault-and-battery charges through the fall of 1849 and spring and fall of 1850. In October 1851 the cases were dismissed.³⁵

On 27 October 1857 Texas dropped even the murder charge.³⁶ With that dismissal, George disappeared from Colorado and Wharton county records.

TARRANT-PARKER GEORGE

Roughly 250 to 300 miles north of Wharton County lies the border area of Tarrant, Parker, Hood, and Johnson counties. George Washington Cottrell first appeared there in 1850. He was forty, born in Kentucky, unemployed, and living with the family of Archie and Nancy Robinson. Robinson, forty-four and a farmer, also was born in Kentucky.³⁷

From then until his death in 1891, George apparently was an unexceptional rural family man whose behavior suggests no link to the one-step-ahead-of-the-law George of Colorado and Wharton counties.

George paid a poll tax in Tarrant County in 1851–53.³⁸ About 1854 he moved into what became southern Parker County, where his closest neighbors included an extended Baker family.³⁹ The state created Parker County at the end of 1855, requiring it to organize in 1856.⁴⁰

32. *Ibid.*, A:28, 11 October 1849.

33. *Ibid.*, A:48, 21 March 1850.

34. *Ibid.*, A:51–52, 25 March 1850; A:74, 23 October 1851; A:85, 25 March 1852; A:103, 30 March 1853; A:147, 19 October 1853; A:179, 30 March 1854; A:200, 18 October 1854; A:238, 28 March 1855; A:268, 17 October 1855; A:298, 26 March 1856; A:322, 29 October 1856; and A:361, 1 May 1857.

35. Colorado Co., District Court Minute Book C:752, 17 October 1849; C:779, 3 April 1850; C:810, 4 November 1850; and C:844 and 846, October 1851.

36. Wharton Co., District Court Minute Book B:7, dismissal, 27 October 1857.

37. 1850 U.S. census, Tarrant Co., Tex., Navarro Dist., pop. sch., fol. 89r, dwell./fam. 3, G. W. Cotril; NARA microfilm publication M432, roll 910.

38. *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/search/film/004653608>), digital film 004653608, image 14, Tarrant Co., Tex., Tax Rolls, 1851, first sheet, G. W. Cottrell. Also, *ibid.*, image 23, 1852, second dist., p. 2, G. W. Cottrell. Also, *ibid.*, 1853, second page, G. W. Cottrell.

39. "Mrs. W. G. Bedford's Letter to G. A. Holland [8 December 1930]," transcription, *Trails West* 24 (July 1994): 61–64, for "In October or November, 1854 . . . Charlie Baker, Joe Baker and Mr. Cotteral had about five weeks previous moved in their little log cabins with dirt floors." Also, Thomas T. Ewell, in *History of Hood County* (Granbury, Texas: Frank Gaston, 1895), 32–33, writes "But about this date [1853–54] quite a number of people began to come into the Long creek valley. Martin Baker and his son Joseph . . . [and] George Cottrell."

40. *The Laws of Texas*, 4:183–85, "An Act to create the County of Parker," 12 December 1855.

Among the Bakers was Martha Louisa, called Louisa or Patsy, born in North Carolina on 9 May 1832.⁴¹ George married Louisa within months of his arrival, but the exact date and place are unclear. The earliest date either of them claimed is 6 December 1853 in Parker County; the last is 6 December 1854 in Johnson County.⁴² That county recorded the event on 29 January 1855.⁴³ Between 1855 and 1868 the couple had five known Cottrell children: Martin Gilbert in 1855, Mary E. in 1856, Sarah Jane in 1858; Margaret “Arby” in 1863; and George W. in 1868.⁴⁴

George helped his in-laws acquire land. With Martin Baker, he was a chain carrier for Charles Baker in 1858.⁴⁵ He did the same for Josiah Baker in 1859.⁴⁶

On 27 September 1861 George staked a claim to 160 acres. The tract adjoined land of Baker relatives, and his father-in-law served as one of George’s chain carriers. George received the land on 10 December 1863.⁴⁷

With Josiah and Charles Baker, George served in the First Frontier District under Captain Pleasant Witt in 1864.⁴⁸ They provided home guard service and protection on the frontier. The service ultimately qualified the company’s members for consideration as Texas Rangers.⁴⁹

41. Louisa Cottrell, declaration, 21 January 1897, widow’s pension application no. 13773 (rejected); service of George W. Cotrell of Texas; Mexican War Pension Files; Records of the Bureau of Pensions and its Predecessors, 1805–1935; Record Group (RG) 15: Department of Veterans Affairs; National Archives (NA), Washington, D.C.

42. For “1853,” see George W. Cotrell Survivor’s Brief, 17 February 1890, Mexican War pension application no. 7890 (rejected), for service of George W. Cotrell of Texas; RG 15; NA-Washington, D.C. For “1854,” see *ibid.*, Survivor’s Claim, 23 March 1887.

43. Genealogists abstracted Johnson County’s Marriage Book 1 before it disappeared. See Weldon Hudson, *Marriage Records of Johnson County, Tx.* (Cleburne, Tex.: Johnson Co. Historical Soc., 2002). Also, Marion Day Mullins and Norma Rutledge Grammer, “Marriage records, Johnson County, Texas, 1854–1880,” manuscript; FHL microfilm 227,498, item 5. Also, “Johnson County Marriage Records, First Book,” *Footprints* 11 (November 1968): 125–28.

44. Tex., Death Certificate 13603 (1946), Martin Gilbert Cottrell; Bureau of Vital Statistics, Austin. Also, *ibid.*, 32464 (1946), Mary E. Green. Also, Highland Cemetery (Iowa Park, Wichita Co., Tex.; on Rogers Road at U.S. 287N, latitude 33°58’3.26”N, longitude 98°39’33.47”W), S. J. Henson marker; photograph by author, 30 March 2003. Also, Tex., Death Certificate 20306 (1944), Margaret Arvy McCann. Also, *ibid.*, 47841 (1940), George Washington Cottrell.

45. Texas Land Commissioner, Land Patent 33:109, Austin Co.; Charles Baker (Parker Co., Tex.), land patent abstract 75, 8 December 1863, 160 acres; Texas General Land Office, Archives and Records Division, Austin.

46. Texas Land Commissioner, Land Patent 25:272, Austin Co.; Josiah A. Baker (Parker Co.), land patent abstract 70, 4 August 1859, 160 acres.

47. Texas Land Commissioner, Land Patent 17:224, Austin Co.; G W Cotrell (Parker Co.), land patent abstract 296, 10 December 1863, 160 acres.

48. “Texas, Muster Roll Index Cards, 1838–1900,” *Ancestry* (<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=2059>) > Civil War Index-Abstracts of Muster Rolls > Surname > Colgen—Counts > image 1453, card for G. W. Cottrell, Co. A (Capt. Pleasant Witt), Parker Co., 1st Frontier Dist.

49. Christina Stopka, comp., “Defining the Texas Rangers: Partial List of Texas Ranger Company and Unit Commanders,” *Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum* (<http://www.texasranger.org/ReCenter/captains.pdf>). Also, David P. Smith, *Frontier Defense in the Civil War: Texas’ Rangers and Rebels* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M Press, 1992), Kindle edition, 1 percent.

After the war George and his neighbors registered to vote. With other men of the former Confederacy, they complied with the required “registration . . . of the male citizens of the United States, twenty-one years of age and upwards . . . who are qualified to vote.”⁵⁰ On 31 July 1867 George said he was born in Kentucky and had lived in Texas thirty-four years and in Parker County eleven years.⁵¹

With few exceptions, George paid taxes in Parker County annually from 1856 through 1888.⁵² Despite his long residence, only two federal censuses enumerate him: in Tarrant County in 1850 and Parker County in 1880.⁵³

In 1880 George was a farmer, fifty-nine, and born in Kentucky. His household included his wife Louisa as “Dottie L.,” forty-four, also born in Kentucky. Three of their children, born in Texas, lived with them: Mary E., twenty-three; Margaret, sixteen; and George W., twelve.⁵⁴ Enumerated just prior were George and Louisa’s daughter and son-in-law [Sarah] Jane and Aaron Henson.⁵⁵ Baker in-laws lived nearby.⁵⁶

In 1890 George was taxed in Wichita County, where he had gone to live near his children Martin Gilbert Cottrell and Mary (Cottrell) Green.⁵⁷ Reportedly at age seventy, he died on 21 May 1891 at Iowa Park, Wichita County.⁵⁸

50. *Statutes at Large*, vol. 14 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1868), 428 “An Act to provide for the more efficient Government of the Rebel States,” 2 March 1867. Also, *ibid.*, vol. 15 (1869), 2, “An Act supplementary to an Act entitled ‘An Act to provide for the more efficient Government of the Rebel States,’” 23 March 1867.

51. “Texas, Voter Registration Lists, 1867–1869,” *Ancestry* (<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=2274>) > Parker, images 6–7, Parker Co. voter register, p. 84, line 96, George W. Cottrell, 30 July 1867. George’s eleven years in Parker County date to 1856, the year the county organized.

52. “Texas, County Tax Rolls, 1837–1910,” *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1827575>), images of Parker Co., Tax Rolls, 1856–59, 1861–67, 1869–71, 1873–74, and 1886–88, alphabetically grouped by first letter of surname, G. W. Cottrell.

53. The author’s line-by-line readings of the 1860 and 1870 censuses and the 1867–69 voter-registration roll show the omission of Parker County’s southern portion in 1860 and much of its precinct 5 in 1870. Some men who registered to vote in precinct 5 in 1867–69 appear in neither census. See 1860 U.S. census, Parker Co., Tex., pop. sch.; NARA microfilm M653, roll 1302. Also, 1870 U.S. census, Parker Co., Tex., pop. sch.; NARA microfilm M593, roll 1601. Also, “Texas, Voter Registration Lists, 1867–1869,” *Ancestry* > Parker > 43 images, Parker Co. voter register.

54. 1880 U.S. census, Parker Co., Tex., pop. sch., Justice Precinct 6, enumeration district 139, p. 2, dwell./fam. 10, George W. Cottrell household; NARA microfilm T9, roll 1232.

55. *Ibid.*, dwell./fam. 9, Aaron Henson household. For the relationship, see Parker Co., Marriage Book 2:387, license and return, Henson-Cottrell, 1 Jan 1880; County Clerk, Weatherford, Tex. George and Louisa were the only Cottrells in Parker County of age to be the bride’s parents.

56. 1880 U.S. census, Parker Co., Tex., pop. sch., Justice Precinct 6, enumeration district 139, p. 2, dwell./fam. 12, Josias A. Baker household; dwell./fam. 13, Jim Baker household; and dwell./fam. 15, Charles Baker household; NARA microfilm T9, roll 1232.

57. *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/search/film/004653727>), digital film 004653727, images 649–50, Wichita Co., Tax Roll, 1890, alphabetically grouped, G. W. Cottrell. For George’s married daughter, see Tex., Death Certificate 32464 (1946), Mary E. Green.

58. Louisa Cottrell, declaration, 21 January 1897, widow’s Mexican War pension application no. 13773 (rejected), RG 15, NA–Washington. Also, plot map of Highland Cemetery; digital image, author’s collection.

George Cottrell of Tarrant and Parker counties was an unremarkable family man, documented for more than forty years as a husband, father, landowner, taxpayer, voter, and even lawman. He appeared in 1850. Only name and chronology seem to link him to George Cottrell of Colorado and Wharton counties, who disappeared from there after 1848, when he was indicted for murder.

A pension application, however, cements the linkage. George of Parker County filed the application late in life. Applying the FAN principle—looking at people George named—reveals what no record specifies.⁵⁹ That indirect evidence points to one man, not two.

THE PENSION APPLICATION

George Cottrell of Parker County applied for a Mexican War pension on 23 March 1887, barely two months after Congress enacted the authorizing legislation.⁶⁰ George identified himself as a farmer, sixty-seven, living in Long Creek, Parker County, and a native of Madison County, Kentucky. He said he was five feet and ten inches tall with fair complexion, black eyes, and grey hair, and that he had married Louisa Baker at Long Creek, Parker County. She was still living with him, and their post office was Center Mills, Hood County.⁶¹

George said he had enlisted under the name “G W Cotrell” and he was a private in Captain Claiborn Hubbard’s company in Colonel Jack Hays’s cavalry regiment. George said he served more than four hundred days, participated in engagements at “Monteray, Buena Vista, Chiputtapec & Pena Gorda.” He also said he had lived after his discharge “first in Navaro Co, Texas and Tarrant Co, Texas, than Resided in Parker Co Texas, about 33 years.” He said his discharge certificate had been lost or destroyed.⁶²

Witnesses supporting his application were W. B. Miller, sixty-seven, of Weatherford, Parker County; and J. N. Baker, fifty-five, of Long Creek. They swore they had known George for twenty-two and thirty years, respectively. They verified his military service only by their “long acquaintance with him & general respect since we have known him, & having often heard him relate circumstances connected with his campaigns in Mexico.”⁶³

59. For an explanation of the FAN principle, see Elizabeth Shown Mills, “QuickLesson 11: Identity Problems & the FAN Principle,” *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation & Source Usage* (<https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-11-identity-problems-fan-principle>).

60. *Statutes at Large*, vol. 24 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 371–72, “An act granting pensions to the soldiers and sailors of the Mexican war, and for other purposes,” 29 January 1887.

61. Mexican War pension application no. 7890, RG-15, NA—Washington, for George W. Cotrell, survivor’s claim, 23 March 1887.

62. *Ibid.* George’s thirty-three years in Parker County date to 1854, the likely year he settled in the area that became Parker County in late 1855 and organized in 1856.

63. *Ibid.*

The pension office sent the application to the adjutant general's office. It responded on 8 October 1887: "No such organization known to this office as Capt. Hubbards Co. Texas Vols. Cav. Mexican War."⁶⁴

On 18 October the pension office noted, "returned to the Adjutant General U.S.A. with request that he will have the rolls examined of Capt. Claborne C. Herberts Co. Col Hays 1st Texas Mtd Rifles, for claimants service."⁶⁵ On 6 December the adjutant general's office replied: "The name Geo W Cotrell is not borne on Rolls of Co 'D' Capt Claiborne C Herbert 1st Regt Texas Mtd Rifles Col Hays comdg."⁶⁶

On 7 March 1888, George responded with more information:

I enlisted about the 1st day of May 1846 at Corpus Christi Tex. under Cap^t Hubbard, Jack Hays was Captain of a Company in same Command. I do not recolect who was Col^{nl}. I now have an impression that Burleson was Col^{nl} but am not sure

Cap^t Jack Hays was promoted to Colonel after the battle of Monterey. My Capt Hubbard got wounded there, He left on furlough. This was the last of my being under him.

I was transfered with my Comrades to Capt Dowdy (from Gen^l Z Taylors line to Gen^l W Scotts line) of Col^{nl} Stocktons command.

When under Hubbard my mess mates were Austin, A Beason, L Beason, John Brannon, Wm Hubbard brother of the Capt, Tom Rupert and etc. Under Capt Dowdy my mess mates were McCoy, Hart, Barry, Hunter, Bags, John Sorreth, etc.

I was in the two days fight 8th & 9th May 1846 under Gen^l Taylor, the beginning of the Mex War, was at the City of Mexico when it surrendered, and in many battles during the the time [*sic*] the following are some, Robber Bridge, Cordova, Orizata, Rio Blanco, Monteray, Chapultepec, Cerro Gorda, City of Mex, and numerous others.⁶⁷

The pension office responded:

The name George Washington Cottrell is not borne on rolls of Capt C C Herbert Co 1st Regt Texas Mtd Rifles Col Hays. The names A W J D Austin, Leander Beason and John Brannon are borne on rolls of said company.

There is no officer known to this office as Capt Dowdy Texas Mexican War Vols. No Volunteers were engaged in the battle of May 8th & 9th 1846. No Texas Volunteers were in action at Cerro Gordo or Chapultepec.

No record of any action at Orizaba nor Robber Bridge Mexico. Col. Burleson was not in the service of the United States during the war with Mexico.⁶⁸

64. Ibid., for War Department to Commissioner of Pensions, letter, 8 October 1887.

65. Ibid., for Bureau of Pensions to Adjutant General, letter, 18 October 1887.

66. Ibid., for War Department to Commissioner of Pensions, letter, 6 December 1887.

67. Ibid., for George Washington Cottrell to Bureau of Pensions, letter, 7 March 1888.

68. Ibid., for War Department to Commissioner of Pensions, letter, 27 April 1888.

In 1890, after George moved to Wichita County, he tried again, alleging the same facts: he enlisted in Capt. Hubbard's company on 1 May 1846 at Corpus Christi and fought in battles at Monterey, Buena Vista, Chapultepec, Cerro Gordo, Rio San Juan, the City of Mexico, and Cordova before being discharged at Cordova "after the treaty of peace." Again no service member supported his application.⁶⁹ Again the pension office rejected the application.⁷⁰

In 1897 Louisa Cottrell applied as George's widow.⁷¹ Her son-in-law A. C. Henson swore he had witnessed George's death, on or about 21 May 1891.⁷² The pension bureau rejected Louisa's application on the prior basis: It had no proof of George's service in the Mexican War.⁷³

If the facts George asserted in his pension application are true, George of Parker and Wichita was not George of Colorado and Wharton. Events George claimed for the pension application overlap events of the Colorado-Wharton George. One man, for example, could not reasonably have attended the probate court of Wharton County on 1 April 1847 and the Battle of Cerro Gordo in the southern Mexico state of Veracruz on 17–18 April 1847.⁷⁴

The War Department said Mexican War records did not support the facts George alleged in his application. In addition, in the details George's story fails to hold up:

- The only company commander who served under Colonel John C. "Jack" Hays with the first name of Claiborne was Claiborne C. Herbert.⁷⁵ The war department had access to at least three muster rolls for Herbert's company. Dated 10 June 1846, 31 August 1846, and 2 October 1846, they cover the entire period of the company's service. George's name appears on none of them.⁷⁶ Nor does it appear on any other Texas company's roster.⁷⁷

69. Mexican War pension application no. 7890, RG-15, NA–Washington, for George W. Cottrell, Survivor's Brief, 17 February 1890.

70. *Ibid.*, for notation ("Status unchanged") on pension wrapper, 14 April 1890.

71. Louisa Cottrell, declaration, 21 January 1897, widow's Mexican War pension application no. 13773 (rejected), RG 15; NA–Washington.

72. *Ibid.*, A. C. Henson, General Affidavit, 23 March 1897.

73. *Ibid.*, widow's brief, stamped "rejected," 25 March 1897.

74. For the court appearance, see Wharton Co., Probate Record Book A:13–15, court orders, 1 April 1847. For the battle, see Center for Greater Southwestern Studies, University of Texas Arlington Library, "Cerro Gordo," *A Continent Divided: The U.S.–Mexico War* (http://library.uta.edu/usmexicowar/topic.php?topic_id=23).

75. "Mexican War Service Records: Texas," *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/272750604>), compiled military service record (CMSR) of Claiborn C. Herbert, First Texas Mounted Rifles; citing National Archives microfilm publication M278, roll 1.

76. *Ibid.*

77. Charles D. Spurlin, *Texas Volunteers in the Mexican War* (Austin, Tex.: Eakin, 1998). The book's 302 pages include Spurlin's transcriptions of extant muster rolls of Texas units.

- Herbert's company recruited for the most part in Columbus—Colorado County's seat—in mid-May 1846.⁷⁸ On 15 May, R. J. Roberts, at Liberty County, became the company's first known enlistee.⁷⁹ Most of the men enlisted about when Herbert did, on 18 May 1846.⁸⁰ No record shows enlistment at or near Corpus Christi on or about 1 May 1846, as George reported.
- The company arrived on the battle line and was mustered into federal service in June 1846.⁸¹ Its troops, therefore, did not fight in the opening Mexican War battle of 8–9 May, in which George said he participated.
- Captain Herbert was not injured or furloughed at the Battle of Monterrey, and no soldiers from his unit were transferred from General Taylor's command to General Scott's command. To the contrary, Herbert was mustered out with his company at Monterrey on 2 October 1846.⁸²
- Mexican War pension applications filed by ten members of Herbert's unit or their widows confirm the unit's approximate service dates, from no earlier than mid-May 1846 to no later than early October 1846. None of those serving in Herbert's company, or as witnesses for widows of their comrades, said George served with them.⁸³

78. For example, "Mexican War Service Records: Texas," *Fold3* (https://www.fold3.com/title_774/mexican_war_service_records_texas#overview), CMSRs of Lyman W. Alexander, Henry W. Baylor, James Berry, Alonzo F. Bixby, Charles Brandes, Thomas Brown, Hugo Clarke, Cleaveland Coffee, James Coffee, Woodson Coffee, Samuel Crabtree, Oliver B. Crenshaw, Edward Davis, Sebastian Durr, Henry Fockes, George Fricker, Auguste Fusenius, Otho Gasenback, Andrew Hammer, Daniel Hansicker, Charles F. Haswell, Earnst Hoffman, Benjamin F. Howard, George W. Johnson, Albert A. Knowles, John C. Lamb, Joseph Luten, John Mays, Angus McNeill, Edgar Merrem, Will W. Mon[t]gomery, George W. Montgomery, William Nelson, Joseph Newman, Charles Olendorf, Morgan L. Payne, James Peacock, Otto [Otho] Phrene, William S. Pindarvis, George W. Salmon, Jesse R. Smith, Watkins L. Smith, Sylvester Sutton, Asa L. Townsend, Stapleton Townsend, Thomas L. Townsend, George S. J. Turner, Joseph L. Walker, Christian Wasserman, John W. Watson, Loving Wilson, and Jacob H. Workins [Weaking].

79. "Mexican War Service Records: Texas," *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/272888716>), CMSR of R. J. Roberts, 1st Texas Mounted Rifles.

80. *Ibid.* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/272750604>), CMSR of Claibourn C Herbert.

81. *Ibid.* See page 4.

82. *Ibid.*

83. John Birch, survivor's claim and supporting papers, 24 July 1886, Mexican War pension application no. 942, for service from Texas, RG 15, NA–Washington. Also, *ibid.*, Ernestine Brandes, widow's claim and supporting papers, 14 April 1888, widow's pension certif. no. 5025, for service of Charles Brandes of Texas. Also, *ibid.*, Mary Crenshaw, widow's brief and supporting papers, 5 May 1897, widow's pension certif. no. 11043, for service of Oliver Crenshaw of Texas. Also, *ibid.*, Sebastian Durr, survivor's claim and supporting papers, 24 February 1887, pension application no. 8124. Also, *ibid.*, John Mayes, survivor's claim and supporting papers, 27 July 1887, pension application no. 16355. Also, *ibid.*, Jesse Smith, survivor's claim and supporting papers, 17 February 1887, pension application no. 5987. Also, *ibid.*, P. A. Townsend, widow's claim and supporting papers, 22 January 1886, widow's pension certif. no. 3278, for service of Asa Townsend of Texas. Also, *ibid.*, Stapleton Townsend, survivor's claim and supporting papers, 9 March 1887, pension application no. 6501. Also, *ibid.*, Thomas L. Townsend, survivor's claim and supporting papers, 23 July 1884, pension application no. 6502. Also, *ibid.*, George Turner, survivor's claim and supporting papers, 23 July 1884, pension application no. 14869.

- No captain in any unit during the Mexican War had a surname even approximating *Dowdy*.⁸⁴ While Texas units included men with the surnames George gave for his comrades under Captain Dowdy, no Texas unit had men with more than one or two of those surnames serving together.⁸⁵
- The only Colonel in the Mexican War named Stockton served with a regiment of volunteers from Michigan.⁸⁶ It included no Texans.

On a broad level, George's story also fails to hold up. Texas volunteers in the Mexican War did not enlist for four hundred days or the war's duration. Nearly all enlisted for three or six months and went home when their enlistments ended.⁸⁷

Additionally, Texas volunteer forces did not transfer after the Battle of Monterrey from General Taylor's command to General Scott's command. Instead, they were discharged after Monterrey fell to the Americans. Little is clearer in the history of the Mexican War than Taylor's disapproval of Texas volunteers' behavior and the alacrity with which he discharged them and sent them home:

The prospect of living eight weeks in Mexico with one thousand idle Texas Rangers did not appeal to [Taylor]. Consequently they were given their discharge October 2, and set out for home immediately.⁸⁸

[Taylor mustered] out the entire force of Texas volunteers, reporting to the adjutant general that, "With their departure we may look for a restoration of quiet and order in Monterey . . . some shameful atrocities have been perpetrated by them since the capitulation of the town."⁸⁹

By the first part of October [1846], most of the Texans were discharged and were prepared to return home. . . . Taylor, upon hearing that the Lone Star State volunteers were leaving, reportedly uttered, "Thank God I have this day discharged the last Texan and now hope to have something like order in camp."⁹⁰

84. Wm. Hugh Robarts, *Mexican War Veterans: A Complete Roster* (Washington, D.C.: Brentano's, 1887). Also, *Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Soldiers Who Served During the Mexican War*, microfilm publication M616, 41 rolls (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1965), roll 10 (Di-Dy); digital images, "Mexican War Service Record Index," Fold3.com (<https://www.fold3.com/search/#t=871>).

85. "Mexican War Service Record Index," *Fold3.com*.

86. Robarts, *Mexican War Veterans*, 58.

87. Charles M. Robinson III, *Texas and the Mexican War: A History and a Guide* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2004), 49. Also, Walter Prescott Webb, *The Texas Rangers in the Mexican War* (Austin, Tex.: Jenkins Garrett, 1975), 59.

88. Webb, *The Texas Rangers in the Mexican War*, 59.

89. Robinson, *Texas and the Mexican War*, 72, citing Z. A. Taylor (Major General, U.S.A., Commanding) to Adjutant General, U.S. Army, letter, 6 October 1846. For a transcription of the letter, see *Messages of the President of the United States . . . on the Subject of the Mexican War* (Washington, D.C.: Wendell and Van Benthuysen, 1848), 430.

90. Spurlin, *Texas Volunteers in the Mexican War*, 104.

A few Texas troops eventually were involved in Scott's 1847 campaign. Most arrived after Scott was already in Mexico City. Colonel Hays did not join Scott "until the war was nearly at its end."⁹¹

Nothing, therefore, supports George's claim of service in the Mexican War. The evidence indicates he invented most of his assertions. Certainly, his story of serving under Colonel Stockton in a unit commanded by Captain Dowdy after being transferred from the Taylor line to the Scott line is fiction. No unit matching his description existed. No Texas unit was assigned in that way.

Additionally, although good records exist for Claiborne Herbert's unit, George's name is absent from them. He did not serve in Herbert's company.

Despite George's fictions about his service, one part is true. Captain Claiborne Herbert did command a company of Texas mounted volunteers, and people George named as comrades served in that company:

- Claibourn [Claiborne] C. Herbert was a captain in the First Regiment, Texas Mounted Rifles, under Colonel John C. Hays. Herbert enlisted on 18 May 1846 at Columbus, Texas, for six months. The company muster-in date was reported as 7 June 1846. The first muster roll is dated June 10 at Point [Port] Isabel, Texas. Herbert appears in D and E companies between June and October 1846 and as captain of D company on an undated return in 1846. He appears on a company muster-out roll on 2 October 1846 in Monterey, Mexico.⁹²
- Augustin W. J. D. Austin served as bugler in Captain Herbert's company. At Columbus, Texas, on 18 May 1846 he enrolled for six months and mustered in on 7 June 1846. He appears on a company muster roll dated 10 June 1846, at Point Isabel.⁹³
- Leander Beason, a private in Captain Herbert's company, enrolled at Columbus on May 18 for six months, and mustered-in at Port Isabel on 7 June 1846. He appears on a company muster roll on 2 October 1846 in Monterey, Mexico.⁹⁴
- John Brannon, a private in Captain Herbert's company, enrolled at Columbus on 18 May for six months and mustered-in at Port Isabel on 7 June 1846. He appears on a company muster roll on 2 October 1846 in Monterey, Mexico.⁹⁵

In addition, Claiborne Herbert did have a brother William who served as a private in the war. He was not in Herbert's company, but in Captain Christopher B. Acklin's company in the same regiment. William enlisted on 11 June 1846 and appears on the company's muster-in roll dated 14 July 1846 at Point Isabel. His record bears the note: "Not borne on subt rolls of Co. Entry cancelled."⁹⁶ His

91. Webb, *The Texas Rangers in the Mexican War*, 70–74 and 79–80.

92. "Mexican War Service Records: Texas," *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/272750604>), CMSR of Claibourn C. Herbert, 1st Texas Mounted Rifles.

93. *Ibid.* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/245/272742185>), CMSR of Augustin W. J. D. Austin.

94. *Ibid.* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/245/272742647>), CMSR of Leander Beason.

95. *Ibid.* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/245/272743695>), CMSR of John Brannon.

96. *Ibid.* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/245/272750704>), CMSR of William J. Herbert, p. 2.

pension file shows that he served primarily in Captain R. A. Gillespie's company, also under Colonel Hays.⁹⁷

Those five men had two experiences in common:

- They served in the military unit in which pension applicant George W. Cottrell of Parker County claimed to serve.
- They lived in Colorado and Wharton counties during the same time as George W. Cottrell of those counties.

Just before the Mexican War, for example, Claiborne C. (or Caleb Claiborne) Herbert and his brother William moved to Texas, where they lived apparently only in Colorado County.⁹⁸ Both were taxed there as early as 1846.⁹⁹ Claiborne was enumerated in Colorado County in 1850 and 1860.¹⁰⁰ He served in the Confederate Congress. Elected to the United States Congress in 1865 and 1867, he was refused his seat because of his Confederate service.¹⁰¹ Both Herbert brothers died in Colorado County. Claiborne was shot to death outside a saloon in 1867, and William died in 1902.¹⁰²

Leander Beeson moved to Texas as a boy and lived in Colorado County the rest of his life.¹⁰³ In 1838 he appears on Colorado County's first available tax roll, in a joint entry "Abel & Leander Beeson," for 4,444 acres. Appearing with him are Preston Gilbert and William Newman, whose lives intersected with the Colorado-Wharton George.¹⁰⁴ Beeson, charged in Colorado County with crimes from assault to gambling, apparently led a colorful life.¹⁰⁵ He lived in Colorado County in 1850

97. See William J. Herbert, survivor's claim and supporting papers, 31 January 1887, Mexican War pension application no. 3049, for service from Texas, RG 15, NA–Washington.

98. Texas State Historical Association, *Handbook of Texas Online*, "Herbert, Claiborne C.," (<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fhe25>).

99. *FamilySearch*, digital film 004616022, image 56, Colorado Co., Tax Roll, 1846, second dist., p. 4, W. A. Herbert and C. C. Herbert.

100. 1850 U.S. census, Colorado Co., Tex., pop. sch., Colorado subdivision, fol. 27r, dwell./fam. 26, C C Herbert. Also, 1860 U.S. census, Colorado Co., Tex., pop. sch., Eagle Lake, p. 64, dwell. 461, fam. 438, C C Herbert; NARA microfilm M653, roll 1291.

101. Patsy McDonald Spaw, ed., *The Texas Senate: Republic to Civil War 1836–1861* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 280.

102. Texas State Historical Association, *Handbook of Texas Online* (<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fhe25>), "Herbert, Claiborne C." Also, "Points About People We Know," *Weimar Mercury*, Weimar, Tex., 29 November 1902, page 1, col. 1.

103. Texas State Historical Association, *Handbook of Texas Online*, "Beeson, Leander," (<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbe27>).

104. *FamilySearch*, digital film 004616022, image 9, Colorado Co., Tax Roll, 1838, p. 2, "Abel & Leander" Beeson. Also, *ibid.*, image 10, p. 3, Preston Gilbert and William R. Newman.

105. Colorado Co., District Court Criminal Case File no. 6, Republic of Texas v. Leander Beeson and W. B. Dewees, 1837, assault; no. 327, Republic of Texas v. Leander Beeson, 1844, betting on election; no. 568: State v. Leander Beeson, 1848, assault with intent to kill; and no. 147, State v. Leander Beeson, John Benny, and Alexander J. Shannon, 1854, gaming.

with his wife Rebecca and son Leander.¹⁰⁶ He was taxed in Colorado County through his death, in 1854.¹⁰⁷

John Brannon appears on only one document besides his military records—the 1846 Colorado County tax roll.¹⁰⁸

Even if George Cottrell of Tarrant and Parker counties did not serve in the Mexican War, he knew about other men who had served. No evidence supports contact between George and any of those men while George lived in Tarrant or Parker counties. Such contact is unlikely for the Herberts, Beason, or Brannon because they lived, worked, and died in or disappeared from the Colorado-Wharton area. Later contact would have been impossible with at least one man George claimed to have served with in Herbert's company: Augustin Austin had been killed in the battle at Monterrey on 21 September 1846.¹⁰⁹

Only one scenario explains George's familiarity with those men. He lived near them in Wharton County around the time of the war. The simultaneous appearance of names in the area's criminal court records bolsters that conclusion: George was indicted for murder in Wharton County on the same day a Wharton County grand jury indicted Claiborne C. Herbert for assault and battery.¹¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Not as a military comrade but as a friend, associate, and neighbor, George knew of Captain Herbert and the men of his company. He used that knowledge when he prepared his pension application. The FAN principle—in this case, researching the claimed associates of a pension applicant—leads to only one conclusion: The law-abiding pension applicant of Parker County had been the alleged bigamist and murderer of Colorado and Wharton counties.

No other hypothesis explains the pension applicant's knowledge of men in Colorado and Wharton counties. Two seemingly different men of the same name were one.

106. 1850 U.S. census, Colorado Co., Tex., pop. sched., Colorado subdivision, fol. 26v, dwell./fam. 12, Leander Beason household.

107. *FamilySearch*, digital film 004616022, image 336, Colorado Co., tax roll, 1854, p. 96, Leander Beason.

108. *Ibid.*, image 135, 1846, second dist., p. 62, John Brannon.

109. "Mexican War Service Records: Texas," *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3.com/image/245/272742185>), CMSR of Augustin W. J. D. Austin.

110. Wharton Co., District Court Minute Book A:9, indictment, 13 October 1846.