

Rooted in Tennessee: My Adams Family Story

By Mary Kate Eckhardt

When most people hear the name “Adams family,” they think of the sitcom or the recent Netflix series, *Wednesday*. But when I found my birth mother and her family in 2007, I had no idea that Adams’ name would connect me to over 300 years of history.

In Tennessee, state law prohibits adoptees from accessing information about their birth families until they turn 21. That law still stands, although modern tools like AncestryDNA and FamilySearch have made it easier to uncover family connections. I found my birth father through AncestryDNA in 2019 and now have a strong relationship with him and his family.

Finding my birth family was a significant experience—not just for me, but for my adoptive family, who raised me from the time I was six weeks old, and for my friends as well. I’ve been fortunate to have support from everyone involved. Today, it’s not unusual for members of my birth and adoptive families to attend the same events. There’s no confusion about who’s who—it’s simply part of our lives.

My interest in exploring my biological lineage was sparked by my maternal grandmother from my adoptive family, whom we affectionately called Mummer. She passed away last year. In 2012, at age 82, Mummer joined the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), and my mom joined alongside her under the same patriot. I became a member in 2017 after three years of research into my biological maternal line, ultimately identifying an undocumented patriot: Levi Adams. Levi was my 5th great-grandfather.

Levi Adams contributed to the Revolutionary War by providing services to the war effort. He was from North Carolina and the son of Archibald Adams, who began a long line of farmers. While Archibald’s origins are debated, what’s clear is that farming was a consistent occupation for generations of his descendants, including my biological maternal great-grandfather.

Levi’s son, Harman Adams, and my 4th great-grandfather, moved to what is now Henderson County, Tennessee, in the mid-1800s. He served as a private under Alfred Rowland in the 4th Regiment of the North Carolina Militia during the War of 1812. This regiment was part of the First Brigade of the North Carolina Militia. Harman’s service lasted just 16 days, and he was paid slightly under \$7.00 for his time—a stark contrast to today’s cost of a single cup of coffee from Starbucks.

Harman petitioned the state of Tennessee twice for land and was granted approximately 300 acres. He relocated his family there and lived on the property until his death. Harman and

several of his descendants are buried on the original farmland in Adams Cemetery. Though the land is no longer in our family, we still visit the cemetery, which remains on active farmland and private property.

One of my favorite family stories involves Harman's son, Dock, my 3rd great-grandfather. Dock and his wife, Freedona White Adams, were Confederate sympathizers. According to W. Clay Crook's March 2019 article in *The Lexington Progress*, a Civil War bullet was recovered from their cabin near the Long-Sought Community along Stray Leaf Road. During the war, a small group of Federal troops led by Corporal Byrd camped near the Adams' home while collecting supplies. Upon leaving, they took several of the family's horses. Dock sarcastically suggested they take the colt as well, prompting one soldier to fire a shot toward the house. The bullet struck the facing of the door, just above Freedona's head.

That bullet remained lodged in the cabin wall for over a century, becoming a quiet witness to the family's history. Anita Bird, a descendant, recalled, "It struck the facing of the door, just above her head." When the old log house was eventually torn down, her father, Mr. Luther Adams, removed the bullet. Anita's brother, Joe Adams, added, "Aunt Florence was the last one to live there before she moved into our home" (Crook, 2019).

In 1993, Greg Bird—descendant of Luther Adams, who was the brother of my biological great-grandfather Joe—helped bring the story and the bullet back into focus. Clay Crook met with Greg, his brother Jimmy, and their mother Anita, while their uncle joined the conversation by phone. Together, they shared not only the family's Civil War story but also the actual bullet and several handmade square nails recovered from the old Adams cabin. Although deformed from impact, the bullet's size and rebated base suggested it was a .44 caliber minie ball, likely manufactured for a Colt's Walker Dragoon.

Dock's brother, Jasper, fought for the Union. Like many Tennessee families, the Adams family was divided during the Civil War. Family stories suggest that Jasper was considered the black sheep of the family, partly because he married multiple stepsisters. When one passed away, he married another. Harman reportedly threatened to remove Jasper from his will if he continued. Jasper and his final wife, Keziah, are buried together in Adams Cemetery. He remained a farmer until his death.

Many members of my birth family still live in and around Wildersville, Tennessee, near the site of the Battle of Parker's Crossroads. The history of this area is rich and compelling, and discovering that I'm connected to it makes it even more fascinating. For the first 21 years of my life, I had no idea where I came from—and it turns out, my roots were just thirty minutes from where I was raised in Jackson by my adoptive family.