

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO**

### **BRANSON**

### **FAMILY**

The original Branson in this country seems to have been John Branson who came from England to Virginia long before the Revolution, and lived the remainder of his life and died there. No details of his life are known except that he was a young man when he came and probably married in this country. His family were all born in this country, but we do not know the names of any of them except one son, who was also named John. Shortly after the close of the Revolution the Bransons lived in northern Virginia up in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains between the South Fork of the Potomac and the Shenandoah rivers. No John Branson appears in the list of that time, which included Lionel and two named Amos. It is likely that the first John was dead and his son, John, had already removed to Tennessee. We know that the second John did go to Tennessee, and that he lived there a number of years.

He came to Gasconade County in 1821. He was an old man at the time, at least old enough to have grown grandchildren. He had six sons, all of whom came with him, but the record is silent as to any daughters. We do not know the names of all the sons, either. Two of them were John and Reuben, both of whom were married and had families before they came here. Direct descendants of other branches of the Branson family, who are now scattered over this state, say that their ancestors referred to John Branson and his family as the 'Lost Bransons' from the fact that they never heard from them after they left Tennessee.

John Branson Senior and his son John both died in 1822 about a year after coming to Gasconade County. From this time the family scattered, although a great many of them lived--and still live--in Osage and Gasconade counties. The part of the family removing to Maries County was only a small percent of the total number.

In the absence of written records it is now too late to say with certainty the relationship of the various families of Bransons who have lived here. It is certain there were four separate families: Jared Branson; the descendants of Valentine Branson; William Branson (Red Head), and David and Reuben Branson, the last two were brothers. Jared's father was John, a grandson of the original John who came from England, and the best evidence now available is that he was a second cousin of David and Reuben Branson, and also a second cousin of Valentine. David and Reuben, in turn, seem to have been second cousins to Valentine, and if this is correct, then the grandfathers of these three groups were brothers, and sons of the first John. William Branson's father, who was Thomas Branson, seems to have been a cousin of Jared, but whether first or second is not known.

Jared Branson, son, grandson, and great-grandson of John Bransons, was born in Marion County, Tennessee,

October 15, 1817, and removed with the rest of his family to Missouri in 1821. The death of his father and grandfather the next year threw the family on its own resources, but by every member doing what he could they continued to improve their situation and were at least of average prosperity. He was married December 14, 1839, to Sallie, daughter of William Bumpass, also of Gasconade County. She was born there January 13, 1825, and died at the family home in this county June 15, 1907. Her mother was an Eads. The young couple made their home in Gasconade County until 1857, when they moved to the farm on the upper Big Maries, thereafter known as the Branson place, where they spent the remainder of their lives. Three children, William G., Melissa, and Mary were born to them before leaving Gasconade County, and one, Benjamin F., after they moved here.

Jared Branson was active in public affairs, but his office holding was confined to one term (1866) as Presiding Judge of the Maries County Court, an office for which he refused for some time to qualify because of having to take the 'test oath.' The trouble was in some way patched up or evaded, however, and he served his term. He was a strong sympathizer with the southern cause during the war, and was one of the objectives of more than one militia raid. His usual partners in hiding out were Dr. B. F. Bumpass and William Simpson. He died October 6, 1882, and is buried in the Bumpass Cemetery, the ceremony being conducted by the Masonic Lodge of which he has a longtime member.

William G. Branson, his oldest son, was born about 1842 at Hibler's Prairie in Gasconade County. He was married in the middle sixties to Martha A., daughter of Barnett Finn. She was born in Maries County July 21, 1842. He at once settled down and lived the remainder of his life on the farm on the Little Maries still known as the 'Black Head Place,' now owned by George Vineyard. Of the four children born of this marriage one,

William M. Branson, survives and lives at Dixon, where he has been in the lumber business many years. He was married to Emma Rigs by August 9, 1891. Dolly, the only daughter of the first marriage, married Ashley G. Williams and died at Waynesville in 1937; her descendants will be found under that name. Nancy, the oldest child, born in 1868, died May 14, 1930. She was the wife of Martin Helton and left two children, Gordon and Eunice, now Mrs. Mont Lupardus. Both live in St. Louis. Thomas F., the fourth child, moved to Vienna several years after his marriage to Alice, daughter of Russell Duncan. He operated a hotel, a store, and served two terms as County Collector, but was retired from business at the time of his death in 1911. Of the four children born of this marriage one, Ray, died in 1937; the others are: Kate in Benton County; Allen G. on the Little Maries in this County; and Thomas in St. Louis; his widow lives in Belle.

The second wife of William G. Branson was Margaret, daughter of James Crismon, and ten children were born to them, of whom seven are still living. The living are: Agnes, wife of Edward Veasman; Minnie, wife of James Hughes of this county; William, Arch, and Ben Junior of Dixon; Paradine who married a Phillips and lives in Miller County; and Ewell of Miami, Oklahoma. Laura, Maud, and Ethel are dead; Laura married Milford Duncan and left two sons, Bland and William, of whom the latter died in infancy, and Bland's last known address was Detroit, Michigan. Ethel married B. F. Scott in Pulaski County March 9, 1899, and died February 27, 1934, leaving eight living children: Dorsey, Wayne, B. F. Junior, Lula, Rosa, May, Ethel, and Maud, all of St. Louis and Pulaski County. A deceased son, Jacob, left one child, also in Pulaski County. Maud married Elmer Curtman and left eight children, of whom two, Floyd and Clyde, live around Russellville, Missouri. Mabel is the wife of Almon Rowden. May is now Mrs. Van Kirk. Ethel, Gladys, Lorene, and Agnes are single and live with their father in Maries County.

Mary, the oldest child of Jared Branson, married Henry Soudermeyer and was the mother of two daughters, Sarah M., wife of John O. Holmes, and M. E., wife of Sat Krone. Their descendants will be found under their married names. Her second marriage, to Simon Feeler, was childless.

Benjamin F., the only child of Jared Branson native to this county, was born February 12, 1859, and died December 31, 1935. He was married February 14, 1883, to Paralee S., daughter of Russell Duncan. She was born December 19, 1864, and died March 30, 1891, the mother of two children: Sallie, now wife of C. W. Misel, and Jared who lives on the home place. His second wife was Ellen Hughes, who was born September 6, 1866, and died December 21, 1911, survived by three children: Remus of Roseburg, Oregon, and Stella of St. Louis, both single; and Byron of Nebraska, married. Benjamin F. Branson's association with public affairs began early in life, when he taught his first term at Cleveland School when only a boy. From that time on he was almost continuously in some position of public trust, either in Probate Court, where he settled a great number of estates, or in public office. The latter included one term as Assessor, seven terms as District Judge, and one four-year term as Presiding Judge. He was a member of all Masonic bodies in this vicinity, and his funeral at Bumpass Cemetery was conducted by that order.

Melissa, the remaining child of Jared Branson and the youngest born in Gasconade County, was born October 4, 1853. She was married to Michael Feeler November 5, 1873, by the Reverend J. M. Johnson, and died January 8, 1876. Benjamin, the only child born of this marriage, now lives at Belt, Montana.

William Branson, called 'Red Head' to distinguish him from William G. Branson who was called 'Black Head,' was born in Gasconade County June 15, 1840. He was the

son of Thomas Branson, who lived and died in Gasconade County early in life. After his father's death William and his mother came to this county. Her maiden name was Hannah Simpson and she was born, possibly in Gasconade County, January 1, 1819, and died on the Little Maries May 3, 1890. Her second husband was Stephen Hughes and their children will be found under that name. William 'Red Head' Branson was married here January 12, 1860, to Mary, daughter of William Todd and Julia Ann Helton, who was born in this county April 9, 1845, and who died here July 27, 1916. Her widower survived until December 28, 1919.

William Branson was one of the early day schoolteachers in this county having taught several terms before the Civil War and some after its close. He was three times Assessor of the county, twice County Judge, and was Justice of the Peace in Miller Township for more than an ordinary generation; he was a lifelong Mason.

Six children were born to him, of whom none now live in this county; Mrs. Lankford lives at Dixon; William and Mrs. John Myers reside at Springfield; and Mrs. Charles Slone in Kansas City; John and Thomas are dead. John Branson was born September 21, 1861; he married Dora Scott, and died in Oklahoma August 15, 1911, to which state he had removed after serving some time as a guard at the Missouri penitentiary at Jefferson City. One of his daughters, Nellie, married a Missouri Pacific engineer and still lives in Jefferson City. The other children, Maud, Tom, Henry, and John live in Oklahoma. Thomas Branson, also dead, married Josephine Dake and is survived by three children. Pearl, Leatha, and Alvia, all of Kansas City.

Valentine Branson, the third of the three sets of cousins associated with this county, never lived here. He spent his entire adult life in Gasconade County, dying near Woollam November 1876. His wife, Alpha M. Branson,

continued to live there until her death on December 19, 1882. One of the sons, Alf P. Branson, was born in that county on March 15, 1838.

On reaching manhood, or possibly even before, Alf Branson began work at Owen's Mill on the Gasconade in Osage County, and ever afterward followed the milling business. After an apprenticeship of some years he operated for some years the mill in which he had learned the business. After the death of his father he moved to Texas where he owned and operated one or more mills until his death on June 7, 1909. Four of his children were connected with Maries County affairs.

His daughter, Mahala, born at Woollam November 28, 1857, was married to T. A. Bray February 4, 1883, and thereafter made her home in this county until her death on February 7, 1912. Her five children are all living; Seth, Ellis, Albert, and Stella, wife of Richard Stockton, live in this county; Minnie, wife of George Neidert, lives in Phelps County.

Elizabeth, the second daughter of Alf Branson, was born April 18, 1869, and married W. A. Walker December 1, 1887. Soon thereafter they moved to this county, where she spent the remainder of her life and where her widower still lives. The twelve children born of this marriage, all yet living, are: William P. who married Lizzie Birdsong, Blanche wife of Clay Wofford, Hadley who married Fannie Tipton, Marian who married Freda Johnson, and Russell who married Alta Holman, live in this county; Floyd L. who married Addie Campbell, Myrtle, wife of Cletus Nichols, Lora, wife of Loyd McKinney, Randal who married Lillie Woodruff, and A. C. who married Beulah Hawkins, all live in Jefferson City; and Rudy who married Stella Wofford lives in Dent County.

Jeff Branson, brother of Mrs. Bray and Mrs. Walker, made his home with the Brays after his parents' removal

to Texas. There he learned the milling business and operated the mill a great part of the time thereafter. He was married to Melcena, daughter of John A. Rogers, while living at Pay Down, and some time afterward moved to and bought a mill at Westover in Crawford County, at which place he remained most of the rest of his life. He sold out there within the last ten years and moved to Kansas, where he engaged in the milling business at Winfield, but had sold out and was farming at the time of his death in 1934. He is survived by his widow who lives at Steelville, and his two sons, Leslie, also a miller, at Detroit, Michigan, and Ansley in St. Louis.

Mary Branson, the fourth child child of Alf Branson to make her home in Maries County, also made her home with her sister at Pay Down until womanhood, when she married John Fortune. They removed to the state of Washington in a few years, where Mrs. Fortune later died. She was the mother of three children, Walter, Alva, and Ida, all of whom are supposed to live in Washington. John Fortune at last accounts lived in central Idaho.

David Branson, who, together with his brother Reuben, was an ancestor of the fourth set of Bransons mentioned herein, was the son of Reuben Branson. He was born in Virginia January 17, 1810, and after living in Tennessee for a while came here in 1821 with the rest of the family. He was the first of the name to live in Maries County, and was married here June 14, 1832, to Sarah, daughter of William David. She was born in Tennessee and her father at that time owned and lived on the farm now owned by Jeff Murphy. They lived in this county a short time, but David Branson never thereafter lived in this county, although he acquired property interests here in an early day and kept them till his death. He made his home in Osage County for more than thirty years, beginning a short time after his marriage. He owned a farm on the Gasconade at the crossing of the Potosi-Jefferson City road, but lived most of his time on Galloway's Prairie, a mile or

two northeast of present Belle, then the site of Rogers' Store. He moved to Rolla in the seventies, and at once became prominently identified with the business life of Phelps County. The Rolla Hospital building, once the Crandall House, was built and owned by him, as well as much other property in and near Rolla. He died there March 9, 1881, and his estate was probably the largest administered in Phelps County up to that time. His first wife died about 1843, and in 1846 he married Elizabeth, daughter of Robert Campbell, who was the widow of James Harvey Hawkins. She was first married in Tennessee, and her first husband died in Gasconade County in 1844. They had no children but she was the mother of three children by her first husband, William J., Joseph Marion, and Jacob Monroe Hawkins. Joseph and Jacob married two daughters of Russell Jones Senior, brother of Elijah Senior, and lived many years and died in Phelps County. The descendants of William J. Hawkins have not been found. David Branson was survived by six children of his first marriage: Andrew J., Ruth A., Elizabeth J., Mary A., William R., and Hannah M. Branson.

Andrew J. Branson, the oldest child of David, was born January 23, 1833, and died June 27, 1915. His first wife was Mary A. Williams, who was born January 26, 1844, and died December 7, 1899. With the exception of a few years at Rolla they made this county their home their entire lives. They first lived in Lanes Prairie, then on Dry Fork and then on the Hoops place, which they took as part of their share of his father's estate. After the death of his first wife Andrew married Parazetta Brown, nee Tipton, who survives him. She is now the widow of Stephen Atkins, and lives in St. James. The six children of the first marriage living to maturity were: Martha M., Elizabeth, Alice, David C., William J., and Ida Branson. Of these, three are still living; Alice, wife of J. D. Rogers, lives at Belle; William J. lives in Colorado; Ida, former wife of Felix Renick, and now Mrs. Ida Keerigan, lives in Maplewood. David C. Branson, the fourth child, married

Florence Pointer and died, childless, February 16, 1918.

Martha Margaret, the oldest child of A. J. Branson, was born September 29, 1866. She was married to Robert Franklin December 23, 1885, and died at Belle February 1, 1937, her husband having died October 3, 1930. Her surviving children are: Mrs. Ray Armer, Freeburg; Mrs. Sylvester Keeney, Freeburg; Mrs. A. J. Backues, Freeburg; Mrs. James Shanks, Belle; Mrs. W. H. Elrod, Summerfield; Mrs. Charles Vanoster, Freeburg; Mrs. Zetta Henley, Belle; and Mrs. J. W. Wilcox of St. Louis.

Elizabeth, the second daughter of A. J. Branson, married Tom Rush Crider, and both have been dead several years. Their children, all living, are: Dr. A. J. Crider, Dixon; Ollie, widow of Syl Shanks and now wife of Thomas Deckard, St. Louis; Florence, wife of David Griffith, and Margaret, wife of Henry Stratman, both of Maries County; Thomas R., Mary, wife of Ralph Swanard; and Eva L., widow of C. O. Palmer, all live in St. Louis.

Ruth A. Branson, second child of David, was born January 5, 1834, and died December 17, 1917. She married William P. Carnes, and her descendants will be found under her married name.

Elizabeth J. Branson, the third daughter of David, was born May 8, 1836; she was married in Osage County September 4, 1856, to Francis C. W. Owens, who was born in Denman, Tennessee, May 6, 1822, and who came with his father to Osage County about 1834. Frank Owens spent his entire adult life--and before manhood--in business ventures of various kinds, having embarked in the mercantile business with Edward Luster in 1839, at the mature age of seventeen years. This was at the present site of Owensville, in Gasconade County, which boasted a few residences in the general vicinity but no business buildings. Shortly after it was proposed to name the place

and secure a post office, each partner urging the other to permit the use of his name for the new post office. The upshot of the matter was that they pitched a game of horseshoes to decide the matter, Luster won, and the place thereafter was known as Owensville. Owens later sold out to Luster and built and operated a mill at present Owen's Mill in Gasconade County. He was the first merchant in Vienna and probably among the very first in Rolla. He was in business in Newburg and had interests in various other places. He made his home in Rolla the last fifty years of his life, where he died January 7, 1910; his widow survived until January 9, 1914.

Ten children were to this marriage: (1) Nancy Ann Owens, born June 29, 1857, was married December 19, 1876, to David W. Smith, and died July 10, 1878, childless; (2) John Robert Owens, born August 24, 1859, died September 29, 1887, single; (3) Mary Frances Owens, born October 4, 1861, married J. M. Diehl December 23, 1884, and died February 20, 1898, childless; (4) Jesse Owens lives at Cooper Hill; he was born December 14, 1863, and married July 9, 1916 Lizzie Baker who died December 17, 1931; (5) Dr. William C. Owens, born November 10, 1865, was married October 1, 1893, to Ida Krunenberg; the date of her death is not at hand, but he was married the second time on August 26, 1922, to Lillian Branson; they live in St. Louis; (6) Sarah Owens, born August 3, 1868, was married in October 1887 to Robert Lyons; they live in Springfield; (7) Laura Belle Owens, born May 22, 1871, married Samuel Johnson July 2, 1889; he died July 21, 1892; she is now Mrs. Harry Davies and lives in St. Louis; (8) Joseph Reed Owens, born May 24, 1873, married Mary Beard April 9, 1901; he died childless; (9) Ida May Owens, born March 18, 1876, married Robert M. Shaver January 19, 1899; the date of his death is not at hand; she is now the wife of Dr. F. S. Tinslar of Lebanon, Missouri, to whom she was married January 5, 1939; (10) Susan Blanche Owens, born October 16, 1879, married Harry McGraw December 25, 1902, and has conducted

his business at Rolla since his death some years ago.

Hannah M., the fourth child of David Branson, married John T. Helbert and lived on the Dry Fork for many years. Mr. Helbert operated a threshing machine over the eastern part of the county during most of the time. He later had a store at Grove Dale after G. W. Jones moved to Lindell. Both are now dead, Mr. Helbert dying in Shannon County and his wife, who later married an Ammerman, in Phelps County. They were the parents of three children: Eva, wife of J. S. Wells; Maud, wife of Edward Patterson; and Charles E. Helbert. All went to Shannon County with their parents, and are now thought to live out of the state.

We have little information as to William R. Branson; he married here or in Osage County and moved to Shannon County a great many years ago after living a short time on Dry Fork. His wife died in Shannon County and any descendants they may have left probably still live there. William R. Branson now or lately was still alive in St. Louis.

Mary Ann, the remaining child of David Branson, was born in 1840, and died in August, 1899. Her first husband was James E. Lore who died about 1872 survived by the widow and their eight children. Her second husband was A. J. Williams, whom she outlived; no children were born of the second marriage. Of the eight Lore children one, John Lore, still lives at Belle; he is a retired railroad employee, after thirty-six years of service on the Rock Island. David, Daniel, and Martha Lore died single; Sarah married Mat Hutchinson, son of William, and her descendants will be found under that name.

The three remaining children were: Lyda who married James C. Owens; both are dead, leaving four children, of whom James, single, lives at Belle, and Oliver at Rolla; Burr is dead, leaving no children; A. D. (Dolph) is also dead, leaving six children: Guy, Della, Helene, Bernice,

James, and Mary, all of Rolla. Burr, Oliver, and Dolph Owens married sisters, daughters of Stephen Branson of Osage County.

Minerva Lore married John Simpson, and is also dead. They were the known parents of four children, Oscar Mattie, Dee, and Clara, who are thought to live in the western part of the state.

Ruth Lore, the remaining child of Mary Ann Lore, married James Barbarick and has been dead several years. Her husband survives and lives at Belle. Of the thirteen children born of this marriage Andrew, Cecil, Walter, and Clarence died single (the last was drowned in the Gasconade River); Logan and Joe Barbarick married in Indiana and are both dead; the latter left no children, and the names of Logan's children have not been received; Rhodes Barbarick died at Jefferson City, survived by his widow and two children who still live there. The six living children are: Bransford, George, John, and Floyd Barbarick, all of whom live in or near Belle (Floyd is in business there in partnership with his father-in-law, Charles Keeney); Nora, now Mrs. Milan, lives at Eldon; and Dora, now Mrs. Holzschuh, at Gerald.

Reuben Branson, son of Reuben Branson and brother of David, was born in a cave in the Cumberland Mountains in east Tennessee March 13, 1808. His parents, with others in the settlement, having taken refuge there from an Indian raid. He came to Missouri in 1821 with his parents and their family of at least four other sons: Washington, Andrew, David, and John. John went to California and never returned; Washington and Andrew never lived in this county.

Reuben Branson married Sarah, daughter of Gilbert Crismon, and was the father of fifteen children by this marriage, of whom only three, Minerva, Amanda, and Elizabeth, ever lived in this county for any period of

time. Amanda who died November 12, 1935, at the age of eighty-two first married Stephen Owens and was the mother of four children: Daniel married Sarah, daughter of James Copeland, and now lives in Callaway County; Jessie, widow of Charles Walker, now Mrs. Breeden, and Robert live at Union. Pearl, the fourth child, who married Granville Copeland, has been dead for some years. She left five children, Ernest and Dewey of this county; Vertie (Mrs. Jesse Workman) and Lillian (Mrs. Bonar Strat) of St. Louis; and Jewel who is married but whose married name and present address are not known. Amanda's second husband was Daniel Pointer, by whom she was the mother of six children who lived to maturity: Sheldon Pointer who married Dora, daughter of James Copeland, lives in Oklahoma; Forest who never married; Angie who married Roy West and lives near Meta; Minnie who married Chester Jett and lives in this county; Fred who married in Colorado and died near Carrigo Springs, Texas, childless; and Louisa who died single. Her last marriage, to Elijah Martin, was childless.

Minerva Branson married Fritz Granaman and spent her entire married life in this county, where both she and her husband died. Eight children were born to them: Dora married a Cladwell; Lulu, wife of William Collins, lives at Union; Sophie married Charles Schue and died childless; Eva, wife of Harrison Hutchinson, lives in this county; and Wayrnon, Louis, and Laura, wife of John Camden, in St. Louis. William, the remaining son, married Dessie Brown, and is dead, leaving two children who live in St. Louis with the widow.

Elizabeth, the third child of Reuben Branson, spent her entire married life in Maries County after her marriage to William Breckenridge Gillispie, who has been dead more than twenty years. She now makes her home in Vienna.

In addition to the above, the following are the children

of Reuben Branson by his first marriage: Thomas, James, Stephen, Sarah Ann, and Nannie who died single; Gilbert married Ann Clay, Martha married William Compton, and Martin married Nancy West, all live in Osage County; John married Cordelia Phelps, also in Osage County; Emma married William Bax and moved to Arkansas; Benjamin married Sallie Phelps; and Joseph married Nancy Ann Pointer. If any of them ever lived in this county, it was for a short time only. All of the first family of children except Mrs. Gillispie have passed away.

Reuben Branson was also the father of four children by his later marriage with Harriet Slater; Samantha J., who married Reverend Lee Phelps of Owensville and now lives in Oklahoma; William Branson at Owensville; and two who died in infancy.