

BIOGRAPHY OF BESSIE J. GILKERSON

Overview:

BESSIE J. GILKERSON was born 23 August 1880 in Ohio and died 21 August 1959 in Sebastopol, Sonoma County, California. It is not really known how much BESSIE's life was affected by being separated from her parents and siblings; adopted at a very early age; and then losing her adopted mother shortly after being adopted. With being married four times, she must have had an adventurous, full and colorful life. A family story is that she married one of them twice. BESSIE's legacy lives through memories, stories and her two sons. Her two daughters passed away from tuberculosis at very young ages.

This biography of BESSIE's life is pieced together through historical documents, newspaper articles and family stories.



Bessie J Gilkerson and her daughter Esther Harriet Howard

Ancestral Background:

A long standing family story is that BESSIE was of Irish descent. There is very little known about BESSIE's parents or siblings as it appears she was adopted by ELLA CHAMBERS in 1884 and brought to California. An article in the "Ukiah Republican Press" dated 14 March 1902 is the only document found to document her past. The article states the following " Mrs. LEWIS W. HOWARD has at last found her relatives, after being separated from them for eighteen years. The family consisted of seven children three whom are dead – one boy and two girls. The father and mother are also dead. Those living are: SHEREMAN GILKERSON of Romney, Ind., and SHERIDAN and GARLAND GILKERSON of Dennis, Ohio. The children were put in the orphans home of Ohio when quite small. Mrs. HOWARD was adopted by Mrs. ELLA CHAMBERS and brought to California." Also in a letter that CAROLINE (HOWARD) SMITH wrote, states that BESSIE's brother GARLAND came to visit her in California and that she had pictures of him.

The 1880 U.S. Census for Brush Creek, Scioto, Ohio taken 03 June 1880 shows a household headed by GARLAN T. GILKERSON age 38 born in Kentucky. His wife was MARTHA age 26 born in Ohio and they had five children: WILLIAM S. age 9, RODA ANN age 8, SHERIDAN age 6, ROSA DELL age 4, and MILTON age 2. All the children where born in Ohio. The death certificate for both SHERMAN and SHERIDAN show the mother's maiden name as MARTHA WATTS. Some of the research and SHERMAN GILKERSON'S obituary would indicate that the WILLIAM S. in the 1880 census is in fact WILLIAM SHERMAN GILKERSON.

Drawing from the Ukiah Republican Press article and the 1880 U.S. Census the following synopsis is made on possibly who BESSIE'S parents are. Further research would have to be done to truly document this synopsis. In the 1880 census GARLAN and MARTHA GILKERSON had five children. BESSIE was born after the census was taken. If GARLAND had been born after the 1880 census, it would have given GARLAN and MARTHA seven children. This would match the newspaper article. And if the RODA ANN, ROSA DELL and MILTON listed in the 1880 census died before the 1902 newspaper article (one boy and two girls), this would also match the newspaper article. The only discrepancy is that BESSIE during her life listed her father in the U.S. Census as being born in Ohio. But being separated at an early age, one could assume BESSIE might not have known her father's birth place as everyone else in this family was born in Ohio.

Timeline:

As indicated in the “Ukiah Republican Press” dated 14 March 1902 BESSIE was adopted and moved to California in about 1884. Her adopted mother ELLA CHAMBERS from newspaper articles past away in 1885. A letter written by CAROLINE (HOWARD) SMITH (LEWIS HOWARD'S sister) stated that BESSIE lived with CAROLINE (HOWARD) BIDWELL (LEWIS HOWARD'S Aunt) until her death in 1891. At that time BESSIE lived with LUCY HOWARD (another Aunt to LEWIS HOWARD) until her marriage to LEWIS WILBER HOWARD in 1897.

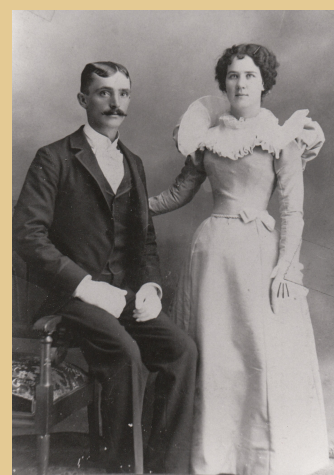
In 1900 LEWIS and BESSIE along with their two daughters are living with LEWIS' parents WILLIAM and ORPHA ANN (WHITCOMB) HOWARD in Ukiah, Mendocino County, California. By 1910 LEWIS and BESSIE with their three children are living with the ROTHSCHILDS in Ukiah, Mendocino County, California. MARY ELLEN (HOWARD) ROTHSCHILD is LEWIS' sister.

In 1920 BESSIE is married to her second husband CHARLES HARBIN and is living on West Street in Vacaville, Solano County, California with their seven year old son Vincent. In a Ukiah Dispatch Democrat article dated 04 June 1920 about the “Howard Family Meets to Decorate Graves”, BESSIE is referred to as “BESSIE HARBIN”. At the death of her daughter ESTHER, the obituary in the Ukiah Dispatch Democrat dated 15 September 1922 and the Ukiah Republican Press dated 20 September 1922, refers to ESTHER HOWARD the daughter of Mrs. BESSIE HARBIN. When her son, WARD HOWARD, died in 1927, the Ukiah Republican Press dated 31 August 1927 refers to WARD HOWARD the son of Mrs. BESSIE HOWARD HARBIN.

The Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat, Saturday, 24 December 1927 announces that Mrs. BESSIE HARBIN and WILLIAM LYNCH were united in marriage. In 1930, BESSIE is still married to her third husband WILLIAM J. LYNCH and living in Ukiah, Mendocino County, California. WILLIAM LYNCH's obituary in the Redwood Journal Press, dated 06 April 1951 states that they were living at 123 Clara Avenue, Ukiah, Mendocino County, California. It all states in this article that WILLIAM had been “a resident of the community for 45 years. At BESSIE's passing away in 1959 she is living in Sebastopol, Sonoma County, California with her fourth husband, RAY FITZSIMMONS. She had only been living in Sonoma County three years.

Marriages:

BESSIE married 1st LEWIS WILBER HOWARD (1871 – 1936) 03 October 1897 in Ukiah, Mendocino County, California. She had given her name as BESSIE CHAMBERS. The marriage was witnessed by WILLIAM HOWARD (LEWIS' Father) and RACHEL ORR (LEWIS' Sister). MACK HOWARD (LEWIS' Uncle) was the Mendocino County Recorder at the time of this marriage. They were married by the Reverend GEORGE W. DISHER of Willits. As stated in an article in the Ukiah Republican Press, dated 08 October 1897, “they plighted their troth at the home of the groom's parents”. It goes on to state, “The wedding was a quiet affair, characterized by simplicity, as only a few of their intimate friends were present. A dinner was served, and the menu was well selected, containing all the delicacies of the season.”



Children of BESSIE J. GILKERSON and LEWIS WILBER HOWARD

- i. ZELAH ORPHA HOWARD, b. Jul 1898, d. 10 Jun 1918
- ii. ESTHER HARRIET HOWARD, b. 29 Apr 1900, d. 13 Sep 1922
- iii. WARD Lewis DICKINSON HOWARD, b. 28 Jun 1906, d. 27 Aug 1927

LEWIS filed for divorce in an article (Ukiah Dispatch Democrat, 23 September 1910) on grounds of desertion. BESSIE and LEWIS, as stated in the Ukiah Republican Press (11 November 1910), “interlocutory decree of divorce ordered drawn”.

BESSIE married 2nd CHARLES HARBIN (1883 -) between 1910 and 1912.

Children of BESSIE J. GILKERSON and CHARLES HARBIN

- i. VINCENT J. HARBIN, b. 23 Aug 1912, d. 28 May 1980

In the Ukiah Republican Press, dated 10 October 1923, BESSIE and CHARLES F. HARBIN filed for divorce on grounds that they “cannot get along”. The final decree of divorce was announced in the Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat, 07 November 1924. The final decree was modified in 1926 over the custody of their son which granted to the plaintiff as stated 21 April 1926 in the Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat. The Defendant was permitted to visit the child.

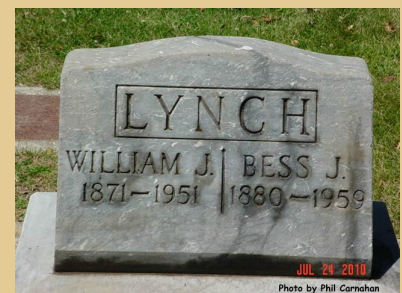
BESSIE married 3rd WILLIAM JAMES LYNCH (1871 – 1951) 20 December 1927 in Ukiah. Mendocino County, California. The marriage was at BESSIE's home on North Oak Street. The “Reverend R. L. SPICER performed the ceremony in the presence of a small group of very intimate friends” as stated in the Ukiah Dispatch Democrat, 24 December 1927. The guests at the wedding included Mr. and Mrs. J. L. MCCracken, Rev and Mrs. R. L. SPICER, Mr. and Mrs. FRED SCHOLL, Mr. and Mrs. L. C. GREENLAND, Mrs. MARY BURREY, E. B. GIBSON. VINCENT HARBIN, BESSIE's son, stood up with the bridal couple.



BESSIE married 4th MYRON RAY FITZSIMMONS (1879 – 1959) after the death of her third husband, WILLIAM JAMES LYNCH. There is not much information found about this couple or marriage, but both were in their seventies when they got married. Also, both died one month apart in 1959.

Obituary:

BESSIE's obituary in the Ukiah Daily Journal dated 24 August 1959 states “BESSIE LYNCH FITZSIMMONS of Sebastopol, a resident of Ukiah for many years, died Friday at Santa Rosa at the age of 79. She was a native of Ohio, born Aug. 23, 1880. She was the widow of WILLIAM LYNCH, who died at Ukiah in April, 1951.” The obituary goes on to say “Mrs FITZSIMMONS is survived by her husband, RAY FITZSIMMONS of Sebastopol and her son VINCENT HARBIN of Castro Valley.”



Russian River Cemetery District, Ukiah, California

Her cause of death was of cerebid thrombosis. She is buried in the Lynch Plot at the Russian River

Cemetery, Ukiah, Mendocino County, California along side her third husband WILLIAM J. LYNCH. Her headstone is combined with WILLIAM J. LYNCH and says "Bess J. 1880 – 1959". At the time of her death she was living with her fourth husband, RAY FITZSIMMONS, at 524 South Main Street, Sebastopol, Sonoma County, California. They had only been living in Sonoma County three years.

Sources:

1880 United States Federal Census, District 161, Brush Creek, Scioto County, Ohio (page 6)
1900 United States Federal Census, Ukiah Township, District 76, Ukiah City, Mendocino County, California (page 5)
1910 United States Federal Census, Ukiah Township, District 68, Ukiah City, Mendocino County, California (page 2A)
1920 United States Federal Census, Vacaville Township, District 206, Vacaville Town, Solano County, California (page 9B)
1930 United States Federal Census, Ukiah Township, District 21, Ukiah City, Mendocino County, California (page 11B)
1897-10-08 Ukiah Republican Press
1902-03-14 Ukiah Republican Press
1902-03-21 Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat
1905-03-24 Ukiah Republican Press
1910-09-23 Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat
1910-10-28 Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat
1910-11-11 Ukiah Republican Press
1920-06-04 Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat
1922-09-15 Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat
1922-09-20 Ukiah Republican Press
1922-09-27 Ukiah Republican Press
1923-10-10 Ukiah Republican Press
1924-11-07 Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat
1926-04-21 Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat
1927-12-24 Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat
1927-08-31 Ukiah Republican Press
1928-01-28 Ukiah Dispatch-Democrat
1931-11-25 Ukiah Republican Press
1931-12-22 Redwood Journal Press
1935-03-13 Ukiah Republican Press
1938-02-18 Redwood Journal Press
1951-04-06 Redwood Journal Press
1951-04-12 Ukiah News
1959-08-24 Ukiah Daily Journal
1959-09-22 Ukiah Daily Journal
Lewis Wilbur Howard – Bessie Chambers, Marriage Certificate in Ukiah, County of Mendocino, California
Lewis Wilbur Howard (Divorced to Bessie Lynch) Certificate of Death in Ukiah, County of Mendocino, California
Bessie Lynch Fitzsimmons Certificate of Death in Sebastopol, Sonoma County, California
Esther Howard (Maiden Name of Mother – Bessie Gilkerson Chambers) Certificate of Death, Ukiah, Mendocino, California
Ward Howard (Maiden Name of Mother – Bessie ?) Certificate of Death, San Francisco, San Francisco County, California
Lewis Ward Howard – Elta Martha Harrison (Maiden Name of Mother – Bessie Gilkerson) Certificate of Marriage, Ukiah
Russian River Cemetery District, Ukiah, Mendocino County, California (Lynch Plot)
Family letter written by Caroline (Howard) Smith