

The Lost Confederate – Timothy Ragsdale

About 40 years ago I was trying to figure out where the boundary lines of the land we lived on were located. We lived about eight miles north of Troy on Love Joy Road in North Carolina. My father knew we owned the fields but he did not know where the property lines were in the woods. On one of the deeds there was a description, "Beginning where Timothy Ragsdale's line crosses Hudson's line". As a relatively inexperienced surveyor, I had never known property lines to cross. Actually, property lines do not cross but survey lines do and I did not know at the time. This situation, I found later, came about when a settler entered or officially listed his intent to purchase from the state, a tract of land, and had it surveyed, but never paid the five cents per acre to the state to obtain true record title. The common custom of other settlers in the area was to consider the property belonging to the settler even if he had not paid the state. This is evident when adjacent land was surveyed and the surveyor on his description called for the line of the settler living there even though the record showed the fee had not been paid to the state for the land. In cases where a settler improved the property and did not pay the grant fee, often a descendant of the original settler would enter a new request to purchase the property from the state and another survey, sometimes varying from the original, would be done. I have found cases of this happening two generations or more later.

In order to find out where this property corner was, I needed to know what tract it belonged to and I needed to find out who this Timothy was. Who did he later convey the land to? Who owned it now? There were no Ragsdales living in the area. My great aunt, Laura Thompson Saunders, was living at the time born in 1891. I asked her, "Did you ever know of a Timothy Ragsdale?"

She said, "Well, Yes. Grandma was a Ragsdale." Aunt Laura's mother was Margaret Brown Thompson, my great grandma, whose mother was Mary Jane Ragsdale Brown, wife of William Brown.

I asked her, "What ever happened to him? I can't find any record of him at the courthouse."

"Well", she said. "He went off to the civil war and never came back."

"What happened to him?" I asked. "Was he killed?"

"Nobody knows" was her reply. This was about 1971. "Some people used to say he may have gone west after the war. You know a lot of people went west."

Now this statement haunted me over the next several decades. I could not believe a man could go west and leave his wife and children and never return. Especially after I found him in the 1860 census, 46 years old, 47 when he left for the war leaving eight or nine children, the youngest being 5, 7, 10, 12 and 14. (My grandmother, Mary Jane, at that time, was 18). I would never know why people thought this but this past year I found something that caused me to understand why people may have truly thought this. But more about that later.

It was apparent to me that in the four generations from Timothy Ragsdale, no one in the family knew what happened to him. Sometimes, things that are hidden are brought to light and it happened in this case.

In 1976, there was a great bi-centennial celebration and as a part of it, Mabel Lassiter, a local librarian of Montgomery County, I think, authored a book called *Pattern of Timeless Moments*, a history of Montgomery County. In it she printed some confederate military records of soldiers from Montgomery County. This was before the age of the internet. These records printed were archived in Raleigh, the state capitol. In reading through these names there I saw it:

Timothy Ragsdale (Company C, 23rd Infantry Regiment North Carolina) Resided as a farmer in Montgomery County. Enlisted on 27 May 1861 at the age of 44. Died of disease on 9 Jun 1862 at Richmond, VA.

Timothy had not gone west. He had died in Virginia, of disease, and no one in the family knew what happened to him!

Why did people think he may have gone west? There is no record of his wife ever drawing any money as a war widow. She stayed on the land and is listed as a farmer and the head of household about 57 years old in the 1870 census. She is listed as being able to read, but not write. Did her husband ever write her from the war? God only knows. She apparently could not write back. Could her husband, Timothy, write? Possibly. He may have been a trader at one time in his life.

A clue to why Timothy was thought to have gone West may be speculative and unproven, but I think it may be true. I have not been able to determine for sure who Timothy's father was but I think it was Thomas Ragsdale. I think Thomas was also the father of Jesse Ragsdale who was older than Timothy by a year or two. Timothy entered the land grant of the home place in the late 1840's. There is a previous Thomas Ragsdale grant about a mile to the north entered about 1827 which I suspect is Timothy's father. The 1830 census lists Thomas as head of the household but in 1840, it appears Jesse Ragsdale is head of the household. Now the second male listed in the 1850 census of the Timothy Ragsdale home is Jesse, probably a son. It was often, in those days, that a man would name an older son not after his father, but after an older brother. Timothy may have been a younger brother of Jesse Ragsdale who took over his father's home in 1840. The deed description of the Thomas Ragsdale grant calls for a corner on "Gold Branch". There is evidence of mining in this area, north west of Jumping Off Rock on Poison Fork Creek. Thomas may have been a miner. Not only does the type land he settled on indicate this (it is too steep and rocky to farm) but there is another important fact. In the 1850 census, Jesse has left North Carolina and is in Mariposa California as a miner. In 1860 he had given up mining and was blacksmithing. In 1870, he had moved to Arkansas and was married to a wife about half his age.

What about Timothy? Why did people think he might have gone west? Interestingly there is an entry in the 1850 census near where Jesse is listed. It lists "Timothy Ragsdale". His age is listed as 35 and he is a trader and is listed as being born in Maine. The California census was taken January 1851. The North Carolina census, taken in September 1850, list him there as a farmer and shows his age to be 32. The 1860 census in NC shows him to be 45 and when he entered Company C of the 23 regiment one year later in 1861, he gave his age as 44. Apparently he did not know or he did not care how old he was.

Another reason to believe this Timothy was the North Carolina Timothy is because I can find no Ragsdale in any of the Maine censuses for 1840, 1850 or 1860. Also, the abbreviation on the original census document "Me" in script looks a lot like "NC" so this may be the same Timothy. I cannot find a Timothy in California after 1850.

If Timothy had previously visited California, perhaps he had often spoken of going back. Perhaps family members, not wanting to think that he was dead, remembered this and spoke it to others. Perhaps that is why my great aunt, Laura, heard it and told it to me, although Timothy was obviously dead by the time my great aunt was grown. This is speculation on my part but it helps explain to me why people would say he may have gone west and did not come home.

In the early 1990's I visited Washington DC with my wife and three daughters. On the way back to Raleigh, NC, we stopped at Richmond and visited Hollywood Cemetery. I could not find a Timothy Ragsdale listed although I suspected he had died in that area of Virginia. The Company he had enlisted in was fighting in that area around Seven Pines at the time of his death.

Just recently, while trying to locate the burial site of an uncle, Andrew E. H. Revel, I found a name in the Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond Virginia listed as T. Raysdale, Company C, 23 North Carolina Regiment. This was the same person, Timothy Ragsdale, who was a member of the same company and Regiment. The date of burial was June 10, 1862. Timothy's military record shows he died on June 9, 1862. Apparently, the person transcribing the hand written information, misread the "g" in Ragsdale as a "y". That is why using computer search engines in the past, I have never been able to find the burial site of this ancestor.

Timothy's wife is believed to be buried in the Brown Cemetery, along with her daughter, William Brown's wife, Mary Jane Ragsdale Brown. She died between 1870 and 1880. She is shown as head of household in the 1870 census as a farmer, 57 years old. The property she and Timothy owned was deeded to the heirs of Wiatt Ragsdale, her son, by the other Ragsdale descendents and spouses on March 27, 1880. No death certificate has been found nor were they common during that time period.

The remains of the Ragsdale homesite, established in the early 1840's, is located on the old road running from the old Arthur Hamilton place on Love Joy Road to the Bright Gold Mine on Dark Fork Creek. The foundation stones and chimney stones are found on a hill to the left about a hundred yards past the second branch the old road crosses. There is a spring just behind the house.

After 35 years of searching off and on, I now finally know what happened to Grandpa Timothy and where his remains are located. That is more than his wife, children, grand children, great grand children, and great great grandchildren ever knew.

I have considered bringing his remains home to the family cemetery where his daughter and probably his wife are buried. But I am probably just one of over one thousand people descended from him now. Do I have that right? I may have spent more time thinking about this grandfather than anyone else in the family.

Uwharrie Boy