

Sketch: What John W Marshall Told Me! The Markham – Somerville Family

In 2003, I was in touch with John W Marshall, historian and author of two books on Mason, Tipton county Tennessee. He shared a wealth of information on the Somerville family and the many inter-related families in Fayette and Tipton county Tennessee. We exchanged details on people in the area, and he gave me some great clues on Francis O Markham and his descendants. We also corresponded on related individuals and families.

This sketch is an attempt to share some of the excellent details on our family that John W Marshall has drawn together in his years of research. Most of the information here is quoted directly from his letters, written in December 2003. I have added a few comments.

About Francis O Markham and Susan Somerville, Mecklenburg county Virginia to Tennessee:

[Francis O] Markham appears in the Mecklenburg Personal Property Tax records for 1834-35 but never owned any property himself in Mecklenburg. From that marriage contract with Susan, I get the impression that he was heavily indebted or broke when he married her. On 26 Sep 1835 Francis and Susan sold her interest in her father's land to William Townes for \$3000 (Mecklenburg Deed Book 26 pg 420) Her sisters Mary and Ann had previously sold to Mr Townes all of their interest in their father's estate including slaves. Susan and her brother William and her mother Eleanor appear to have kept part of their slaves. I believe these are the 30 some odd slaves that FO Markham is shown as owner of in 1840. I think we can pinpoint the time when the Markhams migrated to Tennessee as being Fall 1835.

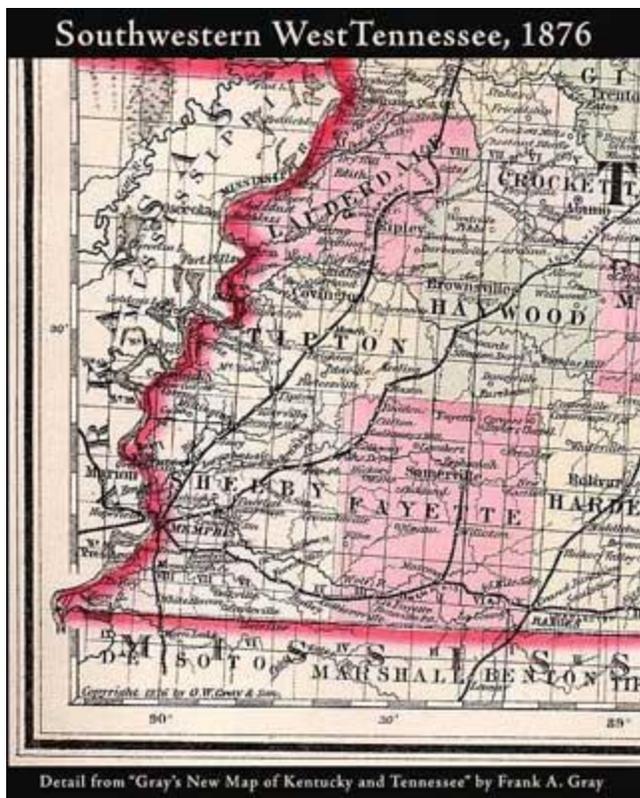
I do have a "reading" on the 1840 census for Francis O Markham . . . Bear in mind that some of those teenagers living with them could have been Susan's brother William B Somerville who died young, but was still living in 1840 I believe. I'm so glad you gave me his census information from 1830. Since his slaves went from 6 in 1830 to 33 in 1840, I feel sure the increase was due to his marriage to Susan. I believe this number of 33 possibly also included her widowed mother's slaves as well. I know for a fact that some of Susan [Somerville] Markham's slaves took the surname Somerville after the Civil War which seems to indicate that they came from her side of the family.

About Francis O Markham and Susan Somerville Markham's plantation in Tipton county Tennessee:

I have never found any deeds where he [Francis O Markham] purchased land here. I do recall finding his name as a witness to a deed in the 1830s. I believe it was a deed in Haywood or Fayette co (Haywood co, Tn Deed Book G pg 290, 1835) If you look on a map of Tennessee you will see that the three counties of Haywood, Fayette and Tipton all meet at a corner. It was right in that area where Francis Markham first settled.

I was researching some deeds to property along the Haywood-Tipton county line. The deeds were for a later period - 1870s- but they referred to the land as the "Markham place". I was delighted with this discovery and can only assume that this was land that Francis had rented many years before.

The tax records for 1837 in Tipton show FV Markham in Dist 10 with 1000 acres of land and 30 taxable slaves. Again I have not been able to find a deed for any land purchased by FO Markham. His name does not appear in 1838.



His [Francis O Markham] name is also found in Mar 1846 as being delinquent on the taxes for 1000 acres of land in District 10. Again this land remains a mystery to me as I have no record of when he bought the land.

There is reference to a lawsuit in Nov 1845 between William H Macon and his wife Eleanor vs. Francis O Markham and wife Susan E Markham. No mention of what the suit was about. May have been a "friendly" suit to divide up property.

. . . my impression was that her [Susan Somerville Markham] husband (Francis Markham) had not left her with much of an inheritance. Some of her slaves I know for a fact used the name "Somerville" after they were emancipated. Therefore, I have always drawn the conclusion that they were slaves she had inherited from her father and not slaves from Mr Markham's family.

About Susan Somerville Markham's family:

[Susan Somerville] was the daughter of George C. Somervill (uncle to the rest of the Somervills that came to Tipton co.) and his wife Eleanor Howe Burchett. And you are right Mary Burchett Somervill who married John Y. Taylor was her sister . .

Susan's sister Mary was married to John Young Taylor. They came first to Tennessee in Fall of 1833 and settled in Haywood co.

In 1837 an Episcopal church was organized in this neighborhood and the following year both Susan Markham and her sister Mary Taylor were confirmed by the Bishop and became members of the

congregation. The church was named St Andrews and located in Fayette county. In 1845 it burned and was relocated to Tipton county and renamed Trinity. Fortunately, the records from this congregation have survived . .

The William H Macon whom Cousin Susan's mother remarried to was a resident of Fayette County and his lands were near the Booker lands. Mr Macon didn't live all that long after they married so that is why Aunt Eleanor [Eleanor Burchett Somerville Macon] was living back here in Tipton by 1850. Apparently, Aunt Eleanor went back and forth to Middle Tennessee during the 1850's and died here in Tipton in 1859.

One other thing is that I did verify that Cousin Susan's brother William Burchett Somervill did die unmarried with no children.

About when Francis O Markham died?

As you mentioned I have never found a probate of the estate of Francis O Markham . . .

. . it appears that Francis O Markham died in between March 1846 and December 1847 when Susan bought her 50 acres.

. . there is a reference on 8 Feb 1848 of a lawsuit against Francis O Markham being dismissed as he had died intestate. (I am going back through the Somervill and Taylor letters for references about Markham. I do think now that FO lived up until 1848 as one of the letters from that year refers to Mr Markham.)

About Susan Somerville Markham as widow:

Although it is not where she and Frances first settled, Cousin Susan Markham, by the 1850s had settled on a small farm of 50 acres sandwiched in between the two larger plantations of her first cousins, William A Somervill and Thomas T Somervill. Our family letters from that period speak of her family frequently. As a widow I have the impression that she had to rely somewhat on her male first cousins and the families seemed to have been very close.

I feel that the Markhams were still living in the neighborhood along the Haywood County line when Francis died in 1843 [probably 1847] . . about 1850 she purchased her small farm adjoining to her first cousin Thomas T Somervill. My impression is that her husband had not left her with much of an inheritance. Nevertheless, Susan and her small family seemed to have made it just fine nestled there amongst all her cousins.

AT Booker to Susan E Markham 50 acres of land on 25 Dec 1847. This is the place where Susan would live the rest of her days. The land was bounded on the east by her cousin Thomas T Somervill and on the south by Joseph P Booker.

[source] Tipton county Tennessee, Deed Book H, page 40; 25 Dec 1847.

Cousin Susan died in 1864 and was buried at Trinity church yard. Unfortunately there is no marker for her, but I will furnish you with the exact dates. . . . William A Someroill II, after he married in 1885, settled in the old "Claiborne" home. Based on the location of where his home was I know it was Cousin Susan's original home. During the 1890's Cousin Will had some financial setbacks and had to move from the Claiborne place. The family was sad to leave as it was a "fine old home" but not long afterwards the home was destroyed by a storm.

JM Claiborne and wife and Mary G Markham sold the land referred to above to S Willie McCall, wife of WJ McCall.

[source] Tipton county Tennessee, Deed Book Y, page 410; 8 Feb 1877.

One thing is that in 1877 when they sold their land to the McCalls, the McCalls turned around and sold some land to Eleanor [Markham] Claiborne. It was 96 acres in the river bottoms. It was almost like they did a swap.



Old Trinity Episcopal Church, Tipton county Tennessee.

About the Markham-Somerville children, George S, Mary G, and Eleanor H:

George S Markham was an old bachelor who never really worked much but just moved around staying with his kinfolks all the time. Seems he would just move from relative to relative. He supposedly died in the old folks home for Confederate Veterans.

Cousin Susan's only child to marry was her daughter Eleanor who married Jesse Claiborne. My ggg-grandfather WA Someroill's wife was Helen Rosina Claiborne. Grandmother Helen and Cousin Susan were close neighbors and the letters I have from the late 1850's are mainly written by grandmother Helen and her children. Jesse Claiborne was a distant cousin to grandmother Helen. I think he was from

Middle Tennessee originally. Supposedly he met Eleanor while visiting his kin here in Tipton county. He put down roots and moved in with the Markhams.

I just received more information relating to Old Trinity Church (Mason, Tn). Someone has come across a list of all buried there that was compiled in the 1920s. Included is Mrs Eleanor Howe Claiborne and her young daughter in 1878 and 1880. I assume that means that Eleanor died in 1878 here in Tipton county. Then by 1880 her husband and the children had returned to Davidson county Tennessee where he was from.

On the 1880 census, Jesse Claiborne [husband of Eleanor H Markham] was living in Nashville in his mother's household. His children are listed with him, but not his wife. It seems as if perhaps Eleanor had died in the late 1870's and the same goes for her sister Mary Goodloe Markham as I cannot find her in the 1880 census.

I can only assume that she [Eleanor Markham Claiborne] and her sister Mary G Markham died prior to 1880 and were buried at Trinity with their mother, although there are no markers. That left the bachelor veteran brother George [Markham] who lived around with relatives and neighbors and died in the veterans home in Nashville. [note – Mary G Markham never married. She moved to St Louis Missouri and lived until 1918.]

Did I tell you that recently we had discovered a list of persons buried at Old Trinity Churchyard [Mason, Tennessee] including many who don't have a marker? Eleanor Claiborne is among those buried there. There is also a note about GS Markham not getting home in time to see his dying mother (he had been at war).

Do you want to know more?

[Link to Francis Osborne Markham](#)

Further Reading:

The Early History of Mason; John W Marshall, 1985.

Mason: A Glimpse into the Past; John W Marshall, 1991.

Photo Credit:

Old Trinity Episcopal Church, photographed by Spencer Kellum in 2014, and shared at Wikimedia. Creative Commons License.

Sketch: What John W Marshall Told Me! The Markham – Somerville Family; Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2014.