
A SEARCH FOR THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN

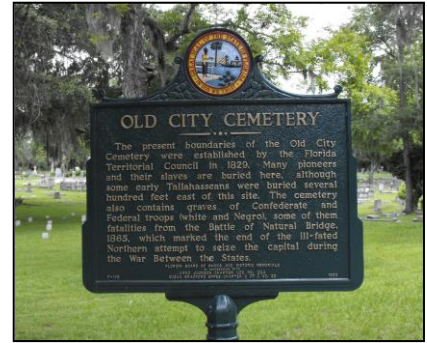


DECEMBER 5, 2016
J. DOUG SMITH
Tallahassee, Florida

Dedicated to Mom

In downtown Tallahassee lies the historic Old City Cemetery which is the oldest public cemetery in Tallahassee. It was established in 1829 by the Territorial Legislative Council and acquired by the city in 1840. The area was laid out in a system of squares and lots in 1841 when a yellow fever epidemic swept through the area.

When the cemetery was established, it was located outside the City on the far side of a 200-foot-wide clearing that surrounded and buffered the



city to protect it from Indian attacks. It is the final resting place for many of the citizens who contributed to the development of Tallahassee and the state of Florida. Initially the City's only public burying ground, the graveyard holds the remains of a wide array of Tallahassee's citizens laid to rest during the 19th and early 20th centuries. They include governors, judges, merchants, bankers, plantation owners, slaves, free blacks, ministers, priests, Union and Confederate soldiers and victims of yellow fever.



View facing south Old City Cemetery 1875 ¹



Memorial Day Service at the city cemetery, ca 1906 ²

This is also the cemetery and final resting place of my 3rd great-grandmother and twenty-five aunts, uncles and cousins.

Many of the early graves were marked with wooden head and footboards, which deteriorated over time leaving the graves unmarked. The records of the cemetery were lost in a fire many years ago and several informative, but unsuccessful attempts have been made to completely document the names of all the individuals buried there.³

¹ State Archives of Florida, *Looking south at the Old City Cemetery - Tallahassee, Florida*. ca 1875. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/34656>

² State Archives of Florida, *Memorial Day service at the city cemetery - Tallahassee, Florida*. 19--?. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/34702>

³ City of Tallahassee, *Old City Cemetery Burials: Significance of the Kenneson Survey*, <https://www.talgov.com/pm/pm-kenneson-signif.aspx>; *Tallahassee and Leon County, Florida Cemeteries*, Floreda Duke Varick & Phyllis Rose Smith, 1979

In the southeastern quadrant is a gravesite containing a piece of marble, rising out of the ground 28 inches high, measuring 7-1/2 inches wide and 3-1/4 inches thick. This grave with this particular piece of marble is unlike the many other graves in this old cemetery that have no stone or indications that someone is buried there, yet this rather plain non-descript marble headstone has no name and no inscriptions.

The gravesite with this plain piece of marble, is in an 85-square foot plot which contains the final resting place of my 3rd great-grandmother, Elizabeth B. Hale-Saxon (1807-1890) and the wife of my 1st cousin 3x removed and their infant son.

This story began in July of 2014, when I first visited Tallahassee's Old City Cemetery looking for my 3rd great-grandmother's gravesite. I

knew she was buried here, as it is listed on Find-A-Grave showing a picture of the headstone taken in August 2004,⁴ but I had never been there. I was not living in Tallahassee at that time, so my time was limited, yet I did go on two separate occasions during this visit to town. Walking from one end of the cemetery to the other, back and forth I searched, but to no avail. This cemetery has an estimated 2,000 graves covering an area of over eleven acres.

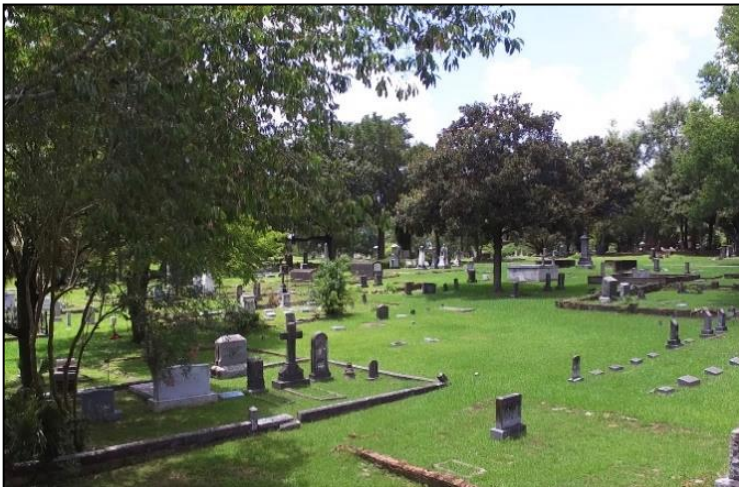
Some say this cemetery is haunted by a witch, due in part to a grave which faces west, inscribed with a strange epitaph of passages from Edgar Allen Poe's "Lenore". Yet, as I walk these sacred and hallowed grounds under the beautiful but strangely haunting moss covered oaks and large magnolias, I get a real sense and feel of old Tallahassee. The names on the headstones are like a Who's Who of early Tallahassee history and many are names I recognize as family friends, acquaintances, business associates and fellow church members.



Unscripted Marble Headstone - Dec. 2014



Elizabeth B. Hale-Saxon, ca 1886 - Author's collection



Tallahassee Old City Cemetery - Jul & Dec 2016

⁴ Find A Grave, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=9344283&Plpi=1120064>

I returned once again on two different days in October 2014, but still could not locate the headstone. I returned for another visit in December that same year and decided to give it one final attempt. I was becoming disappointed and discouraged as I roamed the cemetery on my fifth visit, when I came upon the grave of Elizabeth Deberry Cobb and stopped to look over the old black wrought-iron fence. I had fond childhood memories of visiting Miss Cobb with my mother at her home on North Calhoun Street and had attended Elizabeth Cobb Junior High School named in her honor.⁵

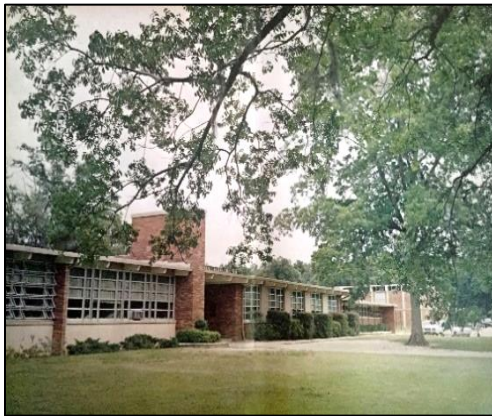
As I turned to leave,



*Cobb House at 403 North Calhoun Street*⁶



*Miss Elizabeth D. Cobb*⁷



*Elizabeth Cobb Jr. High School - 1966*⁸



*Miss Cobb - 1934*⁹

to the north of the fence in the neighboring plot I noticed a headstone lying on the ground. Over the years there have been a lot of vandalized, broken and damaged stones in the cemetery, and some have just crumbled and deteriorated with age.

I would never disturb or move a fallen headstone to examine it or to attempt to read it for fear of further damage. The

headstone was dirty and weathered, and appeared to be made of concrete, as are many of the old stones I've seen in older cemeteries. The early morning sun was beginning to cast its shadow and my eyes strained, as I struggled to make out the inscription. My heart began to race as I slowly read the name of Elizabeth Saxon, my 3rd great-grandmother. No wonder I had missed it on four previous visits, I thought to myself. It had fallen or been pushed off its pedestal, landing in the soft grass but was unbelievably lying face-up.

⁵ State Archives of Florida, built by R.A. Shine about 1878 for John R. Bradford at 403 North Calhoun Street, Miss Elizabeth D. Cobb bought the home in 1921, restored in 1979 it is now the law office of Attorney Lee Meadows; Elizabeth Cobb Junior High, now Middle School built in the years 1952-1953. Miss Cobb began teaching in 1915 and taught both elementary and high school in Leon County. She became principal of Caroline Brevard School in 1931, and supervisor of Leon County Schools in 1935, the year she retired. Miss Elizabeth Cobb died in 1974 at the age of 96. <http://www.leonschools.net/domain/1591>

⁶ State Archives of Florida, *Miss Bessie Cobb's house at 403 North Calhoun Street - Tallahassee, Florida*. 1972. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/24950>

⁷ State Archives of Florida, *Portrait of Elizabeth Deberry Cobb. 19--?*. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/10073>

⁸ Cub's Tale, 1966, Author's Collection

⁹ Photo from Author's Collection



*Vandalized Headstones at Old City Cemetery - 1986*¹⁰

This would be the first of numerous unlikely events all seemingly falling into place which would lead me down an incredible path of discovery. Had I not known Elizabeth Cobb, would I have stopped for a few moments to look and reflect on fond memories of my youth, or would I have hurriedly passed by and not seen the fallen headstone? How had the headstone fallen face-up and away from its pedestal when simple physics would suggest it would fall face down? Had someone turned it over?



*Headstone
laying on the
ground. –
Dec. 2014*



¹⁰ State Archives of Florida, Thomas, Deborah. *Vandalized cemetery at Old City Cemetery - Tallahassee, Florida.* 1986.

My 3rd great-grandmother Saxon moved to Western Leon County with her parents as early as 1828 and by 1880 had moved into town to live with her son George W. Saxon.¹¹ I was informed that although the cemetery grounds were maintained by City crews, the headstones were the responsibility of the families of those interred.

Even though she died over 125 years ago, and many in my family do not even know of her existence, I felt a responsibility to have the headstone cleaned and repaired; after all this is my family. Arrangements were made locally to have the work completed and I returned to Tallahassee in March 2015 to view the results. The headstone and pedestal turned out to be two beautiful cuts of Cherokee marble, and after cleaning they look almost brand new. The headstone is pearl grey and the pedestal is white Georgia both mined in Tate, Georgia about 50 miles north of Atlanta.¹²



Cleaned and repaired headstone. - Mar. 2015

I decided to have the other stones cleaned as well, and was hoping the blank headstone might reveal some readable inscription or perhaps a clue to who might be buried there. However, the stone was completely void of any markings and showed no indications of wear or chipping.

The plot has a total of four headstones:

- 1) Elizabeth Saxon (1807-1890), my 3rd great-grandmother.
- 2) Lily May Willis (1877-1906), wife of Elizabeth Saxon's grandson, Benjamin Franklin Willis (1872-1949), and wife of my 1st cousin 3x removed. She died four days after giving birth to her son, listed here as number 3.
- 3) Charles Franklin Willis (1906-1907), great-grandson of Elizabeth Saxon, son of Lilly May and Benjamin Franklin Willis, and my 2nd cousin 2x removed.
- 4) Blank headstone.

¹¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records, Patent Certificate No. 2134; 1880 U.S. Census, Tallahassee, Leon, Florida, Enumeration District 089, Page 27

¹² Dave Pendleton, Capital Monument Company, Tallahassee, FL, email and phone interview, 11 Jul 2016



Saxon Family Plot, Old City Cemetery - Jul. 2016

I had begun my search for burials in this plot after my initial discovery in December 2014, and I started first with The City of Tallahassee website, which referenced a survey conducted during the 1980's by Claude J. Kenneson who had cataloged and researched the burials at Old City Cemetery.¹³ Claude would play a vital role in helping me locate who was buried there. I had first met Claude at the Florida State Archives where he volunteers three times a week. He, and I are both now on the Board of the Tallahassee Historical Society. In his survey, he had listed an infant daughter of Mr. and Mrs. G.W. Saxon buried in 1890, but had indicated no marker.¹⁴ He was unable to provide the specifics or exactly where he had obtained the information. This was at least a beginning, a clue which I could use to continue my search.

George W. Saxon (1848-1935), my 3rd great uncle was a prominent Tallahassee businessman, real estate investor and founder of the Capital City Bank in 1895. George's wife, whom he married in 1878, was Sarah Rebecca Ball (1859-1935). George and Sarah had three daughters Bessie,

Lucille and Helen, all of whom lived into adulthood and bore children: Elizabeth Mulford "Bessie" (1882-1966) who married Dr. Charles Merritt Ausley (1879-1940); Sarah Lucile (1885-1927) who married Dr. Henry E. Palmer Sr.; and Helen (1893-1980) who married James Francis Cochran Jr. (1891-1956).



**George W. & Sarah Rebecca Ball-Saxon
(seated middle row)
Elizabeth Mulford Saxon-Ausley (back row, far left)
Helen Saxon-Cochran (back row, far right) 1927¹⁵**

¹³ City of Tallahassee, Real Estate Management, *Old City Cemetery Burials: Significance of the Kenneson Survey*, <https://www.talgov.com/pm/pm-kenneson-signif.aspx>

¹⁴ City of Tallahassee, Real Estate Management, Kenneson Survey, City Owned Cemeteries, <https://www.talgov.com/pm/pm-kenneson-search.aspx>

¹⁵ State Archives of Florida, *Group portrait - Tallahassee, Florida*. 19--. Black & white photonegative, 3 x 5 in., PR11591

Birth certificates were not issued in the 1890's, so I had to think of any place where I might find some type of birth records. The 1880 U.S. Census enumerated June 19th listed George and Sarah Saxon with no children, and the 1885 Florida State Census enumerated June 30th before the birth of Sarah Lucile in September, listed one daughter Bessie.¹⁶

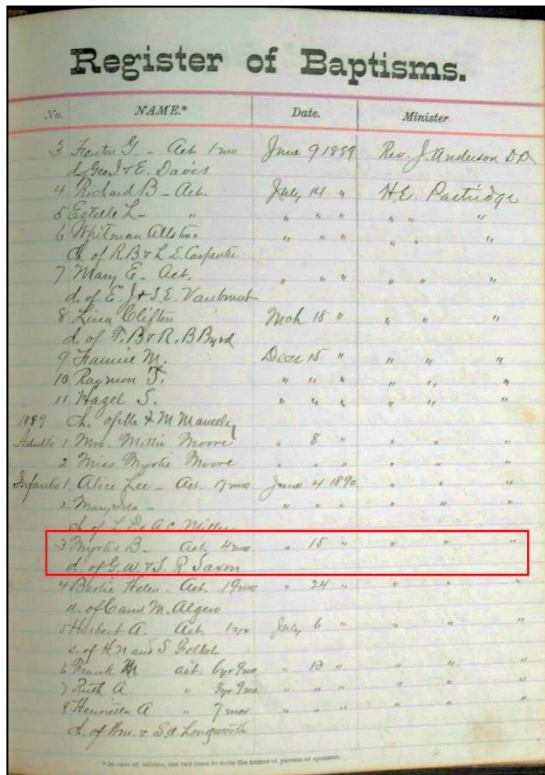
Ninety-nine percent of the next U.S. Census of 1890 was destroyed in a 1921 fire and subsequent disposal.¹⁷ The Florida State census of 1895 only exists for Nassau County.¹⁸

The Saxon family photos and records were destroyed in the Hannon home fire around 1990-1991,¹⁹ so newspaper articles and church records were my only possible choices in finding any information related to another child.

In June 2015, I moved back to my hometown of Tallahassee and scheduled a time to meet with Claude Kenneson at the State Archives to discuss other matters pertaining to my research on the life of George W. Saxon. My friend, local author Julie Strauss Bettinger was going to meet with us but was unable to attend on the scheduled date, so I rescheduled a later time when she could attend. After we got there and started talking with Claude for a short while, a gentleman came up and also began conversing with Claude. I walked away to continue with my other research and in a few minutes the gentleman came up and said, "I hear you are researching George W. Saxon," and I told

him I was. He said, "Do you know George was a member of Trinity Methodist Church?" The man, Dr. E. Lynn McLarty, a local pediatric dentist, told me he was a part time historian working on digitizing Trinity Methodist Church registers. He and I have since become good friends. At that time, I had not had chance to investigate Trinity Church records, so I was interested in his work as I knew George W. Saxon was heavily involved with Trinity and I was wanting to find out when he had first joined and become a member of the congregation, amongst other things

As I browsed the register for the years 1825-1895, I came across the entries of baptisms, and there it was, baptized on June 15, 1890, at age four months, Myrtis B. Saxon, daughter of G.W. and S.R. Saxon. Further records indicated her death in October 24, 1890.²⁰ Needless to say, I was glad I had rescheduled a meeting with Claude at that time on that specific date, and was extremely happy we had, shall I say, been interrupted by Lynn. Was it another simple stroke of luck or sheer coincidence? I could not believe my good fortune. This



Trinity Methodist-Episcopal Church
Register of Baptisms

¹⁶ 1880 U.S. Census, Tallahassee, Leon, Florida, Enumeration District 089, Page 27; 1885 Florida State Census, Tallahassee, Leon, Florida, Enumeration District 13, Page 40

¹⁷ National Archives, Kellee Blake, "First in the Path of the Firemen" The Fate of the 1890 Population Census

¹⁸ State Archives of Florida, 1895 Florida State Census

¹⁹ Interview with Elizabeth Saxon Ausley-Gablehouse, May 2015; Nancy M. Ausley-Hannon was the great granddaughter of George W. and Sarah B. Saxon

²⁰ Trinity Methodist-Episcopal Church, Church Register Book Two 1825-1898, Page 107

was the second time in which the stars seemed to be precisely aligned and shining down on me and my quest.

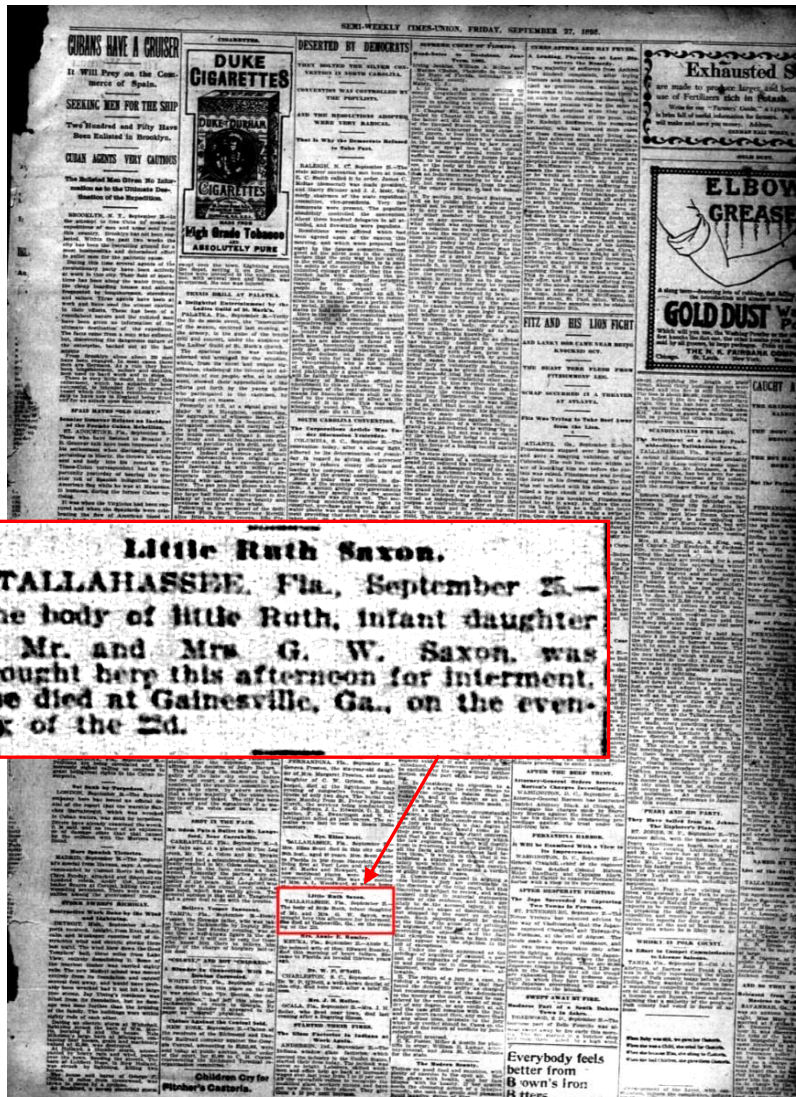
Housed in the State Archives of Florida Library located in the R.A. Gray Building, in downtown Tallahassee, are microfiche of old newspapers from Tallahassee and other cities in the state. Unfortunately, there are no Tallahassee newspapers surviving from 1895, and very few from 1888 through 1894, so if you are looking for information about Tallahassee for these dates, you must search Jacksonville or other surrounding area newspapers.

Approximately three months later, I was again at the State Archives, a place that has become my second home, when I spoke with Claude and he asked me if Ruth Saxon was related to me? "Ruth," I said, "I've never heard that name before. Where did you see that name, I asked?" Claude told me he had seen the name Ruth Saxon in the Jacksonville newspaper sometime in September 1895. Could it be? I thought to myself.

So, with Claude's lead I immediately retrieved the microfiche and began the tedious task of reading every page starting at the beginning of September. After about four hours of searching and in the final eighth edition of September 27, 1895, on page three, near the bottom of column three, was the name of Ruth Saxon who had died in Gainesville, Georgia on the evening of September 22nd.²¹ I had found another daughter!

How in the world can you find seven lines of fine print, published in a newspaper 150 miles from Tallahassee 120 years ago, and make a connection?

Had I been struck by lightning a third time? Was this just another example of circumstance, what are the odds that we would find Ruth Saxon's name? I was starting to question and wonder whether, there was a higher power guiding me and pointing me in the right direction. I had located two young daughters of my uncle George, two innocent infants, two names that had been lost and forgotten in time.



Semi-Weekly Times-Union, 27 Sep 1895, Page 3

²¹ The Semi-Weekly Times-Union, 27 Sep 1895, Page 3

I talked with two of my cousins, George W. Saxon's great-granddaughters telling them of my amazing finds and the circumstances surrounding those finds. Strange events and unexplained circumstances that almost seemed eerie had led me here. These unexplained events and encounters were happening so frequently and often that I gave them a name and began referring to them as my "goose bump moments". I sat dumbfounded and in total shock, the hair on my arms stood up and I had the fourth "goose bump moment" as they proceeded to tell me the story. There may have been as many as three daughters who had passed away.²² Of course there is no one still living, who knew the source of this story or whether this was a fact or just folklore.

What had started out as a quest to discover and identify one child had turned into a quest for two and now three. I began to wonder if I would ever be able to prove there were three children, and finding a third child would be like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

Then I remembered the 1900 and 1910 U.S. Census. From 1790-1840, only the head of household is listed and the number of household members in selected age groups. From 1850 to 1940, details were provided for all individuals in each household. The 1900 and 1910 census indicate how many children were born to each woman as well as how many of those children were still living.²³

What would the 1900 and 1910 census indicate for Sarah Ball Saxon? The number of children born was six and the number living was three.²⁴ I now had proof there were three children who had

passed away, I had found two, and now I just needed to find the last one.

I continued searching on and off for the next ten months. During the first part of June 2016, I was searching for some articles about George W. Saxon and downloaded over five hundred complete pages of various Tallahassee newspapers to bring home to begin the tedious task of reading

NAME of each person whose place of abode on April 15, 1910, was in this family. Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Include every person living on April 15, 1910. Omit children born since April 15, 1910.	RELATION. Relationship of this person to the head of the family.	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.								
		10 Number born.	11 Number living.	1 Sex.	2 Color or race.	3 Age at last birthday.	4 Whether single, married, widowed, or divorced.	5 Number of years of present marriage.	6 Mother of how many children.	
Saxon George W	Head			M	W	65	M	25		
Saxon Sarah	Wife	6	3	F	W	40	M	15	6	3
Saxon Lucile	Daughter			F	W	22	S			
Saxon Helene	Daughter			F	W	10	S			

1910 U.S. Census (composite) - Sarah Saxon

as time permitted. I had various issues from 1876, 1879-1883, 1890-91, 1896, 1898, 1916-17, 1928 and 1929. I completed reading approximately 3/4 of these pages, skipping around from year to year and month to month, in no specific order. I was gathering a wealth of information on Tallahassee history and found articles pertaining to George Saxon, and the Proctor sides of my family.

²² Interview with Elizabeth Ausley-Gablehouse and Margaret Ausley-Stalvey, Aug 2015

²³ National Archives, Clues in Census Records, 1850-1940, <https://www.archives.gov/research/census/1850-1930.html>

²⁴ 1900 U.S. Census, Tallahassee, Leon, Florida, Enumeration District 087, Page 12B; 1910 U.S. Census, Tallahassee, Leon, Florida, Enumeration District 079, Page 5A

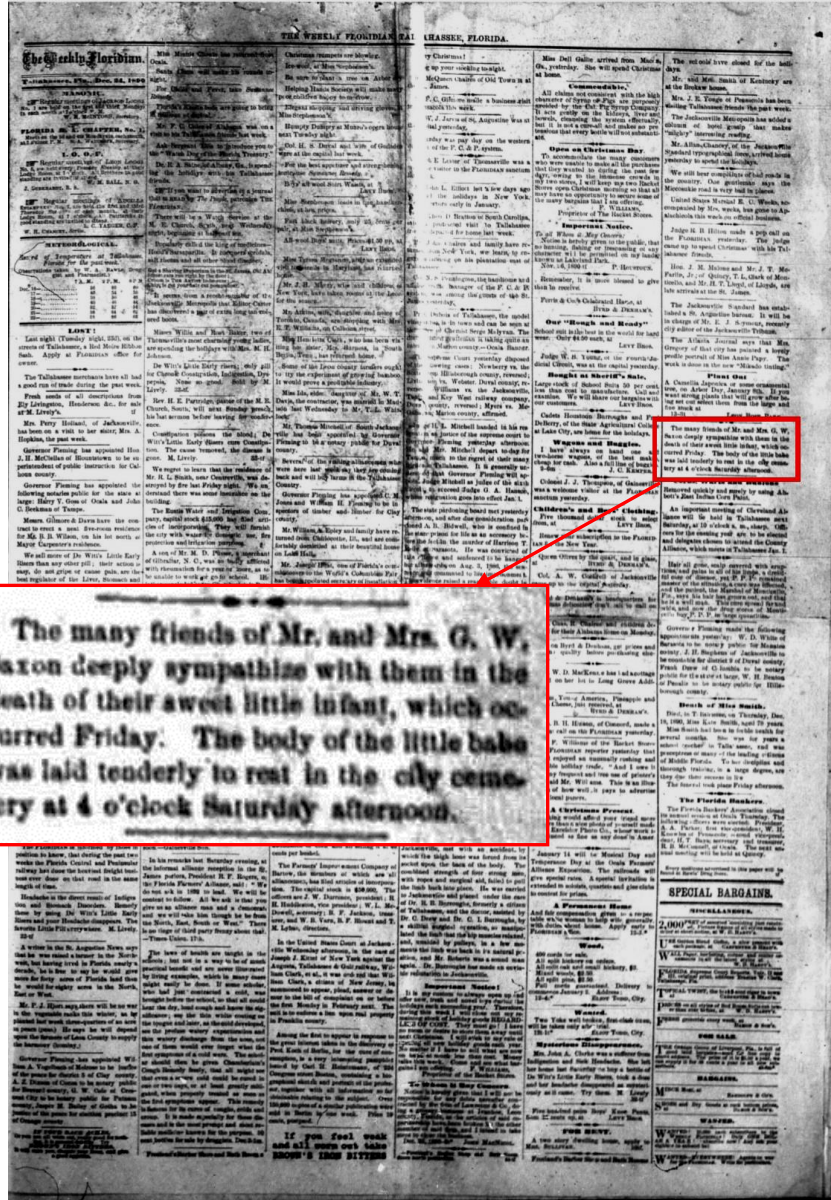
As I have previously explained, the scarcity of newspapers existing at the State Archives includes the year 1890, except for two issues of The Weekly Floridian for May 14th and December 24th.

On an evening in early July 2016, I wasn't sleepy, so I decided to read the December 24, 1890 issue. Was I not sleepy by circumstance or reason? Was I about to experience the fifth occurrence of a repeating theme of coincidences? Was I about to experience one of my now famous goose bump moments? There are only two of the fifty-two issues of this newspaper in existence at the State Archives of Florida in Tallahassee; I have since located all issues for 1890 at the University of Florida.²⁵ What are the odds that I would find the third child in one of only two issues for the year 1890 at the State Archives?

I cannot begin to describe the excitement and heart felt joy I experienced when on page five, column six, I found George and Sarah Saxon's third deceased infant daughter, who died Friday, December 19, 1890 and was buried the following day, Saturday, December 20th at 4:00 p.m. in the Old City Cemetery.

Why had George never had his daughter's stone engraved? It wasn't like he couldn't afford it, was one of the comments given. Was it just too painful for him and Sarah? These are questions for which we will never have answers. There is a myriad of possible reasons as to why, but after studying George for the last three years, in my opinion, it is totally out of his character to have just refused to have the stone engraved, despite the painful reminder of losing a child.

As I looked at the sequence and chronology of events, it seemed to make perfect sense. George's mother Elizabeth Saxon died in February 1890. This was the same month Myrtle was born. Three months later (in May 1890) Sarah would have known she was pregnant. Five months later in October, while Sarah was seven months pregnant, Myrtle died. Two months later, an infant was born and died,



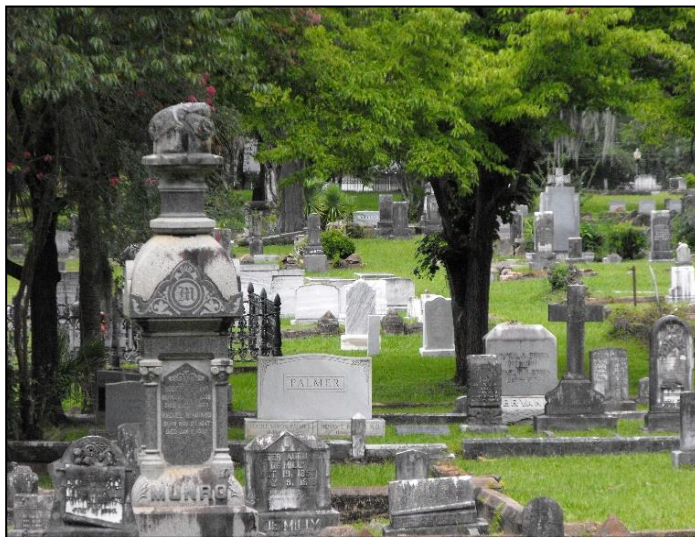
The Weekly Floridian, 24 Dec 1890, Page 5

²⁵ University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, West Library, Microfiche #AN2.F6T2.F66

and indications are that this was a stillborn. Three deaths, two births and one pregnancy are a lot to go through for a family in one year. Obviously, a stone was placed but no one ever got around to engraving it.

Was this stone meant to remain a silent memorial for three young infant daughters? Or do they deserve to have their names etched in the history book? This is a question that needed to be considered before deciding to have it engraved. This was not a decision that I felt comfortable in making alone, so I consulted with other family members and decided to have a new stone etched.²⁶

After the text of this story had been written and edited, and I was working on the final touches and placement of photos. I drove over to the cemetery to take a couple more photos for possible inclusion. I decided to get a shot of the historical marker in the front southeast corner. Heading back to my car I stopped to take a photo of the Saxon plot, which is nine rows deep from the front of the cemetery where I was standing. I did not realize until I got home what I had captured in the photo, which immediately put me at ease concerning any qualms I may have had about having the headstone engraved. Another coincidence? Three rows directly due east of the three girls in the Saxon Plot, lies the grave of their sister Lucile Saxon-Palmer.



*Photo taken from the east (front) fence, Saxon Plot
left center of tree - Jul 2016*



*In the foreground of this photo is the grave of Lucile
Saxon-Palmer, sister of the three girls, whose unmarked
headstone is seen behind it. - Jul 2016*

Historians look at cemeteries as a record of history, a time capsule of people that have existed through the ages. In many cases, the only known existence of an individual is recorded on a tombstone. Unfortunately for Myrtis, Ruth and the Infant Daughter Saxon this was not the case. However, if I had not spent one and a half years looking, would they have been forever lost in time?

In December 2016, next to the unmarked stone, a new engraved marble stone quarried from the same mine was erected. Now after so many years, the graves of the “*Forgotten Children*” are known, and my cousins, my family, will never be forgotten as the young daughters of George W. and Sarah Ball Saxon.

My friend Julie Strauss Bettinger writes to me that you just became the “spiritual father” of these three children!²⁷ These are extremely moving words and I would like to think that I was

²⁶ Original plans were to have the stone engraved, but the monument companies declined due to the age and size of the marble.

²⁷ Email, 03 Jul 2016

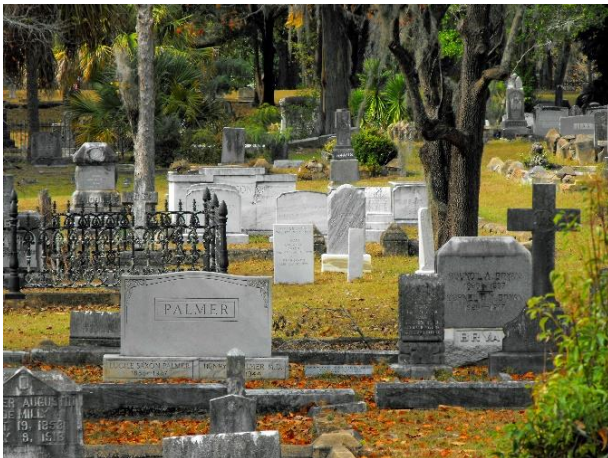
destined to find them, and that my 3rd great grandmother Elizabeth Saxon, 3rd great uncle George, and aunt Sarah are smiling down from heaven and saying job well done.



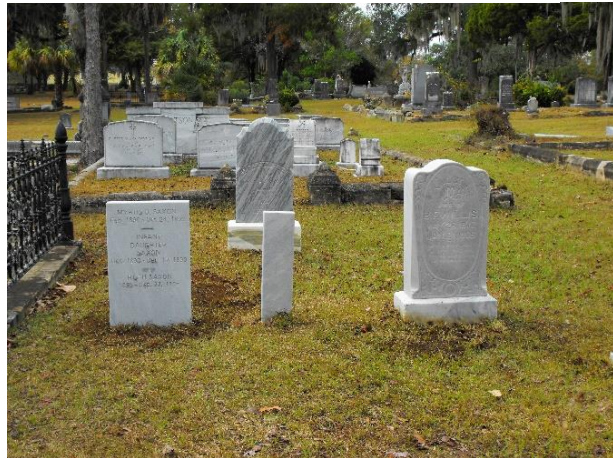
Front of new headstone - Dec 2016



Back of new headstone - Dec 2016



Saxon plot with new headstone - Dec 2016



This journey was a puzzle with many pieces; some provided by my friends Claude, Lynn and Julie. Without them I might never have begun the puzzle in the first place, and I must wonder if meeting and knowing them are just more of the blessings provided so that I could complete the puzzle.

Is this a story of repeated sheer coincidences, or a story of faith and a greater purpose in life? I will let you, the individual reader make your own determination, but will tell you that when I told my 101-year-old mother of my finding of the two girls Myrtis and Ruth, and the circumstances surrounding those findings (my goose bump moments) she said, *“God has his hand on your shoulder guiding you in the right direction”*. She died in October 2015 before I found the third child, and I believe she was right, and she too is smiling down.