

Memorandum to the File

February 9, 2012

Lorenzo Lea (1806-1876)

Lea family researchers often come across references to a Lea family mini-genealogy purportedly written by a Reverend Lorenzo Lea. The purpose of this memorandum is to explore that document and, to a lesser extent, the man who wrote it.¹

To begin, here is the text of the Lorenzo Lea document:

*The Lea Family: Records of Reverend Lorenzo Lea*²

About 1750 two brothers, James and William Lea, from the eastern portion of Virginia (King & Queen County) migrated to North Carolina and settled in what is now known as Caswell and Person counties, but then Orange county.

James Lea located about two miles west of Leasburg, a village subsequently established (in 1788) and named after the family, and it was the county seat of Caswell before Person was set off.

William Lea settled three miles east of Leasburg at South Hyco bridge, near Lea's Chapel which belonged to the Church of England, but now is a Methodist Church.

A third brother, or near kinsman, John Lea, settled on Country Line Creek some 10 miles west of Leasburg, from whom has sprung a numerous progeny.

A.

James Lea, name of wife not given

B.

Polly Lea
William Lea

¹ The focus is on the mini-genealogy, with basic background information provided on Reverend Lorenzo Lea to place his "research" in context.

² Rose, Ben L. *Report of Research on The Lea Family in Virginia & North Carolina Before 1800*. Richmond (Virginia): Printing Services, Inc., 1983 (Second Printing), pp. 134-135. Print. (hereinafter *Report of Research 1983*). Unknown is whether Ben L. Rose edited the Lorenzo Lea notes. Reverend Lorenzo Lea also is seen named Lorenzo Dow Lea. Powell, William S. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991. Volume 4, pp. 37-38.

Gabriel Lea
James Lea, the 2nd
Betsy Lea
Phebe Lea

B. Polly Lea married James Sergent.
B. William Lea married Caty Van Hook
B. Gabriel Lea married Elizabeth Asburn.
B. Betsy Lea married her cousin, James Lea, known as "Jimmy Shoeboot".
B. Phebe Lea married Thomas Kilgore
B. James Lea, the 2nd, son of James Lea (A) moved early to Tenn.

A. William Lea, name of wife not given

B.

George Lea
Anness Lea
Eunice Lea

(Will say that my grand-father, William Lea, married his second cousin on that side, a grand-daughter of William Lea (A).

Note by Rev. Lorenzo Lea: James Lea (A) was a very small man of temperate habits and lived to be very old. His home was known in the family as "The Old Place."

This ends the text of the Reverend Lorenzo Lea mini-genealogy.

The Reverend Lorenzo Lea who compiled this brief genealogy is believed to be Lorenzo Lea (1806-1876), son of William Lea (1776-1873) and Sarah McNeill (1783-1846). Here is his ancestral outline (which is believed to be the correct one):

1. William Lea
2. James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea (1715-1788)
3. Gabriel Lea (1758-1834)
4. William Lea (1776-1873)
5. Lorenzo Lea (1806-1876)

However, uncertainty with respect to this formulation of his ancestry is caused by his statement:

"Will say that my grand-father, William Lea, married his second cousin on that side, a grand-daughter of William Lea (A)."

If his grandfather is a William Lea, the grandfather of Reverend Lorenzo Lea cannot be the Gabriel Lea (1758-1834) shown above, at least on that branch of his ancestry. The Lorenzo Lea with a grandfather named William Lea would be a son of Addison Lea and Elizabeth Patrick. Also, the wife of this grandfather William Lea (being the grandmother of Lorenzo Lea) would, according to Lorenzo Lea, be a granddaughter of William (South Hico) Lea.

The only granddaughter of William (South Hico) Lea known to have married a William Lea is Sarah McNeill (1783-1846) who married William Lea (1776-1873), son of Gabriel Lea (1758-1834) and Elizabeth Ashburn (1757-1840). This would provide the following paternal ancestry of Reverend Lorenzo Lea (Lea side):

1. James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea married Anne (possibly Tolbert or Talbert)
2. Gabriel Lea married Elizabeth Ashburn
3. William Lea married Sarah McNeill
4. Addison Lea married Elizabeth Patrick
5. Lorenzo Lea

And, the following ancestry (grandmother Sarah McNeill side):

1. William (South Hico) Lea married Frances Unknown
2. John McNeill married Anness Lea
3. Sarah McNeill married William Lea
4. Addison Lea married Elizabeth Patrick
5. Lorenzo Lea

Of course, Reverend Lorenzo Lea may have been confused. He apparently believed that James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea and William (South Hico) Lea, his two Lea great grandfathers shown above, were brothers. However, as explained below, they now are not believed to be brothers (nor has any family connection been established).

Katharine Kerr Kendall adds support to the possibility that Reverend Lorenzo Lea did not understand his Lea ancestry:

"Although there is scant material on James Lea Sr., [James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea] his children residing in Leasburg were outstanding and left a rich history. Son Gabriel lived near Leasburg and his son William married Sarah McNeill who were parents to Lorenzo Lea and the famous educator Solomon Lea, president of Greensboro College and owner of the Somerville Institute in Leasburg. One of the pleasures of this writer's childhood was an annual summer afternoon visit in Leasburg with her parents to call on Miss Willie Lea the entertaining and gracious daughter of Solomon Lea."³

The person of the first genealogy discussed by Reverend Lorenzo Lea, James Lea (name of wife not given) has come to be known as James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea, thought to

³ *The Heritage of Caswell County, North Carolina*, Jeannine D. Whitlow, Editor (1985) at 351 (Article #437, "James Lea" by Katharine Kerr Kendall).

have lived 1715-1788. The six children listed by Reverend Lorenzo Lea for this James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea are consistent with the findings of later Lea family researchers:

1. William (Merchant) Lea (1747-1806) married Catherine Vanhook
2. James Lea (called 2nd or Jr.) (aft. 1747 - bef. 1830) married Elizabeth Unknown
3. Mary (Polly) Lea (c.1752-1791) married James Sargent
4. Gabriel Lea (1758-1834) married Elizabeth Ashburn
5. Phoebe Lea (born c.1765) married Thomas Kilgore
6. Betsey Lea married James (Jimmy Shoe-Boot) Lea

The person of the second genealogy discussed by Reverend Lorenzo Lea, William Lea (name of wife not given) has come to be known as William (South Hico) Lea, thought to have lived c.1715-1804, and married Frances Unknown. Reverend Lorenzo Lea lists only three children for William (South Hico) Lea, while other Lea family researchers ascribe at least four children to him (and, possibly, five).

Listed by Reverend Lorenzo Lea:

1. George Lea (1739-1835) married Lucy Tolbert (also seen as Talbert)
2. Anness Lea (1761-1821) married John McNeill
3. Eunice Lea (c.1749 - aft.21 March 1816) married Alexander Rose

Additional children by other Lea family researchers:

4. Elizabeth Lea (aft. 1751 - Bet. Oct 1802–Sep 1803) married James (Cobb's Creek) Lea
5. Frances Lea (died before 3 October 1802) married James Hendricks/Hendrix

Reverend Lorenzo Lea fairly accurately described the children of James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea and William (South Hico) Lea. However, the controversial aspect of his mini-genealogy is describing them as brothers. Many respected Lea family researchers disagree, believing that William (South Hico) Lea is a brother of James (Country Line) Lea and an Elizabeth Lea.

Also, these researchers show James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea as a brother of William (Cobb's Creek) Lea, John (Richland's Creek) Lea, and a Sarah Lea.

As shown above, Reverend Lorenzo Lea also stated:

"A third brother, or near kinsman, John Lea, settled on Country Line Creek some 10 miles west of Leasburg, from whom has sprung a numerous progeny."

The identity of this person is not known. It is possible that Reverend Lorenzo Lea confused this John Lea with James (Country Line) Lea, now thought to be a brother of William (South Hico) Lea (but not a brother of James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea. There is a John (Country Line) Lea, but he is a son of James (Country Line) Lea, thus being of

another generation, and certainly not a brother of either James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea or William (South Hico) Lea.

Ben L. Rose provided the following with respect to this John Lea:

"This John Lea was granted 340 acres on Country Line Creek in 1778. He is called 'John Lea (C. Line)' in 1779 and 'John Lea Sen (of Country Line)' in 1791 in a list of the debtors of Thomas Vanhook, dec'd. It was quite probably this John Lea who is mentioned in the will of John Lea of South Hico as 'John Lea Senr.' This is the John Lea whom Rev. Lorenzo Lea believed was a kinsman of his ancestor, James Lea of Kilgore's Branch. Lorenzo said that this John Lea came to North Carolina from Virginia and 'settled on Country Line Creek some 10 miles west of Leasburg.' Miss Wilhelmina Lea lists him as 'John C. Lea' in her genealogy. This John Lea wrote his will Mar 10, 1803 and died shortly thereafter for the will was proved in the court of Caswell Co in Apr 1803. In his will he mentions his wife, Winneyfred, and his children: James, John, Benjamin, Jeremiah, Nancy, Sally, Betsy and Franky. He signed the will 'John Lea Senr.'

"Although family traditions suggest that John Lea of Country Line creek was a brother or a kinsman of James Lea of Kilgores Branch and of Capt. William Lea of South Hico, the only evidence I found to support this is some similarity in the names of children and grandchildren. On the other hand, I found no evidence to contradict it."⁴

Also ascribed to Reverend Lorenzo Lea, as shown above, is the following statement:
"James Lea (A) was a very small man of temperate habits and lived to be very old. His home was known in the family as 'The Old Place.'"

This would be James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea. However, if he did indeed live 1715-1788, he would have lived approximately 73 years. This does not seem "very old" even for nineteenth-century standards. Perhaps Reverend Lorenzo Lea is again confused, for his father William Lea did live to be "very old" (96 years). Of course, the 1788 death date for James (Kilgore's Branch) Lea may be incorrect.

Following are the observations by Ben L. Rose on the genealogy described by Reverend Lorenzo Lea:

"Rev. Lorenzo Lea (whose notes appear in this book) was quite certain that James Lea of Kilgore's Branch was brother of Capt. William Lea of South Hico, and he was in a position to know. Born in 1806 in Leasburg, Rev. Lorenzo Lea knew personally his grandfather, Gabriel Lea, son of James Lea of Kilgore's Branch. From his grandfather Gabriel (who lived in Leasburg and died there in 1834 when Lorenzo was 27 years old) and from his father William (who died in 1873 at the age of 96 years) Lorenzo had ample opportunity to learn family facts and relationships. it would not be wise to set aside his testimony without clear proof the contrary."⁵

⁴ *Report of Research 1983* at 127.

⁵ *Report of Research 1983* at 126.

An interesting biographical sketch of Lorenzo Lea was republished by Ben L. Rose (paragraph breaks inserted):⁶

"Willis Lea, the oldest son of William Lea, after graduating, studied medicine and located in Mississippi where he became eminent in his profession. Lorenzo D. Lea, the second son, was born Jan 4, 1806, was converted at a camp meeting near Leasburg when about 16 years old. He prepared for college in the Bingham School at Hillsboro NC and graduated from Chapel Hill NC in 1825. He was appointed tutor and remained in Chapel Hill for two years. He then turned his attention to the study of medicine, but soon laid down his medical books for the ministry. He entered the Virginia Conference, which then embraced most of North Carolina, about 1829. He was the first, or among the first, graduate that entered the Conference. He filled some of the most important stations in the Conference, one of which was Lynchburg VA.

"In 1833 he married the beautiful and accomplished Mary Medly of Halifax VA. Soon after the marriage he was appointed principal of the preparatory department of Randolph Macon College, and remained several years in this position. Then he founded the school at Leasburg NC in which he continued until about 1843, when he was made President of Buckingham Female Institute in Virginia. He remained in this situation two years, and then took charge of the Female School at Farmville VA. His stay in this institution was short, for at the request of Dr. Olin he founded the Female Institute at Jackson TN. In 1853 he resigned this place, and sold out to Amos W. Jones, once a member of the N.C. Conference. Then he became the professor of mathematics [*sic*] in West Tennessee College, after this in Soule Female College at Murfreesboro TN and finally took charge of Corinth Female School in the bounds of North Mississippi Conference, where he died Oct 7, 1876, age 72 years.

"His scholarly attainments causes his services to be in great demand, especially in founding new institutions of learning, and planning for their future usefulness. You saw him to the best advantage in the lecture room, especially if his subject was moral philosophy or the fundamental principles of Christianity. As a preacher he was clear and strong, addressing himself to the reason of his hearers with wonderful force. On one occasion at a camp meeting, where much interest has been excited, he was requested to preach. He was at his best all the way through his discourse. When he finished, Peter Doub tuned to a preacher at his elbow and remarked, 'That was the greatest sermon that I have ever heard from the lips of mortal man.' That was a prodigious compliment, coming from a man who was himself a profound theologian. It has been a great misfortune for North Carolina that many of her most talented men have had to go beyond her borders to be appreciated."

⁶ *Report of Research 1983* at 132-133. Perkins, E. L. "The Leas of Leasburg." *The Trinity Archive*. Durham (North Carolina), February 1893. According to Ben L. Rose, this article was "from two notebooks of Mrs. Robert Baker Pegram, nee Mary Susan Wright, of Atlanta, GA. Then notebooks were in the possession of Mrs. Pegram's daughter, Mrs. DeSales Harrison of Stone Edge #1, Lookout Mountain TN. The articles were copied by Ben L. Rose in July 1977 and the notebooks returned to Mrs. Harrison."

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⁷ This document was compiled under the auspices of the Caswell County Historical Association (Yanceyville, North Carolina) (the "CCHA"), and, to the extent that copyright is available with respect to this document, it resides exclusively in the CCHA.