



TARRANT COUNTY TXGENWEB

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Civil War Veterans of Northeast Tarrant County

William Robert Harper

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William Robert Harper was a Confederate veteran of a Tennessee regiment. He lived for several years in Precinct 3 north of Big Bear Creek, and lies buried in White's Chapel Cemetery. He was a brother of another of our veterans, Henry J. Harper.

William Harper was born in Lincoln County, Tennessee on September 13, 1845. He was a son of Lenzy Carroll Harper and his wife, Cassie Coble. Several researchers have placed information on this family at ancestry.com.

In the 1850 census of Lincoln County, Tennessee's District Two, Henry appears as a four-year-old boy in his father's family. Interestingly...and we have not discovered the connection which obviously exists...the family's next-door neighbors were Samuel and Elizabeth Stafford, who also eventually settled in northeast Tarrant County. William R. Harper, his brother, Henry J. Harper, and Samuel Stafford served in the same company and regiment during their Confederate service.

Ten years later, in 1860, William was still living with his parents and siblings in District Two in Lincoln County. His father was a farmer who owned real estate worth one thousand five hundred dollars.

On June 21, 1868 in Lincoln County, Tennessee, William Harper and Sarah A. Huffman were married. She may have been the daughter of J. W. Huffman (born about 1825) and his wife, Jane (born about 1830), who were living with their children in District 2 of Lincoln County and were the only Huffmans living in Lincoln County in 1860. One of their children in that year was a ten-year-old daughter named Sarah Ann.



Mr. Harper with his dog

When the 1870 census was taken, Mr. Harper and his wife, Sarah A. Harper, were living in the Second District of Lincoln County, Tennessee. Mrs. Harper was born in Tennessee about 1849. They had one daughter with them, P. L. Harper, who was born about 1869. They also had a nine-year-old boy named J. T. Kirkland living with them.



Mr. and Mrs. Harper
photos courtesy of
Jeri Coppock-Maserang

By the time of the taking of the 1880 census, Mr. Harper and his family had settled in northeast Tarrant County north of Big Bear Creek. The children with them in that year were Permelia A. (born about 1869), James W. (born about 1870), Bediciana? G. (born about 1872), John W. (born about 1876), and Jefferson L. Harper (born in July 1879). Data in this census indicate they came to Texas between the births of John and Jefferson.

The 1880 Tarrant County tax lists show that W. R. Harper owned forty-five acres of the J. A. Freeman survey, worth a total of two hundred seventy dollars. He also owned one carriage or wagon worth fourteen dollars, one horse or mule worth thirty dollars, one cow worth ten dollars, one hog worth three dollars, and one dollar's worth of miscellaneous personal property. He paid a total of \$5.78 cents that year in state, county, and poll taxes.

In modern-day terms, the J. A. Freeman survey sits in present-day Southlake. It is a square, minus its southwest quarter. Thus the survey actually has six boundary lines. The northern boundary, which is one mile long, follows Southlake Boulevard. The southern boundary lies along Continental Boulevard. The survey's east line is basically Kimball Avenue. On the west, the northern one half of the boundary begins at the intersection of Carroll Avenue and runs south one-half mile, then east one-half mile, then south one-half mile to Continental Boulevard. No modern street sits along either of the last named two lines. Mr. Harper's property lay somewhere within the Freeman survey.

In his Confederate pension application, Mr. Harper said he owned an equity in an eighty-acre tract of land in Lea County, New Mexico. This may explain his absence from the Tarrant County census records for 1900 and 1910.

Mr. Harper applied for a Confederate veteran's pension in 1928. He said he had surrendered at the end of the War at Marble Hill, Tennessee. He said he was born in Lincoln County, Tennessee, had come to Texas about 1867, and to Tarrant County about 1869. His pension application was ultimately disallowed because no record of his service had survived in the files in the National Archives in Washington, D. C., in spite of the fact that he supplied affidavits from men who had personal knowledge of his service.

Though the dates Mr. Harper gave for coming to Texas do not agree with information given many years earlier to the census taker, it is still interesting to note that he apparently lived for about two years at some other location in Texas before coming to Tarrant County.

Henry Watson, a Fort Worth attorney, wrote a letter on April 13, 1928 to the Comptroller's office in Austin. In it, he detailed Mr. Harper's present condition: "...Mr. Harper, who is 82 years of age, was a pioneer in the settlement of Tarrant County, and, until a few years ago, has always had

sufficient property and employment to support him. But at the present time he is too old and feeble to engage in any remunerative occupation, and the only property he has is a vacant lot at Ederville in this county of the probable value of \$25, and an equity in 80 acres of land in Lea County, New Mexico. He derives no revenue from either piece of property. He lives with his son, J. W. Harper, who is employed at the Bewley Flouring Mill....”

In another letter, written on May 8, Watson continued his account of Mr. Harper’s service, saying Harper “...does not remember the Regiment in which he served. He had a cousin named William Harper who was killed in the service of Forrest’s Cavalry....He relates that a squad of about 30 or 40, including himself, under the leadership of Capt. Bill Davis were cut off from the main army of Genl. Forrest near Chattanooga, Tenn., in Horse-shoe Bend of the Tennessee River and, after 8 days of hardships and without rations, the whole company under cover of night urged their steeds into the river and swam down beyond the Union Pickets, made their escape and pitched their camp on Paint Rock. After several days of scouting this company, having been betrayed by two of their comrades, was surrounded by Union forces near Chestnut Ridge and all killed except 8, and the two traitors. Among those killed were Capt. Bill Davis, John and Thomas Brown, Bill and “Pone” Green, and a man by the name of Higginbotham, all his mess-mates. Brice Gray, one of those to escape, was made Captain of the squad under which applicant served until the close of the war. Mr. Harper thinks it will be impossible to find any of his comrades living, but thinks he can probably find two who, as boys too young to enter the service, neighbors of his at the time, will make affidavit to his services, if such would be acceptable. The applicant’s memory seems bad as to events and his service, if any, seems to have centered about Lincoln County, his home, in Tennessee, as his statement that he surrendered at Marble Hill would indicate.”

On May 22, 1928, Bud Huffman of Tarrant County made an affidavit for Mr. Harper, in which Huffman said, “...that as a boy he [Huffman] lived near Lynchburg, Lincoln (now Moore) County, Tennessee, during the closing days of the Civil War; that he knew Capt. Bill Davis, leader of a squad of ‘Confederate Soldiers,’ and defended the community against the predatory incursions of the Yankees, stationed at or near Tullahoma, Tennessee; that under said Bill Davis was a squad of about 25 or 30 men, including Will Harper now known as W.R. Harper, Brice Gray, Taylor Brannon, Tom Grant, Tom Dagget, Bill Green, the Brown boys and a man by the name of Higginbotham, most of which said squad was killed, including Capt. Bill Davis, near Chestnut Ridge in Franklin County, Tennessee, near the close of the war;...” W. Cullen Stafford, a son of William Harper’s lieutenant, Samuel Stafford, also made an affidavit for Harper at about the same time.

Attorney Watson wrote yet another letter to Austin, dated January 12, 1929, added a few more details: “...According to Mr. Harper’s statement to me, the Samuel H. Stafford mentioned in the letter enclosed, together with some of the comrades of W. R. Harper heretofore mentioned, were home on a furlough and, being unable to again join their original commands, formed a Cavalry Company attached to N. B. Forrest’s Cavalry, but were cut off from Forrest’s Army near a town, Mr. Harper calls Tullahoma, and never was able to again unite with it. Mr. Harper says that Samuel Stafford was a Lieut. in the Cavalry Co. in which he served to the end of the war. That the W. C. Stafford, whose affidavit was previously placed on file in your office with Harper’s application, was the son of Samuel Stafford, and that the H. J. Harper mentioned in the Adjutant General’s letter was the brother of your applicant...”

We have been unable to locate the family in the census records of 1900 or 1910. In 1920, already-widowed William R. Harper was living with the family of his son, James W. Harper, in Fort Worth at 1215 Johnson Street. James's wife, Annie, was born about 1872 in Mississippi, and was still living in 1920.

When the 1930 census was taken, Mr. Harper was living with his son, Jim W. Harper, and his grandson, George (born about 1912), at Jim's home at 3444 South Main Street in Fort Worth. Apparently both William and his son, Jim, were widowed by that time. A widowed cousin of Jim's, Nancy Selman (born about 1877 in Tennessee) was also living with them.

William Robert Harper died at 7 p.m. on January 29, 1933 at the home of his grandson at 1417 Davis Avenue in Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas. His death was caused by a cerebral hemorrhage and arteriosclerosis. The funeral firm of J. E. Foust and Son in Grapevine arranged his funeral services, and he was buried the next day at White's Chapel Cemetery in present-day Southlake. His grave is unmarked. While his obituary says he was buried in Grapevine Cemetery, it seems unlikely his funeral would have been held beside White's Chapel Cemetery and then moved again to Grapevine.

An interesting obituary for Mr. Harper appeared in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram on January 31: *"Courthouse Lawn Orator for Many Years is Buried. Death this week claimed a familiar courthouse character when W. R. Harper, 87, who for many years had given his lectures about the corridors and on the lawn of the Tarrant County courthouse, died at the home of a grandson, Lee Cure, 1417 Davis Street. Mr. Harper often was seen surrounded by a group of listeners on the lawn of the courthouse. He had been a resident of Fort Worth and vicinity for over 50 years. He died Sunday after a two-day illness. Funeral services were held Tuesday afternoon at White's Chapel with burial in the Grapevine Cemetery."*

Permelia Lula Harper was born in Tennessee on May 26, 1869. She married Anderson C. Brandon (1849-1913). She died in Providence Hospital in Waco, McLennan County, Texas on July 31, 1953. Her last permanent address was 2310 Austin Avenue in Waco. She was buried in McGregor Cemetery in McGregor, Texas.

James W. Harper was born June 24, 1870. He died at his home at 1417 Davis Avenue on July 18, 1935, and was buried in the Harper Cemetery in Haltom City, Tarrant County. He was married in Tarrant County, Texas on July 25, 1889 to Nannie J. Davis.

Bedecie Annie Gabarella Harper was born September 13, 1872. She died at her home at 1418 East Davis Avenue in Fort Worth on August 21, 1963, and was buried in Mount Olivet Cemetery in Fort Worth. She married Andrew J. Mayton (1865-1947).

William Isaac Harper was born in Tarrant County on October 22, 1892. He was a lifelong bachelor, and worked for many years as a plumber for Huffman Bros. His last permanent address was 1417 Davis Avenue in Fort Worth. He died in Harris Hospital in Fort Worth on December 23, 1957, and was buried in Mount Olivet Cemetery in Fort Worth the next day.