

Four Little Patton Girls from Alabama

Researched and Written by Jackie Layne Partin

Most people in the Pelham Valley area have heard of the **four little Patton girls** who were orphaned and brought to the Valley in the 1870's to live with relatives. But not many people know who they were, where they came from, how they got to Pelham Valley, and what eventually happened to them. So I set about trying to answer these questions since one of them was my husband's great-grandmother in his "**Patton**" lineage.

Around **1817** in Franklin County, Tennessee, **William and Mary Wilson Edgar Patton** became the parents of a son named **John Patton**. William and Mary had lived in Jefferson County, Tennessee and Jackson County, Alabama; John states in the Census records that he was born in Tennessee. I think that some of his older siblings were born in Jefferson County where his parents married in 1796, but some of the younger ones were born in Franklin County which is so very close to Jackson County, Alabama. **John Patton** had several siblings two of whom were **Alexander Edgar Patton** born in 1800 and **Elizabeth Patton Osborne** born about 1804. **John** settled in Jackson County, Alabama; **Alexander and Elizabeth** settled in what became Grundy County, Tennessee.

Around **1850 John Patton** married **Martha Jane Cobb** born 31 August 1831 in Madison County, Alabama. She was a daughter of **Bryant and Mary "Polly" Grayson Cobb**. According to some notes I found in my file, the couple's first child was **Robert Blaxton Patton** born 1851 and died 1853; the second child was **John Bunion Ira Patton** born 1852 and died 1855, and the third child **Mary Elvina Patton** was born and died in 1855. None of these children would have been on a Census record, but there are records elsewhere on the Grayson side of the family. In **1860** the couple was at home in Bellfonte, Alabama where John was working as a shopkeeper. They had two daughters **Josephine** born ca. **1857** and **Isabella Jane** born in September **1858**. The family grew with the addition of two more daughters and a son— **Alabama "Allie" Nancy** born November **1862** and **Minerva Elizabeth** and her **twin brother** born in February **1864**. The small twin boy only lived a few days. On 15 September **1866**, **Martha Jane** gave birth to her second son, **Alexander Cobb Patton**, and exactly one month later she died. This left **John** alone with five young children to rear.

Martha had a sister named **Naomi Cobb** who was married to **William L. Vann**. They were living in Madison County, Alabama. The **Vanns** at the time of Martha's death had only one living child, **Margaret Elizabeth Vann**, so they took John and

Martha Patton's baby son to rear. In the **1870 Census** three-year-old **Alexander Cobb Patton** was listed as a "**Vann.**" That same year, in Kyles, Jackson Co., Alabama, John and his other four children, **Josephine (13)**, **Isabella (11)**, **Alabama (9)**, and **Minerva (6)** were living as a family. It appeared that John had needed someone to take the baby boy and rear him. His sixty-five-year old sister, **Elizabeth "Betsy" Patton Osborne**, had come to live with him and help him with the rearing of his daughters and the household chores. It is obvious that during the Civil War years, **John** had lost everything he and **Martha** had managed to acquire during their married years. He wasn't a rich man, but he was broke by the time the war was over, and he became a common laborer.

On **01 October 1873** in Grundy County, Tennessee, sixteen-year-old **Josephine Patton** married **William Gilliam**. Josephine's marriage date in Grundy County tells me that her father, **John Patton**, died between **19 July 1870** (the Census record date) and **01 October 1873** (Josephine's marriage date in Grundy) in Jackson County, Alabama. This would be the natural conclusion on the death date if the family story that the four little girls came to Pelham **together** to live with a relative after the death of their parents is true. I have a different theory on that story that I would like to present a little later, but first I should say that I don't know at this time where **John Patton** and his wife **Martha Jane** are buried, but I would think that it is somewhere around the "Old Bellfonte" or Gurley, Alabama area.

According to **Charlotte "Lottie" Partin Bell**, (a granddaughter of **Minerva Patton**) after the death of **John Patton** his four daughters were taken to live with their maternal grandfather **Bryant Cobb** in Madison County, Alabama. By the time the girls came to live with "grandpa," he was married to his second wife Amanda Camper Cobb and was rearing another family of children. **Bryant Cobb** was wealthy and could give the girl's a good home. If the girls came to **Pelham** together, it appears that they may not have stayed too long with their grandfather **Cobb** before their **Aunt Betsy Patton Osborne** and first cousin **Thomas B. Patton** came in a surrey from their home in Pelham, Tennessee and took the girls back to live with her. **Aunt Betsy** had been a mother figure for the girls in their youth. **Grandpa Bryant Cobb** was getting older and by 1880 he was living with one of his daughters, probably **Mary Cobb Kilgore**, and her family; he died in 1881. All of this moving around for the girls had to happen between the years 1870 and 1873—or did it? The good part about the moves was that the girls were with loving family members who cared genuinely about them. **Aunt Betsy** died on 18 February 1880 of pneumonia in Pelham. A **Dr. Hinton** was caring for her during her five days of illness. I have no doubt that the four little girls, who were grown or nearly grown by then, were also at her bedside.

Another story that **Lottie Bell Partin** told about her grandmother **Minerva** was that she was a young teenager when **Aunt Betsy** came for her. Now this is my theory about the girls—**Minerva** was officially a teenager around the year 1877 when she would have been thirteen. Ironically, in March 1877, her step-grandmother **Amanda Camper Cobb** died which would have left the girls without a mother figure in the Cobb home. Since **Josephine** was already living in Pelham, married and a mother, we know that **Aunt Betsy** could have only gone for the other three girls. It is only natural that **Josephine** and maybe her new family went down with her to get her sisters and to visit her aging grandfather **Cobb**. By this time **Isabella** would have been nineteen years old; **Alabama/Allie** would have been fifteen, and **Minerva** would have been thirteen. I believe that for whatever reason, **Josephine** had come to Pelham several years earlier to live with her **Aunt Betsy**. Maybe when the move to **Grandpa Cobb's** house came about, **Josephine** chose to live with her aunt in Pelham.

Three months after the death of their **Aunt Betsy** in 1880, the Census record showed that **Alabama/Allie** was nineteen and married to **Alexander Martin Blair**. **Isabella and Minerva** were living on their own next door to their married sister **Josephine** who already had three children. I often pondered why these two young ladies were living in a separate household by themselves until I realized that they were probably living in the home of Aunt Betsey who had died three months earlier. Also in the 1880 Census, the girls' little brother, **Alexander Cobb Patton** was thirteen and still in his aunt's home, but he was listed as a "bound" child, but fortunately he was assigned his correct last name of "**Patton**." Alexander grew up, and in August **1886** he married **Daley C. Ray**. Alexander died in September before his only child was born in October **1887**. I have no further notes on this family. **Alabama/Allie Patton Blair** was still alive in the 1930 Census; a note in my records says that she died in 1953. She and husband Martin seemed to be parents to anyone who needed a home or direction. They made their living by farming in the Pelham Valley and lived along Highway 41.

Josephine and William Gilliam had several children. Their names were **Nancy, John, Alley/Allie, William, Hugh, Harris, Martin, Mattie, Eugenia and Alice Gilliam**. She and William farmed for a living in the Pelham Valley. When William died, Josephine lived with her daughter Alice Gilliam Womack and her family. **Josephine Patton Gilliam** died in 1946 in Pelham Valley.

On 07 July **1881 Isabella Patton** married **James N. Reid** who was born in Rhode Island. He was in Grundy County, Tennessee working as a weigh man in the coal mines. He later supported his family doing carpentry work. Together they had these children: **Melvin, Agnes, Fannie, Charles, Marian Ruth and Isabell Reid**. **Isabella Patton**

Reid died probably in Tracy City between 1900 and 1910—a note in my records gives the date as 1908. I do not know where she is buried.

On 08 November **1883**, **Minerva Elizabeth Patton** married **Daniel Patterson, Jr.** Together they had two sons **Arthur and Daniel Patterson, III**. Then **Daniel, Jr.** died around 1887/88 leaving Minerva with the two boys to rear. She turned to her sister **Allie** for help. **Allie** and her husband **Martin** never had any children, so they eventually took in young **Arthur and Daniel** to help with their care. This was especially important because **Minerva** married again in 1889. This second marriage was to **Henry M. Goodman**, son of **Anderson S. Goodman** of Pelham Valley. Henry's first wife **Margaret Roberts Goodman** had died between 1880-1889. They had seven children; some of whom were still at home when Henry married Minerva. In this marriage there were three more children born to Minerva—**Octavia “Tavy” Belle, James Elbert and Allie Blair Goodman**. Minerva died in 1932 and is buried at Warren Cemetery in Pelham Valley. **Octavia Belle Goodman** married **William “Willie” Harrison Partin**; they were the parents of **Grady Edward, Charlotte “Lottie”, Ruby Anna Mae, Willie Douglas and Roy Elbert Partin**. **Octavia “Tavy”** was the grandmother of my husband Grady Ward Partin—thus, the interest I have in the “four little Patton girls from Alabama.” **James Elbert** married **Elizabeth Turner**; they were the parents of **Georgia, Ralph and Louis Ray Goodman**. **Allie Blair Goodman**, named for her Aunt Alabama “**Allie**” **Patton Blair**, married **Orville Patrick Partin**; they were the parents of **Paul, Alice, Louise, Raymond, Jean, Clara, Reba, James Ray, Kenneth and Helen Partin**.

These are wonderful family stories and should be recorded for all the little descendants who may come along wanting to know about their ancestors. Other information can be found with **James F. Bell, Jr.** He faithfully recorded notes as his mother Lottie told him many stories about his great-grandmother **Minerva Patton Patterson Goodman**. He happily shared some of his info with me. If you have anything to add or any corrections, please let me know: jackiepartin@blomand.net or write to Jackie Layne Partin, P. O. Box 295, Monteagle, Tennessee, 37356.