

Elijah Pepper (1769-1831), Ancestor 84

By his great great great great (4x great) granddaughter, Linda Horton, 7 January 2022¹

Elijah Pepper was born on 8 December 1769 in Fauquier County, Virginia and died on 23 February 1831 in Woodford County, Kentucky. His name lives on today because of its association with the early years of Kentucky bourbon whiskey. Each year thousands of bourbon connoisseurs make the trek along winding McCracken Pike to Woodford Reserve, the high-quality brand that is produced a few yards from the spot on Glenss Creek where Elijah's still in 1812 first made whiskey. Many consider him the founder of the Kentucky bourbon industry.



Figure 1 Photo courtesy of Woodford Reserve

Shortly before migrating to Kentucky with his parents, Elijah married Sarah Neville O'Bannon (1770-1848) on 20 February 1794.¹ His parents, Samuel Pepper (1725-1799) and Elizabeth Holton (1728-1820), settled later that year in Mason County, Kentucky, and Elijah and Sarah likely accompanied them. Certainly by 1797, Elijah and Sarah had located in Woodford County, Kentucky. Initially they lived in Versailles, the county seat, but later they moved to Glenss Creek, seven miles away. The couple had eight children in 12 years, including our great great great (3x great) grandfather Samuel Pepper.

On 23 February 1831, Elijah Pepper died in Woodford County at the age 61, leaving a will. His widow ran the business for a few years, before their son Oscar took it over with the assistance of Scotland-born James Crow as master distiller. When the Pepper family sold the business in 1878, the new owners Labrot and Graham continued production of high-quality product at the original Pepper family property. These traditions have been continued by the current owner, Brown-Forman.

Elijah's early years

Elijah spent his youth on a farm that his father had purchased when Elijah was two years old. The county of his birth, Fauquier, had been formed from Prince William County just a few months before he drew his first breath. His parents' Baptist faith was indicated by their signatures on a petition submitted in 1774 to the colonial governor of Virginia requesting permission to worship as Baptists.² During the colonial period, the established church in Virginia was the Church of England. The Act of Toleration of 1689 applied in Virginia but, in the Baptists' opinion, did not go far enough in providing the freedom of worship that they sought.³ They opposed both paying taxes to support the Anglican church and the requirement that dissenting pastors and their meeting houses be licensed by the colony's General Court. After independence, Virginia enacted religious freedom legislation while, at the national level, the U.S. Constitution and its Bill of Rights provided for freedom of worship.

Another connection to the Baptist faith is indicated by Samuel and Elizabeth Pepper's sale on 25 April 1786 of a 142-acre tract of land to a Baptist clergyman named John Monroe (1750-1824).⁴ Monroe sought to establish a town in a part of Fauquier County where several key roads

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intersected, a spot that he considered ideal for such a community.⁵ The town, comprising 30 acres of the tract that Monroe bought from the Peppers, was incorporated by the Virginia General Assembly in 1796 and named Salem. In colonial Virginia as elsewhere, it was common for people to have trade and business links to those who share their faith. The buyer and seller of a property may have first met in church. In fact, it was a clergyman who ten years earlier had sold Samuel and Elizabeth Pepper the 142-acre tract they sold to James Monroe in 1786. By the time of the latter sale, they were likely contemplating a move to Kentucky. To find Salem, Virginia on a map today, search for Marshall, Virginia. In 1882, Salem was renamed in honor of John Marshall (1755-1835), a native of the area whose brilliant public service career included 34 years as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.⁶

During the Revolutionary War (1775-1783), Elijah's father Samuel served the patriot cause by supplying 750 pounds of beef to Virginia troops. Service of this type qualifies Samuel's descendants for the Daughters of the American Revolution or the Sons of the American Revolution. Earlier, he had served in the French and Indian War.⁷

Some stories handed down about Elijah's father, Samuel Pepper, may have pertained to other men with the same name rather than one of our ancestors. Our family tree has in it 12 men with the name Samuel Pepper, three of them ancestors, so this combination of first and last names was not unusual. A leading Virginia historian wrote that Samuel Pepper was a constable in Augusta County in 1759.⁸ Living in Fauquier County, our Samuel Pepper could not possibly have carried out a constable's law enforcement responsibilities a hundred miles away in Augusta County, even considering that Augusta County at the time comprised more territory than it does today. In the 1780s, a man named Samuel Pepper operated across the New River in southwestern Virginia a ferry that was formally recognized by an act of the Virginia Assembly.⁹ Here again, that Samuel Pepper is more likely to be a cousin than our ancestor, given the considerable distance between Fauquier County and the southwestern Virginia location of New River.

Elijah married and moved to Kentucky

As a boy, Samuel Pepper had been a servant to Bryan Boru O'Bannon (1680-1762), a wealthy Fauquier County landowner. When Samuel's son Elijah married O'Bannon's granddaughter Sarah Neville O'Bannon (1770-1848) on 20 February 1794,¹⁰ the two families became kin. Two other well-known Fauquier County families, the Nevilles and Bohannons, also became relatives.

Later in 1794, Samuel and Elizabeth along with several members of the O'Bannon family migrated via the Ohio River route to Kentucky, a journey of more than 600 miles. . .

1. The star marks Fauquier County, Virginia.
2. The red line marks the trip to Cumberland, Maryland (100 miles).
3. To Wheeling via the National Road, in green (130 miles).
4. On blue Ohio River, family took a flatboat from Wheeling to Mason County (450+ miles).



The length of any pioneer family's trip west depended on the point of origin and the destination. For the Pepper family, the most time-consuming segment of the journey was the first half, overland from their home in Virginia (55 miles west of Washington, DC) to the Ohio River, reaching it near today's Wheeling, West Virginia. As shown on the map on the preceding page, Samuel and Elizabeth settled in Mason County, which is on the river and marked with the arrow. Other Fauquier County families had settled there in 1783, one year earlier.¹¹

The flatboat used by the family for the Ohio River part of the trip was a rectangular, flat-bottomed boat built for short-term use. Flatboats generally had no keel, enabling quicker and more economical construction. Some farmers built their own flatboats. However, they were not durable, and they were difficult to steer. Each had a cabin in front for passengers, divided into chambers for family groups, as well as a pen in the rear for horses and cattle.

An amusing description of flatboats referred to them as "floating shoeboxes" that were "one-way only."¹² In the early days, the boatmen had to walk back home, after selling at their destination any wares picked up by trades during the trip. And the boatmen would sell the worn-out boats to customers at the destination who would disassemble them for the lumber.



A typical flatboat was 16-feet wide and 55-feet long, but some were as small as four feet by 16 feet while the large ones used to transport cargo might be 20 by 100 feet.

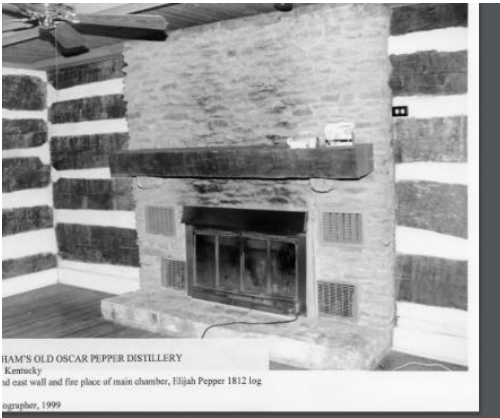
Along the way, the would-be settlers faced dangers on every side. Hidden sandbars in the river, mishaps when trying to steer the clumsy boats. And many unfortunate travelers found out the hard way that they'd purchased a poorly constructed lemon, sometimes made with rotten lumber. For a while the riverbanks were littered with abandoned flat boats. And there was always the danger of Indian attack. The boats were built like floating forts.... Windows, if any, were small and had sliding shutters. The walls were pierced with holes through which guns could be fired.¹³

Elijah and Sarah's move to Woodford County

It is likely that Elijah and Sarah spent two or three years living with his parents in Mason County. By 1797, Elijah and Sarah had struck out on their own. They lived first in Versailles, the county seat of Woodford County, Kentucky, where Elijah and his brother-in-law John O'Bannon

set up a distillery at a spring behind the courthouse. This marks the inauguration of Pepper family bourbon production. At the time of the 1800 census, for reasons unknown, Elijah's family was in Bourbon County, on the opposite side of Lexington.

Then Elijah, Sarah and their children returned to Woodford County, where they settled on the



Above: the interior of the Elijah Pepper home preserves the original log-and-mortar construction used not only for the house but also for the still house, which is no longer standing.

Right: a still was found at the site of the original Elijah Pepper distillery on Glenss Creek.¹⁵

The discussion that follows, explaining “What is bourbon?” and “How is bourbon made?” are interludes for those wishing to know more about these subjects. The biography continues on page seven.



What is bourbon?¹⁶

All bourbon is whiskey, but not every whiskey is bourbon.¹⁷ The legal definition of bourbon varies somewhat from country to country, but many trade agreements require that the name "bourbon" be reserved for products made in the United States.¹⁸ In the world of alcoholic beverages, such “appellations” are common. For example, in many countries, sparkling wine may be called “champagne” only if it was produced in the Champagne region of France.¹⁹

The Federal Standards of Identity for Distilled Spirits, codified at 27 CFR §5.22(b)(1)(i), state that bourbon made for U.S. consumption must be:

- Produced in the United States.
- Made from a grain mixture that is at least 51% corn.
- Aged in new, charred oak containers.
- Distilled to no more than 160 (U.S.) proof (80% alcohol by volume)
- Entered into the container for aging at no more than 125 proof (62.5% alcohol by volume).
- Bottled (like other whiskeys) at 80 proof or more (40% alcohol by volume)

Although aging is a key quality factor of interest to bourbon experts, the standards do not specify any minimum specified duration for its aging period. In the United States, products aged for as little as three months are sold as bourbon. However, any bourbon aged less than four years must include an age statement on its label.

A bourbon that meets the above U.S. requirements for bourbon in general, has been aged for a minimum of two years, and does not have added coloring, flavoring, or other spirits may be, but is not required to be, called *straight bourbon*. For straight bourbon, additional requirements apply:

- Bourbon labeled as *straight* that has been aged under four years must be labeled with the duration of its aging.
- Bourbon that has an age stated on its label must be labeled with the age of the youngest whiskey in the bottle (not counting the age of any added neutral-grain spirits in a bourbon that is labeled as blended, as neutral-grain spirits are not considered whiskey under the regulations and are not required to be aged at all).

Bottled-in-bond bourbon is a sub-category of straight bourbon aged at least four years.

Bourbon that is labeled *blended* (or as a *blend*) may contain added coloring, flavoring, and other spirits, such as un-aged neutral grain spirits, but at least 51% of the product must be straight bourbon.

"High rye bourbon" is not a legally defined term but usually means a bourbon with 20–35% rye. "High wheat bourbon" is described as milder than high-rye varieties.

The U.S. regulations for labeling and advertising bourbon apply only to products made for consumption within the United States; they do not apply to distilled spirits made for export. However, Canadian law requires products labeled bourbon to be made in the United States and also to conform to the requirements that apply within the United States.

In countries other than the United States and Canada, products labeled bourbon would not necessarily adhere to the same standards. For example, in the European Union (EU), products labeled as bourbon must have been made in the United States but are not required to conform to U.S. regulations. In the EU, any product referred to as whiskey or whisky is required to be aged for at least three years. Consequently, products sold in the EU as "bourbon whiskey," must have been aged for three years or more.

Bourbon may be produced anywhere in the United States where it is legal to distill spirits, but most brands are produced in Kentucky, where bourbon production has a strong historical association. As of 2018, approximately 95 percent of all bourbon is produced in Kentucky, according to the Kentucky Distillers' Association. In that year, there were 68 whiskey distilleries in Kentucky, an increase of 250 percent from ten years earlier. Within the state there were more than 8.1 million barrels of bourbon in storage and undergoing the aging process, nearly two barrels for each of the 4.3 million people in Kentucky. Of course, most of the stored spirits would, after bottling, be shipped to markets outside the state.

Bourbon's name came from the French royal family, and there is a Bourbon County in Kentucky, only a few miles from Woodford. Not surprisingly, the county seat of Bourbon County is called Paris, and the county seat of Woodford is Versailles. Bourbon County was named for the French royal family in gratitude for the assistance of Louis XVI in the American Revolutionary War. The largest city, Louisville, was named for him, and a statue depicting the hapless monarch is a prominent feature of the city's downtown district.

Interestingly, the distinctive Kentucky version of whiskey came to be called bourbon, not because of the Kentucky county with the same name, but because of its popularity in New Orleans, Louisiana. In the 19th century, as now, Bourbon Street is the heart of the entertainment district in the bustling port city. Merchants had begun shipping Kentucky whiskey, in charred barrels, down the Kentucky, Ohio, and Mississippi River to New Orleans, where the whiskey came to be known as “the kind of whiskey that is sold on Bourbon Street.”²⁰ By the 1820s, “bourbon” was being used to differentiate corn-based whiskey from Kentucky from Pennsylvania’s rye whiskey.²¹

How is bourbon made?

Immigrants to the British American colonies brought with them know-how about distillation of spirits from whatever grains, fruits, or vegetables were available in their homelands. During the colonial period, rum, gin, and brandy were the strong drinks of choice in the American colonies. But during and after the Revolutionary War, whiskey took over as the leading spirit, as neither it nor the ingredients needed to make it had to be imported.²² Whiskey is produced from corn, a crop native to the Americas, and farmers discovered that a practical way to deal with an abundance of corn was to distill it into whiskey for home use or sale. Many Americans consumed whiskey daily, as a substitute for water, and considered it to have medicinal value. It was even used as money when there was a shortage of currency

A recipe for bourbon calls for corn, other grains, water, mash known as “backset” (sour mash saved from a previous distillation), yeast, and charred oak barrels. The corn and other grains must be harvested then milled. The next step is to boil the milled field corn into a porridge or mash. A portion of backset is added to ensure a consistent flavor. When the corn has boiled long enough, the temperature is lowered and ground rye or wheat, depending on the desired combination, may be added. Finally, malted barley is added to the mash. The cooked mash is pumped into the fermenting vats, and yeast and more backset are added. Enzymes in the barley help convert starches in the grains to sugar, which the yeast then ferments into alcohol.

Fermented mash is pumped to the still room. At Woodford Reserve today, three copper pot stills are heated to allow distillation to take place, as shown on the photo on the next page. (The distiller plans to expand capacity due to the high demand for its product.²³) The resulting alcohol is collected and stored in the cisterns for warehousing in barrels. Filled barrels are rolled to the warehouses on the Woodford Reserve “barrel run” for storage. The clever barrel run was an innovation in 1934.²⁴

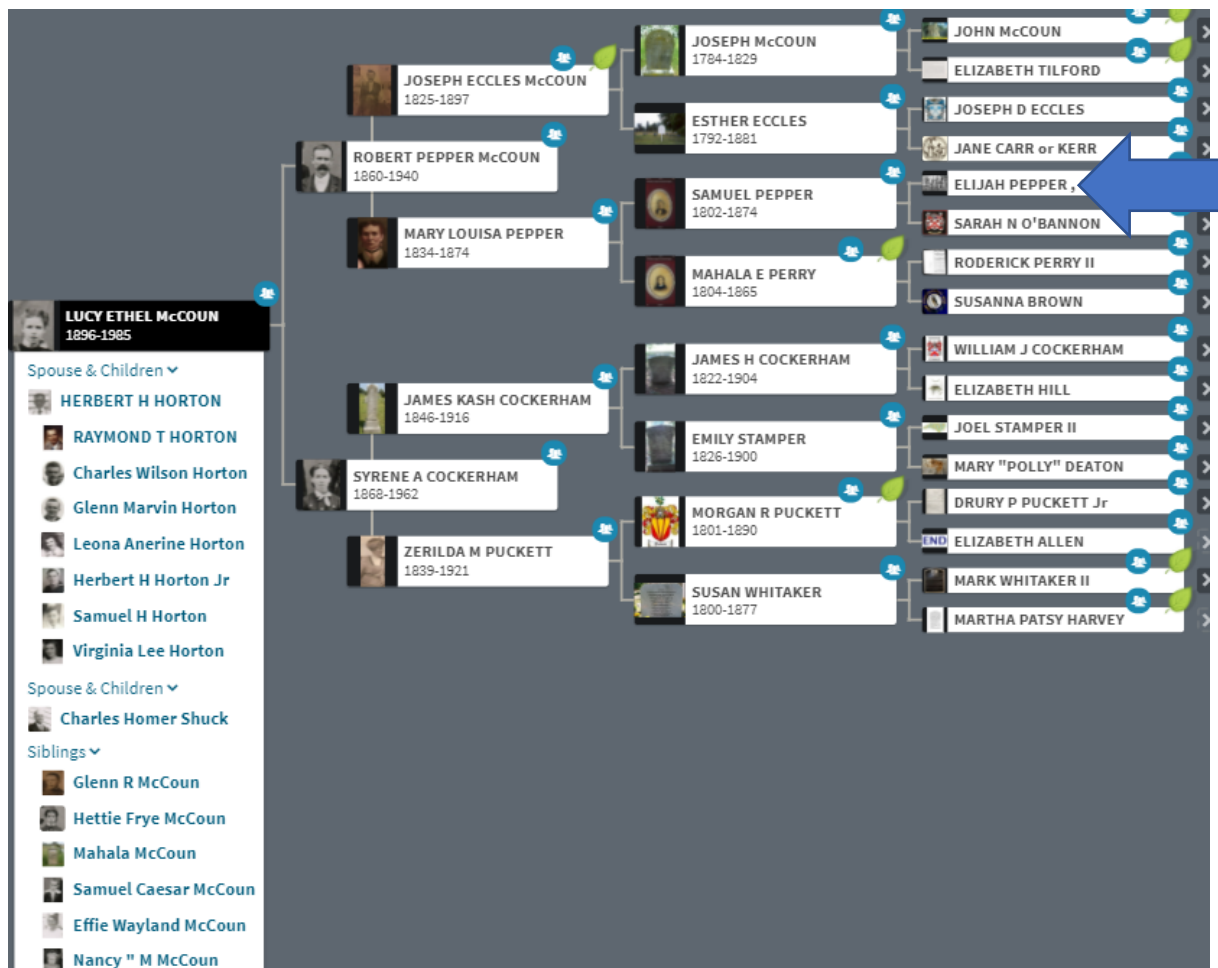
The properties of local water explain why distilleries in the Kentucky Bluegrass region dominate bourbon production. The high concentrations of limestone unique to the area filter out the iron in the water as it flows over the rock, resulting in sweet-tasting mineral water.

Elijah located his Glenss Creek distillery near three springs burbling water near the Creek. In later years, the creek was no longer pristine due to upstream agriculture and other activities. Today water used in Woodford Reserve bourbon comes from deep wells on the property but continues to benefit from the filtration properties of the limestone bedrock.²⁵



Placing Elijah Pepper in the family tree

Elijah Pepper was the great grandfather of our great grandfather Robert Pepper McCoun. That makes Elijah our great great great great (4x great grandfather). He is part of the McCoun quartile of our family tree, shown below (the others being Horton, Bryan, and Sprowl).



Elijah Pepper's ancestry was predominantly English. His great grandfather Samuel Pepper was born in 1676 in Nottinghamshire (shown on a map below) and migrated to Augusta County, Virginia in 1700. The immigrant was our 7x great grandfather and his grandson, the father of Elijah, was his namesake. Other men in our family named Samuel, such as Elijah's son Samuel, our great uncle Samuel Caesar McCoun, Samuel Hayward Horton, and Samuel LeBarre Horton may have been given their names because of this Pepper family naming tradition.

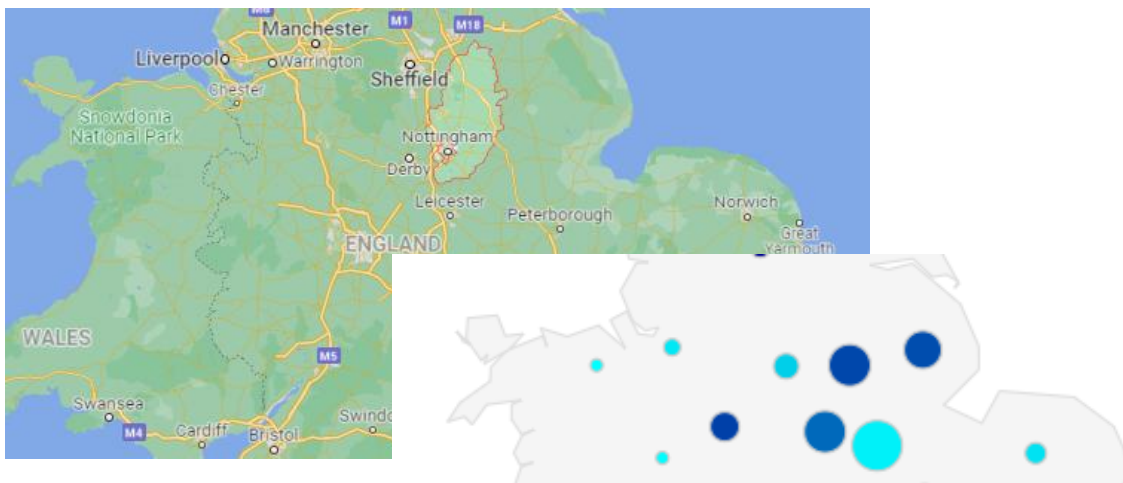
Not surprisingly, the Elijah's YDNA haplogroup is R-M 269, the predominant haplogroup of males in the British Isles, Ireland, and western continental Europe. We know this because two participants in the Pepper surname project under FamilyTreeDNA descend from Elijah's father, Samuel Pepper, born in 1725.²⁶

Origin of name Pepper

Some say the name was a corruption of the Norman name, Pipard.²⁷ A Norman named Gilbert Pipard died in England in 1189.²⁸ Several manors in England include Pipard in their names, such as Clyve Pipard, today Clyffe Pypard, in North Wiltshire.²⁹ Others say that Pepper is an occupational surname from Pepperer, a dealer in pepper or spices.³⁰ A third theory, which is our family tradition, maintains that the name Pepper derives from Culpeper, Culpepper, or Colepepper. This theory is unsubstantiated. No known ancestor spelled his name Culpeper or a variant. The story continues to be handed down because the leading history of Woodford County, written in 1894, was in accord with the interesting but unproven family tradition:³¹

The county of Culpeper Va. was named in honor of Sir John Culpepper,³² the progenitor of the Culpeper family in America, but the family name was changed by Elijah Pepper, the pioneer of Kentucky, after his removal to this state.

If the family surname were indeed derived from Culpeper, that name change occurred many years before Elijah Pepper.



Pepper, an unusual English surname, was at the time of the 1881 census and in recent years more common in Nottinghamshire and neighboring counties than in other parts of England.³³ The blue dots on the map above that is a slice of the English Midlands show the incidence in 1881 of Pepper-surnamed persons in Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, and neighboring counties.

Before we leave the topic of the surname's origin, or the Midlands, let us visit the churchyard of St. John the Baptist, Stamford, Lincolnshire, where the tomb of William Pepper, who died in 1783 at the age of 46, bears this inscription:³⁴

Tho' hot my name, yet mild my nature,
I bore good - will to every creature.
I brewed fine ale, and sold it too,
And unto each I gave his due.

Whether or not the Lincolnshire ale brewer William Pepper was kin, his headstone's inscription delivers a touch of levity to the otherwise somber topic of our certain deaths. This poem highlights what most people enjoy when they hear someone has the name Pepper—its association with a spice that sits on the table rather than in a spice rack, so often is it used to impart a more interesting taste to other foods.

Elijah and Sarah Pepper's life together

Railey's Woodford County history³⁵ is so widely cited that it is spelled out here:

Elijah Pepper, accompanied by his wife, Sarah Neville O'Bannon, and his brother-in-law John O'Bannon, came to Kentucky in about 1790. ...Elijah Pepper and John O'Bannon built a distillery just below the big spring that gushes from a cave back of the courthouse in which they distilled whiskey in a limited way. This partnership continued for several years, or until Elijah Pepper bought a large tract of land seven miles below the spring on Glenn's Creek, when the partnership was dissolved. John O'Bannon continued the distillation of whiskey at Versailles. Elijah Pepper erected on his farm on Glenn's Creek a comfortable log house on an elevated slope above the creek that faces the Versailles and Millville Road, and in the creek below he erected a distillery plant where he continued to manufacture "Old Pepper." The residence is still standing but in recent years has been weatherboarded. ...On his farm he raised the grain that entered into the manufacture of his liquid product.

Elijah Pepper and Sarah Neville O'Bannon had eight children, the youngest three of which were triplets—Amanda, Matilda, and Oscar—who were born on 12 October 1809:

1. William O'Bannon Pepper, 1797-1831; married a first cousin, Alithe Pepper, whose father was Elijah's brother.
2. Elizabeth Holton Pepper, 1800-1870; married John Sullenger.
3. Samuel Pepper, 1802-1874; married Mahala Perry, 1804-1865; they were our ancestors.
4. Presley Neville Pepper, 1804-1881; married Eleanor Wallace Perry; kinship unknown.
5. Ann "Nancy" Neville Pepper, 1807-1892; married Sewell Garnett.
6. Matilda Pepper, 1809-1842, married John B. Perry, a brother of Mahala Perry.
7. Amanda F. Pepper, 1809-1963; married her first cousin John O'Bannon, the son of William O'Bannon, a brother of Sarah Neville O'Bannon.
8. Oscar Neville Pepper, 1809-1865; married Nannie Edwards, Mahala Perry's stepsister.

The census reports provide a few details about Elijah and Sarah Pepper's family and work. Elijah appeared in the 1800 U.S. tax list for Woodford County, Kentucky, indicating he acquired property before that date.³⁶ For reasons unknown, at the time of the 1810 census, Elijah, Sarah, and their children were living in Bourbon County, northeast of Lexington.³⁷ Little is known

about the family's three years there except that Elijah then owned nine slaves. By 1812, Elijah, Sarah, and their family had returned to Woodford County, where he was paying tax on 200 acres of property along Glenns Creek. In the 1820 census, the household consisted of nine white persons and 12 enslaved individuals, three slaves more than in 1810. By then, he had increased his land holdings to 350 acres.

Elijah Pepper's farm, mill, distillery and home on Glenns Creek

Considering that corn is the principal component of bourbon (other than water), it is not surprising that corn was planted in many acres on Elijah's farm. In fact, the most time-consuming phase of bourbon production involves raising the grains, i.e., corn, barley, and rye. Field corn, not the sweet corn such as that eaten on the cob, is the type grown for bourbon production. The corn must be harvested then milled, explaining the proximity of Elijah's grist mill³⁸ to his distillery.³⁹

A major attraction of the site was the excellent supply of pure limestone water. Three springs flowed near the banks of the creek. The Grassy Springs Branch of Glenns Creek coursed through limestone cliffs with enough force to power Elijah's grist mill. During those early years, distilling was carried out only four to five months of the year, using copper stills.⁴⁰

The original Elijah Pepper distillery was upstream of today's Woodford Reserve Distillery and, unlike today's distillery, was located on the east side of Glenns Creek. Log construction was used, consistent with that used for the Pepper farmstead.⁴¹ As shown in the 2012 photo below, which accompanied a description of the bicentennial celebration at Woodford Reserve,⁴² the remains of the original distillery provide an idea of the building's original size and construction. Nearby are the remains of a stone cistern that also was part of the early distillery operation.⁴³ The only part of the original Pepper settlement that remains intact is the house.⁴⁴ Like all structures of that era, the house was built of timbers on foundations of stone.

The hillside arising on the east side of Glenns Creek provided a perfect building site for Elijah Pepper's home, completed in 1812. It is a two-story house with a massive exterior limestone chimney, shown in the first photo on the next page. The original, central portion of the house was constructed of logs and limestone mortar.

Additions were made to the house four times during its history⁴⁵ to accommodate a



PHOTOS BY CHARLES BERTRAM | cbertram@herald-leader.com
Master Distiller Chris Morris stood by the remains of the original spring house at the Grassy Spring branch of Glen's Creek as he led a two-hour anniversary tour that also included the original 1812 Pepper house, the original distillery site and the present distillery.

succession of owners with large families. One such addition was the front porch, which today can be reached only from a first-floor room such as the one visible in the second photo below. A 1936 photo reportedly showed a wide staircase descending from the porch to the front yard. The black-and-white photos of the house on page four and below were taken by Jean Wolf in 1999 and are associated with the registration of the home, in addition to the nearby distillery site, on the National Register of Historic Places.⁴⁶

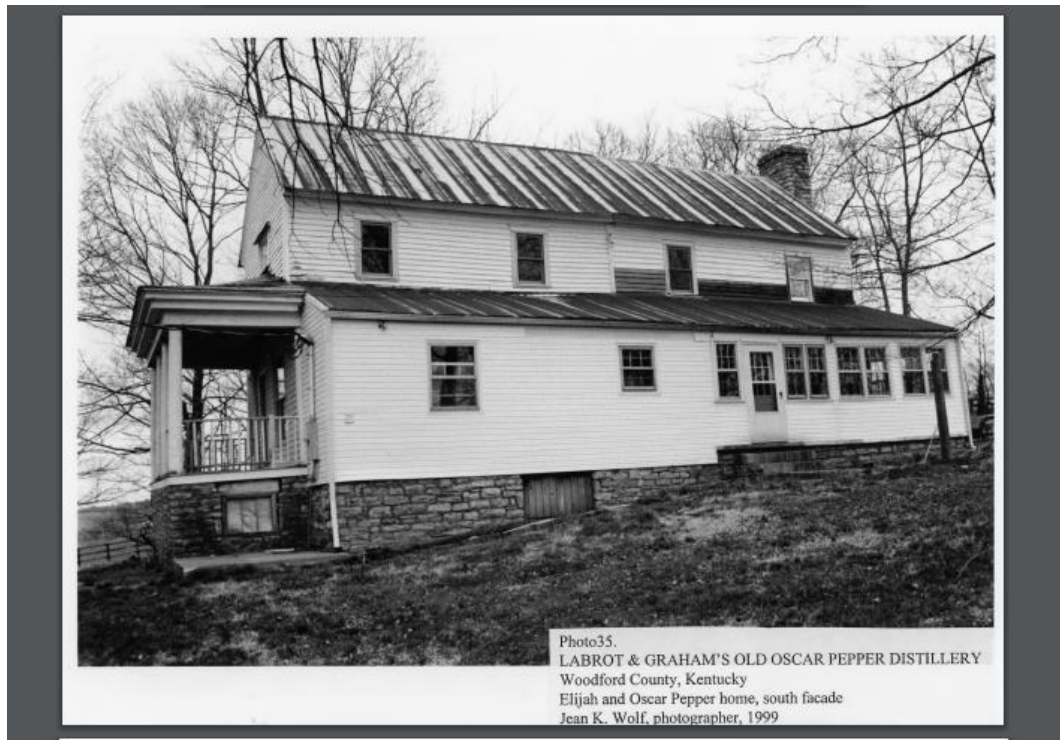
With the purchase by the Brown-Forman Corporation of the current distillery in 1995, and in 1997 of the homestead and site of the original distillery, unitary ownership of all key elements of the history of bourbon at the site was achieved for the first time since 1869.



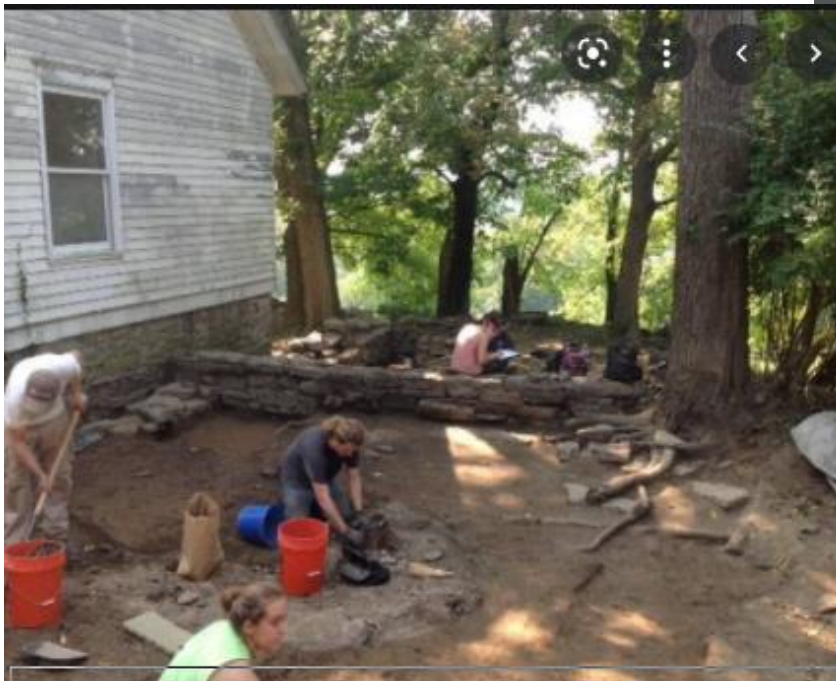
Photo32.
LABROT & GRAHAM'S OLD OSCAR PEPPER DISTILLERY
Woodford County, Kentucky
Elijah and Oscar Pepper home, west and north facades.
Jean K. Wolf, photographer, 1999

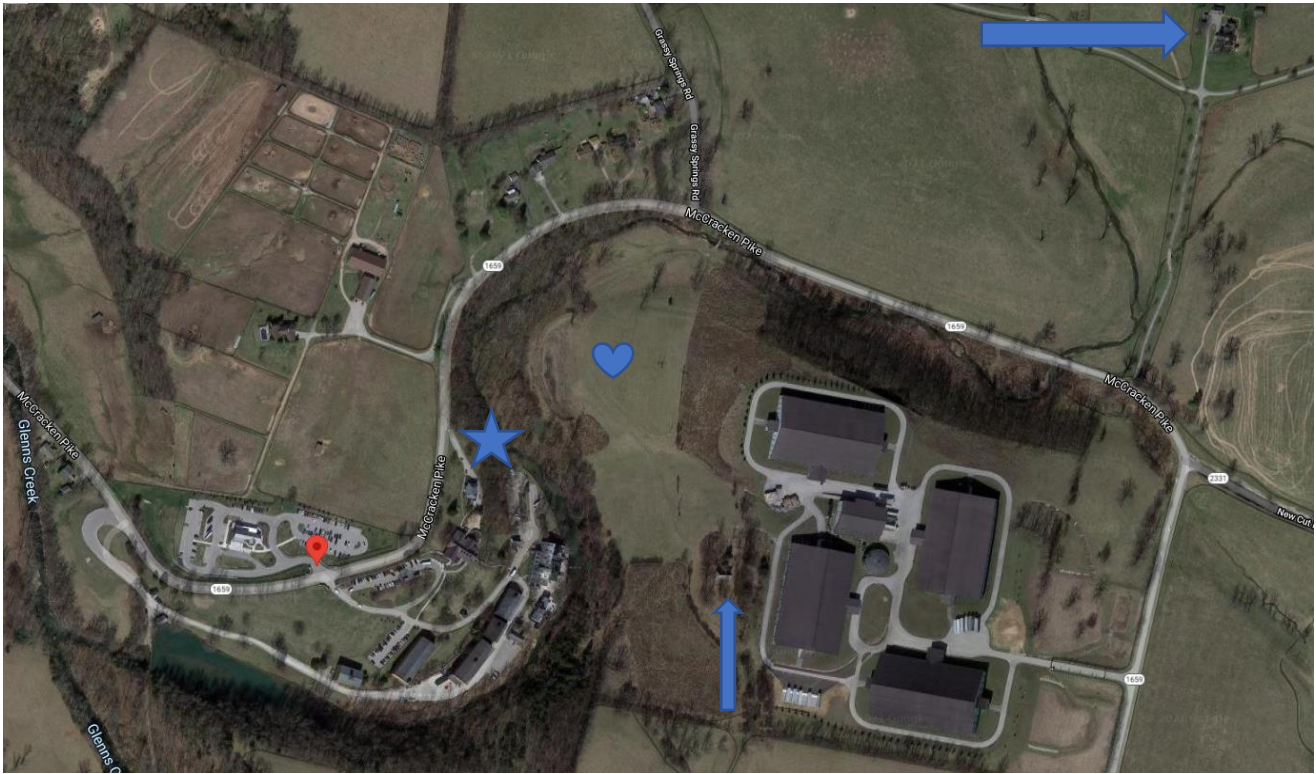


Photo33.
LABROT & GRAHAM'S OLD OSCAR PEPPER DISTILLERY
Woodford County, Kentucky
Elijah and Oscar Pepper home, east facade
Jean K. Wolf, photographer, 1999



An archaeological dig at the site of the Elijah Pepper home has unearthed clues about the lives of families who have lived in the home,⁴⁷ but it would be surprising if any artifacts are found that date back to the time of Elijah and his family..





The map above shows the locations of present and past structures important in family history:

- The star shows the likely location of Elijah's 1812 still building.
- The red marker is at the entrance to the Woodford Reserve Distillery on the site first developed by Elijah's son Oscar in 1838.
- The arrow at bottom center points to the 1812 Elijah Pepper home.
- The arrow at the northeast corner points to Sweet Lawn, built in 1831 for Elijah's son, Samuel. In 1865 Samuel sold the property to his son-in-law Joseph Eccles McCoun and daughter Mary Louise.
- The heart marks the likely location of the property of our 4x great grandfather, Roderick Perry.
- Tree-lined Glenss Creek forms the dark green S-shaped curve that determines the shape of McCracken Pike, looping to its west. The Creek encircles the Woodford Reserve Distillery, which sits on property shaped like a crescent moon.

As may be seen on the map, Elijah's distillery was only a short walk downhill from his home. It is certain that, when he returned each evening, the particular aromas clinging to his clothing revealed the stage of bourbon production then underway.

The corn, barley, and rye used to make bourbon must be dried for long periods of time. Drying grains emit a bread-like smell, amplified when the grains were milled. Sweet aromas arose from the vats where the fermented mash was brewing, filling not only the distillery but the nearby countryside. During part of the history of the Glenss Creek distillery, after completion of the brewing process the spent grains would be dried for use as a nutritious and hearty feed for livestock. This drying process emitted some of the stronger aromas associated with distilleries, and some distilleries simply sell their brewer's grains to animal feed companies. A hallmark of genuine Kentucky bourbon, adopted by James Crow during his service as distiller during Oscar

Pepper's time, is maturation of the spirit in charred oak barrels. The distiller's stockpile of barrels awaiting fill would emit a pleasant smell reminiscent of a campfire or fireplace.



Figure 2 Mash brewing at Woodford Reserve.⁴⁸

A chemist would explain that the various distillery smells are esters, compounds created during fermentation when fatty acids and alcohols interact. Each ester has its own aroma, many with fruity notes. Fortunately, most people like the smells that waft around distilleries, and out in the beautiful country surrounding Glens Creek, they would also experience the fresh country smells of turned earth, new-mown grass, freshly cut corn, and honeysuckle clinging to trees and stone fences along McCracken Pike before June turned into July. These pleasant smells would be punctuated with olfactory hints that humans were not the only residents of the area. Those traveling through might occasionally locate the farms with large populations of cattle, sheep, pigs, or horses by smell as well as sight, but this would be atypical today among farms that pride themselves on strict standards of cleanliness. But human residents of the region would receive occasional pungent and unmistakable aromatic reminders that the skunk was a native of the region long before humans.

Elijah Pepper's contributions to the community

Elijah Pepper was interested not only in farming and the bourbon business but also in improving his community. He supported local education by helping to purchase the land on which was constructed a school. According to an account written in 1946,⁴⁹

On Glen's Creek was a schoolhouse built probably before 1827, when Pluright and Ruth Sisk deeded to Elijah Pepper, James Garnett, and Bernard Gaines a lot "for the use and benefit of a school whereon a stone Schoolhouse now stands known by the name of 'Glen's Creek English Institute.'" In 1830 it was advertised by J.H.W. Insett, Jr., in the *Frankfort Commentator* under the title "Glenn's Creek Select School." He described it as being handsomely built of stone, and situated in a respectable and healthy neighborhood," and stated that board could be furnished in the families of Charles Cotton and Bernard Gaines. In that era of private schools, it flourished for years, but was finally abandoned, and the building was recently demolished.

Elijah also supported local religion and culture. He served as a trustee for the Glen's Creek Republican Meeting House, an ecumenical meeting house for religious and secular purposes:

In 1830 a lot on the hill between Millville and the river was deeded by Michael Mitchell to Bernard Gaines, Charles Ware, Thomas Winn, Elijah Pepper, William Hawkins, Michael Mitchell, and Randolph R. Darnell, trustees of the Glen's Creek Republican

This is a compilation of a number of early maps, including Filson's, Munsell's maps of 1818 and 1834, and several others, besides plats made for individuals by Richard Fox, Willis Blanton, and other surveyors. Names of streams and settlements are taken from the maps on which they first appear, though many of the names of homesteads are from the Howitt map of 1861.

Roundly speaking, this represents the neighborhood about 1800, though many anachronisms are apparent. Names of later sites are put in parentheses, earliest roads are marked by -----, later ones by -----, and county boundaries by -----.

Elijah's final days

In the 1830 census, the Elijah Pepper household consisted of eight free white persons (shown below) and 23 enslaved individuals.⁵⁴ The age and gender breakdown of the 23 enslaved members of the household in 1830 was as follows: six male slaves and five female slaves under age 10; one male slave and three female slaves between 10 and 23; three male slaves and three female slaves between 24 and 35; and one male slave and one female slave between 36 and 54.

Slaves under my ward- ship, free, or col- ored.	NAMES or HEADS OF FAMILIES.	FREE WHITE PERSONS, (INCLUDING HEADS OF FAMILIES.)																													
		MALES.															FEMALES.														
		Under five years of age.	5 to 10	10 to 15	15 to 20	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50	50 to 60	60 to 70	70 to 80	80 to 90	90 to 100	100, &c.	Under five years of age.	5 to 10	10 to 15	15 to 20	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50	50 to 60	60 to 70	70 to 80	80 to 90	90 to 100	100, &c.				
		Or twenty and under thirty.	Or thirty and under forty.	Or forty and under fifty.	Or fifty and under sixty.	Or sixty and under seventy.	Or seventy and under eighty.	Or eighty and under ninety.	Or ninety and under one hundred.	Or one hundred and upwards.	Or twenty and under thirty.	Or thirty and under forty.	Or forty and under fifty.	Or fifty and under sixty.	Or sixty and under seventy.	Or seventy and under eighty.	Or eighty and under ninety.	Or ninety and under one hundred.	Or one hundred and upwards.	Or twenty and under thirty.	Or thirty and under forty.	Or forty and under fifty.	Or fifty and under sixty.	Or sixty and under seventy.	Or seventy and under eighty.	Or eighty and under ninety.	Or ninety and under one hundred.	Or one hundred and upwards.			
Wiley	Edwards		1	1				1						2	1	1	1		1												
John Dandy	Mary		1			1		1								2															
Lewis	Fender,	1	1	1		1													1												
Charles	Maro								1																	1					
Elijah	Pepper	1				2				1				1			1	1								1					

On 17 February 1831, six days before his 23 February death at the age of 61, Elijah Pepper made a will, which was proved the following month.⁵⁵

In the name of God amen. I Elijah Pepper of Woodford County Kentucky being weak in body but of sound mind knowing that it is appointed to all men once to die do hereby make and ordain this my last will and Testament in manner and form, to wit.

1st. It is my will and desire that after all my just debts are paid and my three children that are yet with me and unprovided for are made equal with what I have given the rest. That is that Presly Nevil Pepper in addition to one Horse Saddle and bridle already given him worth one hundred dollars shall receive one negro girl or boy worth three hundred and twenty-five dollars, 2 Beds and furniture worth one hundred Dollars, one bureau, Table [illegible] to the amount of seventy-five dollars.

It is my wish that Oscar Pepper receive in addition to a horse saddle and Bridle already rec'd worth one hundred dollars one negro girl or boy worth three hundred and twenty-five dollars, 2 Beds and furniture worth one hundred dollars, one Bureau & table etc. worth seventy-five dollars.

And it is my wish that my daughter Nancy Nevill Pepper receive in addition to one Saddle & Bridle already rec'd worth thirty dollars one horse worth seventy dollars one negro girl or boy worth three hundred and twenty-five dollars 2 Beds & furniture worth one hundred dollars One Bureau, Table etc. worth seventy-five dollars--

Then it is my wish and desire that all the rest of my Estate both real and personal remain in the possession of my beloved wife Sarah Pepper for her use and benefit, during her natural life or widowhood but in case she marry that she takes her thirds.

And it is my wish and desire that at her death or marriage that the Balance of my children now living (that is) Elizabeth Sullinger, Sam'l Pepper, Nancy N. Pepper, Presly N. Pepper, Amanda F. O'Bannon, Matilda Perry and Oscar Pepper together with my grandson Elijah Enoch Pepper shall after giving to my daughter Nancy Nevil Pepper a negro girl or boy worth three hundred dollars over and above the rest and charging to my son Sam'l Pepper nine hundred dollars without Interest on the land given him. Then make an equal division of all the rest of Estate both real and personal --

And lastly it is my wish and I do hereby appoint Presly Neville O'Bannon and John O'Bannon Executors of this my last will and Testament.

In Testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this seventeenth day of February 1831.

E. Pepper

Any admiration we might feel for an ancestor who founded the Kentucky bourbon industry is tempered by the dismay we feel when bequests of enslaved persons lack references to their names but refer to them by in terms of their fungible monetary value, \$325, which today is worth more than \$10,000.⁵⁶

The extent of Elijah's agricultural and distilling business is suggested by his estate inventory. It listed hemp on hand and eight acres ready to break, flax and flax seed, wheat, rye, 41 barrels of whiskey (1560 gallons), 6 stills such as the one shown on page four, 74 mash tubs, kegs, stands, 22 horses, 113 hogs, 95 sheep, 30 lambs, and over 30 head of cattle. He owned numerous types of equipment for farming and timbering. Household possessions included carpeting, silver, and furnishings indicative of wealth.⁵⁷ (Hemp was an important crop in Kentucky for several centuries. It was used to make rope, paper, and coarse fiber such as that used for ship sails.⁵⁸)

Management of the Pepper distillery by Sarah Neville O'Bannon Pepper

After Elijah's death, Sarah continued and managed the distillery business with the help of her son Oscar, who took it over in 1838. Under her late husband's will, all his real property had passed to Sarah, with distribution to her children only upon her death or remarriage.⁵⁹ The same was true of any other property not specifically bequeathed to one of their children. Estate records show that Sarah purchased much of her late husband's farm and distillery equipment, including "stills and tubs etc. in still house."

Every indication is that Sarah, at age 60, was "fully up to the task" of running the distillery.⁶⁰ Although she probably had little or no formal education, historians believe Sarah had already during her husband's lifetime been entrusted with aspects of running their large farm and the

distillery business, including purchase of the farm and distillery equipment detailed in Elijah's estate inventory as well as the furnishings that graced the family home.⁶¹

Sarah was a member of Virginia families known for their participation in leadership roles in the military, government, and business. She was the niece of General John Neville (1731-1803), a prominent officer in the Revolutionary War and personal friend of George Washington. Her brother, John O'Bannon, also fought in the War, and he served in 1810 as a trustee of the city of Versailles⁶² and was Elijah's early business partner. Her brother Presley Neville O'Bannon was so prominent as an early leader in the U.S. Marines that even today the official anthem of the Marines alludes to his victory over the Barbary pirates at Tripoli: "From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli; we fight our country's battles in the air, on land and sea...."⁶³

And in lauding these achievements of Sarah's male kin, we should not overlook the fact that she had successfully raised eight children, including birthing and raising a set of triplets, and she managed a household where there probably was no demarcation between homelife and her responsibilities helping to manage the family business.

In 1838, Sarah sold her interest in the distillery to her son, Oscar. The timeline that is a companion to this biography details later events in the Pepper bourbon distilleries and their successors.

Below: Glenns Creek on 9 November 2021, close to the location of the original Pepper still.



I hope you enjoy reading my biographies as much as I enjoy writing them. Please feel free to write me with suggestions. The original version of this biography, shared with family and others in October 2021, included a timeline of Pepper family involvement in the bourbon business, with a particular focus upon the years in which Oscar ran the Pepper bourbon business as well as the bourbon enterprises of Oscar's son, James.

The timeline will be published in updated form in 2022. During a trip to Woodford County in November 2021, the author collected a vast amount of information about Pepper family involvement in bourbon production, after the death of Elijah. This information needs to be digested and incorporated into the updated timeline.

Linda Horton, lrhorton@comcast.net
7 January 2022

¹ Their marriage bond was dated 9 February 1794. <https://www.genealogy.com/ftm/f/o/r/Charles-W-Ford-CA/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0357.html>

² For the disestablishment of the Church of England and freedom from taxation for religious purposes (transcribed & indexed in Magazine of Virginia Genealogy, Vol. 35, No. 2, Spring 1997) http://digitool1.lva.lib.va.us:8881/R/RNMP6KJK6JUJT4JPLIFGVJ64IY7BV1IEXMFF8CVY4FYVMUB42X-04237?func=search-advanced-go&LOCAL_BASE=1505&ADJACENT=N&find_code1=WPA&request1=legpet&find_operator=AND&find_code2=WRD&request2=000606093&find_operator2=AND&find_code3=&request3=&pds_handle=GUEST

³ “Act of Toleration (1689), Encyclopedia of Virginia <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/act-of-toleration-1689/>

⁴ For those of us who descend from Ethel Sprowl Bryan, John Monroe was our second cousin six times removed. Our relationship to James Monroe, the fifth president, also is second cousin six times removed.

⁵ Gott, John K., *A History of Marshall (formerly Salem), Fauquier County, Virginia*, Delinger’s, Middleburg Press, Middleburg, Virginia, 1959, at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b2820973&view=1up&seq=11>

⁶ For those of us who descend from Elizabeth Hill (1796-1880), who married William John Cockerham, John Marshall was our fourth cousin six times removed. Although John Marshall was only about five years older than Elijah Pepper, and each grew up a member of a large family in a modest log cabin on what was then the Virginia western frontier, there is no evidence that John and Elijah knew each other.

⁷ Kegley, *Virginia Frontier: the beginning of the southwest*, Southwest Virginia Historical Society, 1938.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Act of 9 December 1791, cited in the blog Genealogy.com at <https://www.genealogy.com/forum/surnames/topics/pepper/981/> http://digitool1.lva.lib.va.us:8881/R/84R3VB14L8YMN4VPL2QFAGMMLH1QFMMDFGA1VELPYRA6GRM6V8-01738?func=results-jump-full&set_entry=000005&set_number=133799&base=GEN01-ARC01

¹⁰ Their marriage bond was dated 9 February 1794. <https://www.genealogy.com/ftm/f/o/r/Charles-W-Ford-CA/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0357.html>

¹¹ Among these migrants was a well-known explorer, Simon Kenton. <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~daisy/trek.htm>

¹² Heal, Deborah. <http://deborahheal.com/flatboats-ohio-river/> 8 May 2015. The image is from this website. Ms. Heal writes historical novels.

¹³ Id. “In 1788, 323 boats passed down the Ohio, carrying 5,885 people, 2,714 horses, 937 cattle, 245 sheep, 24 hogs and 267 wagons.” <https://adamsfamilydna.com/2012/12/14/flatboats-and-ohio-rivier-migration/>

¹⁴ Railey, William Edward, *Woodford County (Second Installment), Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, May 1920, Vol. 18 No. 53 at 59, 82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23368518>

¹⁵ Photo courtesy of Woodford Reserve.

¹⁶ Reigler, *Kentucky Bourbon Country: The Essential Travel Guide*, University Press of Kentucky, 2013, at 10-11; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourbon_whiskey

¹⁷ <https://recipes.howstuffworks.com/whiskey-bourbon-difference.htm#:~:text=Yes..to%20be%20a%20certain%20percentage>

¹⁸ A concurrent resolution of the U.S. Congress passed on 4 May 1964, recognized bourbon whiskey as a “distinctive product of the United States.”

¹⁹ <https://www.winecountry.com/blog/sparkling-wine-vs-champagne/>

²⁰ Kiniry, Laura, “Where Bourbon Really Got Its Name and More Tips on America’s Native Spirit,” in *Smithsonian Magazine*, 13 June 2013, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/where-bourbon-really-got-its-name-and-more-tips-on-americas-native-spirit-145879/>

²¹ Reigler, Susan, *Kentucky Bourbon Country: The Essential Travel Guide*, University Press of Kentucky, 2013, at 14-15. The section on how bourbon is made relied heavily on this useful book.

²² <https://www.history.com/news/whiskey-america-economy>

²³ <https://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/bourbon/article254858452.html>

²⁴ National Historic Landmark Nomination, Labrot & Graham’s Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, prepared by Jean K. Wolf, at 11. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/bc1dea5b-c4a1-4f23-b9d4-8d30d3e73dce> [hereinafter National Landmark Nomination Old Oscar Pepper Distillery]. A link to the historic designation, achieved on 7 November 1995, is at ([#95001272](#)).

²⁵ Id. 14.

²⁶ Apparently neither test taker has upgraded his test to the Big Y/700 level, which would provide more information about the origin of the patriline of the Pepper family and the distance of the relationship between two men who match on YDNA results. <https://www.familytreedna.com/public/pepper?iframe=yresults>

²⁷ <https://forebears.io/surnames/pepper>, citing Lower, Mark Antony, *Patronymica Britannica* (1860); Montague, George William, *History and genealogy of Peter Montague of Nansemond and Lancaster counties, Virginia and his descendants, 1621-1894*. Press of Carpenter and Morehouse, 1894, at 433, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p15012coll1/id/22934/> https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/13959/images/dvm_GenMono000293-00260-1?pId=474

²⁸ Dugdale, *The baronage of England, or An historical account of the lives and most memorable actions of our English nobility in the Saxons time to the Norman conquest, and from thence, of those who had their rise before the end of King Henry the Third’s reign deduced from public records, antient historians, and other authorities*. Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2011

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A36794.0001.001/1:12.10?rgn=div2;view=fulltext> See also <https://fabpedigree.com/s080/f944860.htm>

²⁹ <https://www.clyffepypard-bushton.com/about-our-community/>

³⁰ <https://forebears.io/surnames/pepper>, citing Harrison, Henry, *Surnames of the United Kingdom* (1912); Black, George Fraser, *The Surnames of Scotland* (1946); Smith, Elsdon Coles, *Dictionary of American Family Names* (1956).

³¹ Railey, William Edward, *Woodford County (Second Installment), Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, May 1920, Vol. 18 No. 53 at 59, 82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23368518> Elijah Pepper's grandson, James E. Pepper, repeated the legend that Elijah had been born with the surname Culpeper but shortened it to Pepper. <https://jameseppepper.com/old-pepperhistory/>

³² John Colepeper, 1st Baron Colepeper of Thoresway (c 1600-1660) was an English royalist who was an influential counselor to King Charles I during the English Civil War. The king awarded Colepeper with a peerage and landholdings in Virginia. John never visited Virginia but his cousin, Thomas Colepeper (1602-1660) not only migrated to Virginia but settled there, where he died, leaving children and establishing the Colepeper family in America.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Colepeper,_1st_Baron_Colepeper

³³ <https://britishsurnames.co.uk/surname/pepper/map>

³⁴ Allen, Thomas, *The History of the County of Lincoln from the earliest period to the present time*, Vol. 2, John Saunders Junior, London & Lincoln, 1834, at 326.

https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_History_of_the_County_of_Lincoln/PEKV0mgoQmgC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Tho%27+hot+my+name,+yet+mild+my+nature,+I+bore+good+-+will+to+every+creature.+I+brewed+fine+ale,+and+sold+it+too,+And+unto+each+I+gave+his+due&pg=PA326&printsec=frontcover

³⁵ Railey, William Edward, *Woodford County (Second Installment), Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, May 1920, Vol. 18 No. 53 at 59, 82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23368518>

³⁶ Clift, G. Glenn. *Second Census of Kentucky, 1800*. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2005.

³⁷ http://www.historic-structures.com/ky/versailles/oscar_pepper_distillery.php

³⁸ The grist mill was demolished by 1901. National Landmark Nomination Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, *supra* note 25, at 9.

³⁹ http://www.historic-structures.com/ky/versailles/oscar_pepper_distillery.php

⁴⁰ National Landmark Nomination Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, *supra*, note 25.

⁴¹ http://www.historic-structures.com/ky/versailles/oscar_pepper_distillery.php

⁴² Patton, Janet, "Woodford Reserve travels 200 years back to its beginning: distillery holding special events for its Bicentennial," *Lexington Kentucky Herald-Leader*, 22 Aug 2012.

⁴³ National Landmark Nomination Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, *supra* note 25, at 24.

⁴⁴ Five Peppers Stirred the Copper Pot from Website Those Pre Pro Whiskey Men <http://pre-prowhiskeymen.blogspot.com/2017/01/five-peppers-stirred-copper-pot.html>

⁴⁵ National Landmark Nomination Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, *supra* note 25.

⁴⁶ NP Gallery Digital Asset Management System. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/540d2397-313f-41da-9397-6efc99365194>

⁴⁷ Patton, Janet, *Lexington Herald Leader*, Woodford distillery's past comes to light with archaeology dig, 14 October 2013. <http://www.kentucky.com/lexgoeat/bourbon/article44448783.html>

⁴⁸ Photo courtesy of Woodford Reserve.

⁴⁹ Darnell, Ermina Jett, *Forks of Elkhorn Church*, publisher the University of Virginia, 1946, at 12.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 13. "After the Baptist and Christian Churches were built at Millville in the nineties, the building was abandoned and eventually taken down. When Robert Watts bought the lot in 1938, the deed, in order to fulfill all legal requirements, had to be signed by a representative from each of the white Protestant churches in Woodford—twenty-five in all." *Id.*

⁵¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Republican_Party

⁵² National Landmark Nomination Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, *supra* note 25, at 27

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ National Archives and Records Administration; Ancestry.com. *1830 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Images reproduced by FamilySearch.

⁵⁵ Will of Elijah Pepper made 17 Feb 1831 and proved March 1831; Woodford County, Will Book I, page 24. Witnesses were John H. Berryman and Edward Shipp.

⁵⁶ <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1831?amount=325>

⁵⁷ This paragraph is from http://www.historic-structures.com/ky/versailles/oscar_pepper_distillery.php

⁵⁸ <https://www.farmcollector.com/farm-life/strategic-fibers/>

⁵⁹ After Sarah's death, distributions of real property to Oscar from his siblings are recorded in Woodford County Deed Book U at 747-748 and Deed Book Y at 477-478.

⁶⁰ *Five Peppers Stirred the Copper Pot*, <http://pre-prowhiskeymen.blogspot.com/2017/01/five-peppers-stirred-copper-pot.html> National Landmark Nomination Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, *supra* note 25.

⁶¹ National Landmark Nomination Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, *supra* note 25.

⁶² Railey, William Edward, *Woodford County (Second Installment)*, *Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, May 1920, Vol. 18 No. 53 at 59,82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23368518>

⁶³ Moskin, J. Robert, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, McGraw-Hill, 1982, at 37.

<https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/hrom/New-Employees/About-the-Marine-Corps/Hymn/>
<https://www.mcleaguelibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Marines-Hymn-Lyrics.pdf>