

# Georgia, Balaam, & Boney

by Amy Lyn Hedrick

**Georgia Natlaw** was the center of a government fraud investigation in 1899, having apparently been married to two men at the same time, while claiming the military pension of her second husband.

In 1897 she filed for a widow's pension for her deceased husband, **Bonaparte "Boney" Gibson**, who served on the *USS New Hampshire* for the Union during the Civil War. She states in an initial deposition that she had a life interest in a 15-acre farm with a small dwelling and outhouses valued at about \$400 and about \$90 in farm tools and stock. This was her sole means of income and sustenance.

She had no knowledge of **Boney's** military service; she was illiterate and there was a mistake in spelling on her marriage license, yet, she does not explain the mistake. Her age in 1896 was 56 years, but, on the next affidavit it is "about 66" and in the 1870 census she gave her age as 60 years. This seems to be the age she just randomly gives no matter the date.

She has as dependents an "imbecile" daughter of **Boney's** and a granddaughter, aged 14 years, also from **Boney**. During the 1900 census, her mother, **Katie** was living with **Georgia** as well as an adopted daughter, aged 15 years, named **Camilla White**; was this possibly her niece, born of **Harry and Caty (Natlaw) White**?

**Charles Lee** and **Prince Ramsey** of St. Simons Island, gave testimony as to **Boney's** military service as they served on board the *USS New Hampshire* with **Boney** from August 1864 to May 1865, stationed between Hilton Head and Bay Point, South Carolina and that they returned to St. Simons after being discharged. It's unclear whether or not they meant **Boney** returned with them or not.

**James McIntosh** age 65 and **Jonas Brown** age 63 were deposed in 1897 as to **Georgia's** income, claiming she had a small farm and had **Boney's** daughter and granddaughter in the

home. Then come **Washington Mitchell** age 61 and **London Bennett** age 62 of Evelyn and Brunswick respectively to state that **Georgia** was only ever married to **Boney Gibson** and that they knew **Boney's** first wife had died because they saw her buried (oh, to know what cemetery). They further stated that **Georgia** never remarried and that she has the said farm that could only generate \$15/m in rents should she try to make money in this fashion. Of course, now the land is worth less, at \$300 and the personal effects at \$75.00.

The Tax office in Brunswick said that she returned 15 acres of land, head of cows, horses, hogs, and farming tools for \$490.00 total in 1896.

In June 1896, **James T. Spearing**, age 72 years of Evelyn, and **Major Magwood** age 62, also of Evelyn were deposed regarding the marriage of **Georgia Boatwright** and **Boney Gibson** as they were present at the marriage, that **Boney** was a widower and that they married one year after **Mina Gibson** died and that both were present at her funeral and at **Boney's** funeral.

**Clarissa Kennan**, age 55, and **J.W. Denby** age 56, both of Brunswick, depose that **Georgia** and **Boney** remained married until **Boney's** death; having never divorced.

When **Clarence Kennon** was deposed, he vehemently denied knowing **Georgia** and wanted it entered into record that he only knew her once she married **Boney** whom he had known since he, **Clarence**, was a child. He states that **Boney** was enslaved by **James Hamilton Couper** and we can assume that **Boney**, **Mina**, and their children, were all enslaved at Altama Plantation by **Couper** and it's entirely plausible that **Mina** was buried on Altama Plantation in an as yet discovered burial ground.

**Boney** filed for his pension in 1892, claiming rheumatism and heart trouble; upon applying he stated that he married **Georgia Natnawl** on 23 February 1873 at Needwood Church after his first wife died in September 1873.

However, all was not what it seemed, contained in her pension file was a letter from **Boney Gibson, Jr.** claiming that his “stepmother” should not be granted his father’s pension because she was spending the money on her children born to her previous husband, **Balaam Boatwright**, who was STILL LIVING.

**Boney, Jr.** claims that **Georgia** got this pension, and then promptly moved her entire family into **Boney Senior’s** home and put her two sons born of another man into business using this pension.

**Boney, Jr.** wrote to the pension office declaring that these actions were unfair and unlawful and that his father only left three children living by 1896, himself, **Joseph** and their sister **Lunah**, and that none of them ever wrote to the pension office to claim any monies as they didn’t think they were due such benefit because they were making a living.

Therefore, **Georgia** should not be due the benefit either as she has another husband still living and children making a living, as well as a home she took from **Boney, Sr.’s** children upon his death.

QUOTE: “I [**Boney, Jr.**] don’t think anyone who is not Entitled to it should have it.”

The pension office took **Boney Jr.’s** letter to heart and promptly started an investigation of the matter in May 1899. The official statement was that she was dropped because at the time of her marriage to the soldier her former husband was still living and “undivorced”.

**Georgia** responded by stating she was previously married “according to slave custom”, which basically meant the marriage wasn’t legally documented with a license in the courts. Her marriage to **Boney**, however, was legally documented by license in 1873. She claimed that she and **Balaam** separated in 1869.

These marriages were investigated to determine whether or not **Georgia** had to legally secure a divorce or not before marrying **Boney** as Georgia law for Freed Persons stated that “persons

of color living together on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of March 1866, as husband and wife sustain that legal relation to each other.” Basically, if you were living together as husband and wife on this date, you were legally married by law, no license was needed. So, the question was, were **Georgia** and **Balaam** living together on this date or not?

Through a lawyer, **Georgia** claimed that she was “illiterate and ignorant” and that she didn’t understand many of the questions asked of her. **Balaam** was living with her part of the time and then he was living with another woman named **Mary**.

She claims that she was living in Waycross when the war ended and that **Balaam** was closer to home in Wayne County and that she came back to Glynn County alone and did not see **Balaam** again until 1869 and that **Balaam** had yet another wife living in Brunswick named **Rebecca**.

Several people were deposed, giving statements attesting to **Georgia**’s claims; however, they all, unknowingly, place her and **Balaam** together well past 1866.

**James T. Lambright** came forward on **Georgia**’s behalf and stated that in 1871 he hired **Balaam** and his wife **Rebecca** at Evelyn to harvest rice and that the couple had two children, ages 6 and 4 years and that **Georgia** was employed by **Mr. Marston** on another rice plantation about 1½ miles away from **Balaam**.

By 1899, **Rebecca** was separated from **Balaam** and living in Brunswick as **Georgia** stated previously. **Lambright** claims that **Balaam** was brought from Waycross by his enslaver to Glynn County, however, **Lambright**’s statement doesn’t really help **Georgia** as these events happened in 1871.

**Sancho Walburg** (age 70 years) testified on her behalf. He stated that he was enslaved at Broadfield Plantation and **Georgia** was born on this plantation and lived there up until the Civil War and that a few years prior to the war, she and **Balaam** lived together for about two years. When **Georgia** learned of the “other woman”, **Sancho** says she turned **Balaam** out

from her home and that this happened right at the beginning of the war and **Georgia** was then sent to Waycross and **Balaam** was sent about 15 miles further away from Waycross to work on the railroad.

**Sancho** closes his statement by saying that **Georgia** never lived with **Balaam** again and that **Balaam** married another woman.

**Charles McIntosh** (age 51 years) also came forward to confirm **Sancho's** statement, he too was born at Broadfield. **Charles** tells us that **Balaam's** "owner" was **George C. Dent** and that they all came back around 1865-66 to work on the plantation.

**Paul Benjamin** (age 54 years) was another formerly enslaved person to stand up for **Georgia**.

**Rebecca Boatright**, age 53 years (in 1899); also testified on **Georgia's** behalf. She states that she first met **Balaam** in 1862 in Waycross and that they married at Evelyn in 1870 by **Rev. Lemuel Ross** and that she and **Balaam** lived together until about December 1871 when he left her. She never heard of **Balaam** having a wife prior to her and that she currently believed him to be living in Camden County with yet another woman. She first learned of **Georgia** "a few days ago".

**Claricy Williams**, age 55 years, was also enslaved at Broadfield Plantation and was intimately acquainted with **Georgia** and testified on her behalf.

**Jane McIntosh** was 85 years of age in 1899 when she testified on **Georgia's** behalf and that she has known **Georgia** since the day she was born at Broadfield and that she has never known **Georgia** and **Balaam** as husband and wife, that they only lived together and that **Balaam** was also living with another woman at the same time. **Jane** states that their "owners" were never concerned with this matter and that no ceremony was ever conducted between the couple.

**Eliza Walburg**, 80 years of age, testified on **Georgia's** behalf and stated the same testimony as **Jane**.

I especially wanted to point out **Jane's** and **Eliza's** statements as they are suggesting that marriage ceremonies occurred between the enslaved at Broadfield. That you were either married or you just lived with a significant other; there was a distinction while enslaved.

The end result of these depositions was a final statement where **Georgia** claims she and **Balaam** were married by consent of their enslavers while still enslaved and that they had two children together, **Epping** and **Sherman Boatwright**; one was born before freedom the other after; the 1870 census says they were born 1865 and 1866, respectively.

**Georgia** and **Balaam** lived together until freedom when **Balaam** left for Waynesboro and then she heard he went to Florida but that it has been a few years since she has heard from him at this writing in 1899. She says they never divorced and she doesn't understand how they could get divorced when they were never married. She said that **Balaam's** cousins, **Kate Nelson** and **Watson Magwood** told her he was in Florida.

I'm assuming the term "legally married" is being left out as she states they were married by consent of their enslavers then she states why get a divorce when they were not married.

I'm not sure what is meant by "when freedom came" either, I'm assuming they meant the close of the war in April 1865 and not the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 as she states she and **Balaam** lived together up until later the year of freedom when he left for Waynesboro and got married about four years prior to her marriage to **Boney** in 1873.

She states that **Boney** was her first legal spouse but that she did live with another man in between **Balaam** and **Boney**, that being **Renty Harris**, whom she never married.

They were all enslaved by **Columbus C. Dent** [as quoted in this letter], who is now dead but his son **James T. Dent** lives at Evelyn, Georgia, he was an adult when the war started and could easily provide the necessary facts. It's surprising he was not deposed.

**Boney** was previously married to **Mina**, whom he married while they were enslaved and **Mina** died about one year prior to **Georgia's** marriage to **Boney**. She and **Boney** lived together the entire time from their marriage date up until his death on 20 February 1896.

**Abraham Bennett** (age 54 years) claims the same as the other deponents but states that **Georgia** and **Balaam** lived together for a few years AFTER THE WAR and then **Balaam** went to Camden County and now resides about four miles from Woodbine Station. He states that **Boney's** first wife was **Demina** and that he knew them both during enslavement; that he had known them for 12 years prior to the Civil War. **Abraham** was at **Mina's** funeral and burial so he knows that she died about a year before **Boney** and **Georgia** were married.

Sadly for **Georgia**, the final ruling was that **Georgia** and **Balaam** were legally married by the act of 9 March 1866 through **Georgia's** own statement about not being with **Balaam** after 1869 and **Abraham Bennett's** statement that they were together a few years after the war's end in 1865.

During the 1870 census, **Georgia** and **Balaam** are listed together, she is the head of household, and there are three minor children living with them, **Epping, Sherman, and Rosa Boatright**.

To confuse matters more, **Rosa's** social security application states that her father was **Balam Boatwright** (as spelled) and her mother was **Charlotte Lawrence**, yet another woman!

**Georgia** lost her widow's pension.

And, if you are familiar with the lists we have found to date for the enslaved, **Boney**, or **Bonaparte**, nor **Balaam**, were listed at Hofwyl-Broadfield. Even though they lived on the

lands, **Boney** was enslaved at Altama Plantation and **Balaam** was likely brought to Hofwyl when **George C. Dent** married **Ophelia Troup**.

This pension file not only identifies numerous people who were once enslaved at Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation, but it also tells us about the many family and friend connections between the people, not only of Hofwyl, but of neighboring plantations.

If you learn that your enslaved ancestor filed for a military or widow's pension for Civil War service, GET THAT PENSION FILE! There is such a wealth of information in these pension files that one would never learn any other way and it is information given by a living person of the time.

**Amy Lyn Hedrick**

P.O. Box 772

Darien, GA 31305

[amylyn@glynnngen.com](mailto:amylyn@glynnngen.com)

GlynnGen.com Webmaster

