

PAULINA S. LAX (1824 - 1866)
Also known as Perlina S. Lacks

By Joan Horsley

Based on research as of Sep 2013

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PAULINA S. LAX/LACKS

Daughter of Royall Lax and Mary Hodge(s)

Born: 11 Mar 1824, Halifax County, VA

Married: 22 Nov 1841, Halifax County, VA to John J. Abbott

Died: 9 Oct 1866, St. Clair County, AL

JOHN J. ABBOTT - Son of Richard Abbott and Catharine Fulkerson

Born: 3 Feb 1821, Halifax County, VA - Died: 22 Nov 1876, St. Clair County, AL

(Married 2nd Abt. 1869, St. Clair County, AL to Amanda McCargo)

CHILDREN of PAULINA S. LAX/LACKS & JOHN J. ABBOTT (11)

James B. Abbott (died in Civil War), John H. Abbott (m. Idora McClellan), Mary "Mollie" C. Abbott (m. William D. McCargo), Nicholas W. Abbott (m1 Nancy Elizabeth Lowery, m2 Mary "Molly" I. Alexander), Richard Abbott (died in childhood), William R. Abbott (m. Annette "Netta" L. Cosper), Pauline Rebecca Abbott (died in childhood), Thomas J. Abbott (m. Martha "Mattie" F. Willingham), George W. Abbott, Jefferson D. Abbott (never married), Matthew T. Abbott (m. Mary A. "Addie" Brewer)

PAULINA S. LAX ABBOTT's twentieth-century descendants in Alabama knew her first name through passed-down family information as Perlina or Purlina. However, earlier documents in Virginia, including her father's will and her marriage record, prove her original name was Paulina. Later, in the regional accents of Alabama and the Deep South, "Paulina" evolved into "Perlina" in the same way that, for example, "Pamela" in Virginia became "Permelia" in Georgia and Alabama. All spelling prior to the early 1900s was phonetic, so a name was spelled the way it was heard and then passed down that way to later family. Interestingly, though, in the 1932 death record for her youngest son, Matthew T. Abbott, his mother's name is spelled the original way as Paulina.

The phonetic spelling of Paulina's last name also has changed over time and place. For over 100 years in Virginia, her family's name was spelled "Lax," as she is named in her father's 1841 will. Only in the mid-1800s did the spelling begin to transition from "Lax" to "Lacks," the way Paulina's maiden name is spelled on her 1841 marriage record, although in the 1850 census, the families in Halifax are still spelled "Lax." Since our interest as family historians is in Paulina's birth family and ancestors when the name was recorded as Lax, I generally use the "Lax" spelling of their day. Recognizing variant spellings of any name is important when searching for historical family records, and using the spelling common to a time and place helps to retain the historical context.

Likewise Paulina's father's name, "Royall," was always spelled with the double-l. The name was a surname in early Virginia history. It became a popular given name down through the generations, even among those who were not direct Royall family descendants. Original documents in Virginia use the "Royall" spelling for first and last names at least through the

mid-1840s. Again, I retain the original spelling for historical context and to aide further records research.

Paulina S. Lax was the daughter of Royall Lax & Mary Hodge(s), the granddaughter of Benjamin Lax & Betsy (maiden name unknown), and the great-granddaughter of William Lax & Susannah Chandler. All are proved by wills, marriage records, and/or death records.

Paulina's great-grandfather William Lax was in Halifax County by 1759 [HPB2:509], three years before the Abbott family arrived in Halifax from King and Queen County, VA. On 15 Jul 1760, William Lax was granted 400 acres in Halifax County. [VPB34:606] He is named in the grant as "William Lax Junior." At this time and place, "Jr." can mean the younger one of the same name in the area or family group and not necessarily son of a same-name father. William likely was related to William and James Lax who by 1729 were in Goochland County (where William Chandler Sr. and family also lived for a time). However, contrary to numerous undocumented and self-contradicting online files, the older William Lax in Lunenburg County by 1750 does not appear to be the father of William Lax in Halifax (formed from Lunenburg in 1752). Lunenburg deeds, tithables, and personal property tax lists indicate the Lunenburg William Lax Sr. had a son William Lax Jr. born abt. 1755, and they both lived together in Lunenburg through 1783. To my mind, much more research is needed to fully prove and properly document the parents of William Lax of Halifax and to learn more about the earlier family.

The 400 acres granted to William Lax in Halifax County were on "a branch of Difficult Creek" adjoining Ephraim Hill, among others. [VPB34:606] Ephraim Hill was also an adjacent landowner to the land where Joseph Abbott settled his family abt. 1762. Joseph Abbott was the grandfather of Paulina Lax's husband John J. Abbott, son of Richard Abbott, each proved by wills. [HWB2:298, PWB2:68]

Paulina's great-grandmother and William Lax's wife, Susannah Chandler, was a daughter of William Chandler Sr. and named in her father's will as "Susanna, Wife of William Lax." [HWB1:260] Susannah, named among her father's "three oldest daughters," was a daughter by William's first wife, said to be named Elizabeth. (His wife at his death and named in his will was Judith.) William Chandler Sr. and his son William Chandler Jr. were adjacent neighbors of the Abbott family on Difficult Creek just east of today's Crystal Hill, VA, and Chandlers appear in Halifax records with Abbotts for three generations or more, well into the 1800s. It is possible the families knew each other before Halifax, since Susannah's father William Chandler was born in New Kent County, VA, parent county of King and Queen, where John J. Abbott's grandfather Joseph Abbott was from. The Chandlers also were related to John J. Abbott's mother, Catharine Fulkerson, through Halifax County marriages.

Paulina's great-grandfather William Lax wrote his will 21 Jul 1778, proved 18 April 1783. [HWB1:432] He divided his Difficult Creek land among several sons, including 200 acres to son Benjamin Lax, Paulina's grandfather.

Benjamin Lax was born in Halifax probably abt. 1755. He married abt. 1780, as the 1782 household enumeration lists him with "3 whites," indicating he is recently married with one child. Benjamin's wife was named Betsy, proved by the 1855 Halifax death record of their daughter Mary Lax Hodges. (The informant was Mary's husband, who was born and raised in Halifax and would have known her family well.) [Halifax Death Records 1855. Contributed to VAGenWeb

Archives by Martha Hills. Also "Virginia, Deaths and Burials, 1853-1912," index, FamilySearch, citing Book 3, p. 17, item 7] Betsy Lax apparently pre-deceased her husband Benjamin, as she is not named in his 1808 will. Betsy's maiden name is not known.

Undocumented online files incorrectly list Benjamin Lax's wife as a Mary Royall. The first name is proved wrong by Mary Lax Hodges' death record mentioned above. The maiden name seems to be based solely on Benjamin's son named Royall Lax. However, the given name "Royall" was popular in Virginia and does not necessarily indicate direct ancestry. Such names can be misleading and are not viable proof in themselves. Also, online files erroneously say this Benjamin Lax was the one who married Elizabeth Cobbs on 20 Nov 1821. Obviously this is impossible, since this Benjamin Lax died in 1808.

Benjamin Lax wrote his will 6 Apr 1808 and died within a few weeks, as his will was proved in Halifax Court on 23 Apr 1808. [HWB7:465] Benjamin divided his Difficult Creek land among his three sons, John Lax, Timothy Lax, and Royall Lax, who was Paulina's father.

Royall Lax was born in Halifax abt. 1784, based on his father's tax lists. Royall Lax married Mary Hodge (sometimes spelled Hodges) in Halifax on 17 Dec 1805. They were married by Rev. Thomas Dobson, a Baptist minister. The marriage bond was dated 13 Dec 1805, and the security or "bondsman" was William Hodge. [Halifax Marriage Bond Register No. 1. LVA Reel 82] By a bond of the same date, Royall's brother John Lax married Barsheba Hodge, and again William Hodge was security on the bond. Two weeks later on 31 Dec 1805, a William Hodge married Royall's sister Mary Lax, also with Rev. Thomas Dobson officiating.

Halifax personal property tax lists indicate William Hodge the bondsman was the father of Mary Hodge and her sister Barsheba, and it was his son named "William Hodges Junr." in the 1807 tax lists who married Mary Lax. William Hodge Sr. also had a son named Elisha Hodge. [Halifax PP Tax Lists] (Many online files list Royall Lax's wife Mary Hodge as a daughter of the John Hodge in early Halifax; however, this cannot be, since he moved from Halifax to Orange County, NC by 1775. [HDB10:27])

Paulina S. Lax was born to Royall and Mary Hodge Lax on 11 Mar 1824 on their Difficult Creek farm in north-central Halifax County, VA. [Birth date from family information.] (Contrary to some family information in the late 1900s, Paulina was not born in Danville, VA, which was 40 miles southwest and in adjacent Pittsylvania County.) Paulina was born near the Difficult Creek home of John J. Abbott and his parents, Richard Abbott and Catharine Fulkerson, so Paulina and John knew each other all their lives.

At age 17, "Paulina S. Lacks" married "John J. Abbott," then three months shy of 21 years old, by bond dated 22 Nov 1841. John's bondsman was Paulina's brother-in-law John H. Traynham, who married her sister Rebecca H. Lax in 1834. Paulina's father, there entered as "Royall Lacks," gave his consent. [Halifax Marriage Bond Register No. 1]

Royall Lax wrote his will two months earlier on 21 Sep 1841, naming his daughter "Paulina S. Lax," and he died before 28 Nov 1842, when his will was proved in Halifax Court. [HWB20:142] The transition from the Lax to the Lacks spelling is apparent in the way the clerk entered this will into the will book. The "Lax" spelling is used throughout the entire body of the will, then the signature line is entered as "Lacks," even though the will begins "I, Royall Lax," This is the first of the wills for this line that includes the Lacks spelling:

WILL of ROYALL LAX

Written 21 Sep 1841- Proved 28 Nov 1842 - Halifax Will Book 20:142-143

Transcription by Jefferson M. Moak (Caps added by JH)

In the name of God Amen. I ROYALL LAX of the County of Halifax and State of Virginia being in sound and disposing mind and memory thanks be to God for the same do make this my last will and testament in manner and form following to wit,

Item 1st, My wish and desire to that all my just [debts] be duly paid by my Executors hereinafter named, my funeral charges also paid -

Item 2nd, I give and bequeath to my Grand children the children of my daughter Elizabeth Bomar deceased fifteen dollars to be equally divided between them.

Item 3rd, I give and bequeath to my daughter PAULINA S. LAX thirty five Dollars to her and her heirs forever.

Item 4th, I give and bequeath to my daughter Martha R. Lax thirty five Dollars to her and her heirs forever.

Item 5th, I loan to my living and much beloved wife MARY the whole of my estate both real and personal (not already disposed of) during her natural life or widowhood and if my beloved wife should marry my will is that she enjoy one third of what I have loaned her during life and at her death I dispose of the property loaned to her in the following manner to wit,

Item 6th, I give and devise and bequeath to my two sons Benjamin H. Lax & Armistead W. Lax the tract of Land wheron I now reside and one female slave Delphiis (?) to be equally divided between them - But provided that either of my above named sons should die without a Lawful heir, then what I have given to him my will is that the surviving brother shall have and if both of my above named sons die without a lawful heir it is my will that what I have given them be equally divided between my living children and the heirs of those that are dead.

The remaining part of my Estate not heretofore bequeathed it is my will that it be equally divided into seven parts and give one seventh part to the children of my deceased daughter Elizabeth Bomar, to wit, Mary Ann Bomar, Louisa Bomar, Sarah Bomar and James Bome (infants), one seventh to my grandson John R. Rye if living, the son of daughter Mary Rye deceased, one seventh to to my son Benjamin H. Lax, one seventh to my son Armistead W. Lax, one seventh to my daughter Rebecca H. Traynham, one seventh to my daughter PAULINA S. LAX and one seventh to my daughter Martha R. Lax to them and their heirs forever.

Item 8th, And Lastly, I nominate and appoint my two sons Benjamin H. Lax and Armistead W. Lax Executors to this my Last Will and testament.

In Witness whereof I have hereunto affixed my hand and seal this 21st day of September in the year of our Lord 1841.

/s/ Royall Lacks

Signed sealed and declared by the testator to be his last will and testament in the presence of Timothy Childress, Joel M. Lax

N.B. my wish is that there be no appraisement on my estate

At a court held for Halifax County the 28th day of November 1842. The within written Last will and testament of Royall Lacks deceased was exhibited in court and proved by the oaths. . .

[Transcription by Jefferson M. Moak to me April 2006, citing Halifax Will Book 20:142 and referencing additional probate HWB20:218; 21:289 & 26:150. Included here with his permission.]

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Children of Royall Lax and Mary Hodge

1. Elizabeth Lax - b. c1807 - m. 30 Nov 1830, James Bomar - d. bet. 1840-1841
2. Benjamin H. Lax - b. c1810 - m. c1857 to Rebecca J. (Conner)
3. Armistead W. Lax - b. c1812 - m. 22 Aug 1842, Susanna H. Lax/Lacks
Susanna's parents were Timothy Lax & Tabitha Lax (d/o Joel Lax), married 1818
4. Mary H. Lax - b. c1815 - m. 26 Sep 1836, John Y. Rye - d. bef. father's 1841 will
5. Rebecca H. Lax - b. Apr 1819 - m. 22 Dec 1834, John H. Traynham (no children)
6. Paulina S. Lax - b. 1824 - m. 22 Nov 1841, John J. Abbott - d. 1866, St. Clair Co, AL
7. Martha R. Lax - b. c1827 - m. 25 Dec 1848, James Newbill - d. aft. 1880, Carroll Co, TN

[Sources: Names are from Royall Lax's 1841 will. Marriages are from Halifax Marriage Bonds Register No. 1. Except for Paulina, birth years are based on censuses. (1900 gives Rebecca's mo/yr of birth).]

Note:

In notes of Ernestine Abbott Almon written in the 1950s or so and circulated around the family, she says Virginia "letters in our family before 1880" mention Armistead, Rebecca, Martha, and William Lacks, who she states were "brothers and sisters of Perlina Lacks." The first three were, indeed, Paulina's siblings. However, William Lacks, whom Ernestine identifies as marrying Catherine Rudder in 1849, was not a brother, per Royall Lax's will, but obviously he was closely related. (His bond to marry Catherine is dated 17 Dec 1849.)

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Paulina's mother, Mary Hodge Lax, died between 21 Sep 1841, when Royall named her in his will, and 30 Oct 1845. By a Halifax deed of trust that date, John J. Abbott secured a debt using, in part, "all my interest in the estates of Royall Lax and Mary Lax which I am entitled by right of my wife Paulina S." [*HDB51:49*] (See report on John J. Abbott for details.)

By 29 Oct 1850, when their household was enumerated for the 1850 census, Paulina and John Abbott had four children, the youngest being infant Nicholas W. Abbott, born 30 Jun 1850. John was working at the time as an overseer in southwestern Halifax County near the Dan River. Economic conditions in Halifax were poor, and John and Paulina soon joined the ongoing exodus from the county. They left Halifax abt. 1851 and moved to Alabama, first to Lauderdale County, then shortly to Talladega County, where they lived abt. ten years before moving west across the Coosa River into adjacent St. Clair County, AL abt. 35 miles east of Birmingham, AL.

Paulina's eldest of 11 known children, James B. Abbott, enlisted in Talladega County, AL in 1862 to serve in the Confederate Army a year after the Civil War began. James died while in

service in Chattanooga, TN in 1863 at abt. 20 years old. [NARA M311] Paulina's last child, Matthew T. Abbott, was born the next year on 24 Mar 1864 in St. Clair County.

Paulina S. Lax/Lacks Abbott died two and a half years later on 9 Oct 1866 in St. Clair County, AL, at age 42. [Death date from family information.] She is buried with her husband, John J. Abbott, in Coosa Valley Baptist Church Cemetery near Pell City, AL at Cropwell, AL. The cemetery where Paulina and John originally were buried was flooded by the creation of a dam on the Coosa River in the early 1960s. Thanks to the commitment, diligence, and hard labor of family members still living in the area, they were able to transfer all the family graves to the new location before the flooding. There is no marker for Paulina today, but family there told me she is buried with John, whose grave marker still exists.

(For more information about Paulina's life after marriage and about her husband, children, and burial place, see Report on John J. Abbott.)

Acknowledgements:

Special thanks go to Jefferson Moak for sharing with me his fine research on the early Lax families in Virginia. I found his work to be thoroughly documented and well-sourced, which helped guide my investigation and facilitated my obtaining the documents necessary for my research into Paulina's line in particular and to verify Mr. Moak's transcriptions. The above report is based on my own research conclusions and assessments of the information in the records I gathered, and any errors in fact or interpretation are my responsibility, not that of Mr. Moak.

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