

Warren Alfred: Searching the Neighborhood

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My paternal grandmother's maiden name was ALFRED. Some twenty-five years ago I easily traced her line back to my great-great-great-grandfather Warren Alfred (1816-1895) of Caddo Parish, Louisiana. I have been stuck since then. However, some recent intensive research has uncovered some clues that may point to his residence before coming to Louisiana.

Warren Alfred's birth date of 14 Dec 1816 comes from his tombstone in Providence Cemetery in rural Caddo Parish. Census records consistently record his birthplace as North Carolina. But the years from his birth in 1816 in North Carolina to his marriage in 1842 in Caddo Parish, Louisiana, were silent years. Where was he in between those years?

Through census and deed research, I could not find any other Alfred (or Alford or other spelling variation) family in that area of Louisiana or nearby Texas. The only tidbit I had from family tradition was from an interview with Warren Alfred's grandson Dewey Alfred (1897-1979) who was living on the old Warren Alfred homestead when I interviewed him about 1978. He said that he had heard the old timers in the family talk about "Mammy," Warren Alfred's mother who lived with him. Dewey did not know her real name.

I subscribed to Gilbert K. Alford's newsletter *About Alford's* in 1987, hoping to make a connection. I also became a charter member of the Alford American Family Association. I poured through every issue of *About Alford's* and *AAFA ACTION*, but no breakthroughs. I was especially

attracted to the large Alford family of Wake/Franklin County, North Carolina, because of the numerous occurrences of the given name "Warren" in that line. But careful study did not uncover any clear connection to my line.

I read and heard several well-known genealogists who made the same suggestion for a roadblock ancestor: study the neighbors. The strategy behind the advice is that people in that day and time rarely traveled and settled in a new area of complete strangers. They usually settled with or around family members or people who had been neighbors at their previous residence. Several years ago I put this idea into action with Warren Alfred.

A Neighborhood

If I was going to study Warren Alfred's neighbors, then I needed to define his neighborhood. That was my first step. The section, township, and range land system used in most states west of the Appalachians, including north Louisiana, helped make this first step easy. I used four locations to help define that neighborhood.

The first was Warren Alfred's first purchase of land in 1841 which was in sections 15 and 22, township 16N, range 16W. The next was his next-to-last purchase of land, in 1871, in section 22, township 16N, range 16W. This was his homestead for the rest of his life and I believe is still owned today by descendants. The third was his burial location, which is next to the church the family attended, Providence Baptist Church, which is in section 3, township 15N, range 16W. The fourth is the location of the homestead where Warren Alfred's in-laws, the John Ray family, lived in the 1840s at the time of his marriage to their daughter Rachel

Ray. It was in section 35, township 16N, range 16W.

All these locations are close together and suggest that Warren Alfred lived in the same neighborhood in Caddo Parish, Louisiana, at least from 1842 to his death in 1895. I chose section 36, township 16N, range 16W, to be the "center" of my neighborhood search and extended it about three miles in each direction.

I did several checks to help confirm this location. Family tradition says that when Warren Alfred's first wife, Rachel Ray Alfred, died about 1855, she was buried in the Davidson Family Cemetery. Unfortunately no grave marker has been found for her. This cemetery is located in section 12, township 15N, range 16W. Warren Alfred's oldest daughter, Ophelia Alfred, married Marcus Lafayette Robertson in Caddo Parish in 1858. "Fate" Robertson's mother had her homestead in section 2 (or 23), township 16N, range 16W. Warren's son Waymon Marcellous Alfred was married in 1871 in Caddo Parish to Georgia Elizabeth Rutherford. Her parents' homestead was in sections 9, 10, and 15, township 15N, range 16W. All of these are in the same "neighborhood" that I had chosen.

Neighbors

The next stop was to figure out the "neighbors" that I would study. Once again the land records proved of much help. I used the Tract Book in the Caddo Parish courthouse to find the first owners of the land in this neighborhood that I was studying. I found the first sales of land by the federal government in this "neighborhood" dated back to December 1838. I recorded all the federal land sales up to 1850.

Then I looked in deed records for land transactions for these first owners, up to about 1850. I also followed deeds for any subsequent owners. I found that some of the land was owned by absentee owners in other states.

I located many of the land owners on the 1840 census of Caddo Parish, all on page 35. I also located many of them on the 1850 census on pages 321-329. In this way I identified some possible neighbors who were not landowners.

My search through the deeds had an added benefit. I found three deeds where Warren Alfred was a witness. One was a deed from William T. Fortson to John Ray in July 1839 (John Ray became Warren Alfred's father-in-law in 1842). Another was from Riley Higginbotham to William T. Fortson, also in July 1839, while the third was from William T. Fortson to Elijah S. Fortson in the mid-1840s. (Caddo Par., LA, Conveyance Records A:560, B:276, C:671) All three transactions were for land in my "neighborhood." Obviously Warren Alfred was in this neighborhood earlier than I knew, as early as July 1839. And since this neighborhood was first settled about 1838, he obviously was one of the first settlers. Since he would be only about 22 years of age when he came to Caddo Parish, I was more convinced that he came to this area with other family members or someone he knew very well from his previous residence rather than alone. I also decided to narrow my search to "neighbors" who were here in the late 1830s or early 1840s.

Narrowing the Search

I came up with a list of seventeen surnames that met the criteria of neighborhood and time period. Then I started researching their origins, trying to locate them in the 1830 census.

One location quickly caught my

attention: Greene County, Alabama. This had been the previous home of the Fortsons, Higginbothams, and Pollards, three of the seventeen neighbors in Louisiana. Two of these were the men whose deeds Warren Alfred had witnessed.

I now returned to my back issues of *About Alford*s and *AAFA ACTION* to look for Alford's in Greene County, Alabama. It didn't take me long to decide that several different Alford families lived in Greene County in the years before 1840, and my Warren could belong to any one of them.

But several things caught my eye, both having to do with the men whose deeds Warren Alfred witnessed in Caddo Parish, LA. Riley Higginbotham married a Lydia ALFORD in 1829 in Greene Co., AL. In the 1830 census of Greene County, Riley Higginbotham is living next door to a Green ALFORD. (Warren Alfred named a daughter "Lydia" Elizabeth Alfred and a son William "Riley" Alfred.) Also William T. Fortson of Greene Co., AL, later Caddo Par., LA, had a brother Samuel Fortson who married a Mary ALFORD in 1829 in Greene Co., AL. Both Mary and Lydia came from a branch of the Alford family from Wake County, NC, that migrated at an early date to Greene Co., AL. This branch has used the given name "Warren" for several generations. This looked like more than coincidence to me.

One other deed record drew my interest. In February 1841, William T. Fortson sold to Warren "Alford" 160 acres of land, 3 adult slaves and a one-half interest in an additional slave, a cotton gin house and gin equipment, livestock, and farming utensils, all of the latter co-owned with Thomas L. Davis. In return, Alford paid NO cash down but instead signed four promissory notes for \$1160 each. Alford also acknowledged a mortgage back to Fortson on all the property as collateral on the notes.

Warren Alford was age 24 at the time. Would Fortson have made such a large financial arrangement with some young stranger he barely knew, or does this deed suggest that Fortson had known Alford and his family back-ground for many years? In the end, Alford was not able to meet the payments and a year later quietly deeded the entire property back to Fortson in exchange for cancelling the mortgage (Conv. Rec. B:25, 479). This did not ruin any business relationship between Alford and Fortson as Fortson sold him land on two other occasions in 1850, one for cash and one for a note for \$320 (Conv. Rec. F:404, 549).

My cursory study of the Greene County, Alabama, Alford family has not revealed a definite connection to my Warren Alfred. A quick research trip to the Greene County, Alabama, courthouse did not find anything, either. However, I am now convinced that my Warren Alfred came from North Carolina to Greene County, Alabama, with members of the Alford family, possibly around 1820, then came to Caddo Parish, Louisiana, in the late 1830s with other, possibly extended, family members. He is likely some kin to Lydia and Mary and Green Alford. Next on the agenda is a similar detailed study in Greene County, Alabama.

Appendix 1: Name Spelling

All the direct male descendants of Warren Alfred consistently spell their surname ALFRED. Did my "Alfred" family originally spell the name "Alford," and if so, when did the name change occur. I now theorize that my Warren Alfred changed the spelling of his surname from "Alford" to "Alfred" sometime after the Civil War.

This theory is based on clues, though, and not on hard evidence. I have yet to find an original signature of my Warren Alfred from any time period.

The only substitute I have found is the parish clerk's transcription of deeds in the Conveyance Records in Caddo Parish. The clerks made their transcriptions from the original documents. My experience has been that by the mid 1800s the clerks did a reasonably good job of transcribing the signatures from deeds with fairly accurate spelling, as long as the name was somewhat legible. I looked at the transcriptions for all the deeds in which Warren Alfred sold land or was a witness, as all the original deeds would have had his original signature. All deeds before 1877 (three as witness, five as seller) show his name as ALFORD. All deeds after 1877 (two as seller) show his name as ALFRED.

Hopefully further research will reveal more signatures that will prove or disprove my theory.

Appendix 2: Another Neighboring Alfred

My intensive research in Caddo Parish found one other Alfred in this neighborhood. He is of contemporary age to my Warren Alfred and possibly a brother.

From Marriage and Death Notices - Shreveport, Louisiana Newspapers

"Oct. 23, 1846 - Died in this place at the residence of CAPT. THOS. B. JONES, on the 15th inst., MR. J.J. ALFRED, in the 29th year of his age..." This Thomas B. Jones lived in sections 19, 21, and 22, township 16N, range 15W, in the "neighborhood" that I studied for Warren Alfred. ♦

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(The President's Piece, cont. from p. 1)

tors, and he maintained that as long as he was heading the Nominations Committee, he would never allow himself to be nominated for the board of directors. I think that is unfair. It will be up to a committee and the membership to return him to the board, but I think our system should allow for such. Therefore I am hereby announcing the establishment of a new Nominations Committee for this year. The chair of the committee will be Dr. Cecil O. Alford, and members will be Lynn Shelley, Sally Stoewer, and Pam Thompson. All of these are current members of the board of directors, and I want to make it clear here that if the committee sees fit to nominate one or more of their own to return to the board, that will be acceptable.

Based on changes to our Articles of Incorporation at the last meeting we will have 12 directors beginning in October. Terms of all current directors will expire at that time. At the 1999 meeting in San Antonio, the Nominations Committee will nominate 4 directors to serve 1 year, 4 to serve 2 years and 4 to serve 3 years. After that we will elect 4 directors each year. Directors may be elected to immediately return to the board in October and in all succeeding years. If you are asked to serve on the board, it will be because AAFA needs you in giving direction to our organization. It is not an honorary position. It is a real working job with the director expected to give some input to what AAFA does and where it is headed. Please say yes if you have a sincere interest in the future of AAFA.

Two of the most critical positions in the association are those of the Secretary and the Treasurer. They keep records on our money, membership, and dues. They are also jointly responsible for the registration at each annual meeting. We have long been looking for ambitious and enthusiastic

assistants for them.

Doris Alford Vetri #0303, our treasurer, has indicated that she would like to step down as Treasurer in a couple of years after she has held the job for ten years. We are fortunate that we have two folks who have consented to be assistants to the Treasurer. Hopefully when Doris is ready to go, one of them will be ready to step in and the other take on the full assistant's duty.

The new assistant Treasurers are Evelyn Mistich #0481 and Kate Rehkop #1035. Coincidentally, Kate and Evelyn are both from the same Alford branch, Seaborn John Alford born 1807 Louisiana.

Max Alford #0230 has been the Secretary only one year less than Doris has been Treasurer. He hasn't made any sounds about retirement, but he did have a stroke late last year. He and we are fortunate that there was no permanent damage. We do need to get him lined up with an assistant or two and would like to hear from those willing to help him and AAFA.

I dispatched an e-mail message to a group of about 20-25 of our more active, involved, and interested members last October placing them on the AAFA Strategic Planning and Policy Committee—STRAP COM for short. This committee has overview or cognizance over all of AAFA. At the request of any of the directors or on his own accord the chair of this committee may establish a subcommittee from within and review and make recommendations regarding any aspect of AAFA and its operation.

I am pleased to announce that Jimmie Alford #0500, of Chicago, will chair this committee. Those who were present at the Paducah meeting will remember that Jimmie was one of those who made an impressive and outstanding presentation at the meeting, dealing with migrations and