

Story of Delilah German and her son Jerry Holdren

by Kim Yeager-Holdren

In 2003 my daughter was getting ready to go off to college and I knew I needed a hobby. I decided to get myself back into genealogy. We were living near Troy, PA at the time, which is the area my husband Gary Holdren's family is from. I thought I would focus on his Holdren family since we were living in the area and could more readily research. His family did not seem to know much beyond their grandparents on this side.

My father-in-law, Artie M Holdren moved from Williamsport to Canton/Troy in the mid 1940s. So, I knew I had to focus on Lycoming County. Little did I know that over time my search would take me to Columbia County, which is where my father's paternal family is from. I knew that Artie's grandfather was William Jeremiah "Jerry" Holdren born Dec 1859 and died Mar 1940 in Lycoming County, PA. I learned Jerry's parents were William and Delila (Delilah) Holdren.

I am going to focus this article on Delila and her son Jerry. I always thought it odd that everyone referred to her as Delila German since no one seemed to know anything about her. Who was Delila German Holdren? The first time I found her was in the 1870 census living in Davidson Twp., Sullivan County, PA. She was living with William Holdren and the following children: Jeremiah, Wesley, Margaret and General. They also had a laborer living with them named Edward Warner. Little did I know how important Edward Warner would become to my research.

I found the family in the 1880 census living in Penn Township, Lycoming, PA: William, Delila, W. Jerry and Wesley. Margaret and General are not in this census and I have not been able to find out what happened to them. I found Delila Haldson in the 1910 census as a widow boarding with the Koontz family in Wolf, Lycoming, PA. Her death certificate from 1913 provided no clues as to her parentage. I often thought that perhaps German was her surname from a previous marriage. After all, she was in her mid-thirties when she was first with William, so a previous marriage was very possible.

I and others searched for her and William in the 1860 census. After many years, fellow researcher, Mary Rhone, found an 1860 census for Madison Township, P.O. Jerseytown, for a family with the surname Fanny—William, Delila, William (age 4) and Samuel (age under 1). We believe this to be William and Delila Holdren, but William Jeremiah wouldn't be 4 and who was Samuel? It is believed that William Holdren lost his first wife Nancy French in Jan 1859. There were no children by the name of William from that union, nor were William's children living with them.

Over the years, I had my husband's Y (FTDNA) and autosomal DNA done on various sites, as well as his siblings'. One day in 2019, I was looking at matches on My Heritage. I found a close cousin match to my husband who was another great grandchild of Jerry Holdren. After writing to Earl Holdren we agreed that he would take a Y DNA test to prove their male paternal connection. I also found an unknown 2-3 cousin match to Gary and Earl. After looking at this match I noticed she had a great-grandmother with the name Delila German in her tree. Could this be the connection? I reached out to the match. We talked and after reviewing our family histories we concluded that we shared the same Delila. It turned out that Delila German was first married to Henry Swift Warner. No records of the marriage have been found. They were in the 1850 census living in Madison Township, P.O. Jerseytown with a daughter Hannah. Within a few years they

had two additional children Edward Woodward (b. 1851) and William (b. abt 1852-54). William was in the 1860 census with his mother and Edward was in the 1870 census.

Researching Henry Swift led me to find a conviction in 1845 for passing counterfeit money and a newspaper article in May 1857 discussing the conviction of the “notorious Henry Warner.” Could this be why Delila left Henry for William? Unfortunately, we will never know the details of why and when she left Henry, but it appears that a pregnant Delila moved in with the recent widower William Holdren based on the 1860 census. I believe that the William in that 1860 census is her son from Henry Warner, and Samuel to be William Jerimiah “Jerry” Holdren in the 1870 census. All this new information aroused my curiosity. Could Henry Warner be the father of Jerry?

Y DNA: Many years ago, I had my husband, Gary’s Y DNA done on FTDNA. For years there were no matches and when we finally did get some matches, they were for German surnames, no Holdrens. I knew of several Holdrens that had tested over the years—so what was going on?

Things start to come together. In the fall of 2019, I was visiting CCHGS and bumped into George Holdren, a fellow Holdren researcher, and member of CCHGS. I asked George if he had tested his Y DNA and he said “yes.” He went on to tell me that Murray Holdren, a descendent of William and Nancy French, had also tested. George reached out to Susan Messersmith who manages Murray’s Y DNA. In reviewing George and Murray’s Y DNA (who shared a connection) and calling FTDNA to confirm, it was determined that Jerry was not the son of William Holdren.

Who was the father? Was he the son of Henry Warner? In his 1845 prison record Henry was described as short (5’3”) with dark hair, eyes, and complexion. Some of the early pictures of Jerry’s children could fit that description but there were no Warners matching on the Y DNA. I was glad that Earl Holdren did a Y DNA test and there was a connection. We at least knew that Jerry Holdren was a common ancestor between Gary and Earl. I started researching matches with a genetic distance up to 3.

After looking at a Babb who shared Y DNA (0 distance at 37cm) I started to think he might be the son of a Babb. I researched this person’s line and found no evidence of the family being in Columbia County at the timeframe of Jerry’s birth. I then joined Gary and Earl’s Y DNA to the Y DNA projects for Babb and Bobb.

In the background I was learning more about Delila through autosomal DNA. Through DNA and good old research, I discovered that Delila was the sister of Elizabeth German (1822-1869) married to William Bradley, and Nancy Anna German (1821-1907) married to Adam Bobb. The surname Bobb—could Adam Bobb be the father of Jerry Holdren?

I researched the family of Adam Bobb and found a brother George in the 1850 census. Other than the 1850 census I could find no records for George. In the meantime (June 2021), I reached out to the administrators of the Bobb and Babb Y DNA projects to see if they could be of any assistance.

Daniel Babb (administrator of the Babb project) was a great help. He researched independently and came to a similar conclusion. However, he also found a first cousin of Adam and George Bobb whose name was Samuel Bobb. Samuel resided in Rebuck, Washington Township,

Northumberland County, which makes him a possible candidate. Was Samuel in the 1860 census named after this Samuel or was it a coincidence? Daniel and I both agree that the most likely candidate for Jerry's father is Adam because of proximity. However, without more Bobb descendants testing we may never know exactly which Bobb was Jerry's father.

I hope this article will inspire others to do autosomal testing and direct male Babb/Bobb descendants to test their Y DNA on FTDNA and join the Babb/Bobb project.