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Lorraine Frantz Edwards

[The Coffins]  
A BRIEF FAMILY HISTORY  
by  
Theron E. Coffin

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## INTRODUCTION

Most people, sooner or later -- generally later, and, almost always, too late -- become curious about their ancestry and family history. I had the good fortune to become interested in the remote Coffin history about fifty years ago, but not enough interested in the closer relationships to ask questions of my parents and others of their generation until it was too late.

During the last two years I have been trying to fill the gaps in my knowledge, and have done about as much as is possible; this is a summary, copies of which I am sending to interested cousins and nephews and nieces.

My grandparents' names were Isaac Newton and Martha (Bell) Coffin and Joseph P. and Sarah Jane (Kelly) Cook. Much information on the Cook and Kelly families I have obtained from a notebook compiled by my Aunt Emma (Cook) Coffin, who was <sup>one of</sup> my mother's sisters and also the wife of one of my father's brothers.

Another excellent source of information was Hinshaw's Cyclopedia of Quaker Genealogy. Every detail of the Coffins' moving from Massachusetts to North Carolina, and of the coming of the Bell, Cook, and Kelly families from England and Ireland to North and South Carolina, and then moving on to Ohio and Indiana, is there. It is interesting to know -- and I, personally, take some pride in the fact -- that the Coffins have been Quakers since 1701, and all the other ancestors that I know anything about were Quakers before they came to America between 1713 and 1759.

The fullest account of our Coffin ancestry that I know about, however, is given in YE COFFYN FAMILY, by Marion Coffin, a first cousin of my father. He did a prodigious amount of research, traveling, and writing to relatives. He then typed a history and family charts, and bound into many books the sets of thirty-three carbon copy pages. I borrowed the copy owned by Aunt Emma and passed on to her daughter, Lelah (Coffin) Kissick.

In view of the difficulties he overcame, Marion Coffin's achievement was so remarkable that I feel sure you will be glad to know more about him than just his name.

## THE COFFIN FAMILY IN ENGLAND

There is an unproved, but generally accepted, belief that a Sir Richard Coffin accompanied William the Conqueror, as a general, from Normandy to England at the time of the Conquest in 1066. His estate, called Courtiton, was near Falaise, which is about twenty miles south of Caen, a large city near the coast, about half way between Le Havre and Cherbourg.

This estate belonged to the Coffin family in France until 1796. Nothing I have read says what happened to it then, but it seems reasonable to suppose that the French Revolution, which began in 1789, had something to do with it.

After the Norman Conquest Sir William Coffin was given an estate, the Manor of Alwington, a few miles from Bideford (pronounced Biddyford), in the northwestern part of Devonshire, which is in the southwestern part of England. During the following centuries, descendants of Sir Richard spread throughout Devonshire and the neighboring counties of Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, and Cornwall. By 1252 the name, variously spelled Colvin, Corvin, and Cophen, as well as Coffin and Coffyn, was frequently found in records. Some well-known men of the family were as follows:

|             |                |             |             |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Sir Richard | in the time of | Henry II,   | 1154 - 1189 |
| Sir Elias   | " " " "        | King John,  | 1199 - 1216 |
| Sir Jeffrey | " " " "        | Henry III,  | 1216 - 1272 |
| Sir Richard | " " " "        | Edward II,  | 1307 - 1327 |
| Sir Richard | " " " "        | Henry IV,   | 1399 - 1413 |
| Sir William | " " " "        | Henry VIII, | 1509 - 1547 |

Sir William, the last one listed, was Sheriff of County Devon, was Master of the Horse at the Coronation of Queen Anne Boleyn, and was one of the eighteen assistants at the Tourney of the Cloth of Gold in Guienne, France, in 1519.

The earliest direct ancestor that we know about was Tristram Coffin, the great-grandfather of the Tristram who came to America. He and his descendants lived in Brixham, a harbor town in eastern Devonshire, about twenty miles east of Plymouth. Tristram had a son Nicholas, who had a son Peter, who married Joanna Thumber, and they had five children: Tristram, Joan, Deborah, Eunice, and

Mary. Peter died in 1617. In 1642 the Civil War began between the Royalists, who were loyal to King Charles I, and the Puritans, under the command of Oliver Cromwell. In that year Tristram Coffin, a Royalist, left England for America.

Before I leave England with Tristram, however, you may be interested in knowing, before I begin on the Coffins in America, that I have twice seen Portledge, the manor house of Alwington Manor. In 1939, during a sabbatical in England, I bicycled from London to Land's End -- the southwestern tip of Cornwall -- and back. On the way I passed through Brixham but, forgetting that it was Tristram's home town, failed to stop and try to learn whether any Coffins still live in that area.

After passing through Bideford, I went on four miles to the Alwington Parish Church, where I found many references to Coffins. All around, inside the building (for that's where the upper classes were buried, in vaults along the walls, or under the floor, while the laboring classes were buried in the churchyards) were busts and plaques memorializing Coffins of several centuries, and on a wall near the door was a large plaque listing the names and dates of all Coffins who had been Patrons of the Church, from Sir Richard in 1287 to 1837.

Beginning in the latter year the Patron was Richard Pine-Coffin. Apparently at that time the inheritor of the manor was a maiden lady with a suitor named Pine, and she didn't want the name Coffin to disappear after five and a half centuries of their being lords of the manor, so the two names were joined by a hyphen. The Patron in 1901 was Matilda Pine-Coffin, who never married, so, since her death in 1931, the Patron has been The Trustees of the Will of Matilda Pine-Coffin.

For more information I, being a brash American, went to the home of the Rector, the Reverend Reginald W. Groom. He received me most kindly, for, after we had talked a while, he asked me to stay for lunch, after which he proposed that we walk to the estate. He could give the excuse of going to call on a parishioner, but, he said, "I shall not ask permission to take you inside the house, because some time ago an American Coffin was discovered walking up the stairs and was indignant when asked to get out, protesting that he had a perfect right to enter and explore the ancestral mansion."



So the Reverend Mr. Groom and I walked down the mile-long winding road from the gate-house to Portledge, a large gray stone mansion, with flower and vegetable gardens, greenhouses, stables, and barns behind, and, on the other three sides, green lawns with occasional trees and masses of shrubbery.

I waited outside, by the tall arched doorway on the left, while the rector called briefly on the occupants of the house, a retired London stock-broker and his wife. (If Mr. Groom knew, he didn't say where the owner, Mr. Pine-Coffin, and his family were living. Apparently he preferred to live elsewhere and collect rent on the estate.) After his short pastoral call, Mr. Groom took me around to the back of the mansion to see the oldest part of it, which dates back to the twelfth century, and the gardens and other buildings. From there we walked another mile -- this is a 3,000-acre estate -- to the seashore, where we saw a small building containing picnicking equipment, a tall flag pole, and a cannon that had been taken from a Spanish Armada ship washed ashore in 1588.

In 1950 my wife (whom I had met in London in 1939) and I drove the family Austin from London to the Southwest and back. We had heard somewhere that, sometime between 1939 and 1950, Portledge had become a hotel, and we had resolved, not to stay there, because it was probably very expensive, but at least to have dinner there. When we arrived, however (this

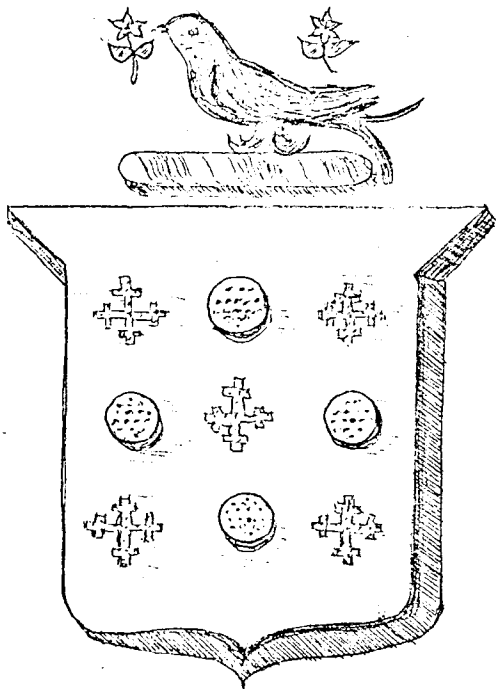
was on April 28), we found that it would not open for the summer season until the first of May. So we took a picture of the manor house and drove away.

I may as well continue this digression by mentioning two historic houses we have seen in this country. The first, which you will read about soon, is a house in Newbury, Massachusetts, part of which was built in 1653 by Tristram Coffin, Jr. The second, which is on Nantucket Island and is the oldest house there, was built in 1686 for Jethro Coffin, the son of Peter, who was the oldest child of Tristram, Senior.

One other matter before I go on to the history of the family in this country: some comments on the origin of the name Coffin. Having read that the name may have come from a Hebrew, a Welsh, or an Anglo-Saxon word, I went to a library and consulted five different authorities on the origin of English surnames, and found the following:

- 1 Occupation: carpenter, a maker of coffins or coffers.
- 2 Originally spelled caffyn, derived from French chauvin, meaning "bald-headed."
- 3 From French chauvin - "bald." The French name is "Chauvin."
- 4 The Welsh Coffins probably got their name from the Welsh word cefyn - "ridge" or "hill."
- 5 A nickname, "the bald." A variation of Caffin, the earliest form being Chaufin. In France, the enthusiastic devotion of a Nicholas Chauvin to the Emperor Napoleon gave rise to the terms "chauvinism" and "chauvinistic."

Since our Coffin ancestors came from Normandy, I think we can disregard the origin of the name of the Welsh Coffins. And if we don't like the "bald" explanation, we can recall that even kings had such names as Charles the Bald, Charles the Fat, Charles the Simple, Aethelred the Unready, and Richard Crouchback.



This is the Coffin coat of arms, as shown in the book, THE COFFIN SAGA, by William Gardner, which is sold in the Whaling Museum in Nantucket.

A coat of arms consists of the shield and the crest. The crest is the decoration on the helmet.

In the language of heraldry, this coat of arms is described as follows: The shield -- "Azure semée of crosses crosslet or, three bezants." The crest -- "A martlet azure."

Explanation: Azure, of course, is blue.

"Semée means strewn.

"Crosses crosslet" are crosses, the four ends of which form little crosses. "Or" means gold, or golden.

"Bezants" were gold coins of Byzantium, an ancient city where Constantinople now is. So the shield is blue, strewn with gold crosses, , each arm forming a cross, and four golden discs like coins. "Martlet" was the name of an imaginary bird said to be without legs. So the crest was a blue martlet. The candy-striped object the martlet stands on represents a wreath. There was always a wreath on the helmet for the decoration to stand on.

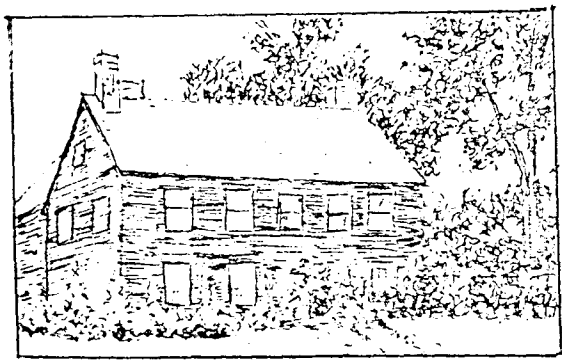
This coat of arms doesn't give the motto; I don't know why. But this motto should go with it and be under the shield: IN TEMPESTATE FLORESCO, which means, IN (time of) STORM I FLOURISH.



OUR COFFIN ANCESTORS IN AMERICA

In 1642, on the ship Hector, Tristram Coffin, who had married Dionis Stevens in 1630, came to America, bringing with him his widowed mother, his sisters Eunice and Mary, and his wife and five children. Four more children were born in this country.

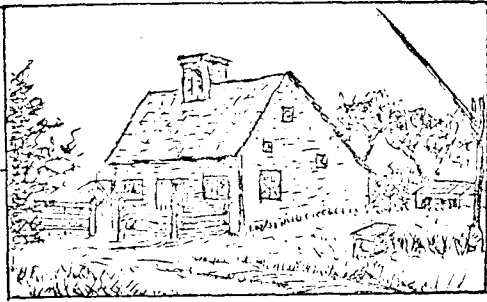
They landed at Salisbury, Massachusetts, which is on the north shore of the Merrimack River, near its mouth, about twenty miles north of Gloucester. After a short time they moved up the river to Pentucket, now called Haverhill. Not long afterward they moved to Newbury, which is on the south bank of the river, opposite Salisbury, where they remained until they moved to Nantucket, eighteen years after their arrival in America. The house in Newbury, referred to on the previous page, and pictured below, was lived in by ten generations of Coffins, and is now owned by the Society for the Protection of New England Antiquities.



Nantucket Island was bought, not from the Indians, but from Thomas Mayhew, a resident of Martha's Vineyard, who had title to Nantucket from the Crown. The purchase price was thirty pounds plus two beaver hats; the deal was not made until the claims of all the Indians living on the island were satisfied. Tristram Coffin,

his sons Peter, James, and Tristram, Jr., and his son-in-law Stephen Greenleaf, bought five of the twenty shares. Other original purchasers were Richard Swain, Christopher Hussey, John Sears, and William Pike. Also there were ten Associates, who helped to settle the island: Nathaniel and Edward Starbuck, Thomas Lock, Robert Barnard, James Coffin, Tristram Coffin, Jr., Thomas Coleman, John Smith, Thomas Mayhew, Jr., and Robert Pike.

Not all the families moved to the island to live. The first settlers, in 1659, were Thomas Macy, Edward Starbuck, Isaac Coleman, and James Coffin and their families.



The second historic Coffin house, mentioned previously, and pictured here, is the Jethro Coffin house. This building stands out in

the "moors" at some distance from the town of Nantucket.

Tristram Coffin's youngest daughter, Mary, married Nathaniel Starbuck. Their daughter, also named Mary, was the first white child born on the island. Mary Coffin Starbuck was one of the first inhabitants of Nantucket to be converted to Quakerism -- in 1701 -- and she was one of the most influential persons in establishing the Religious Society of Friends on the island.

It might be well to state here that everybody named Coffin now living in America is a descendant of one or another of Tristram's five sons: Peter, Tristram, Jr., John, James, and Stephen. Our ancestor is John, the eighth child, who was born in Haverhill in 1647, married Deborah Austin, had eleven children, and died in 1711.

Our third generation in America is represented by John's son Samuel, the sixth child, born in 1680 in Nantucket, married in 1705 to Miriam Gardner, and died in 1711 in Edgartown, on Martha's Vineyard.

It was the fourth generation Coffin ancestor who left Massachusetts. William Coffin, Samuel and Miriam's seventh child, was born in Edgartown in 1720, and married Priscilla Paddock, of Nantucket, in 1740. They had ten children, born between 1743 and 1765. In 1771 William and Priscilla went to North Carolina and became members of the New Garden Meeting. This meeting house is adjacent to the campus of Guilford College, which is between Greensboro and Winston-Salem. Five of their sons, Barnabas, Libni, Bethuel, William, Jr., and Levi, also went to North Carolina between 1771 and 1773, some to New Garden, and some to Deep River Meeting, which is about eight miles south and a little west of New Garden.

(on p. 8)

The Levi Coffin just mentioned married Prudence Williams. They had six daughters and then one son, and that son was the Levi Coffin of Underground Railroad fame.

Several of my cousins and I have a dear friend, Blanche (Mitchell) Winslow, who was in Penn College when we were. A year or more ago, learning that I was working on a family history, she sent me the newspaper clipping reproduced here. She doesn't remember where she got it, and there is nothing in it to tell when it was printed or in what newspaper, but it surely gives a vivid account of Levi and Catherine Coffin's operation of an Underground Railroad "station." Fountain City is about eight miles north of Richmond, Indiana.

## COFFIN'S U. G. DEPOT

Indiana Takes Steps to Save a Famous Old Homestead.

### REFUGE IN SLAVE DAYS

House at Newport in Which the Fugitives Were Hidden.

Place Where Mrs. Stowe Found Her Uncle Tom's Cabin People in Actual Life.

Special Correspondence of The Inter Ocean.  
 FOUNTAIN CITY, Ind., Oct. 14.—The Wayne County Historical society has at last taken steps for the preservation of the old Coffin homestead in this village. The historic building is to be turned over to the state. Here, in actual life, existed most of the characters known around the world, wherever "Uncle Tom's Cabin" has been read. This was the headquarters and home of the Underground railway in the days of slavery. Then Fountain City was Newport. With the end of the days of 1861-4 its star began to fade. Its great system, which hurried slaves from the South to Canada, was relegated to the rear, and Newport was forgotten. From Indiana's most noted settlement it became one

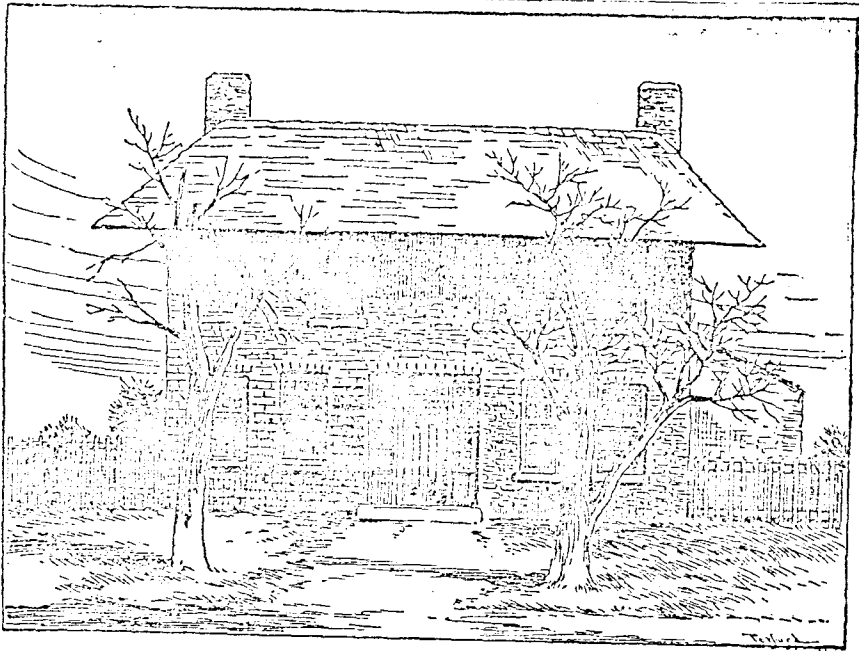
from the Ohio river to Sandusky, Ohio, where they passed over into Canada.

John W. Johnson, now an old man, is a nephew of the president of the Underground railway. He still lives at Newport or Fountain City, only a few doors from the historic house.

#### Eliza's Famous River Trip.

In speaking of the "good old times," among other things Mr. Johnson said: "I was at my uncle's when Eliza of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' fame was brought to his house. Her pursuers were close upon her trail. She was a brown-skinned, intelligent woman, and was sheltered there for several days. She said that she was a slave from Kentucky, living back a few miles from the Ohio. It was this story told to my uncle and aunt, and repeated to Mrs. Stowe a few days later, that resulted in the interesting scene in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' wherein Eliza, followed by the bloodhounds, reaches the Ohio and passes over on the ice. The great body of American people think it is all fiction, but it was not. She reached here just ahead of her pursuers, and was stowed away under the eaves of the old house. She remained there several days, and was then forwarded on to Sandusky, and thence sent over into Canada. I think it was in the year 1854 that my uncle and aunt were on a visit to Canada, and attended church at a colored meeting-house at Chatham. During the services a pretty colored woman rushed up and exclaimed, 'How are you? God bless you, Aunt Katie!' She was not recognized until she referred to the Coffin house, and said she was named Eliza Harris by Mrs. Coffin herself. She was living happily in Chatham then, but I have lost sight of her in the years that have passed. I suppose she is dead."

This narrative, told to Harriet Beecher Stowe during one of her visits to the Underground Union station, produced such a wonderful effect upon her that she made it the chief incident in her story. George Harris was



LEVI COFFIN'S UNDERGROUND RAILWAY DEPOT.

of her most obscure. Nothing is left of its activity, nothing of its glory, but a few old brick buildings and the famous Coffin home—the home of Levi and his wife—"Simon and Rachael Halliday" of the great novel. The streets are deserted, and all is still. Only occasionally can an old Quaker be seen who recalls the days of departed fame and tells again the story of the past.

The home of Levi Coffin once sheltered "Eliza Harris" and the baby she carried across the Ohio in her flight on the ice, "George Harris," "Simon and Rachael Halliday," and other characters known to every child in the land, and considered by the great majority of people to be simply creations of the imagination of Mrs. Stowe. Here lived Levi and "Aunt Katie" Coffin, the husband known as the president of the Underground railway, and his house the Union station; his wife known as vice president, auditor, and general promoter. But they are all gone now, even the writer who placed the characters in fiction, even Fred Douglass, who often visited the scenes of this story, and there met Harriet Beecher Stowe. Murat Halstead, who used to run over frequently from Paddy's Run, Ohio, has even given the town what is now called "the shake," and no vigorous pen remains to jot down for the coming generations the quaint old scenes which throw light upon the descriptions and real life and blood into the characters of "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

#### Old Underground Railway Station.

Newport dates back to about 1791, when Quakers living in North Carolina liberated their slaves and moved North. Wayne county was then a Quaker center, as it is at present, and they formed a settlement and called it Newport. Near the cross street where are clustered the postoffice, the drug store, and the town's business is the home of the noted president of the underground railway, Levi Coffin. Southern slave owners conferred the name upon the house and its occupant. The house is a square, two-story brick structure. The windows and doors stand out prominently, rather too boldly for beauty. The roof slopes down, forming dark eaves. In this structure and under the sloping eaves of the roof were sheltered at various times 3,200 slaves, all runaways from the South, who, after reaching that haven, were never over-

in reality Lewis George Clark, a mulatto, who died recently in Lexington. He was born in Madison county, Kentucky, in 1812, and was the property of Samuel Campbell.

#### Coffin a Man of Nerve.

It is said that Mrs. Stowe got her inspiration for Legree and other characters through incidents at Newport. Hardly a day passed but the town was thrown into an excitement because of an invasion of angry slave hunters who had come to regard Coffin and his followers as enemies, because hundreds of negroes had mysteriously disappeared at the "union station." Sometimes the slave hunters threatened to burn down



CATHERINE COFFIN.

taken. "Aunt Katie" Coffin's greatest and probably only boast was that of all the 3,200 that had been hidden away in the house not one had ever been recaptured and returned to slavery. Though the sloping roof does not add beauty to the structure, it did much in adding to its fame. Though not noticeable on the outside, the eaves come over far enough to form a small continuous dark room all around the house. It was into this space that the runaway negroes were stowed through a door which was then hidden from view by a big bed. The house was searched



LEVI COFFIN.

fully 200 times, and on one or two occasions the door to the dark closet was found, but not once did a slave hunter ever regain his property when once it had been stowed away in this cavernous room.

#### Eliza Harris Hidden There.

In this dark space "Eliza Harris" and her child were hidden when they were compelled to seek hiding after making their perilous trip across the Ohio. "George Harris" was also hidden away once in this garret, and through this house thundered the man to whom Harriet Beecher Stowe gave the name of Simon Legree. He was a Kentucky slave dealer whose business it was to sell negroes. Aunt Katie would feed her charges and take good care of them for weeks at a time. Many who hid in the monster feather beds which were quite popular in Hoosierdom about that time. After seeing that they were safe from their pursuers, Levi, her husband, Daniel Huff, and others, would bring out the old wagon, which still stands in the old Huff barn, and they would start their fugitives along to the next station of the Underground railway. Coffin had organized it perfectly

every house in the town in order to find their negroes, but when the fifty or hundred free negro residents would come out armed to the teeth with guns the raiders changed their minds.

Coffin was a man of wonderful nerve and was surrounded by Quakers equally as brave. It is related that at one time, after helping to save by legal process some negro girls from being kidnapped into Kentucky by unprincipled men, one of them said: "I would like to see the man who swore out this affidavit. I would fill him full of shot." Coffin rode up to him on horseback and in his simple Quaker custom said: "My friend, if it will afford thee any satisfaction to see that man look at me, I am the man. But it is not I that thee has to contend with, but the state of Indiana."

Mrs. Coffin was a woman of infinite tact and resource. On one occasion she found a negro girl in a house that was being surrounded by slave-trailers. She laid aside her Quaker garb, and assumed the clothes of a fashionable woman. Then, dressing the negress in her own clothes, she made a mock baby of a bundle of clothes, and passed the slave-owner with the girl as a nurse carrying a child for her mistress. There are many stories of her wonderful ability in this line.

#### Joke on Slave Traders.

Mr. Coffin at one time was a man of considerable wealth, but he exhausted his fortune in taking care of fugitive slaves, and in the last years of the Underground railway was compelled to ask for financial assistance from his friends in carrying on the work. One day, while in Cincinnati on a business trip, he went into the office of Henry Lewis, then the most prominent pork packer in the West. Mr. Lewis and Mr. Coffin were warm friends, and the latter said:

"Friend Lewis, I've got a man and his wife and children at my house, and it's costing me considerable to feed and clothe them and get them fixed up for their trip. Can you help me a little in the work?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Lewis, who knew well what Coffin meant by "the work," and at once handed over a liberal donation in money. Being fond of a joke, Mr. Lewis turned to a number of men who were in his office, saying:

"Perhaps some of you gentlemen would like to assist Mr. Coffin and myself in taking care of a poor family he has on his hands just now?"

This appeal brought generous response from every man in the office, and Mr. Coffin went away with a goodly sum in cash. As his friend left, Mr. Lewis said:

"I neglected to tell you, gentlemen, that my friend Coffin is the head of the Underground railway, and that the poor family he is assisting are fugitive slaves."

As all the men were Southern merchants and planters, who heartily hated Coffin and his work, Mr. Lewis' announcement created something like a sensation, but the feeling soon died down, and the matter was treated as a good joke.

"D--n me," said one of the party. "but you've suddenly got us, Mistah Lewis. Th' ideah of makin' us subscribe to th' stealin' of our own slaves. Let's likker, gentlemen."

Our fifth-generation-in-America ancestor was William and Priscilla's son Bethuel. He was born in Nantucket in 1756 and married Hannah Dicks in North Carolina in 1776. They had nine children, of whom the third, Zacharias, is our ancestor. The family moved in 1824 to Wayne County, Indiana, and lived near Richmond. Bethuel died in 1837 near Greensboro, in Henry County, Indiana. Henry County is just west of Wayne County, and its county seat is New Castle.

Zacharias, of the sixth generation, was born in Guilford County, N.C., in 1732, and married Phoebe Starbuck in 1803. In 1839 they moved to Walnut Ridge Meeting, near Carthage, in Rush County, which is south of Henry County. They later moved to Westland, in Hancock County, which is just east of Marion County, where Indianapolis is. He died there in 1845, and she in 1852.

A brother of Zacharias was Elijah Coffin, who had gone to Indiana in 1824, was Clerk of Indiana Yearly Meeting for more than 30 years, and was a prominent business man and citizen of Richmond. For more than twenty years he took a leading part in working for and finally, in 1849, establishing the Friends Boarding School, which later became Earlham College.....Adjoining the Earlham campus on the west, but having no connection with the college, is the Earlham Cemetery. The gateposts at the cemetery have on them the names of Elijah Coffin and his wife Naomi, and of their son Charles F. Coffin and his wife Rhoda. Both men had been prominent business men of Richmond, Clerk of Indiana Yearly Meeting, and Earlham College trustees.

Zacharias and Phoebe Coffin had nine children, of whom Elihu, the second, was the seventh generation in America, and was my father's grandfather. Elihu, born in 1807, married Sarah Brown in 1828 at Deep River Meeting, Guilford County, N.C. Their first child was Isaac Newton Coffin, my grandfather.

It is interesting that Bethuel, mentioned at the top of this page, and his great-grandson Isaac N., illustrate the westward movement of Americans. Bethuel, one of William and Priscilla's five sons who left Nantucket for North Carolina, went, at the age of 68, to Indiana. He, his son, and his grandson all moved from North Carolina to Indiana within fifteen years, between 1824 and 1839. My grandfather went with his parents from North Carolina to Indiana when he was three years old, and then from there to California when he was ~~68~~ 68.

Elihu Coffin had quite a career. He and Sarah and <sup>Indiana,</sup> their first two children went from North Carolina to ~~North Carolina~~, settling first near Milton, in wayne County, then moving after a few years to walnut ridge Meeting in Rush County. They had eleven children by 1850. In that year Elihu set out, in an ox-cart, for California to look for gold. The story is that, before going, he sold 100 acres of land in Iowa, where the city of Des Moines now stands (!) (how he happened to have land in Iowa when he had never been there is not explained) and that he gave 80 acres to his son Isaac, who traded the land for a saw mill in Indiana. Having found no gold in California, Elihu came home by way of Panama and lived for a while in West-land, in Hancock County. He later moved to Plainfield, about fifteen miles southwest of Indianapolis, where he died in 1883, about a month after Sara's death.

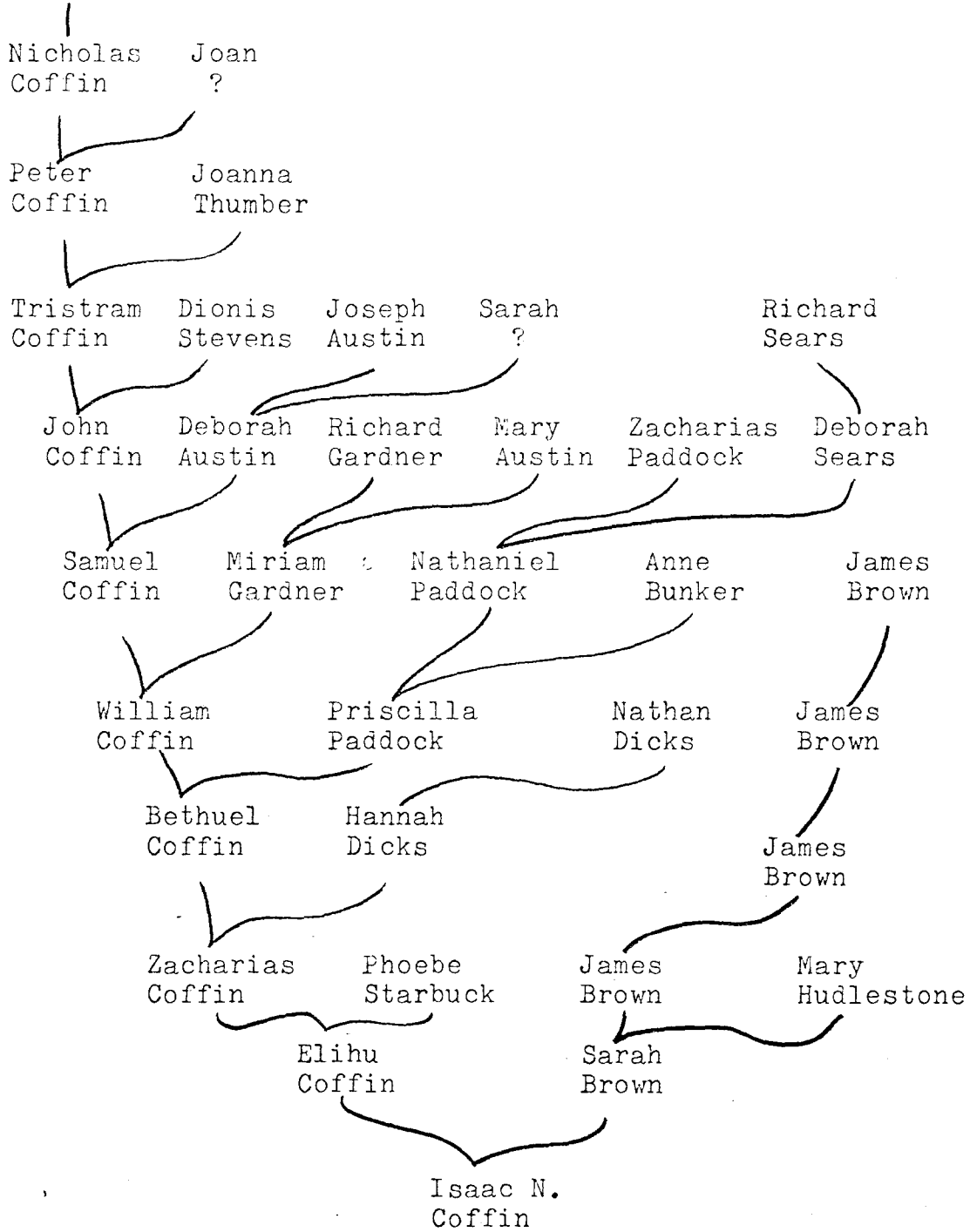
From this point on the Coffins began to scatter. Elihu's brother Harvey went to Iowa, and I knew some of his descendants in Oskaloosa. His son Milton, as I told in the Introduction, went to Kansas. His son Alfred went to Iowa, and some of his descendants also lived in Oskaloosa. Elihu's son William went to Missouri, and some of his descendants are still there. The youngest child of Elihu and Sarah was Sarah Ann, who married John Street, and we knew her as Aunt Sadie Street. I saw her once before she died in California in 1939 at the age of 89, and she told me how she had played as a child with James Whitcomb Riley.

Isaac Newton Coffin, the seventh generation, was born in North Carolina in 1826. He married Martha Bell at Hope-well Meeting in Parke County, which is straight west of Indianapolis along the Illinois border. Later the family moved to Walnut Grove Meeting, near Thorntown, in Boone County, northwest of Indianapolis.

As I said in the beginning, my four grandparents' names were Isaac N. Coffin, Martha Bell, Joseph P. Cook, and Sarah Jane Kelly. Now, before going further with the Coffins, I shall tell what little I have learned about the Bells, Cooks, and Kellys.

Tristram Coffin

THE COFFIN FAMILY TREE



FADJIAN COLLECTION