

Wednesday, 2 May 2018

## The search for William Romulus Powe's father

For a long time, I've tried to find the ancestry of my ancestor William Romulus Powe.

Finding William Romulus Powe - 'WRP' – in the first place was an interesting journey which I've [described before](#).

A major difficulty is that he is often assumed to be William Powe, the son of Revolutionary War veteran William Powe (1759-1849). They were both about the same age but married different wives in Garrard County Kentucky and moved to Missouri at about the same time.

But having clarified that, I became stuck on trying to find who WRP's parents were. I'd come to a dead-end.

So, I decided to get some (more!) expert help from genealogist [Dr Leonard Butts](#).

My request was simple: can you find the parents of WRP and document his relationship with the other Powes in Garrard County, Kentucky?

### What we know

Here are the main things we [know](#) about WRP.

WRP *married* Margaret Brown in Garrard County in 1817. She was, a member of the Brown family into which the Revolutionary War veteran, also named William Powe, married. The older William married Jerusha Brown.

WRP *served* in the War of 1812, enlisting in Garrard, and was at the decisive Battle of New Orleans.

WRP *left* Kentucky for Missouri well before the death of Revolutionary War veteran William Powe in 1839 and was not mentioned in his will.

WRP *separated* from Margaret Brown and their children in Missouri in 1849 and after marrying again moved to Indiana and then Illinois, where he had additional children.



*WRP served in the Battle of New Orleans, January 1815. Copy of lithograph by Kurz and Allison published 1890. Courtesy [National Archives](#).*

## **William Romulus Powe's connections**

WRP states in census records that he was born in Virginia.

Although Madison County, Kentucky (part of which became Garrard) was in the Commonwealth of Virginia at the time of early settlers, it would have been part of Kentucky well before the time of WRP's birth in about 1795. However, no evidence of William's origin in other parts of Virginia has been found, even though some of his descendants believed he was born in Virginia.

The only possible Powe family connection with WRP is with that of Revolutionary War veteran William Powe (1759-1839) of Garrard County, Kentucky. This William Powe married Jerusha Brown, whose relationship with William Romulus Powe's first wife Margaret Brown was likely as an aunt. A Frederick Brown posted bond for the wedding of WRP and Margaret, which suggests he too could be a relation.

Although WRP has often been confused with the son of William and Jerusha Powe (also named William), he is clearly a different person. William Powe Jr, born about the same time as WRP, always stated he was born in Kentucky.

WRP could have some relationship to the John Powe who appears in both Madison and Garrard counties in 1794, a few years after the Revolutionary War veteran William Powe. The suggestion is that they were related and possibly brothers.

If it was John Powe who brought WRP to Kentucky, the time of arrival is close to coinciding with William's birth. This might explain why William always stated he was born in Virginia since both John and the elder William were from Virginia. This theory fits the few known facts but it's important to note that there are many gaps in the records.

WRP's use of 'Romulus' began when he migrated to Missouri, possibly to distinguish himself from William Powe Jr., who migrated to the same county in Missouri at about the same time. A search for the origin of the name Romulus – as a surname or as a paired connection with the name Remus (the mythical founding twins of Rome) revealed nothing to indicate that the name was anything more than a fanciful use by William himself or his parents.

This idea is reinforced by the fact that William seems to have used 'original' rather than family names for his own sons. William did name a daughter Agnes Royston Powe. While there was a Royston family in Garrard County, no prior relationship between the Powe and Royston clans could be discovered.

## **William Powe senior and John Powe**

The most obvious research path for WRP is through William Powe and John Powe, who arrived in Madison and Garrard counties in Kentucky after the Revolutionary War.

William Powe, the Revolutionary War veteran is well-documented and there is enough material for a future item on him. WRP married into the same Brown family as the elder William Powe, which suggests a double family connection. Unfortunately, though there is nothing certain about his ancestors either.

John Powe is more mysterious and for that reason has been assumed to have had some connection to WRP, possibly as his father.

The elder William Powe and John Powe served in the Revolutionary War out of Orange County, Virginia, but the only Poes living there at the time and previous to the war could not be connected to William and John.

'Powe' is not the spelling of the name in Virginia, but William and John spelt it that way, as did their children and WRP, whose relationship to them is unknown. WRP and the elder William's son William Powe Jr. both migrated to Missouri at about the same time, reinforcing a close family connection.

In the end, Leonard's research showed that it is lack of records which has prevented identification of WRP's parents. There is some early tradition believed by William Powe junior's descendants of a connection with WRP's family, though exactly what that relationship is we don't yet know.

## Next Steps

Among Leonard's suggestions for next steps are several related to the YDNA project which boil down to 'get more people to take part'. There is a good chance that Revolutionary war veteran William Powe (1759-1849) who died in Garrard County KY is connected in some way. Some of his numerous descendants are easy to find but none of them wants to take part – and none live near enough for me to 'drop in' with a test kit.

He also suggested doing the same search for some other specific family groups, though locating such descendants is more problematic.

I have also agreed to take part in an autosomal test to identify possible Poe 'cousins' as recent results from a known relative have shown some promise.

A focus on Orange County, Virginia, records is also a logical option though access to such records, especially the many which are unindexed is likely to be expensive.

Further research on other family connections among early settlers of Garrard County who were from Orange County is also a potential focus.

A critical clue is the Garrard County court record showing John Powe brought two mulatto children to Garrard County from North Carolina. However, without knowing *where* in North Carolina he brought them from, it is impossible to know where to look. Should evidence emerge showing some connection of the Garrard County John Powe to someone in North Carolina prior to 1794, this could help resolve the mystery.

Wednesday, 14 June 2017

## What do we know about William R. Poe? Part 3

William and Margaret moved to Missouri in the 1820s. They were not alone. Many settlers moved from Kentucky to areas further west.

In 1816 a small army of settlers began moving from Kentucky to Indiana, then on to Illinois. In the following years, many more people migrated westward with more than half moving to Missouri and most of the rest going to Indiana and Illinois.

On 9 August 1824, William R Poe (WRP) was possibly the party to a bond signed by Joseph Casteel binding his daughter Mary, as an apprentice to 'William Powe' until 27 Feb 1827, to 'learn to knit, sew, etc'. If this is him it would have been soon after his arrival in Missouri and may be an illustration of his enterprise. But there was one other William Powe in Clay County at this time. He had also come from Garrard County Kentucky and the two are often confused.

By 1830 William was using the middle name Romulus, possibly to distinguish himself from the other William. 'Powe' at this time a more common usage than 'Poe' which they would all later adopt. Whether he was related through his Powe ancestors to the other William is not known. There were family connections through his wife's family – the Browns. You can imagine that sorting out the Browns is even more difficult!

The use of Romulus or the middle initial 'R' helps identify him clearly in land records and various court proceeding. It is safe to assume that any references to William Powe without the 'R' after about 1830 are to the other fellow.

Perhaps he adopted the name himself though it is not clear what its significance may be. Romulus was a co-founder of Rome and regarded as an example of tyranny. Powe is associated with Whigs who supported Alexander Hamilton the popular federalist, remembered on the US five-dollar note. Hamilton had wished to ensure limitations on presidential power. So perhaps WRP was having a joke on himself if he was regarded as autocratic.

WRP made several land purchases in Missouri. A number of these pieces of land were purchased from the government, with funds to be used for schools and payment of teachers. So, he had real wealth with which to buy the land. It would be interesting to know exactly how he made his money.

In October 1848 WRP was certainly a founding member, though never an officer, of the Plattsburg Masonic Lodge. The Masonic records of Kentucky for the earlier period do not show anyone with the surname Powe, Poe, or Pow in any records, so it appears it was not the family custom at this time.

WRP was convicted for gaming during this period and also of selling liquor to the Indians.

Census and court records show he and Margaret had four children, though it is possible and consistent with the time that one or two others may have died at a young age, perhaps in Kentucky before their move to Missouri.

Those who there are records for are Agnes Roster (1823) born in Kentucky and three boys all born in Missouri; Alonzo Marion (1826), Americus Napoleon (1827) and Alexander Hamilton (1832).

Who came up with those names? Agnes may have been a family name and Royster may be the surname of his or his wife's family – though as yet none have been found. Alonzo may have been named as part of a plan to distinguish his Powe family from the others who filled their families with a confusing array of Williams and Johns.

Third in the 'A team' was Americus Napoleon. Americus was a pen name of popular politician Alexander Hamilton, but Napoleon – the tyrant. Perhaps this is more family humour. His youngest son was named, perhaps more respectfully as Alexander Hamilton, clearly in honour of the [Federalist](#).

Naming children after founding fathers was a common practice, with many George Washingtons and Benjamin Franklins appearing. But there were few Alexander Hamiltons and even fewer Americuses - again, WRP was being unique.

The interesting thing about the census record is that I can find no entry for William in the 1830 census, but he is there as 'Wm R Pow' in the 1840 census as is the person he is often confused with 'Wm Pow'.

His eldest son, Alonzo, decided to 'go west' at the age of 18. He signed up for a job with Lemmon-Walden party who left Missouri in April 1845 arriving in the Washington Territory in October. Young Alonzo Poe was a naive lad getting himself into a bit of trouble with Indians whom he assumed (perhaps based on his life experience to that point) would always be friendly.

There is no indication about what made him go west at such a young age. He seems to have been often bored on the journey and wasted bullets shooting at small creatures to pass the time. Perhaps this shows a comfortable upbringing as well as a restless spirit - and perhaps his leaving followed tension in the family. Alonzo claimed land and built a small home but complained of loneliness to his friend Issac Ebey. His younger brother, Americus joined him within a few years after he settled in the Washington Territory.

Back in Missouri, the family was not in good shape.

WRP left his remaining family and Margaret was successful in obtaining a divorce in 1849 on the basis that he had abandoned her and a minor child, Alexander who was 17 years old at the time. Property listed as frozen during the dispute included land within Clinton County, 'two sorrel horses, ... nine head of cows and steers, and one waggon' as well as kitchen utensils and farm implements.

Once we get to the 1850 census both WRP and Margaret appear in the census records living in separate states.

WRP was beyond the reach of the Clinton County authorities by 1850 and did not appear in his own defence in the property dispute. The court found against him and his land was subsequently sold on the courthouse steps to Americus in October 1851 who bought it for a token sum of \$50 (it was valued in 1860 at \$3,000).

Americus presumably had to come back from the Washington Territory which probably explains the delay in this action taking place. The time for mail to get to him and his journey back would have taken the best part of a year.

Two years later he transferred the land to his youngest brother Alexander, who had by then turned 21. Alexander would support his mother for the rest of her life.

Margaret herself bought at least two further plots of land after the divorce settlement. Later following Margaret's death, the land was split three ways between his remaining children, Americus, Agnes who had married by then, and Alexander in the absence of Americus who was now in California.

In addition to various land transactions, there are other deed registrations which if examined closely may reveal family or business connections, but at present, I only have index references, not details.

What was WRP doing while this happened?

On 29 April 1849, WRP was married to Mary Jane Dale, some 35 years his junior, by a Justice of the Peace, Mr Saunders, in Buchanan County, Missouri. (It looks like the JP forgot to register the marriage in any courthouse, so we only have these details from Mary's later statement after she was widowed.) Soon after, they moved to Indiana where they had a son, named after him, in April the following year. In his second marriage, he abandoned the 'A team' idea.

After about 5 years WRP and Mary moved to Franklin County Illinois and in all had seven children, though only four survived to adulthood. They were William R (1850-1863), Lucy Jane (1852-1946), Edgar Adam (1855-1868), Winifred Scott (1857-1858), Sydney Allen (1859-1928), Pleasant Newton (1859-1928) and Robert Dale (1866-1943).

Winfield was presumably named after [Winfield Scott](#), a popular United States Army general and unsuccessful presidential candidate of the Whig Party in the 1852 presidential election.

In 1850 William and his new family had moved to Indiana and in the census, he is described as a plasterer. Around 1855 they moved to Illinois and by 1860, the family was living in Perry County Illinois, where he is also described as a plasterer.

WRP died in 1866 at the age of 70, soon after his eldest son, Alonzo, died of tuberculosis on the other side of the country.



A nineteenth-century plasterer, via Wikipedia.

Wednesday, 21 June 2017

## Grandfather Poe and the King of Chinese Cinema

When I started asking about my grandfather, [Alexander Marion Poe](#), and his work in vaudeville, my father told me he went to the United Kingdom (UK) and that his theatrical agent was Ramos and Ramos.

This occurred during the second time he 'went missing' from Australia, roughly 1908-1912.

He had first arrived in Australia in 1902 at the age of 17 and was back in California, the place of his birth, in early 1906 though returned to Australia before October that year.

I could find nothing about Ramos and Ramos in the UK. People I wrote to there just said 'there is no record' of such an agent.

The other stories about this period included one that grandfather Poe's vaudeville stage act was performed after a film about Edgar Allan Poe was shown. Grandfather Poe would then be introduced as a 'direct descendant' and perform his act which may have included magic, mind reading, flamenco guitar or singing.

Part of the story was that he returned to Australia with two English friends he had met in the UK and on the way, they worked in 'China'. It all sounded a bit farfetched but I kept an eye out for 'Ramos and Ramos' checking the internet from time to time.

Eventually, they popped up on [The Australian Variety Theatre Archive](#) which began in 2011 as a research website devoted to popular culture entertainment between 1850 and 1930. The [item](#) was written by Juan Ignacio Toro Escudero as part of his PhD research.

All of a sudden one short paragraph on Ramos and Ramos gave some credibility to the stories. So, who were Ramos and Ramos?

One of the most important pioneers of Chinese cinema and a significant presence in the 'Far East' as a vaudeville entrepreneur was Antonio Ramos Espejo. He operated the firm Ramos and Ramos with Ramón Ramos (no relation) from the early 1900s, initially out of the Philippines. Antonio became so successful with his film theatres that he was known as 'The Spanish King of Chinese Cinema'.

By 1906 they had established themselves in China and within another three years were running live shows and films in Manila, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tianjin (in north-east China), Macao and Beijing.

Australian vaudeville acts toured for Ramos and Ramos and were signed up by the firm's Australian representative, Amaro Lopez, for a six-month tour of Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tianjin, Macao and Beijing. Lopez was based in Sydney.

The path to China was well trodden by artists of the time. Lopez placed an advertisement in the Sydney press in October 1909 seeking vaudeville artists for Ramos and Ramos to work in Hongkong and Shanghai. At least 40 applicants responded – more than he was looking for.

However, the story I had was that Poe was linked with Ramos and Ramos in the UK and headed back to Australia via China with them.

I asked Juan Ignacio Toro Escudero for advice as he is the only person dedicated to studying Ramos & Ramos. Much of his research was derived from newspapers, but he didn't find any reference to grandfather Poe, though one of his stage names, Abdul Khan, did ring a bell. Acts did change their names often following suggestions from local entrepreneurs. Sounded like grandfather's kind of people.

Juan was especially interested that his agent in England was Ramos and Ramos. Ramón Ramos was the first agent for Chinese vaudeville artists in Europe that he has knowledge of. So the story of Poe being engaged from the UK fits with what is known, though it certainly is an area for further study.

Juan's thesis is now completed though it is in Spanish and his focus is on Ramos' film enterprises. For a fascinating introduction to his work please see his video 'Antonio Ramos Espejo, el emperador Española del cine Chino' [The Spanish Emperor of Chinese cinema]

One of the features of the Ramos shows was to combine a film show with a stage act. Grandfather Poe's time with Ramos and Ramos in China may be the origin of a story that he did his stage act after the showing of a silent film about Edgar Allan Poe.

The basis of this speculation is that the only film which fits the story would be D.W. Griffith's film 'Edgar Allen [sic] Poe' made in 1909.

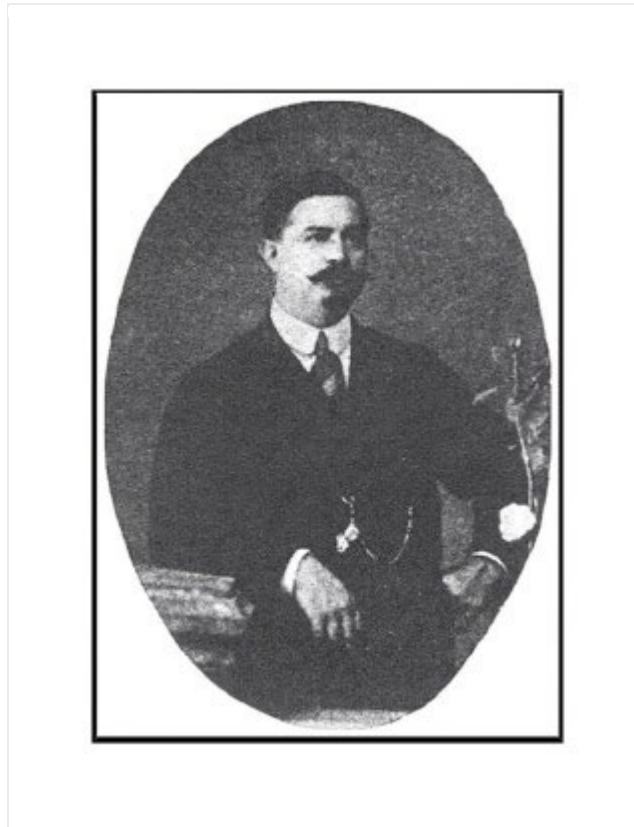


This would fit the time he was away from Australia (1908-1912). In some cases, these films were shown a year or two after their release in the USA, so if it played in China in 1910 or 1911 this is consistent with it happening just before his return to Australia. Although there is apparently no record of this particular film being shown in China, Griffith's films were popular and widely distributed in China, so it is highly likely to have been shown there.

As an aside, the story that he was related to the poet would have some credibility given that grandfather Poe was of a similar complexion. Whether the relationship is actually true is, of course, another story.

There is not enough information of grandfather Poe's two English companions to identify where they were exactly at this time. One of his companions was certainly Jack Wright. Jack had apparently learned martial arts in Japan but was also an entertainer. He certainly arrived in Australia at about the same time as grandfather Poe did so the timing fits.

Wright's family does not know anything about his time in 'the Far East'. However, within a few years of arriving in Sydney, he made a short film called *Yellow Fang* set in China which he combined with a demonstration of Jujitsu.



Ramón Ramos, who may have signed up Poe to work in China. *Via The Theatre*, December 1909.

The other part of his China story is that he supplemented his interest/skills as a herbalist during his time in China. As yet there is no way to verify this, except that he only began working as a herbalist after he arrived back in Australia in about 1912. He was apparently able to communicate in 'Chinese' with Chinese herbalists back in Australia. This would be consistent with him having spent some time in China and most likely in Hong Kong if it was Cantonese he was familiar with.

In spite of many gaps in the record, the story of his time in China is at least consistent with some verifiable facts. There are many stories which (as yet) are not.

### ***Postscript 13 August 2018***

Interesting to [read about historical](#) links between Indian and Western stage magicians as described by John Zubrzycki in his latest book. In 1917, grandfather Poe billed himself as Abdul Khan 'The Hindoo Mystic' with feats of strength and mind reading, appearing 'with other comedians'.

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