

Chapter XVII: Neal-Cowden-Trimble

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Thomas Neal's father and mother were **WILLIAM NEAL** and **ELIZABETH {COWDEN} NEAL**. William was born in Kentucky, probably in Shelby County, on December 15, 1809. This date is calculated from his grave marker in the Neal-Paxton Cemetery in Paxton, Indiana, which reportedly states that he was 60 years and 22 days old when he died on January 6, 1870. According to Elizabeth's grave marker in the same cemetery, she was 54 years, 5 months, and 22 days old when she died on April 28, 1851. This would make her date of birth November 6, 1796, but, as the next two paragraphs will describe, the year of her birth was probably 1806 instead. According to the 1850 census, Elizabeth was also born in Kentucky.¹

Having been born in 1796 would have made Elizabeth fourteen years older than her husband, William, and such a wide difference between their ages seems quite improbable. Moreover, there is evidence that her parents did not begin a family until

¹ William Neal's grave marker in the Neal-Paxton Cemetery in Paxton, Indiana, is located between the markers of his two wives. In 1994 (see slide 07149) his tablet was broken; in early 2006 (see slides 12029 and 12033-34) it was lying face up slightly below the surface of the ground. A repair our Neal family commissioned in late 2006 restored William's marker to an erect position on a new base, but damage to the stone itself while it had been on the ground makes it impossible now to read his age at death, if that was originally inscribed on the stone. A document from 1956 states that William Neal was 60 years and 22 days old at his death in 1870, and this statement presumably was based on what his grave marker then said. Later accounts, however, perhaps written after the grave marker had been damaged, state that he was 61 years old at death. It is possible that the 1956 account is in error: Elizabeth's life span, it will be noted, includes "22 days," and it may be that the person who in 1956 recorded William's age at death mistakenly repeated the "22 days" in the document referred to. In any case, he seems to have been born in 1809 or 1810. For Elizabeth's grave marker, see slides 07147, taken in 1994, and 12028, taken in 2006. Between 2006 and 2012, her stone was also severely damaged, but I had a monument company repair and straighten her marker. A cholera pandemic swept through Sullivan County in 1851, and it is possible that this disease caused the death of Elizabeth {Cowden} Neal, and perhaps that of William Neal as well.

after 1800: according to records in Kentucky, they were married in 1802. Cowden researchers believe there were three females other than Elizabeth born to those parents before 1810, when Elizabeth's presumed father appears on the census with four females under ten years of age and none at all over that age – where Elizabeth should have been listed if she had actually been fourteen years old in 1810. I believe she was, in fact, one of those four female children recorded as being under ten years old that year.

What settles the matter, in my opinion, is that on later censuses Elizabeth herself evidently reported ages that are consistent with her having been born in 1806 and not 1796: she was in the age categories for 20 to 30 years old in 1830, 30 to 40 years old in 1840, and 40-something in 1850 – when the number as written is difficult to read owing to an ink blotch but upon close inspection in a digital version clearly says 45 years old. In my view, all of this points to a ten-year error on Elizabeth {Cowden} Neal's grave marker, perhaps owing to faulty information from a relative, perhaps an error by the stone carver. A birth in 1806 is more in line with her husband's age, the marriage of her parents, and the birth years of her siblings.²

² A history of the Matthew McCammon family gives Elizabeth Cowden's birth year as 1806 but for the wrong reason. Basing this date on an incorrect reading of her grave marker, the book says it reads 44 years when the grave marker itself clearly says 54 years. Although I have concluded that a ten-year mistake on the grave marker is the culprit for the erroneous birth year for Elizabeth, there is other possibilities. Elizabeth could have been a relative (perhaps a younger sister, or a niece?) of either her presumed father or her presumed mother who lived with John William Cowden and his wife, perhaps because she was an orphan, and was reared as this Cowden couple's own child. Or, she might have been the child of John William Cowden and an unknown earlier wife. Either of these circumstances would explain Elizabeth's supposed birth in 1796, six years before John Cowden and Mary Trimble were married, as well as the apparent gap between herself and her presumed sisters born after 1802. It would not explain why Elizabeth herself consistently reported younger ages on the several censuses cited, nor the distribution of younger females in the Cowden household on the census in 1810. I think the chances are greater that the stone

We do not have a date for the marriage of William Neal and Elizabeth Cowden. This marriage could not have taken place before the mid-1820s at the very earliest, though, if he was not born until late 1809. The couple's first child we know of was born in 1829, which is consistent with the reasoning here. We can presume that William and Elizabeth were married in Sullivan County, Indiana, since both sets of parents seem to have been living in that county during the 1820s, but there is no documentation to support this – probably because of the fire at that county's courthouse in 1850.

William and Elizabeth can be identified in their respective parents' households in 1820 (also in 1810 in her case, as we have seen). By the time of the 1830 census, when they were both described as twenty to thirty years of age, they had begun their own household in Sullivan County, Indiana. It is not clear exactly where they were residing then, but even though William Neal did not purchase public land until November 13, 1834, it would appear that they had already been living for several years on the land he would buy: the land records include William's sworn statement in support of his right of preemption. This means that he had been residing on the land, or at least cultivating it, for some time before claiming it in 1834, as the law provided he could. It is also possible that William and Elizabeth had been renting in the area before they could afford to buy their own land or that they had gotten land from another resident but the deed of sale was

carver made an error (or his information was faulty), but we cannot totally rule out these or other explanations.

destroyed in the court house fire. One of the two, William or Elizabeth (probably the former), could read and write, according to the 1830 census.³

The 1840 census shows William and Elizabeth Neal were still living in Sullivan County, where William was farming the land that he had purchased during the previous decade. Each was enumerated as being between thirty and forty years of age. They were there again in 1850, when he was described as forty-one years old and she was – as we have seen – reportedly four years older than William was. In June in that year, William expanded his holdings by purchasing an additional 80 acres in an adjoining section. William Neal and his family were among the founders of the Antioch Church of Christ in Cass Township of Sullivan County, which was established in 1829. This church was located on that county's border with Greene County.⁴

³ William Neal received a patent for the southwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 26, Township 7 North, Range 9 West on October 1, 1835; this was the land for which he had filed the statement in November 1834 (affixing his mark, not a signature). The second purchase, made on June 20, 1836, was for the northwest quarter of that same quarter, but evidently William did not claim it under preemption. The patent for this second purchase was issued on September 7, 1838. The total of 80 acres cost William and Elizabeth \$100. See the USGS map for Sullivan/Indiana and slides 12017 and 12018, taken in 2006, for views of this property. See Appendix II for a description of how public lands were surveyed and sold by the United States government. William and Elizabeth Neal's property adjoins the Neal-Paxton Cemetery.

⁴ See the USGS map for Linton/Indiana for the location of this church. William and Elizabeth had one child in school in 1840. William Neal's later purchase (on June 13, 1850) was the west half of the northeast quarter of Section 22, Township 7 North, Range 9 West. The agricultural census for 1850 shows William Neal had 160 acres, 35 of them improved. Cash values that year were \$490 for the farm, \$100 for implements, \$175 for livestock, \$50 for homemade manufacturing, and \$56 for slaughtered animals. He owned six horses, four milch cows, five other cattle, twenty-eight sheep, and sixteen swine. The previous year, William had produced 50 bushels of wheat, 12 bushels of rye, 300 bushels of Indian corn, 20 bushels of oats, 50 pounds of wool, 18 bushels of Irish potatoes, 120 pounds of butter, 1 ton of hay, 35 pounds of flax, 3 bushels of flaxseed, and 100 pounds of maple sugar. William's farm passed out of the Neal family after his death in 1870. My grandfather recalled visiting the area about 1890 and finding little trace of his grandfather's home, only some newer buildings and an old orchard. William's son Thomas, my grandfather's father, moved north to the property in Hamilton Township and Cass Township we have described in a previous chapter. Antioch Church no longer exists; for views of its site, see digital image 01366, taken in 2012.

After Elizabeth died in 1851, William Neal married a widow named Charlotte G. {Moore} Bledsoe on January 13, 1853.⁵ This couple shown on the 1860 census, when they were living near Carlisle in Haddon Township of Sullivan County. He was now described as fifty-three years of age, which is slightly inaccurate if he had been born in 1809. Identified again as a farmer, William is said to have had \$1,750 in real property and \$1,000 in personal property. Charlotte was recorded as thirty-nine years of age on the 1860 census.

William Neal died before the 1870 census – on January 6 in that year, according to some sources. This date seems confirmed by a newspaper notice on January 13 signed by Thomas, his son, as administrator of William's estate. According to her grave marker, Charlotte died just ten days later, on January 16. Both of them should have been enumerated on the 1870 census anyway, since they had been alive more than halfway through the census year that had begun on June 1, 1869, but evidently they were overlooked when the census taker came around. The inventory of William Neal's possessions, dated February 9, states that his widow took her share. From this one would ordinarily assume that she was alive as of that date – except that her grave marker says she had died on January 16. It could be, however, that the inventory was made while

⁵ William's second wife, Charlotte G. Moore, was the daughter of Robert Moore and Drucella {Miles} Moore and the widow of Isaac Bledsoe. Robert Moore was reputedly a half-brother of Nancy Hanks, the mother of Abraham Lincoln. William and Charlotte were married by Levi Woodward, a justice of the peace in Sullivan County. The Moores and the Bledsoes were also members of Antioch Church.

Charlotte was still alive but she had died before it was submitted in February. The partition of William's estate, recorded on March 16, 1870, does not mention Charlotte, which seems to indicate she was deceased by then. We can be fairly sure she was no longer alive as of May 1870, for the partition of William's property also does not mention her.⁶ Both William and Charlotte are buried in the Neal-Paxton Cemetery in Paxton, Indiana.⁷

The grave marker for William Neal's first wife, Elizabeth, is not inscribed with her family name. Several other sources show it as Cowden, however, and some of these sources give the name of her parents as William Cowden and a woman from a Trimble family. This information is substantiated by some family history memories related in a 1906 letter by a woman who was ninety years old, Eliza {Benefiel} Trimble,⁸ who married into the Trimble family. Most researchers interested in William Neal and Elizabeth Cowden have concluded that her father's full name was John William Cowden and have concluded that this man must have chosen to use only his middle name during his later years.

⁶ I did a name-by-name search of the census for the entire township without finding either William or Charlotte in 1870. In the partition of William Neal's estate in March 1870, Thomas Neal's share was lot 10 (7 1/2 acres) in the southern part of the northwest corner of the west half of the northwest quarter of Section 26, Township 7 North, Range 9 West. His lot was one of fifteen relatively small lots that ranged from a little over five acres to, in one instance, sixteen acres that were distributed to survivors from both the Neal family and the Moore family. By 1871, most of these heirs had released their rights to William's son named William Allen Neal, who had gotten about eleven acres in the partition. How long he continued to own his father's properties is not known.

⁷ For Charlotte's grave marker, see slides 07149 (1994) and 12030 (2006). She was born on October 2, 1822.

⁸ Eliza (1816-1907) married a son of Joseph Trimble, a son of the James Trimble who is identified as Mary {Trimble} Cowden's father later in the text.

As we have seen, there is a John Cowden, in the column for 26 to 45 years of age, on the 1810 census in Washington County, Kentucky, and his four daughters that year would have included our Elizabeth; there is, unfortunately, no other record of this man in that county. The next census, in 1820, shows a Sullivan County, Indiana, farmer with that same name who was still in that age category for 26 to 45 years old; this leads us to suspect that John Cowden had been closer to twenty-six than to forty-five in 1810. The chances seem good that these two sightings are of the same individual – and the Cowden male we should focus on, because his presence in Sullivan County in 1820 would have brought William Neal and Elizabeth Cowden together during the 1820s, when and where they must have been married. Presumably this was also the John Cowden who is said to have married Mary Trimble in Fayette County, Kentucky, on December 17, 1802 – information we cannot verify because that county’s marriage records prior to 1803 were also destroyed by a fire. We are probably correct to believe, therefore, that the parents of Elizabeth Cowden were this **JOHN WILLIAM COWDEN** and his wife, **MARY {TRIMBLE} COWDEN**. As we will see in this chapter, however, the confusion over this man’s given name(s) muddies the water when it comes to identifying him and complicates our analyses of his origins.

Where John and Mary Cowden lived in Kentucky from 1802 until at least 1810 is not known; it could have been either Fayette County or Washington County, which are not

far apart. By 1815, however, his first wife evidently having died (probably in 1814 or early 1815) and with a number of young children to raise, John Cowden remarried in Knox County, Indiana, out of which Sullivan County would soon be created. The name of his second wife, whom he married on November 12, 1815, was Rebecca Richey, a woman born in Maryland about 1772. It was she, therefore, who was described in the Cowden household on the census of 1820 as twenty-six to forty-five years old. John's daughters now included two who were recorded in the age category for 10 to 16 years old (where Elizabeth should have been listed if she had been born in 1806) and three others ten years old or younger, which corresponds to what we know about John William Cowden's other children.⁹

Sometime after 1810, and probably before his second marriage, John Cowden presumably had staked out property in the part of Knox County that had become Sullivan County in 1817, since as we have just seen he and his family were recorded in the latter county on the 1820 census. A later deed in Sullivan County shows that John Cowden patented 80 acres of public land there in June 1825. This patent does not appear in the database of the Bureau of Land Management, probably because it was purchased before 1820. There is also some confusion about John William Cowden's landholdings, though:

⁹ On the 1820 census there was a female in John Cowden's household who was between sixteen and twenty-six years of age, where Elizabeth would have been recorded had she indeed been born in 1796. This was probably John's eldest daughter, Henrietta, who is thought to have been born in 1803 and if so had been properly bumped up into this older age category in 1820. We should also take note of a James Cowden in Scott County, Kentucky, who had several daughters in 1820 – including one who would have been in the right age category for Elizabeth whether she was fourteen or twenty-four years old in that year. I doubt he is the man we are looking for, but he may have been related to our Cowdens somehow.

the partition of his estate in 1871 does not mention the acreage he bought in 1825 but does refer to property in two other sections of the county – property for which we have no records at all.¹⁰

Strangely, the 1820 Indiana census was the last one on which John William Cowden would ever appear. There is no John, William, or John William Cowden listed on *any* subsequent census in Indiana or in any other state whose age or origins match what we know about our John William Cowden. Neither do any of the Indiana Cowdens who are listed in those years have an extra male his age in their households, as they would if he had been living with a relative and not in his own household. It is also puzzling that in 1850 John William Cowden's second wife, Rebecca, seems to have been residing not with him but with a granddaughter and this young woman's husband in Washington County, Kentucky. In fact, the only contemporary evidence we have that John William Cowden might have lived beyond 1820 are two land patents¹¹ issued in Sullivan County, Indiana, for a John Cowden, and this man could just as well have been John William Cowden's son, who was also named John.

¹⁰ John Cowden's patent, dated June 1, 1825, was for the east half of the southeast quarter of Section 30, Township 7, Range 8. It may be noteworthy that the deed was not recorded until 1911, perhaps because the Sullivan County courthouse fire in 1850 caused it to be re-recorded but perhaps because the property had remained in the Cowden family for all those years up to 1911. The property in the 1871 partition of Cowden's property included lots in the west half of the southwest quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 11 and in the northwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 14, both in Township 9 North, Range 9 West. How John William Cowden obtained this land in Section 14 is not known, but it is quite possible that his deeds of purchase were among those destroyed in the fire at the Sullivan County courthouse in 1850.

¹¹ Dated November 7, 1837, and October 1, 1840, these patents were for the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 32, Township 7 North, Range 8 West (40 acres) and the southeast quarter of the northeast quarter of that same section (also 40 acres). See the USGS map for Dugger/Indiana.

And yet we have two sworn statements, one from a relative and one from the county clerk in Sullivan County, Indiana, both made during the mid-1860s, that William Cowden (as he was identified here) died intestate on September 15, 1863. The clerk, however, drew a line through the next words on the printed form, “in said county,” which suggests that he had evidence, had been told (presumably by the heirs), or else was guessing that William Cowden had died somewhere other than in Sullivan County. Clearly those heirs were desirous of carving up the Sullivan County land that Cowden had owned, but how did they learn he had died – and did they have any knowledge of where he had been since 1820? (They swore that several of their fellow heirs had gone to Texas many years before and had never been heard from again, but they did not make the same statement about Cowden himself.) Thus we are left wondering about the circumstances that would lead to such a filing in Sullivan County, when and where John William Cowden died, and where he had been all these years since 1820.

Surely there is an explanation for this man’s apparent invisibility for all these years following 1820, but what it is eludes me. I even checked institutions in the event he was incarcerated or confined, but the man we call John William Cowden seemingly dropped from sight after 1820 until we learn of his death in 1863. This total lack of evidence of his very existence for more than four decades is extraordinary, even at a time when recordkeeping was rudimentary and it was not unusual for individuals to be missed on the

occasional census.¹² In fact, we know *nothing* about this man other than the census data mentioned here and an 1871 list of his children that is part of the estate settlement referred to.

Assuming the ages reported for John William Cowden on the two censuses we do have (1810 and 1820) were accurate, he was born between 1775 and 1784; according to his youngest daughter, his birthplace was Kentucky, though there is no documentary evidence to support this statement. If we accept John William Cowden as Elizabeth's father, as I believe we should, what can we learn about his origins? The absence of a census in Kentucky before 1810 is a real handicap here, and even the surviving tax rolls are not much help. A John Cowen was in Bourbon County, Kentucky, in 1790, but this is far too early for our John William Cowden to have been in any record if he was indeed born between 1775 and 1784. If we are willing to speculate that the spelling of Cowen's last name was slightly garbled, the man listed in 1790 might be considered a candidate for John William Cowden's father, but this is a slim lead indeed – and this John Cowen was listed, again as *Cowen*, in later records.

¹² John William Cowden may be probably buried in Booker Cemetery in Haddon Township of Sullivan County, Indiana, a cemetery that was established by a daughter. This cemetery is near the Cass Township line but is almost inaccessible. See the USGS map for Dugger/Indiana. The file for William Cowden's administration includes a list of his thirteen children but does not refer to a widow. Each of Cowden's principal heirs received \$16.32, this sum for each heir to be divided equally among the heir's own heirs if this principal heir was at that time deceased – as six of them were by then. Among the heirs of John William Cowden's six deceased children were those of our Elizabeth {Cowden} Neal, who had died in 1851; each of her own seven heirs received \$2.33. Two of John William Cowden's daughters stated in 1866 that five of siblings had gone to Texas many years previously and had never been heard from again. The censuses for Texas in 1850 and 1860 do not list any of these individuals – and neither do they show John William Cowden. The document partitioning Cowden's real estate in April 1871 does mention the heirs of Cowden's second wife, Rebecca, so we can be certain that she was deceased by then.

There are almost no sightings of a John or William Cowden in Kentucky during the last decade or so of the 1700s, and at first blush there is only one sighting of any interest at all: a newspaper notice that a letter for William Cowden was waiting in Lexington (Fayette County), Kentucky, in early 1800. This notice, if it was intended for our John William Cowden, would place Mary Trimble's future husband in that county at around the right time for their marriage there two years later. Besides that single piece of evidence, such as it is, there is no obvious clue as to the whereabouts, or even the existence, of John William Cowden in Kentucky before 1802, either.

Where was this man before then? And which was the Cowden family into which he was born between 1775 and 1784? These questions will leave us just as puzzled as this man's existence after 1820 does. It is a mixed blessing that there are several clusters of Cowdens in at least four places that were likely sources of a young man in Kentucky during the 1790s: once again we have, in a sense, too many possibilities without any indication any one of them is better than the others. There were Cowden families in central and southwestern Virginia (Augusta County, Franklin County, Henry County, and Wythe County); in the newly settled area that would become Tennessee in 1796; and in several counties in North Carolina. A John William Cowden who reached maturity and moved west into Kentucky during the 1790s could have come from any of these clusters, but none of them offers us a viable candidate. And there were other Cowden families in

Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts – all states that helped feed the rapid expansion of Kentucky during the period of time when our John William Cowden was born and reached maturity.¹³

Perhaps the most interesting of all these clusters in the states nearest Kentucky is the one in Rowan (later Iredell) County, North Carolina. Here a John Cowden died in 1777, leaving three sons. Two of them, Matthew and William, were living in Madison (later Garrard) County, Kentucky, during the 1790s. William resided in the northern district of this county, which attracts our interest because this district adjoined Fayette County. In 1800 this William Cowden sold his land in Iredell County to his brother John, who still lived back in that North Carolina county. The tax lists for Garrard County show that William was living there in 1801 and 1802 – the year when our John William Cowden married Mary Trimble in Fayette County, not far at all from where this William Cowden of North Carolina was residing in Garrard County.

Because this William Cowden disappeared from Garrard County not long after 1802, it began to look possible that he could have been the John (William) Cowden we see first in Washington County, Kentucky, in 1810 and then in Sullivan County, Indiana, in 1820. In addition, we know that this William Cowden born in North Carolina later went to live

¹³ In 1742 a William Cowden obtained a land grant just south of Staunton, Virginia, very near the property of a James Trimble. However, if our James Trimble did in fact come to America during the 1770s, as a document we will consider later in this chapter suggests, this other Trimble male in Virginia would be irrelevant for our purpose here.

in Tennessee with his brother John, who had by now moved there from Iredell County. William Cowden continues to be on the census in Tennessee through 1840. If this man was Elizabeth's father, his move to Tennessee thus would have dovetailed nicely with John William Cowden's disappearance from Indiana after 1820 (and after Elizabeth Cowden had married William Neal there).

For a time, then, it appeared that we had solved that particular Cowden mystery. Unfortunately, there is evidence enough to demolish this explanation of our John William Cowden's origins and movements: the William Cowden of North Carolina married in Tennessee in 1810, and his children shown on later censuses there were not numerous enough to account for the ones we know our John William Cowden fathered during those same years. This man also died in Tennessee, which is rather conclusive proof that he was not our William Cowden, whose estate was settled in Indiana during the 1860s.

Unfortunately, too, the collapse of this theory leaves us without a single candidate for the man who married Mary Trimble. Our only remaining lead, and it too is a faint one, is a Samuel Cowden who was involved in a land dispute in Fayette County, Kentucky, in 1808. This man was (judging from the 1809 marriage bond in Scott County for the widow of a Samuel Cowden, which refers to a number of minor children) a contemporary of our John William Cowden, perhaps even his brother, and so if we could identify this Samuel's father and mother we might find that they were also the parents of Elizabeth

Cowden's father. My search for a set of parents for Samuel has been fruitless, however. Thus we are stuck, with no trails to follow.

Even if we do find out more about John William Cowden between 1820 and 1863 and identify a plausible Cowden family for him, we may never solve our puzzle about his name and why he disappeared from sight for several decades between 1820 and his death in 1863. Was he named John William at birth? If so, why did he use each of these given names at various times? Perhaps he simply preferred (or disliked) one of the two names when he was younger and the other when he was more mature. Or perhaps he began using his middle name of William when his son, also named John William Cowden, had reached maturity. As for his disappearance, did he simply refuse to cooperate with census enumerators? Did he live under an assumed name or change his name altogether, unbeknownst to us? For now at least, John William Cowden will have to remain almost entirely a mystery to us.

Although there are several histories of Cowdens in America, with information about their origins in the British Isles, there is conflicting evidence about which of them settled in Virginia and North Carolina, the most likely sources of our John William Cowden's line. We know that a Matthew Cowden born in Ireland about 1707 arrived in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, area in 1728 or 1729, and it was his children who would go to Rowan (later Iredell) County in North Carolina. But another group of Cowdens, including

brothers named Walter, Robert, Samuel, and possibly William, moved first to Augusta County, Virginia, and then on to Mecklenburg County in North Carolina sometime after 1754. There does seem to have been contact between these two Southern Cowden families, so an earlier familial relationship is likely.

These Mecklenburg County brothers evidently were the sons of James Cowden, born in Londonderry, Ireland, in 1695. He came to America in 1728 and lived in what was first called North Worcester, Massachusetts, where he bought a home in 1731. This town renamed itself Holden in 1740, and Holden it is today. James Cowden died there on October 1, 1748. His wife's name was Polly {Connor} Cowden. This James Cowden was himself one of three sons (the others being William Matthew and William – note the use of a brother's given name as a middle name) of a man originally known as Thomas MacCowden. This MacCowden, born in Scotland, relocated to Ireland about 1688 and subsequently dropped the prefix from his name.

The James Cowden of Massachusetts had plenty of sons (perhaps as many as seven) and grandsons, so he might have been the source of all of the Cowden offspring who found their ways to North Carolina, but Cowden researchers are not agreed on this point either. The ancestral home of this James Cowden was at Manor Cunningham near Londonderry, on the road to Letterkenny; a “Cowden house” is said to stand there yet today. The Cowden family is described as having been the wealthiest family in the area,

so it may be that Thomas MacCowden went to Ireland in order to manage estates that his family or other families owned.

Bowing to the reality that we can proceed no further with the Cowdens without more evidence, let us see what success we have with the Trimble¹⁴ portion of Elizabeth {Cowden} Neal's ancestry. Some researchers believe that her mother, Mary {Trimble} Cowden, was born about 1779. As noted, we surmise Mary died between 1810 (when she was tabulated on the census with John William Cowden) and about 1814 or 1815 (just before John William Cowden married for the second time). Mary could have been born in Virginia, where there were numerous Trimbles, but she is more likely to have been born in Kentucky if we accept the interesting family lore about her father that we have thanks to the written recollections of Eliza Trimble. The name of Mary Trimble's father, if we accept the veracity of Eliza's recollections, was probably **JAMES TRIMBLE**. Eliza herself was uncertain about this man's given name, but an old Trimble family tree seeming to date back to the mid-1800s confirms that it was James.

According to what Eliza had heard from her husband's family, James Trimble was born in Ireland or Scotland in about 1760. (He is said to have been a Roman Catholic, which argues for Ireland.) En route to America, Trimble family lore says, James Trimble's merchant ship was captured by pirates and he was pressed into service with them for

¹⁴ Some Trimble researchers suspect that their family's name evolved from the name Trumbull.

awhile. After the pirate ship was captured, James was able to persuade the authorities that he was an involuntary pirate and so was not punished along with the real ones.

Once he was in America, Eliza's account continues, Trimble joined the fight for American independence in a location she did not specify. He was taken prisoner by Indians and remained in captivity for a long time. Eventually James Trimble and a comrade escaped and made their way, suffering many deprivations, to a fort on the Kentucky River.¹⁵ Here they were nearly shot by some of the understandably edgy defenders of the fort but were able to convince these defenders that they were not Indian raiders. Trimble and his colleague then resumed their service to the cause of America's independence.¹⁶

The fact that the events Eliza related are said to have occurred before James Trimble was married (and fathered Mary about 1779) would seem to date them between 1777 and 1779, when there was in fact considerable fighting between settlers and Indians in Kentucky. I could find no evidence that a James Trimble served in the Revolutionary War in any capacity that matches these details, but of course those records are far from complete and do not always include those documenting state militia forces.¹⁷

¹⁵ From the description, the location of the fort was probably at either Boonsboro or Harrodsburg, both of which were on a river.

¹⁶ Needless to say, Eliza's account is much more colorful. It shows signs of having been told and retold over the years, which may have led to some exaggeration and errors.

¹⁷ A surgeon's mate in 1775 and a captain of militia in 1778, both of whom were named James Trimble, served in Virginia, which then included what would become Kentucky. Also, a William Trimble of Augusta County, Virginia, mentioned in his pension application a campaign against Indians in 1777 and a second one, in Ohio two years later, during which he substituted for his brother James. (The commanding

Men named Trimble were among the earliest settlers – and surveyors – of the Virginia frontier and so of Kentucky, and Trimbles were surprisingly numerous in Kentucky during the last part of the 19th century (there is even a Trimble County). If Eliza's story is accurate, though, the James Trimble we are trying to identify had no direct connection with them because he came to America as a teenager and went directly to Kentucky from the British Isles, probably at about the time the War of Independence began. Was he one of the numerous Trimbles found in Kentucky after that war? Land grants in Kentucky, some of them for very large areas, bring to our attention several men there named James Trimble. One of them is a well-known James Trimble who, like the one in our family we are trying to identify, was captured by Indians – but in 1770, probably too early for the man we are seeking. Like Mary's father, this James Trimble fought in the Revolutionary War, but as a captain of militia. Nothing in this well-known James Trimble's biography, therefore, suggests that he was the father of Mary Trimble, the wife of John William Cowden.

We are not completely at sea, however. Some circumstantial evidence points out to us one man who at least may have had continuing proximity to Mary and her husband, John William Cowden. He was a James Trimble who is on the militia list¹⁸ for central

officer was the James Trimble mentioned above; perhaps William and James were his sons.) There is no reference to any capture by the Indians, however.

¹⁸ James Trimble was in Captain Cave Johnson's company.

Kentucky in 1786. A man with that same name is on the Kentucky tax rolls in 1790; this James Trimble is particularly interesting because he lived in Fayette County, the county where Mary Trimble would marry John William Cowden a dozen years later, in 1802. A James Trimble about the right age (twenty-six to forty-five years old) continued to reside in Fayette County in 1810, but it is interesting to observe that between 1807 and 1810 a man with the same name was in a lawsuit in Knox County, Indiana (which then included what would become Sullivan County). Ten years later, we see that a James Trimble over forty-five years of age lived very near the couple we think were John William Cowden and his second wife in Sullivan County, Indiana. Mary {Trimble} Cowden had died between 1810 and 1815, but if her father – well advanced in years by that time – had moved to be near her while Mary was still alive (that is, between 1810 and 1815), he could have remained there even after his daughter's death. James Trimble is not on the census in Sullivan County in 1830, and so he may well have died after 1820. (He could have moved elsewhere or gone to live with a relative.) All this is not much to go on, but what there is at least seems consistent with what we do know about the movements of Mary and her husband, John William Cowden.¹⁹

We have to face the fact, though, that there is no contemporary documentation whatsoever definitely identifying the James Trimble who is supposed to have been the

¹⁹ There was no James Trimble in Fayette County in 1800, but there was one in adjacent Woodford County. There were two other men named James Trimble in Kentucky in 1790, one in Breckinridge County and the other in Livingston County. The locations of these two counties make these men unlikely candidates to have been our Mary's father. If James Trimble died in Sullivan County, Indiana, he probably was buried in the Trimble Cemetery in that county. See digital image 01365 (2012) for an overview of this cemetery.

father of Mary Trimble. We cannot be sure of anything about her father, where he lived, or when he died, and neither do we know anything about this man's wife except that her given name (according to the Trimble family tree referred to earlier) was **SARAH**. Mary's parents thus are an even deeper mystery than John William Cowden is. Without Eliza's sketchy recollections, in fact, we would know nothing at all about Mary's father, even his name, and there is enough of the fantastic – piracy, capture by Indians, and nearly becoming the victims of friendly fire – in her account to make us wonder how much she heard (and remembered) was fact and how much was a good yarn the Trimbles told one another on cold evenings.

And with these multiple mysteries still ringing in our ears we must abandon the Cowden and Trimble lines, and with them our somewhat disappointing investigation of the families of Elizabeth {Cowden} Neal, William Neal's wife. We now return for the final time to the Neal family, where what is perhaps the largest mystery of all lurks in wait for us.