

SARAH ABBOTT and FAMILY
Daughter of Richard Abbott of Halifax County, Virginia

Research Report by Joan Horsley
Based on research as of May 2013
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See notes at the end of the report

Sarah F. Abbott, born abt. 1826 in Halifax County, VA, was Richard and Catharine's eldest surviving daughter. (Their first daughter, born abt. 1819, died before age 12, and her name is not known.) Sarah F. Abbott may have been named for her two grandmothers, Sarah Fulkerson and Frances Abbott, and she went by the nickname "Sallie" as did her grandmother Fulkerson.

Sallie Abbott was about 18 years old when her family moved from Halifax to adjacent Pittsylvania County and abt. 22 when her father died. Her youngest surviving brother was then age 18, and her only surviving sister was just 13. Apparently Sallie also had two brothers who died in childhood, born abt. 1828 and 1832. Sarah/Sallie's ages in the 1850 and 1860 censuses are both far wrong, as are her mother's--obviously neither of them was the respondent--but her birth abt. 1826 is proved by the 1830 and 1840 census enumerations for her father's household and the birth dates of her surviving siblings.

Sallie F. Abbott never married, but she earned her own way. The 1860 census shows she was living in Pittsylvania County, VA with her widowed mother, Catharine Abbott, where each was listed as a "seamstress." Catharine also had five slaves, all young females, so she and Sally may have run a cottage sewing business. Both are missing after the Civil War in the 1870 census, when Sallie would be abt. 44. No marriage record was found for her in Pittsylvania or Halifax or in nearby NC counties where some of her siblings lived.

We can prove what happened to Catharine Abbott after the 1860 census, but so far we cannot fully prove whether Sallie died before her mother or lived into her 70s. However, the cumulative evidence supports that Richard and Catharine's daughter Sallie Abbott was the one employed after the Civil War as a family cook and household servant in Pittsylvania and who died there bet. 1900-1910 (per censuses below). Hers is a story repeated many times over in the turmoil and economic devastation of the Civil War and post-war years.

About 1871, Sallie's youngest brother, Richard M. Abbott, moved his family back to Pittsylvania from nearby Rockingham County, NC, where they had lived the previous 15 years. (Her other siblings lived in NC and AL.) Shortly before January 1873, her mother, Catharine Abbott, went to live with son Richard and died December 1875 at abt. 86 years old. It is obvious from an old family letter and passed-down family information that Sallie did not go with her mother to live with Richard.

According to Ernestine Abbott Almon in the mid-1900s, a letter Richard wrote to his brother John J. Abbott in Alabama dated 6 Jan 1873 said their mother was then living with him. Richard talked about his losses during the Civil War and the difficulties of trying to make a living on a rented farm. He also mentioned a nervous condition that greatly troubled him. By the 1880 census, Richard was working as a "huckster" (peddler) with his wife and four unmarried children at home as well as a young widowed daughter with her two small sons. Richard M. Abbott died three years later at age 53.

Under such difficult and stressful economic conditions, one can see why Sallie would not want to add to Richard's burdens by going to live with him when her elderly and probably infirmed mother did. Besides, the 1860 census shows Sallie was used to working and earning a living.

Thus, the following censuses appear certainly to be for Richard and Catharine's daughter Sarah/Sallie. No other unmarried Sarah/Sallie Abbott in this age range was found in these or previous censuses for Pittsylvania or adjacent Virginia and North Carolina counties. Furthermore, several facts are particularly relevant, and the combined information is strong evidence that this is their daughter Sallie.

First, it is notable that this Sallie could read and write, not common in servants born when she was, yet all the other children of Richard and Catharine Abbott were literate (as they both were). Other single women from "good families" had to take domestic service after the Civil War. In fact, a daughter of Sallie's sister Cassandra Abbott Dollahite did likewise. Kate Dollahite, who had lived with her widowed mother and never married, was working in 1900 as a cook for a family in Person Co, NC, where she was born and raised.

Second, the following Sallie Abbott's age listed in the 1900 census is particularly noteworthy. This is the first census beginning from 1850 that gives the correct age for Richard and Catharine's daughter Sallie, who was born abt. 1826, per the 1830 and 1840 censuses and her siblings' birth years. Although her birth month is left blank in the 1900 census (as it also is for the other family servant), the given birth year of 1826 was not simply guessed from her age, which is given as 73. Could the information have come from Sallie herself, as it obviously was not in the 1850 and 1860 censuses (where her mother's ages are also far off)? Even the 1880 census age (b. c1830) is closer than the previous two.

The other striking fact in the 1900 census is Sallie's employer, Robert L. Dodson, born in 1857. Robert is proved by birth and marriage records to be a son of Felix S. Dodson and Elizabeth M. Ferguson of Pittsylvania County. In 1850, Felix Dodson was age 27 and listed with his widowed mother and siblings only four households from Sallie's brother Joseph Abbott and family, all in the same general vicinity as Sallie with her mother and unmarried siblings.

No death record was found for Sallie Abbott in online resources. Research continues in order to fully prove the following Sallie Abbott's identity. However, from the evidence to date and the absence of other single women of her name anywhere in the area since 1850, she seems highly likely to be Richard and Catharine Abbott's daughter Sarah/Sallie.

1880 - Pittsylvania, Virginia - Chatham Dist.

Thompson, John - 27 - Farmer

Martha - 21

James - 1

ABBOTT, SALLIE - 50 - W - Single - Servant - Cook - VA-VA-VA - can read/write

Tignal, Mollie - 13 - B - Servant - Nurse

Green, Clark - 22 - B - Servant - Laborer

Jones, John D. - 19 - B - Servant - Laborer

Note:

Chatham is the courthouse town in the center of the county. In 1900, John and Martha J.

Thompson (married c1876) were still in Chatham Dist. but had no servants and only son James S. Thompson living with them.

1900 - Pittsylvania Co, VA - Dan River Dist.

Dodson, Robert L - 42 - born Sep 1857 - Farmer - VA-VA-VA

Nannie J - 33 - born [blank] – marr. 10 yrs. - VA-VA-VA

Harry F - 17 - Feb 1883

Laila F - 15 - Nov 1884

Lester - 14 - May 1886

Ciphas W - 8 - Aug 1891

Lynch, George - W - 9 - born __1890 - Servant

ABBOTT, SALLIE - W - Single - age 73 - born __1826 - Servant - VA-VA-VA - can read/write

Note:

Robert L. Dodson married first abt. 1882 to Eliza, mother of the three oldest children.

1910 - Sallie Abbott not found this year or after, thus apparently died 1900-1910.

Researched and written by Joan Horsley

Based on research as of May 2013

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This is a fairly complete report that Joan Horsley was working on when she died. There were no notes included in the text that indicated any facts or other lines of inquiry she wanted to pursue. Any correspondence that would have been directed to my late wife should be sent to JHGenResearch-Abbott@yahoo.com

If you use any information from this report, please include the documentation as given here and cite this paper as:

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