

BOYLE COUNTY KENTUCKY

On March 23rd and 24th, 1896, Special Examiner E.H. Jennings first interviewed an A.W. Barker¹ and Mrs. Sophia Harlan Taylor² in Boyle County, Kentucky near the city of Danville. Mr. Barker was an acquaintance of John Harlan and Sophia was John Harlan's sister. Mr. Jennings asked both of them about the killing of Tom Pittman and both admitted candidly that John had killed Pittman, was tried, and was acquitted of the charge. They both stated that John Harlan then moved to Robertson County, Texas where he became a sheriff, was married to a Julia Wallace, and had children. Sophia goes on to say she was "mad with him" for not contacting her after he left and said that he died suddenly and many thought he had been poisoned. Both of the interviewees stated that they didn't think John had been married in Boyle at all but that he was definitely alive after 1858, which was when Harriet married James HC Rodgers. The reason this was an issue is because if Harriet was married to John Harlan and never divorced or widowed from him before she married James HC Rodgers, then the three children she had with James HC were not legitimate and therefore not entitled to any pension. Both of the interviewees restated that they did not believe John Harlan had ever married Harriet. Both interviewees also stated emphatically that John Harlan was alive and well after January 14, 1858 which was Harriet and James HC's wedding date. Mr. Jennings files his report to the Pension Commissioner, details these facts, and makes a few suppositions that were not corroborated by official depositions in the file. In particular, Mr. Jennings makes the comments that "one or two old people (said), and its seems well known that John Harlan had killed Pittman over a prostitute they were both (seeing....) The woman {I couldn't learn her name} and her family are said to have gone

¹ [A.W. Barker 3/23/1896](#)

² [Sophia Harlan Taylor 3/24/1896](#)

immediately to (Missouri) so as not to be present at the trial.” Mr. Jennings ended his report there, seemingly oblivious (or maybe just in laziness) to the obvious implications of the testimony.³ Mr. Jennings’ superior in Washington DC was not impressed and wrote Mr. Jennings a scathing letter in response.

In an actual typed letter, one of the only ones in the file, a Wm. Lochner wrote back to Mr. E.H. Jennings. “Herewith are returned to you the papers...together with your report...which is deemed unsatisfactory.”

Mr. Lochner continues on to say that the facts in place at the time and by the testimony of Harriet that Mr. Jennings’ investigation was completely sub par. Jennings was told he should have examined all the courthouse records and indeed, interviewed people about the prostitute that Harlan had killed Pittman over. Mr. Lochner even goes so far to say that Harriet was the prostitute in question and that Mr. Jennings should have realized that. Mr. Lochner orders Mr. Jennings to continue the investigation in Boyle and surrounding counties before any further investigation or interview of Harriet takes place.⁴

About one month later, April 27th, 1896, Mr. Jennings returned to visit John Harlan’s sister, Mrs. Sophia Harlan Taylor. His only question of Mrs. Taylor was whether or not John Harlan was married prior to his moving to Texas and how she would know. Mrs. Taylor is very clear in her memory that John Harlan lived with her and their mother right up until the time Harlan shot and killed Pittman. After his trial, Mrs. Taylor says, John Harlan went to Kansas and then to Texas. Mrs. Taylor concludes by basically calling Harriet a liar.⁵ Mr. Jennings would next interview John Harlan’s brother, James L. Harlan.

³ [Special Examiner E.H. Jennings 3/28/1896](#)

⁴ [Pension Commissioner Wm. Lochner 4/18/1896](#)

⁵ [Sophia Harlan Taylor 4/27/1896](#)

Again, Mr. Jennings asked flat out if John Harlan was ever married before he went to Texas and gets the same response: “I will state most positively that (John) was never married in (Kentucky).” Mr. Jennings then asks James if he had ever heard of Harriet. James said yes he had heard of Harriet and told his part of the story. “Harriet Camlin,” James Harlan says, “was the daughter of a man named Ridge who married a Camlin and Harriet must have taken his name. Harriet was a young girl...a prostitute. John was going to see her...(and) got into a difficulty (with two other men) and (my brother) John was cut in 17 places. They (the two men) were cousins of Tom Pittman whom my brother met soon after getting out of bed (and who) he was forced to shoot.” James Harlan goes on to say that Harriet was indeed the cause of the “difficulty” and that Pittman was killed by his brother John Harlan because he was continuing to see her. James Harlan concluded he hadn’t heard anything of Harriet or her family since she moved to them in Missouri. James also stated that he thought there may be Pittmans still alive in the county and Mr. Jennings would next interview the brother of the man John Harlan killed, Mr. W.H. Pittman.⁶

On April 26th, 1896, Mr. Jennings interviewed W.H. Pittman who again states very surely that John Harlan was not ever married in Kentucky. Mr. Pittman was asked if his brother was shot by John Harlan and he at first stated that he didn’t know. Mr. Jennings prompted him asking if the shooting was on the account of a woman and Pittman said he “wouldn’t be surprised.” Pittman said John Harlan was “keeping” a prostitute named Harriet Camlin for over a year during which time they had a child but Mr. Pittman is positive the two were never married. Mr. Pittman also is the first to allude to the idea that Harriet’s mother was also not married when she gave birth to Harriet.⁷

⁶ [James L. Harlan 4/28/1896](#)

⁷ [W.H. Pittman 4/29/1896](#)

More on this will be discussed later. Next in Boyle County, Mr. Jennings would find the niece of the man who married Harriet's mother.

On April 30th, 1896, Mr. Jennings interviewed Annie E. McKenzie who was the niece of James Ridge, the man who married Harriet's mother Lucinda Camlin and would, of course, take the name of Ridge as well. Ms. McKenzie goes on to state she was sure Harriet was never married in Kentucky but did have a child out of wedlock that drown in a well.⁸ On the same day Mr. Jennings interviewed a sister of Ms. McKenzie, an Amanda Holt.

Ms. Holt continues to give the same testimony as everyone else in Boyle County has and it seems that Mr. Jennings is trying to hammer this point home: Harriet was a prostitute who had a child out of wedlock with John Harlan that died before age two. They were never married and she left as not to be a witness at his murder trial.⁹ The last private citizen to be interviewed was considered the most reputable of the interviewees in Boyle, the county pharmacist, Dr. A.J McGrarty.

On May 1st, 1896, Mr. Jennings interviews seventy five year old AJ McGrarty who finalizes this round of depositions in the same way the others had. I argue Mr. Jennings saved the best reputation for last and the good doctor had no problem speaking his mind about both Harriet and John. He said he was sure they were never married, that Harriet was "not considered respectable," and that John Harlan was "very wild." The doctor finalizes his short testimony saying that John Harlan regularly rode into town with his gun and "everyone would close up." The doctor even states that John even came to

⁸ [Annie E. McKenzie 4/30/1896](#)

⁹ [Amanda Holt 4/30/1896](#)

his door with his gun out and that the doctor would just give him what he wanted so he would leave.¹⁰

The last deposition Mr. Jennings would obtain was from the sitting Clerk of the Boyle County Court, J.B. Nichols, Jr who states: “I have carefully examined the marriage record on file in my office from 1848 to 1855 and can not find any record of a marriage between John Harlan and Harriet J. Camlin or Harriet J. Ridge. The above is correct and understood.”¹¹ Mr. Jennings would then file his second report to his superiors.

Mr. Jennings second report was short and didn't not say much more than his first other than he emphatically states that Harriet Camlin and John Harlan were never married and if Harriet still wants to claim the marriage that she be required to provide proof. It seems clear to all those concerned that there never was a marriage. The question was, why was Harriet claiming so adamantly to have been married to John Harlan before leaving Kentucky?¹² The pension office would next send another special examiner to visit Harriet who was still living in Dykes, Texas County, Missouri.

¹⁰ [Dr. A.J. McGrarty 5/1/1896](#)

¹¹ [Boyle County, KY Clerk of Court J.B. Nichols 5/2/1896](#)

¹² [Special Examiner E.H. Jennings 5/2/1896](#)