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Sarah Hughes Bradley Parris: A Life on Lufty

By: Martha S. Hill, great-grandniece of Sarah Elizabeth Bradley Parris, 18 December 2022

In April 1929, as part of the government acquisition of land to create the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, [Sarah Elizabeth Hughes Bradley Parris](#), widow aged 74, signed a quit claim deed. That document relinquished any claim she had to a tract of land that official reporting described as:

“It is a good farm, well cared for; about 15 acres of river bottom [overall about 40 acres]. It is used as a home place by the owner, and shows case [sic] in every way, and is among the best farms on Oconalufthy River.”

The owner of the property was [Frank Cordell](#). Lillie [Lillian Jane Bradley Cordell], Sarah’s youngest daughter, was married to Frank, and they jointly owned (with an exception) the farm for about 20 years. Lillie had died in 1925 at age 44. In March 1929 Frank was forced to sell the farm to the government for the Park.

What exactly was Sarah’s claim to the farm, a claim for which she received \$10 and other valuable considerations? Sarah was specified as sole heir to the farm in the [1899 will of her second husband](#), Civil War veteran and widower Major (a given name, not title) Wiley Parris.¹ He had owned the farm since 1870. In August 1904 (registered April 1909) Sarah had a deed written that effectively traded most of her rights to the farm for eldercare by Frank and Lillie. (Recall that this was a time before social security.) Similar arrangements were fairly common at the time, and were made by other members of the Hughes extended family and other Swain County families. In one such arrangement a dedicated milk cow was specified.

In the 1904 deed Sarah lovingly conveyed the farm to Frank and Lillie in return for \$5, stipulating that they “maintain and support” her “during her natural life time and pay doctor bills and funeral expenses” and that she have “full control of the dwelling house”. The house was noted in the government’s 1929 report as being a six room frame house with two chimneys and in good condition. It was valued for government purchase at \$650. The entire farm was valued at \$4,150, saying “The appraisers are of the opinion that this price is a bargain, and there would be no trouble of disposing of the property almost any time at this price.”

Sarah lost control of her home with her signing the quit claim deed. The home itself as well as the rest of the farm could no longer provide her support. With the farm gone and her daughter Lillie gone, Sarah’s eldercare was gravely diminished.

Sarah was no stranger to challenging situations. She was 10 years old when her father Asaph Hughes died. She was the only daughter available to help with housework and care of her younger brothers, one born blind. At age 19, in 1873, Sarah married Avery Bradley, also age 19. Avery was brother to Nancy Artise Bradley, the wife of Sarah’s older brother Ira Jefferson (Jeff) Hughes. Avery was also a grandson of Isaac Bradley and Sarah Coxey; Bradly Fork is said to be named for Isaac Bradley, and Smokemont was once known as Bradleytown. Sarah and Avery had three children and soon a fourth. Around 1880 Avery was convicted of murder and given a jail sentence. This no doubt brought shame on Avery and by association shame on

¹ Letters from Major Wiley Parris to his first wife, Sarah Jane Gibson, are posted in the [Southern Appalachian Digital Collections](#).

Sarah and their families. Sarah bore additional stress from the key member responsible for supporting her and her children being absent.

The Hughes family responded by tucking Sarah and her children into the family nest, although possibly they had never left. The 1880 Census in Ocona Lufty lists a household headed by Mary Hugh(e)s, with sons William S(elf), Thomas I(rvin), Asaph H(amilton), and Robert L(ee) and a sub-family consisting of Avery Bradley as head but 'in jail murder', Sarah as wife but 'with mother', two sons James age 5 and Aseph age 4, and daughter Ellen age 2. The 1880 Census for the town of Sevierville, Tennessee lists Avery Bradley in the Sevierville Jail along with five other prisoners. Sometime between 1880 and 1900, though, Avery moved out west. The 1900 Census in Montezuma County, Colorado lists him as an employee (a day laborer), with marital status 'single'. In 1907 he was witness to their son Ace H. Bradley's marriage in Bellingham, Washington. The 1910 Census in Skagit, Washington lists him as father in Ace Bradley's household, with marital status 'widowed'. At some point Avery returned to Lufty. He died there in 1918 and was buried in Bradley Family Cemetery. What must Sarah have felt with Avery's return to Lufty and his death?

According to oral family history, Sarah was left to raise their children, which was very difficult. This is backed up by an 1884 deed in which "Sarah Bradley wife of Avery Bradley" sold for \$100 her inherited one-eighth portion of her father Asaph Hughes' land to one of her seven brothers, Wm Self Hughes, two years her junior. The deed attests to Sarah stating "...her husband aforesaid [Avery Bradley] is now and has been absent from her for nearly four years and during that time has held no correspondence or furnished any means whatever for the support of herself and children." Circumstances along these lines were an exception to the law initiated in 1872 and still in effect as late as 1913 which prohibited a married woman from contracting for real or personal property without her husband's signed consent. Oral family history has it that Wm Self assumed responsibility for raising Sarah's children and gives that as the reason he did not seek marriage himself until later in life, marrying in 1898 at age 41. He and his wife Mary Eugene Moody Hughes lived in Lufty until 1914.

Sarah married Wiley Parris in 1889. The 1900 Census in Oconalufy lists a household with Willy Paris (sic) head, Sarah E. Paris wife, stepson Asoph Bradley age 25, and stepdaughter Lillie Bradley age 18. They were living on a farm in Lufty on the west side of the Oconalufy River. By way of earning her own income, Sarah was postmistress at the Seph post office located at the upper end of the Floyd Bottoms for the entire length of its existence, 1901-1911. As of the 1910 Census Wiley was no longer living and Sarah was in the household of Frank Cordell, his wife Lillie, and their three children. The situation was the same in the 1920 Census except three children had become five. When Lillie died in 1925, responsibility for Sarah's eldercare fell to Frank alone.

Then in 1929 came the taking of the land for the Park, forcing relocation at a time other farmers in the area were in the same boat. Sarah in her declining elder years had to leave the home, the farm, the area familiar to her. Fortunately Frank was able to purchase a farm not a great distance away. But that did not happen with Sarah's eldest daughter Ellen. Before the taking of land for the Park, Ellen and her family lived in Lufty not far away and likely were a source of solace and maybe help. Ellen married in 1897 James R. Reagan, only son of Chastain Reagan (Chasteen Creek--a feeder stream to Bradley Fork about a mile above Smokemont—was named for him). James and Ellen lived at quite an attractive site on Bradley Fork about a fifth of a mile below the mouth of Chasteen Creek. James' parents were no longer living when land was taken for the Park, and James and Ellen were the sole owners of all the Reagan property, amounting to just under 550 acres. However, no longer with land in Lufty, James and

Ellen, like other Reagan families in the area, relocated to Tennessee. The 1930 Census found them in Monroe County, Tennessee along with four of their (altogether 10) children, ages 9 to 17. They were fortunate in owning the farm they were living on, but they were far away from Sarah.

The 1930 Census shows Frank owning a farm in Qualla Township and four of his (altogether 6) children plus Sarah living with him. But further travails were in store. In December 1930 Sarah's eldest son, James Harris Bradley age 57 died in Caldwell County, N.C. Within a seven-year span and in her declining years, Sarah had lost her youngest and caregiver daughter, her eldest son, her home of 40 years, plus she had to move to a different area. On January 22, 1933, Sarah aged 78 died. Buffeted about by life forces but supported by family, Sarah met many a challenge and left a living legacy of 15 grandsons and 13 granddaughters. She rests in Lufty in the Floyd Cemetery, alongside Lillie and Frank.

Editor's note

At the fall 1885 term of Swain Superior Court, Sarah Bradley sued Avery Bradley for divorce on the grounds of adultery. The jury found in her favor and the divorce was granted.