

Research Question: Who was the father of Mary Isobel Mason, who married James David Williamson, and who died on 13 January 1923 in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina?

Background: Mary Isobel Mason and James David Williamson were the parents of my maternal grandmother, Lillie Mae Williamson Hefner (1910-1997). Granny was always reticent about her family, although she did mention that her mother died in her sleep in her 40s. I do not recall her ever talking about her mother's parents, or mentioning their names. She did say that she had family connection to Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church (now Sugar Creek Presbyterian), in Charlotte, North Carolina, but did not indicate whether it was her mother's family or her father's.

My research on the parents of Mary Isobel Mason grew out of an examination of her 1923 death certificate.

1. Death Certificate for Mrs. Mary Williamson, 1923

North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. *North Carolina Death Certificates*. Microfilm S.123. Rolls 19-242, 280, 313-682, 1040-1297. North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina; accessed at *North Carolina, Death Certificates, 1909-1976, Mecklenburg County, 1923, January* image 76 of 121, Mary Williamson, 13 January 1923, register 2, stamped 44, Ancestry Library Edition (www.ancestrylibrary.com : viewed 14 October 2018).

RELIABILITY AND CONTEXT OF RECORD

This is a **duplicate original record**, and is a digital image of a microfilm image of the original duplicate death certificate filed with the State of North Carolina. The quality of the image is reasonably good: handwriting is legible and unfaded. There are no splotches, tears or strikethroughs. There are a couple of handwritten numbers, including one that is circled, but they do not overlay any information.

The certificate was prepared by the Mecklenburg County coroner, as an official permanent record to be filed with the State of North Carolina. He used a standard printed form, consistent with other images in this digitized microfilm file.

North Carolina began using death certificates after March 1913, with originals filed with the Register of Deeds at the county level and duplicate originals filed with the state. Older death certificates are held at

the North Carolina State Archives. Note that compliance with the law regarding creation of death certificate was not uniform in the state until World War II.¹

Several informants contributed to the information in this record; their initials will be used in discussion of the quality of the information they provided:

- J. H. Williamson (JHW), who is known to be the son of the decedent, provided information regarding his mother's name, her age, birthplace, and employment; her parents and their birthplaces; and her husband's name and employment
- Frank Hovis (FH), Coroner, provided information regarding Mary's date and place of death and its cause.
- Z.A. Hovis (ZAH), Undertaker, provided information about her burial.

RELEVANT INFORMATION AND OTHER DETAILS

Primary information on the death certificate includes the decedent's name, Mary Williamson; the date of her death, 13 January 1923; and the location of her death in Berryhill Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina (FH). Her husband was J. D. Williamson, who was not working; Mary was a domestic (JHW). She was buried at Ebenezer [Ebenezer Presbyterian Church] on 14 January 1923 (ZAH). All of these facts were related by first-hand observers.

Secondary information included her birthplace of Meck. Co., N.C.; her father's name and place of birth, John Maison, N.C.; and her age, about 45 (JHW). Her son was not present for any of these events.

In addition, the coroner noted that no doctor was in attendance, but that the cause of death was heart disease (FH). He likely was called directly to the residence to act in his official capacity and was informed of this illness by members of the family; it is unlikely that he had first-hand knowledge otherwise.

EVIDENCE AND CLUES TO OTHER RECORDS

Direct evidence is provided by the explicit statement that Mary Williamson's father was John Maison.

Given that the informant (JHW) was unable to name Mary's mother or to provide a more exact birthplace for John Maison than the state, N.C., it is unlikely that Maison was still living at this time; otherwise, he could have been asked for his wife's name and birthplace, and for more detail about his own background. It may also be possible that Mary's mother may have died long enough ago that JHW, her oldest grandchild, had no memory of her.

Note that the location of Mary's death, Berryhill Township in Mecklenburg County rather than a hospital, is consistent with Lillie Mae Williamson Hefner's story that her mother died in her sleep.

The information and evidence suggests that the following records be located:

¹ Raymond A. Winslow, Jr., "Marriage, Divorce and Vital Records," in *North Carolina Research: Genealogy and Local History*, Helen F. M. Leary, C.G., F.A.S.G., ed. (Raleigh, N.C.: North Carolina Genealogical Society, 1996), 166.

- Census records for North Carolina households with a John Maison, or spelling variations such as Mason or Mayson, with a child named Mary or Mary Isobel. Given Mary's estimated age of 45 in 1923, which gives a calculated birth year of around 1877-1878, the 1880 and 1900 federal censuses should be consulted first. The search may begin with Mecklenburg County, since that is reported as the location of Mary's birth.
- Death certificate or other form of death record for John Maison/Mason/Mayson, starting in Mecklenburg County. Other records that may document his death could include an obituary or tombstone.
- Marriage record for James D. Williamson and Mary Mason. North Carolina marriage licenses in the latter part of the 19th century included the names of the parents of the bride and groom.

2. 1880 Federal Census for Mallard Creek Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

U. S. Federal Population Census, 1880. (NARA microfilm publication Series T9, Roll 971), Mallard Creek Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Enumeration District 110, penned page 27 (overwriting 28) dwelling 253, J. H. Mason, 14 June 1880, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D. C., accessed at *1880 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry Library Edition (www.ancestrylibrary.com : viewed 14 October 2018).

RELIABILITY AND CONTEXT OF RECORD

This is a **duplicate original record**, and is a digital image of a microfilm image of the original population scheduled filed with the U.S. Census Bureau. The quality of the image is excellent: the handwriting is very legible and contrasts starkly with the background of the document.

The Census population schedules contain information about individual households, collected by an enumerator who went door-to-door within a county. The 1880 census was the first to include the relationship of each person to the head of household and to collect information on marital status. Original documents are held at the National Archives, but copies may also be held at the state and county level, and may contain variations in details.²

The informant for this document is not identified, although it perhaps was M.A. Mason, the wife who is listed as "keeping house" and therefore would have been the family member most likely to be at home when the enumerator came around.

Note that this enumerator used initials for most, but not all, members of the households he counted.

RELEVANT INFORMATION AND OTHER DETAILS

On 14 June 1880, this family was enumerated in Mallard Creek Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina:

² Winslow, "United States Census," in *North Carolina Research*, 433-446.

- J.H. Mason, White, Male, 28, Married, a farmer, born in NC, father born in NC, mother born in NC
- M.A. Mason, White, Female, 32, wife, Married, keeping house, NC, NC, NC
- L. J. Mason, White, Female, 6, daughter, NC, NC, NC
- M. Mason, White, Female, 4 daughter, NC, NC, NC
- M. I. Mason, White, Female, 3, daughter, NC, NC, NC
- Infant Mason, White, Female, 1, daughter, NC, NC, NC
- M J Mason, White, Female 21, sister [of J. H. Mason], NC, NC, NC

Because the informant cannot be identified, this information is considered **undetermined**.

EVIDENCE AND CLUES TO OTHER RECORDS

Indirect evidence is provided by the presence in the household of a 3-year-old female child with the distinctive initials "M. I." A calculated birth year of 1877 is consistent with the 1877-1878 birth year calculated from Mary Isobel Mason Williamson's 1923 death certificate.

J. H. Mason may be the John Maison named as Mary's father on the death certificate.

Other facts gleaned from this record can inform a search for corroborating evidence:

- The oldest child is 6, indicating that the Masons married earlier than 1874; this narrows the time period for a marriage record search.
- The 1900 federal census may provide full first names for members of this household.
- Marriage records may be located for women with the last name "Mason" and the initials of the children in this household; these often include the names of the couple's parents.

3. 1900 Federal Census for Sharon Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. (NARA microfilm publication Series T623, Roll 1206), Sharon Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Enumeration District 53, penned page 14, dwelling 260, family 264, John H. Mason, 28 June 1900; and dwelling 261, family 265, James D. Williamson, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., accessed at *1900 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry Library Edition (www.ancestrylibrary.com : viewed 14 October 2018).

RELIABILITY AND CONTEXT OF RECORD

This is a **duplicate original record**, and is a digital image of a microfilm image of the original population scheduled filed with the U.S. Census Bureau. The quality of the image is good. While the handwriting is very legible, there are numerous codes jotted by names and numbers and letters retraced to correct. The enumerator also renumbered most of the dwellings and families, as indicated by strikethroughs.

See No. 2 above regarding the general provenance of federal census population schedules. The 1900 census was the first to include month and year of each person's birth, the number of years married, the number of children born to each mother and the number still living..³

The informant for this document is not identified, although it perhaps was Fannie Mason, the wife who is does not have employment listed, and who therefore would have been the family member most likely to be at home when the enumerator came around.

RELEVANT INFORMATION AND OTHER DETAILS

On 28 June 1900, this family was enumerated in Sharon Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina:

- John H. Mason, head of household, White, Male, Mar 1851, age 49, married for 30 years, born in NC, father born in NC, mother born in NC, a farmer
- Fannie Mason, wife, White, Female, Feb 1853, 47, married 30 years, 13 children born, 5 living, NC, NC, NC
- James L. Mason, son, White, Male, Sep 1880, 19, single, NC, NC, NC, farm laborer
- Charles M. Mason, son, White, Male, Oct 1885, 14, single, NC, NC, NC, at school
- Joe Mason, son, White, Male, May 1884, 16, single, NC, NC, NC, at school
- Edward Mason, son, White, Male, Jan 1886, 14, single, NC, NC, NC, at school

Living next door to the Mason family is the Williamson family:

- James D. Williamson, head, White, Male, Mar 1862, age 38, married 3 years, NC, NC, NC, farmer
- Mary Williamson, wife, White, Female, Jan 1876, age 24, married 3 years, 2 children born, 2 living, NC, NC, NC
- George Williamson, son, White, Male, May 1897, age 3, single
- Infant Williamson, son, White, Male, Feb 1900, age 3/12, single

Because the informant cannot be identified, this information is considered **undetermined**.

EVIDENCE AND CLUES TO OTHER RECORDS

This record provides **indirect evidence** for the identities of Mary Isobel Mason Williamson's parents, but also offers a significant conflict with other evidence that must be resolved.

The presence of these two households side-by-side in the census implies that the Mary Williamson who is married to James D. Williamson could be the daughter of this John H. Mason. Her birth month and year of January 1876 is close to Mary's birth year of 1877-1878 that was estimated from her death certificate.

John H. Mason's age of 49 is consistent with the 28-year-old J. H. Mason of the 1880 census, and he also is a farmer. However, this wife has a different name, Fannie instead of M.A., and the census indicates that

³ Winslow, "United States Census," in *North Carolina Research*, 433-446.

the couple has been married for 30 years. This is long enough for Fannie to be the mother of Mary Williamson, but is in conflict with the 1880 census.

In addition, none of the members of the J. H. Mason household appear in this Mason household. Where J. H. Mason had four daughters born prior to 1880, this Mason has four sons all born after 1880. If these two men are the same person, the daughters likely have married and moved out of the household.

A clue is found in the order of the 1900 listing for the sons and their dates of birth. Charles M. and Edward are both 14, but were born three months apart; they are not twins, but undoubtedly are step-brothers. As Joe is listed after Charles, despite being older at 16, he likely is the brother of Edward, but not of the first two sons listed.

The information and evidence suggests that the following records be located:

- Marriage record for John H. Mason and Fannie to either confirm that they have been married for 30 years, or identify an error in the census record.
- The 1880 census, for a reexamination. Was John H. Mason overlooked in the original search in the 1880 census? Where there two men named Mason with the initials J. H.?
- Marriage records for James L. Mason and Charles M. Mason, which should confirm or eliminate Fannie as their mother.

4. 1870 Marriage License and Certificate for J. H. Mason and Maggie Rodden

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Marriage Licenses, J H Mason - Maggie Rodden, 26 December 1870; image 348 of 1475, " Marriage licenses (Mecklenburg County, North Carolina), 1851-1962", *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C91Z-V2BG?i=347&cat=1908967> : accessed 23 April 2020); citing "Mecklenburg County; FHL microfilm 2447671."

RELIABILITY AND CONTEXT OF RECORD

This is an **original** record, and is a digital image of a microfilm image of the original marriage license and certificate filed with the Register of Deeds in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. The license and certificate are printed on a single page, with information about the bride and groom filled in by hand. The top portion of the document, the license, is more legible than the certificate at the bottom, which has ink that has faded significantly. The document has crease lines with small tears at the edges, indicating that it was folded when filed.

While printed as one document, the license and certificate may be regarded as separate records, administered by different officials. The license, or permission to marry, is issued by the Register of Deeds; the certificate is completed by the minister or justice of the peace who performs the marriage ceremony, and who returns the completed document to the Register of Deeds for filing.⁴

⁴ Winslow, "Marriage, Divorce and Vital Records," in *North Carolina Research*, 158-159.

RELEVANT INFORMATION AND OTHER DETAILS

The information provided here is **primary**, provided by the participants involved.

On 26 December 1870, a marriage license was issued for J. H. Mason, son of James Mason and Mary Mason, and Maggie Rodden, daughter of Gabriel Rodden and Caroline Rodden.

On 27 December 1870, John H. Mason and Maggie Rodden were married by R. Z. Johnston, minister at Sharon.

EVIDENCE AND CLUES TO OTHER RECORDS

This marriage license provides **direct evidence** that John H. Mason was married to someone other than the Fannie of the 1900 census. Maggie Rodden could be the M.A. Mason of the 1880 census.

The marriage certificate also provides **direct evidence** for the Presbyterian connection stated by Lillie Mae Williamson Hefner. The officiant was a well-known Presbyterian minister in Mecklenburg County, although here he is affiliated with Sharon Presbyterian Church rather than Sugaw Creek Presbyterian.

Given that the 1880 census lists a sister, M.J. Mason, in the J.H. Mason household, and that James and Mary Mason have been identified as the parents of John H. Mason, earlier censuses may be consulted to see if there is a James Mason household that also has both J.H. and M.J.

5. Marriage License and Certificate for R. W. Cook and Lula Mason, 1893

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Marriage Licenses, R. W. Cook - Lula Mason, 23 November 1893; image 40 of 1059, "Marriage licenses (Mecklenburg County, North Carolina), 1851-1962", *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C91Z-ZW2F?i=39&cat=1908967>; accessed 23 April 2020); citing "Mecklenburg County; FHL microfilm 2447677."

RELIABILITY AND CONTEXT OF RECORD

See No. 4 above for discussion of the purpose and provenance of North Carolina marriage licenses and certificates. This is an **original** record, and is a digital image of a microfilm image of the original marriage license and certificate filed with the Register of Deeds in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

RELEVANT INFORMATION AND OTHER DETAILS

The information provided here is **primary**, provided by the participants involved.

On 22 November 1893, a marriage license was issued for R. W. Cook, age 32, of Mecklenburg County, son of Robt Cook (dead) and Mary E. Cook, also of Mecklenburg, and Lula Mason, age 20, of Mecklenburg, daughter of J H Mason and Margaret Mason (dead), also of Mecklenburg.

On 23 November 1893, R. W. Cook and Lula Mason were married by E. L. Pusey, a Methodist minister, at Derita in Mallard Creek township. Witnesses were F. M. Bi____ [name is difficult to make out], Bettie Cheshier, and Maggie Mason, all of Derita.

EVIDENCE AND CLUES TO OTHER RECORDS

Lula Mason and Maggie Mason align with L. J. Mason and M. Mason, who were listed in the J. H. Mason household with M.I. Mason in Mallard Creek township in the 1880 census. Lula's age, 20, is consistent with L. J. who was six years old in 1880.

This record provides **direct evidence** that Lula was the daughter of J. H. Mason and Margaret Mason, and that Margaret was deceased before 22 November 1893. Margaret almost certainly is the same person as Maggie Rodden, who married J. H. Mason in 1870.

Given this information, a death record or substitute should be located for Margaret Rodden Mason prior to 22 November 1893. Note that death certificates were not in use in North Carolina at this time.

6. Newspaper Notice of the Death of Maggie Mason, 1893

"Died", *The Charlotte Democrat* (Charlotte, Mecklenburg, North Carolina), 19 May 1893, page 3, column 5; digital image (www.newspapers.com : accessed on 23 April 2020).

RELIABILITY AND CONTEXT OF RECORD

The *Charlotte Democrat* was published weekly during the latter part of the 19th century and seems to be a typical publication of its day. Local news is interspersed with statewide or national articles, advertisements, news of interest to businessmen or farmers, and social news, often delivered with a strong dose of opinion. It is uncommon for sources to be named, and accuracy of details may be questioned.

This digital image is good, with the print very legible and easy to read. The digitization makes it possible to regard this as an **original record**.

RELEVANT INFORMATION AND OTHER DETAILS

This article states that on 13 May 1893, Mrs. Maggie M. Mason, age 49, wife of John Mason, died in Derita, Mecklenburg County.

This is **undetermined** information because the informant is not known.

EVIDENCE AND CLUES TO OTHER RECORDS

This article provides **indirect evidence** for John and Maggie Mason being the parents of Mary Isobel Mason. The death date of 13 May 1893 is consistent with Lula Mason's marriage license stating that her mother, Margaret Mason, was dead, and leaves ample time for John to remarry before the 1900 census is enumerated. Maggie's location in Derita is consistent with the witnesses to Lula's marriage living in Derita. And, her age of 49 is close to what would be expected if she was 32 in 1880, per the federal census.

7. 1910 Federal Census for Sharon Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910. (NARA microfilm publication Series T624, Roll 1122), Crab Orchard Township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Enumeration District 124, penned page 17, dwelling 305, family 306, John H. Mason, 13 May 1910; National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., accessed at *1910 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry (www.ancestry.com : viewed 23 April 2020).

RELIABILITY AND CONTEXT OF RECORD

This is a **duplicate original record**, and is a digital image of a microfilm image of the original population scheduled filed with the U.S. Census Bureau. The quality of the image is not as good as other census images. The handwriting is distinctive, but not easily legible. There are numerous check marks and Xs. The enumerator used designations of M1, M2, and so on to indicate first marriage, second marriage, etc.

The Census population schedules contain information about individual households, collected by an enumerator who went door-to-door within a county. Original documents are held at the National Archives, but copies may also be held at the state and county level, and may contain variations in details.⁵

The informant for this document is not identified, although it perhaps was Fannie Mason, the wife who is does not have employment listed, and who therefore would have been the family member most likely to be at home when the enumerator came around.

⁵ Winslow, "United States Census," in *North Carolina Research*, 433-446.

RELEVANT INFORMATION AND OTHER DETAILS

On 13 May 1910, this family was enumerated in Crab Orchard township, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina:

- John H. Mason, head, Male, White, age 59, M2 (second marriage), married for 14 years, born in North Carolina, father born in North Carolina, Mother born in North Carolina, farmer
- Fannie Mason, wife, Female, White, age 57, M2, married 14 years, SC, SC, SC
- Isabella Cook, granddaughter [sic], Female, White, age 13, single, NC, NC, NC
- Bertha Cook, granddaughter [sic], Female, White, age 9, single, NC, NC, NC

EVIDENCE AND CLUES TO OTHER RECORDS

This record provides **indirect evidence** for the identities of Mary Isobel Mason Williamson's parents, and also offers a solution to conflicting evidence.

The granddaughters in the household likely are the children of R.W. and Lula Mason Cook, and thus are the nieces of Mary Williamson. Beside their surname, they are the right ages to have been born after the Mason-Cook marriage in 1893.

The marriage column shows that this is a second marriage for both John and Fannie. They have been married 14 years, which falls neatly between Maggie Mason's death in 1893 and Fannie's appearance in the Mason household in 1900.