

The Rison Family of Madison County

By Collins (CE) Wynn
Alumni of Rison Elementary School

Disclaimer

I am not in a position to certify the information appearing in this article is accurate or absolutely correct; however, I have made every effort for it to be so. I have made some assumptions and one or two wild guesses to bring order to the Rison family history. Most of the information found herein comes from a variety of websites and sources that have no known specific author. Those who are serious about researching this family should rely on other sources to confirm or refute what is said here. This is not a scholarly work and is intended only to "fill in the blanks" of our neighborhood history. I make no claim that this is original work but I do claim it is an original compilation.

It appears **Archie L. Rison**, the namesake of Rison High School, Rison Junior High School, and Rison Elementary School was just the latest in a long line of distinguished Rison family members in Madison County, Alabama, beginning with his possible relative (Richard Rison) who appears on the 1819 marriage rolls of the county.

It does not seem very likely that the young male 0 to 5 years old that appears in the listing for Richard Rison in the 1830 Madison County census is Archibald Rison, the grandfather of **Archie L. Rison**. If that were so, Archibald would be from 6 to 11 years old when he marries Martha Bibb in 1836 and about 25 when he is listed in the 1859 Huntsville City Directory neither of which is the case. The article appearing below states that Archibald's parents came to Madison County from Tennessee in 1829. Perhaps Archibald's father and Richard Rison were brothers or otherwise related which might be a reason his father would have come to Madison County. After his arrival in Madison County, Archibald Rison had three sons William R. B1837; John L. B1839; and Wilson B. B1842. He is interred in Maple Hill Cemetery with a date of death of April 10th, 1862, at the age of 59.

The Polly Cobb who married Richard Rison in 1819 appears to be a member of another of the founding families of Madison County, the Cobb family of David Cobb.

Based on these occurrences, the lineage of Archie L. Rison through the time Rison School opened in 1921 would be Unknown Rison (perhaps a brother to Richard Rison) to Archibald R. Rison to William R. Rison to Archie L. Rison. It appears **Archie L. Rison** came by his vocation of mill operator honestly since his grandfather was in the cotton gin manufacturing business in Huntsville in 1859 according to the Huntsville City Directory of the time. It appears the management of a textile mill was not that great a leap from the family cotton gin business. I am sure it was helpful to have his father as Vice-President of Dallas Manufacturing Company.

The Family Timeline

- 1819** Madison County Marriage License
Richard Rison and Polly Cobb issued on August 2nd.
- 1830** Madison County Census
Line 26 on Page 90 of the 1830 Madison County census shows the Richard Rison family with a male 30 to 40 years of age (probably Richard Rison himself), one female 20 to 30 years of age (presumably Polly Cobb), one male 0 to 5 years of age and four females (two 0 to 5 years of age and two 5 to 10 years of age).
- 1836** Madison County Marriage License
Archibald Rison and Martha Bibb issued on April 7th.
- 1850** Madison County Census
Rison, Archibald B1803 in TN Age 47 Will probated – number 2518
Rison, Martha Ann B1817 in AL Age 33
Rison, William R B1837 in AL Age 13 Will probated - 40061/2 Rison Bank Company
Rison, John L B1839 in AL Age 11 Will probated – number 4395
Rison, Wilson B B1841 in AL Age 9
- 1859 Huntsville City Directory
Rison, Archibald R. is operating a Cotton Gin Manufacturing business on the north side of Holmes Avenue between the “Mill” and the “Rail Road”.
Rison, Wilson B. is a Post Office clerk residing with Archibald Rison.
Rison, William is residing with Archibald Rison.
Rison, John L. is residing with Archibald Rison.
- 1866** Madison County Marriage License
Adam Rice and Judy Rison issued on July 21st. The connection to our Rison family is unknown.
- 1870** Madison County Census
Rison, William B1837 in AL Age 33 Banker
Rison, Maria B1842 in AL Age 28 Keeping House
Rison, Martha B1817 in AL Age 54
Rison, Archie L. B1859 in AL Age 11
Rison, John B1839 in AL Age 30 Druggist Ward I Huntsville
Rison, Jenny B1842 in AL Age 28 Keeping House Ward I Huntsville
- 1880** Madison County Marriage License
Archie L. Rison and Rena Lanier issued on September 15th.
- 1904 Madison County Marriage License
Marie Louise Rison and Harry M. Rhett issued on November 16th.
- 1921 Rison School Opened
Named for **Archie L. Rison**, General Manager, Dallas Mills

William Richard Rison

The man for whom the city of Rison, Arkansas, was named, William Richard Rison, was a Confederate civil war veteran and eventually a prominent banker in Huntsville, Alabama.

He was born January 20, 1837, in Huntsville. He was the son of Archibald and Martha (Bibb) Rison whose parents came to Alabama from Tennessee in the early 1829's and the father of **Archie L. Rison** for whom Rison School in Huntsville, Alabama, was named.

It is said Mr. Rison received a common school education, and at the age of 15 accepted a position as a clerk in a grocery store, which position he held until 1853. He then kept books in a dry goods house until 1859, when he went into the Northern bank of Alabama, where he remained until he was detailed into the mining department in the military service of the Confederate Army.

In the summer of 1864, he was attached to the Fourth Alabama cavalry as a First Lieutenant, and served until the close of the war, by which time he was commanding his company.

After the war he went to Aberdeen, Mississippi, where he engaged in the mercantile business, until March 1866, when he returned to Huntsville and established a private bank. Later his son engaged with him in the business, the firm becoming W. R. Rison and Co. In 1872, he was appointed county treasurer of Madison County, and was elected to that office in 1874. *He was a director of the Huntsville Cotton Mill, and vice-president of the Dallas Manufacturing Company.* He was a Royal Arch Mason, and member of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

He married Maria L. Jones, daughter of Leroy and Mary (Brandon) Jones, of Huntsville. Mr. and Mrs. Rison had one child **Archie L. Rison** who was born in 1859 and who is the subject of this article.

William R. Rison died on July 16, 1904, and was buried in Maple Hill Cemetery in Huntsville.

At the time this article was originally written (that date is unknown) he was said to have four descendants living. They were listed as Mrs. Word Orem of Reston, Virginia; Mr. Harry M. Rhett, III, of Nashville, Tennessee; Mrs. W. Warren Rhett of Birmingham, Alabama; and Mrs. Henry Crosby of Huntsville, Alabama.

So far as the original author could determine, William R. Rison never visited the city of Rison, Arkansas. Mr. Rison's name was selected based on the recommendation of a local Arkansas businessman who had once been a federal army officer in Huntsville, Alabama, a business partner and great admirer of William R. Rison, Samuel Wesley Fordyce. This was the case even though they fought on opposite sides in the civil war. The folks in Rison, Arkansas, say the original name of W.R. Rison Banking Company in Huntsville was Rison and Fordyce Bank from 1864 until 1876 when Mr. Fordyce moved to Arkansas for health reasons.

Rison Family Portrait

This family portrait, taken circa 1886-87, shows the city of Rison, Arkansas' namesake, William Richard Rison B-1837 (seated, right). Pictured with him are: Martha Ann Bibb Rison B-1817 (seated, left), wife of Archibald Rison and William R. Rison's mother; Archie L. Rison B-1859 (standing, center), the son of Maria B-1842 and William R. Rison; and Marie Louise Rison B-1882 (center, front) daughter of Archie L. Rison and his wife, Rena Lanier Rison B-1863. There are four Rison generations in this photograph. The namesake of Rison School is the young man standing in the rear of the photograph.

If you consider Mother Rison was born in 1817 and Marie Louise Rison Rhett died in 1973 at the age of 91, then this photograph covers 156 years of our history.

I don't have any information about Archie L. Rison's service at Dallas Mills. It is possible he could have still been with the mill in 1925, the year he died at age 65. Certainly it is reasonable to assume he was there in 1921, the year Rison School opened and was named for him. Since he was born in 1859 he would have been about 31 years old when T. B. Dallas founded the mill in 1890 and about 62 when Rison School opened.



Likewise I do not have any information on the residence of the Dallas Mill Superintendent and do not recall having ever seen his home or to have known where it was located. Some of the other mills had rather nice and large accommodations for their upper management personnel topping out with mansions for superintendents. Merrimac and Lincoln Mill Villages are particularly noted for this. Mr. John Rison Jones, a direct descendent of our line of Rison's told us that William R. Rison's home was on West Holmes. It would have been reasonable for Mr. Archie L Rison to have lived there with his family as well. I am told an article about this home appeared in a Huntsville historical digest some years ago but the year and issue are not known to me.

Dallas Mills did provide some very nice homes to other staff members though. Mr. Myhand, the original Dallas YMCA Physical Education Director and the one time

coach of many of us, once lived in a nice home on the south side of Oakwood Avenue across from Rison School in the late 1950s.

Maple Hill Cemetery Information

RISON, Archibald	Age 59, Died 04/10/1862 Husband
RISON, Martha	Age 81, Died 12/29/1905 Wife
RISON, Archie L.	Age 65, Died 01/22/1925 Husband-Chronic Myocarditis
RISON, Rena Lanier	Age 72, Died 03/05/1935 Wife
RISON, Jno L.	Age 58, Died 06/15/1896-Myxoedum
RISON, Maria	Age 62, Died 08/14/1902
RISON, Martha	Age 87, Died 12/30/1903
RISON, Wilson B.	Age 21, Died 01/12/1863-Civil war casualty-Confederate Veteran
RHETT, Harry M	Age 74, Died 07/09/1948-Husband
RHETT, Marie Louise	Age 91, Died 05/22/1973-Wife (This entry is an assumption)

REMARKS:

1) **Myocarditis** is an inflammation or degeneration of the heart muscle. Myocarditis may be a complication during or after various viral, bacterial, or parasitic infectious diseases, such as polio, influenza, rubella, or rheumatic fever. It is often caused by various diseases such as goiter, endocarditis, or hypertension, however, myocarditis may appear as a primary disease in adults or as a degenerative disease of old age.

2) **Myxoedema** is a thyroid-deficiency disease developing in adult life. The symptoms include loss of energy and appetite, weight gain, inability to keep warm, mental dullness, and dry, puffy skin.

3) **“Jno” was a common abbreviation for “John”.** The following brief, edited version of an article from Tom Kreitzberg, tak@bushrat.jpl.nasa.gov, provides one possible answer.

“It is remarkable how these things evolve. One person, let's call him A (or her; it might well be a female person; the point to remember is that we are calling this person A) asks, “What about this Jno. business, hey?” Someone else, say Person B, replies, “I have no idea. Perhaps it's short for Jonathan.” Persons C, D, and F (the names, you understand, are not important; the idea is that persons C, D, and F are distinct from both Person A and Person B, while Person E is wisely remaining out of the fray) then chip in with their own ideas. Some time later, Person G asks, “I mean to say, Jno.?” and Person A, who has become a vested authority, replies, “I understand that it is short for Jonathan.”

“I may now unmask myself and admit that I am none other than Person D. And as D, let me explain what I know of the etymology of Jno.”

“It was once the habit of men who wrote out legal documents and such for a living, to make abbreviations wherever possible. They were, after all, paid by the document, not by the letter. And so the name John, being a common name in England at this time, was commonly abbreviated with a big J, followed by a little n and a little o over a line. There being no easy way of representing this in type, when printing came to be done on a press there needed to be some way of representing this. As it happened, the way settled on was as “Jno.” (Similar processes produced “Thos.” and “Jas.” for “Thomas” and “James.”) “