# The Brothers Spencer of Northwest Alabama

The following is a short history of my relatives who lived, worked, and raised their families Northwest Alabama specifically in Franklin, and later Colbert County Alabama. I have attempted to validate numerous stories that have been passed down from generation to generation with census, cemetery records and other legal documents. In addition, many thanks go out to my Brother Fred and a number relatives for sharing their documents, pictures, and for their time chasing leads in court houses and cemeteries.

This history begins with my great great grandfather Thomas Spencer who arrives in Northwest Alabama (Franklin County) twenty years after the Chickasaw Nation in Northwest Alabama was purchased by the US Government and opened for settlement. The history continues with my great grandfather William Slyvester Spencer, my grandmother Mary Frances Spencer, and my mother Mattie Bell Matthews.

Currently I am in process of writing two additional short histories. One of these will trace Ferry Operations on the Tennessee River in Franklin (later Colbert) and Lauderdale Counties Alabama.

Edward F. Vengrouskie, 2023, email; edvengrouskie@gmail.com

Thomas Spencer (1833-1898)

Thomas Spencer was born in Wayne County Tennessee in 1833 (validated from a Thomas Spencer signed affidavit of February 22, 1878) (**Note see below**). Sometime between 1845 and 1850, Thomas and George Spencer (brother) came to Point Smith or Smith' Port (later Chickasaw & Riverton), Alabama. At the time of the 1850 census of Franklin County, Alabama (Oct 29, 1950) Thomas and George Spencer were listed living with A.E. Spencer, his wife Elizabeth and their daughter Becky. The 1850 census listed A.E. Spencer age 26; Elizabeth age 26: Becky age 1; George age 15; Thomas age 17.

From the 1855 Franklin County state census, Thomas Spencer was recorded living in Chickasaw (name changed from Point Smith in 1851). His family consisted of himself and Mary Elizabeth Bledsoe (wife) (married in April 8, 1853, Gibson, TN). Between 1858-1860 Thomas Spencer received county courts approval from Lauderdale and Franklin counties to operate a public ferry across the Tennessee River.

From the 1860 census, Thomas Spencer was recorded living in Chickasaw, Alabama. His occupation was listed as farmer. In the household was his wife Mary, son William Sylvester Spencer (born in 1856) and one daughter Elizabeth Fannie Spencer (born in 1858).

During the Civil War, Thomas Spencer did not support the rebel cause (Confederacy) and pledged allegiance to the Union. In March 1863, Thomas and his family were taken by Union gunboat from Eastport, Mississippi via the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers to Brooklin, Illinois. Thomas supported the Union Army working in a woodyard and also piloting steamboats from Paducah, Kentucky to Eastpoint, Mississippi. His brother George disserted from the Confederate army, and joined Thomas in Brooklin. (validated from Thomas Spencer's affidavit of February 22, 1878). In 1864-1865 a daughter was to Thomas and wife Elizabeth she was named Elenor Martha Spencer. After the Civil War, Thomas and his family (including his brother) returned to his home in Chickasaw, Alabama

From the 1870 state census (see appendix), Thomas Spencer is living in Chickasaw, his occupation was listed a farmer, but his family had grown significantly. He was still married to Mary Elizabeth age 33, and his children were William Sylvester Spencer (son) age 14, Elizabeth Fannie Spencer (daughter) age 11, Mary Spencer (daughter) age 9, Ellen Spencer (daughter) age 6 and Sarah Spencer (daughter) age 3.

**Note:** The location of birth of Thomas Spencer is in conflict with information found on the death certificate of Julia Owen Spencer (Daughter of Thomas Spencer stating Thomas was born in Decaturville, TN. Decaturville, TN was founded in 1845. So this information is most likely not correct since Thomas was born in 1833.

Even though there was a Yellow Fever epidemic that ravaged the North Alabama area from 1878-1879, no immediate Thomas Spencer family members were affected.

On February 22, 1878 Thomas Spencer filed a claim to the US Claims Office for personal property that was destroyed or taken by the Union Army as they occupied and passed through Franklin, County, AL. His claim was for livestock, sheep, and destruction of his crops and burning of his ferry boat.

By the 1880 census there were some changes to the Thomas Spencer family. There was one addition to the family, Julia Spencer (daughter) age 7, and Mary Spencer (daughter) married Lafack Wallis (living in the Thomas Spencer house). The 1880 census listed the Thomas Spencer household as Thomas, Mary Elizabeth, William (son): Elizabeth Fannie (daughter): Ellen (daughter): Sarah (daughter) and Julia (daughter). On February 18, 1882, Mary Elizabeth Bledsoe Spencer, wife of Thomas Spencer, died and was buried in the Riverton Cemetery.

By 1890 (the boom days of Riverton) the Public Ferry operated by Thomas Spencer and his brother George was a prosperous business. Also, Thomas Spencer owned, and operated the handsome Spencer Hotel, the largest and the most handsome hotel for miles around in Riverton.



Thomas Spencer ~ 1890

During 1886 daughter Elenor Spencer (Nance) 21 years old passed away at Riverton, Alabama.

On April 2, 1895 Thomas Spencer brother George was killed at a railroad crossing in Riverton, Alabama.

During 1896 daughter Sarah Spencer (Henry) 29 years old passed away at

#### Hardeman, Tennessee

General Assembly of Alabama H.665, February 13, 1897. James. W. White of Lauderdale county (Waterloo) is authorized to establish a public ferry across the Tennessee River (from lines 11/12 Township 2 Range 15 W to the south banks of the Tennessee River (sections 12/14)

No. 352.] AN ACT. [H. 665. To authorize J. W. White to establish a ferry across the Tennessee River.

SECTION 1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Alabama, That J. W. White, of Lauderdale county, Alabama, is hereby authorized to establish a public ferry across the Tennessee River at a point within the lines of section eleven, twelve and fourteen, Township two, Range fifteen west; the northern bank of said river at such point being in section eleven or twelve in Lauderdale county, and the southern bank being in Section twelve of fourteen in Colbert county, Alabama, and he, his heirs and assigns are hereby authorized to charge such tolls for crossing at said ferry as may from time to time be prescribed by the court of county commissioners of Lauderdale county.

Eminent domain. SEC. 2. Be it further enacted, That said J. W. White is hereby authorized, if he cannot agree with the owners of the land on the banks of said river to have said lands condemned for the use of said ferry, by proceedings as provided in the Code of Alabama, and that if he cannot agree with the owners of the land in said sections eleven and fourteen, and in case he may desire to establish public roads leading to said ferry, he is hereby authorized to have said lands condemned by preceedings, as provided in the Code of Alabama.

Monopoly in what radius.

SEC. 3. Be it further enacted, That no other ferry shall be established across said river, within two miles of the ferry herein authorized to be established.

Mr. Spencer Will not Submit to Being Ousted. A reporter of The Tribune was in Riverton Monday and had a talk with Mr. Thon as Spencer, the ho tel man and ferry man, with regard to the proposed new ferry across the river at this point. Mr. Spencer is not disposed to submit tamely to the act of the Liegislature that granted a ferry charter to Mr. J. W. White, of Waterloo. He declared that the act was illegal and would not stand the test of trial, When pressed for, his grounds for this assortion, he said: "Why, I own a prior charter, granted by Lauderdale and Col. bert county courts in persuance of a legal custom more than fifty years old. The ferry has been continuously operated under this privilege, except for awhile during the war." "What if Mr. White or his lessees should begin operating a terry?" the reporter asked. "Then," said Mr. Sporcer, "I shall proceed against them according to law. I have a prior right; and my right cannot be superceded till its expiration, which is nearly ten years benco. My charter is not from the State of Alabama, but is made from the two counties under the State law. It Mr. White undertakes to start a forry I will fight it to the last ditch.'

Article from the Waterloo Tribune Newspaper, Waterloo, Alabama

On March 20, 1897, the Tennessee River reached the highest mark in history. The Thomas Spencer House received extensive water damage and lost 250 bushels of corn. Only six days later, on the night on March 26, 1897, The Spencer Hotel caught fire and was destroyed. The hotel served as a headquarters for the skilled mechanics employed on the locks, and for the public.

In early March 1897 Thomas Spencer leased his hotel to W.D. Swinford (his son in law), who was to take ownership in a few weeks. It was later discovered that hot cinder chips from the furnace smoke stakes in Sheffield 15 miles upriver started the hotel fire. Not long after the fire, Dr Riley J. Moore, a physician in Riverton, and personal friend of Thomas Spencer, expressed an interest in purchasing the hotel site with the intent of rebuilding the hotel.

On March 5, 1885 Thomas Spencer married Rutha Young Bridges in Marshall County, Alabama

THE STATE OF ALABAMA	To any of the State Judg	es, or to any Licensed Minister of the Gospel,	or to any Justice of the Perce of the said
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Rutha Spencer ~1910

On May 23, 1898 Thomas Spencer wrote his last Will and Testament. On July 29, 1989 Thomas Spencer passed away and was put to rest in the Riverton Cemetery next to his first wife Mary Elizabeth Bledsoe Spencer.



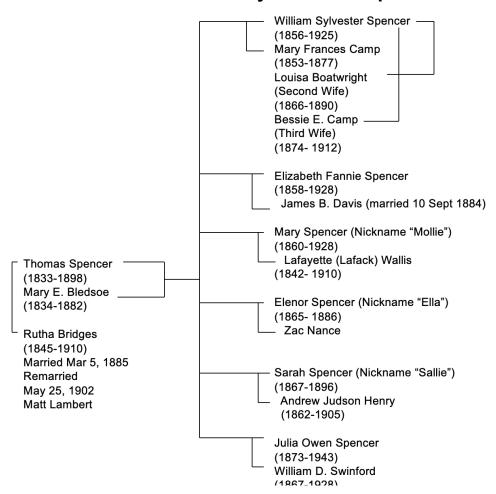
By 1900 census, Rutha Spencer had remained in Riverton, Alabama living in the Thomas Spencer House. Elizabeth Fannie Wallis, oldest daughter of Thomas Spencer was also living in the household along with James Thomas Davis, grandson of Rutha Spencer.

On May 25, 1902 Rutha Spencer married Matt Lambert in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

On December 8, 1910 Rutha Lambert passed away in Cullman, Alabama and buried at Henbron Cementry Walker County, Alabama

Concerning the Public Ferry at Riverton. In section 8 in the Last Will and Testament of Thomas Spencer (dated May 23, 1898), Rutha Spencer was giving authority for the management and disposition the Riverton Public Ferry Charter. Please see *Ferry Operations on the Tennessee River in Franklin (later Colbert) and Lauderdale Counties Alabama* for additional information.

#### The Family of Thomas Spencer



# George Spencer Brother (1835-1895)

George Spencer was born in Wayne County, Tennessee in 1835. Sometime between 1845 and 1850, Thomas and George Spencer (brother) came to Point Smith (later Chickasaw & Riverton), Alabama.

At the time of the Franklin County 1850 Federal census (District 5- 20 Oct 1850) Thomas and George Spencer were listed living with A.E. Spencer (Household 53), his wife Elizabeth and their daughter Becky. The 1850 census listed A.E. Spencer age 26; Elizabeth age 26: Becky age 1; George age 15; Thomas age 17.

From the 1860 Federal census (Franklin County, Alabama), George Spencer was recorded as living in Chickasaw (name changed from Point Smith in 1851), his occupation was listed as day laborer. His family consisted of Julia Lair (wife) (age 17). Married ~ 1859-1860).

During 1862 George was drafted into the a Confedrate Army unit in Franklin County but later disserted, and joined his brother Thomas in Brooklin, Ilinois. (validated from Thomas Spencer's affidavit of February 22, 1878).

From the 1866 Franklin County census, the George Spencer Family shows two males under age 10, one male age 30-40, one female under age 10 and one female age 20-30. This is correct from the previous census (1860), except one male under 10 cannot be accounted for.

From the 1870 Federal census, (Colbert County, Tuscumbia, Township 5 Range 12) George Spencer is still living in Chickasaw, his occupation was listed a working in tan yard, but his family had grown significantly. He was still married to Julia Lair, age 28, and his children were Arthur Spencer (son) age 8, Ellen Spencer age 3. Checking additional records, we find Mary Eliz Spencer was born 1867, age 2 during the 1870 census period.

Even though there was a Yellow Fever epidemic that ravaged the North Alabama area from 1878-1879, no immediate George Spencer family members were affected.

By the 1880 census there were some changes to the George Spencer

On April 2, 1895 George Spencer was killed from an accident. See article from Florence Times dated April 6, 1895

# KILLED AT RIVERTON.

The Waterloo Ferryman Meets Sudden Death.

On Tuesday morning last Mr. Geo. Spencer, the keeper of the Waterloo and Riverton ferry, while crossing the railroad track at the latter place was run over by the cars and killed. He was crossing the railroad, walking, and why he failed to clear the track is a mystery. He lived about two hours after he was injured. He was a brother of Mr. Tom Spencer, well known as the proprietor of the hotel at Riverton, and leaves a wife and several children. His age was about sixty. He was a worthy man and his death was a sad one indeed.

# William Sylvester Spencer (1856-1925)

(Son of Thomas and Mary Elizabeth Bledsoe Spencer)

William Sylvester Spencer was born in Chickasaw Village, Franklin County Alabama in 1856. William was the only son born to Thomas and Mary Elizabeth Bledsoe Spencer.

It is documented in the 1860 Federal Census (June14, 1860, Franklin County Alabama, Post Office, Chickasaw), that William (listed as Sylvester, age 4) lived in the Thomas Spencer household (Thomas Spencer, father, age 25, Mary Elizabeth, mother, age 20, Sylvester age 4, and sister Sonsia (later nicknamed Luizer – given name was Fannie Elizabeth, age 2).

On July 11, 1870 a Federal Census was taken at Colbert County Alabama, Post Office Chickasaw. William was still living in the Thomas Spencer household, (age 14) along with Thomas Spencer, father, age 36, Elizabeth, mother, age 35, sisters Luizer (Fannie Elizabeth), age11, Mary, age 9, Eleanor, age 5, Sarah age 3, also living in the household was Lotie Rundtree, age 19 years.

On June 11, 1880 a Federal Census was taken at Colbert County, Village of Chickasaw. William Sylvester was living in the Thomas Spencer household, age 24, but listed as widower, because his wife, Mary Frances Camp, had passed away on Sept. 27, 1877, age 24 years, and was buried at the Riverton Cemetery. It is speculated that William Sylvester Spencer and Mary Frances Camp were married sometime after the 1870 census (July 11, 1870) and before 1876 (exact date unknown).

William Sylvester Spencer and Mary Frances Camp had the following children; Twin baby girls were born on January 15, 1863. One died at birth, and the other twin was named Elizabeth Willard Spencer, who died on September 15, 1864. All of these children were buried at the Riverton Cemetery

On November 10, 1870 twin boys were born to William and Mary Frances. One baby died at birth. The other baby was named Thomas Benton Spencer who died on May 9, 1879. All of these children were buried at the Riverton Cemetery.

On June 12, 1881, William Sylvester Spencer married Louise Boatwright from Russellville, Alabama (a daughter of Edmond and Clancey Boatwright). On May

31, 1882 a daughter was born to William Sylvester and Louise Spencer, she was named Mary Frances Spencer, her place of birth was Chickasaw Village, Alabama. On February 16, 1885, a son was born to William Sylvester and Louise Boatwright Spencer, he was named Thomas Austin Spencer, his place of birth Chickasaw Village, Alabama. In December, 1887, a son was born to William Sylvester and Louise Boatwright Spencer, he was named George Ellis Spencer, his place of birth was Chickasaw, Alabama.

On November, 1890, Louise Boatwright Spencer passed away and was buried in the Riverton Cemetery next to Mary Frances Camp Spencer, the first wife of William Sylvester Spencer.

On February 1, 1893, William Sylvester Spencer married Bessie E. Camp. One daughter was born in July 1896, her name was Bessie Lou Spencer. In March 1900, a son was born, his name was Ethbert Spencer.

The 1900 Federal census of Alabama (June 20, 1900), listed William Sylvester Spencer and family living in Sheffield, Alabama on Montgomery Avenue. The family consisted of William, husband, age 46; Bessie, wife, age 25; Mary, daughter, age 18; Thomas, son, age 15; George E., son age 12; Bessie Lou, daughter, age 4, and Ethbert, son, age 4 months.



The 1910 Census of Alabama liistd William Slyvester Spencer as "Ollie" married for 18 years, which alignes with his marrage Bessie E. Camp. His family consists of son George age 21, daughter Bessie 15 and son Ethbert age 10.

In the Sheffield Business Directory of 1913-1914 it lists W.S Spencer living at 1106 Annapolis Avenue, Sheffield, AL occupation was carpenter.

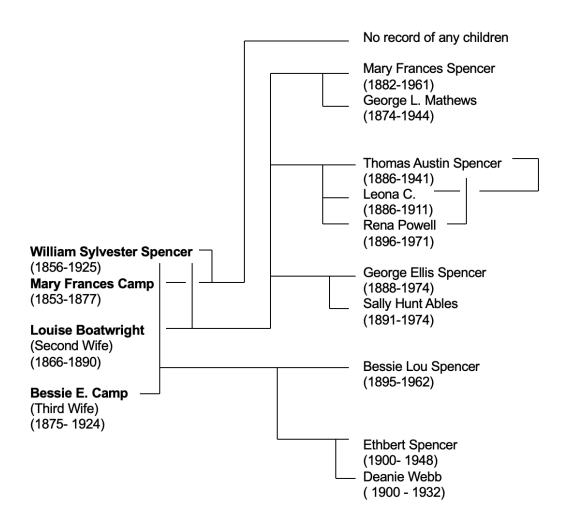
1920 census of Alabama

The Sheffield Business Directory of 1920-1921 listed William Sylvester Spencer living at 13½ Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> house east of second street. Occupation was listed as carpenter. Boarding with W.S. Spencer was Ethbert Spencer

William Sylvester Spencer, later in life was called "Grand Daddy Spencer." He died in April 1925 was buried in the Spencer Plot in Oakwood Cemetery in Sheffield,

CERTIFICA	TE OF DEATH
STATE OF ALABAMA-BU	REAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
	ARD OF HEALTH
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Length of residence in city or town where death occurred by yrs. mrs.	ds. How long in U. S., if of foreign birth? yrs. mos. ds.  MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH
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# The Family of William Sylvester Spencer





Mary F., wife (First) of W.S. Spencer, Born May 5, 1853, Died Sept 27, 1877, age 24 buried at Riverton Cemetery



Lou Boatwright, wife (second) of W.S. Spencer buried at Riverton Cemetery

### **Elizabeth Fannie Spencer**

(1858-1928)

(other names found withing the following census, Fannie, Louisa, Luizer, Elizza)

Born 1858, Chickasaw, Franklin County, AL

**1860 Census**: Daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Spencer, age 2, name listed as Louisa

**1870 Census:** age 11, name listed as Luizer. Living in the home of Thomas and Elizabeth Spencer

**1880 Census**: age 22, name listed as Fannie. Living in the home of Thomas and Elizabeth

Sept 10, 1884 Fannie Spencer married James B. Davis

#### 1890 Census:

**1897-** In the Last Will and Testament will of father Thomas Spencer (1898), name is listed as Fannie Wallis

**1900 Census:** age 44, name listed as Elizza F. Wallice (widow). Living in the home of Ruth Davis Spencer (widow of Thomas Spencer)

**1910 Census**: age 54, name listed as Fannie Wollis (widow) living in the home of sister Mollie Wallis (widow), Bower, Arkansas

#### 1920 Census:

**1928** Death December 24, 1928 Memphis, Tennessee. Death certificate is signed by James T. Davis

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### **Mary Elizabeth Spencer**

DOB 1860 DOD

(other names found withing the following census, Mollie, Palley, Molly)

Born 1860, Chickasaw, Franklin County, AL

**1870 Census**: Daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Spencer, age 9, name listed as Mary

**1878** Mollie age 18 married Lafach Wollis

**1880 Census:** age 20, name listed as Mollie Wollis with husband Lafach, living in the home of Thomas and Elizabeth Spencer

#### 1890 Census:

In the Last Will and Testament will of father Thomas Spencer (1898), name is listed as Mary Wallis

**1900 Census:** name listed as Palley Wallis living with husband Layfacht Wallis and the following children: Munroe, Andy, Luty, Minnie and Carry.

Layfacht Wallis dies prior to 1910 census

**1910 Census**: name listed as Mollie (widow) living in Bower, Arkansas with children Andy, Minnie, Carry and Marie. Sister Fannie L Wallis also living here.

**1920 Census:** name listed as Molly Wallace (widow) living in home of son A.L (Andy) Wallace and his family in Bower Arkansas

**1930 Census:** age 70, name listed as Molly Wallace living in home of son Fate Wallace and his wife

**1940 Census**: Age 79, name listed as Molly Wallace living in home of son in law LB Sandlin and wife Lillie in Morgan County, Alabama

There is a *E. Mollie Walli*s buried at Riverton Cemetery in Colbert County Alabama