

The Letter from Arkansas

*Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and truth. –
Buddha-*

Fort Smith Arkansas March 18th 1862
 To the Post Master at Yanceyville North
 Carolina

Dear

Sir some time in December
 last a gentleman by the name of
 Benjamin Jacobs came to this place
 in company with his wife Catherine
 Jacobs and an infant son named
 Elijah Jacobs. He had two negro boys
 with him as I understand and stayed
 with a man by the name of Samuel
 Edmondson & alias Ginger soon after which
 himself and wife was both taken
 sick and died I am almost certain
 there was some thing to the effect they were
 poisoned. This poor old Ginger took
 the negroes off and sold them & how
 taken out letters of administration
 on the Estate of the said Jacobs and
 yesterday I called on Edmondson for
 the ~~the~~ purpose of taking an
 inventory of the property and find
 nothing but two trunks of clothing
 and some other I find the quantity
 of some friend of theirs I learn the
 lady said it was her brother I have
 that and a lock of the lady's hair
 Edmondson has bill of sale for the
 negroes but I am certain it was
 forged because if he had bought the
 negroes and paid for them there would
 have been money on hand there was

Not a Dollar I have hired a nurse
 for the infant & find a receipt
 for Eighty Dollars in a bill of sale
 from E Jacobs to Benjamin Jacobs
 for a negre Boy aged about 14 years
 which I suppose must have been
 one of the negros sold by Edmondson
 what induces me to write to you is
 I find the envelope of a letter that
 was mailed at Yanceyville N. C. to
 Benjamin Jacobs Du buque Marion
 County Arkansas and from that
 infer there must be some of the
 Relatives of himself or wife in that
 Country please find out if you
~~can write upon the same immediately~~
 I will do the best I can for the
 Child So help me God

Farewell

Please attend
 to the above and if you find
 any of the Friends let them
 correspond with me immediately
 H. L. Holloman

Scott Smith

(S)

Transcript of 1860 letter:

"Fort Smith, Arkansas, March 9th 1860 To The Post Master at Yanceyville, N Carolina

Dear Sir. Some time in December last a gentleman by the name of Benjamin Jacobs came to this place in company with his wife Catherine Jacobs and an infant son Elijah Jacobs. He had two Negro Boys with him as I understand and stayed with a man by the name of Samuel Edmondson, alias Ginger. Soon afterwards himself and wife was Boath Taken Sick and died. I am almost certain there was Foul Play. I think they was Poisoned. This Pious old Ginger took the Negroes off and sold them. I had taken out Letters of administration on the Estate of the Said Jacobs and yesterday I called on Edmondson for the Purpose of Taken an Inventory of the Property and find Nothing But two trunks of Clothing and one watch. I find the Deguaritipe of Some Friend of theirs. I learn the lady Said it was her Brother. I have that and a lock of the lady's hare. Edmondson has a bill of sale for the Negroes but I am Certain it was forged. Because if he had bought the Negroes and paid for them there would have been money on hand. There was not a Dollar. I have hired a nurse for the infant. I find a receipt for Eighty Dollars in a bill of Sale from E. Jacobs to Benjamin Jacobs for a Negro Boy aged about 14 years which I suppose must have been one of the Negroes Sold By Edmondson. What induced me to write to you is I find the Envelope of a letter that was mailed at Yanceyville, N.C. To Benjamin Jacobs, Dubuque, Marion County, Arkansas and from that infer there must be Some of the Relatives of himself or wife in that Country. Please find out if you can and inform me Immediately. I will do the best I can for the Child So help Me God.

Farewell Please attend to the above and if you find any of the Friends let them Correspond with me Immediately.

*H. L. Holleman
Fort Smith Ark."*

The letter, written in a strong, even, script, has been passed down in my family for 155 years. Its watermarked paper has darkened from the original cream to tan; the ink has faded from black to brown. Written on one sheet of paper, back and front, there was once an envelope where it rested between perusals. That is long gone, but the letter and its poignant message remain. It has been read so many times that the paper has given way in the folds; read over and over to see if maybe, this time, there will be something new to be discovered, something missed before. Long ago my grandmother mended these separations with cellophane tape so that no precious part of it would be lost.

Always, when someone reads it for the first time, they ask the same question, "What happened to the child?"

I suppose most families have ancestors whose stories are not tidy, stories that cannot be drawn together from beginning to end with neatness and certainty; legends that leave us with an unsolved mystery. Even when these situations are

long past and all the principal participants dead and buried, we somehow feel responsible for reporting the final chapter of their story. I suppose we worry most over the innocent. In our case he was a small orphaned child a thousand miles from his closest living relatives.

Benjamin and Catherine Jacobs, mentioned in the letter, were not married, at least not to each other. Catherine Hall Winstead (Bradsher) was the wife of Benjamin's brother-in-law, William S. Bradsher. Benjamin had married his first cousin, Martha Banks Bradsher. William was not only Benjamin's brother-in-law, but also his first cousin, making his entanglement with Catherine very messy indeed.

During the June term of Person County Court, 1858, Benjamin Jacobs is mentioned in a peace warrant. It reads:

'State vs. Benjamin Jacobs, Recognize in the sum of \$1000,- Elijah Jacobs, George Satterfield, and E. C. Jordan, Recognize jointly in the sum of \$1000, for the appearance of Benjamin Jacobs to the next term of court and that he keeps the peace towards all good citizens and particular towards his wife and the family of Abner Bradsher.'

No information is given as to the specific actions which brought on this warrant, but it indicates that all was not well between Martha and Benjamin. Shortly before or shortly after this warrant was issued Martha and Benjamin ceased living together.

Catherine and William had four daughters ranging in age from 10 to just under 2 years old. Benjamin and his wife, Martha, had two daughters, 10 and 4. The two families had spent a lot of time together and the children were more like sisters than first cousins.

On August 31, 1858 Benjamin sold the last of his land holdings to William Grandison Bradsher, a cousin of his wife, Martha. Martha and their daughters were still living on this property. Shortly after he sold the land, Benjamin, age 33 and Catherine, age 31 made the decision to leave their respective families and run away together. They took with them 2 enslaved boys, both about 14 years of age. Their names were Nelse and Haywood. One of the boys, Benjamin purchased from his father, Elijah Jacobs, just before leaving. The other boy belonged to Catherine.

Early on the morning Catherine left she gathered her daughters, Bettie, almost 11, Mary White 9, and Eunice, 5. She gave the three oldest girls a sip of her coffee and hugged each one.

Her youngest, Lura Dean, not quite 2, was asleep in her cradle. Catherine picked her up, held her close and said, "Isn't she precious?"

When Benjamin and Nelse arrived in the buggy, Catherine gathered her things and she and Haywood climbed in.

Benjamin stopped the buggy when he got to the top of the hill near the Harris place and fired 3 shots. Catherine's oldest daughter, Bettie, watched as they drove out of sight down the dusty road. She and her sisters never saw or had any word from their mother again.

Before November of 1858 Benjamin, Catherine, Nelse, and Haywood had made their way to Dubuque, Arkansas on the White River. In addition to the buggy, they now had a matched span of horses, a mule and a wagon. It is doubtful that the little group made their way that far alone. Most likely they joined a wagon train for at least part of the 1,000 mile journey and may have done the rest by water.

They rented the Frank Pumphrey place on Shoal Creek and settled in. Unlike most of their neighbors they had ready cash, wore fine clothes, and had silver trimmed harnesses for their horses. They appeared to be from an aristocratic background and no one with whom they came into contact had any reason to think they were not married.

Benjamin, a tall, broad shouldered man with light, reddish-brown hair and a ruddy complexion was quiet and courteous as he fished and hunted wild turkeys along the creek.

Benjamin knew horses. He knew how to choose a good horse for working, riding, or racing and he loved to bet on them and watch them run. He had spent many hours at the Morton's race track at Four Points, just north of Leasburg. Dubuque was famous for horse racing as well and may have been one reason Benjamin and Catherine chose to settle there.

He had farmed in Person County and he and his father also hauled crops to market for other farmers. Since he now owned a wagon he may have planned to

engage in some hauling of crops or goods for others. Sober, he was hardworking and industrious.

However, it didn't take long for an old affliction to catch up with him. When he drank, he drank too much and was anything but quiet and courteous. He would drink until he felt there were snakes in his boots crawling and biting him. He would go completely crazy, foaming at the mouth, gnashing his teeth and would pick a fight with anyone who would fight with him.

Bob Trimble ran a store in Dubuque. One day Benjamin was in the store with some of his friends. He had been drinking and started to dance back and forth across the floor, bragging of his bravery, and trying to start a fight with someone. Most of the men in the store paid him no attention, but his friends cheered him on. Mort Herron was in the store and as he stood at the counter he observed Benjamin.

He saw Mort watching him and danced up laughing, bent down, and spit tobacco juice and bits of tobacco right into Mort's face and eyes. The man was in a lot of pain and temporarily blinded. Benjamin and his friends laughed heartily as Mort writhed in pain and wiped his eyes to remove as much of the irritating spittle and debris as possible.

As soon as he could see well enough to leave the store, he went down to the river and washed the rest of the tobacco and its juice out of his eyes and off his clothes. Even after rinsing his eyes for quite a while he was still in some discomfort. Some of Mort's companions came down to the river and told him that Benjamin was still in the store bragging about his bravery in spitting into Mort's face and he and his friends were laughing about how Mort had been treated.

Mort said, "A brave man would not treat a fellow human being as he has treated me and I want revenge for it."

Mort's friends said they would keep Benjamin's friends off if Mort wanted to teach him a lesson.

Mort chose a couple of good sized, smooth, oval stones from the riverbed and went back to the store. Benjamin was still dancing around and ignored Mort when he came in. Mort walked up to him and struck him a hard blow to the side of the head. Benjamin dropped to the floor in a heap. All the men gathered around him but no one offered to retaliate against Mort. Mort and his friends

stayed in the store for quite a while after that but Benjamin was still unconscious when they left.

Mort Herron did not go back to Dubuque for several weeks after that but he heard Benjamin lay unconscious for four days before he could be taken to his home.

On November 15, 1858, Catherine gave birth to Elijah. Assuming little Elijah was a full term baby, she would have been more than 6 months pregnant when they left Person County. Mrs. Fielden Holt, Elizabeth, lived near the Jacobs home and went over one afternoon to help out with little Elijah. Since Catherine had no other children Mrs. Holt assumed this was her first and thought she might like an experienced hand to teach her how to care for him.

Catherine said, "I appreciate your kindness as I have not been accustomed to children and never had the pleasure of caring for them."

In all fairness to Catherine, she probably had taken care of her four older children very little. It was not unusual at that time for a well-to-do woman to give over the day to day care and even the breast feeding of her infants to a nurse. While Catherine's statement implied that she had never had any children at all, it was still most likely, partially true.

However, Nelse or Haywood overheard her remarks to Mrs. Holt and took offense.

He told another neighbor that, "Missus need not say that she was not use to children for she run away with Massa Jacobs and left several small children at home in North Carolina."

He also gave the name of the post office where they had formerly lived. Since both Benjamin and Catherine lived nearest to Leasburg, NC, this is most likely the name of the post office that was given.

At a time when a slave's testimony was not admissible in court, this story seems to have been taken seriously and created a sensation with the surrounding neighbors. They decided that an investigation was in order. "River" Bill Coker addressed a letter of inquiry to the postmaster at the post office the Negro had given. The acting postmaster at Leasburg, as of January 14, 1859, was Jefferson Whitfield.

It is almost certain that Martha Jacobs had knowledge of this inquiry from Dubuque as the following notice ran in the Milton Chronicle on Thursday, March 10, 1859:

State of North Carolina,
PERSON COUNTY
 In Equity, Nov. Term, 1859,
Martha Jacobs, vs Benj. Jacobs,
 Petition for Divorce.

THIS case coming on to be heard, and it appearing to the satisfaction of the Court that the defendant, Ben. Jacobs, is not an inhabitant of this State, it is ordered that publication be made in the Milton Chronicle for six weeks for him to appear at the next term of this Court to be held in Roxborough on the 7th Monday after the 4th Monday in March, 18b9, then and there to attend the proceedings in said petition or judgment will be taken pro confesso, as to him.

Witness, John A. Barnett, Clerk and Master of our said Court, at Office in Roxborough, the 27th Dec 1858

dv. \$6. **J. A. BARNETT, C. M. E**

The Milton Chronicle
 Milton, North Carolina
 Thursday, March 10, 1859
 Page 4, Col. 2

In the fall of 1859 a letter was received at the post office in Dubuque, Arkansas. The contents of the letter stated the following;

"Jacobs married into a wealthy family but he turned out to be a set drunkard and his father-in-law looked on him as an unworthy man and refused to recognize him any longer as a son-in-law. Benjamin Jacobs eloped with his wife's brother's wife and the 'false and fickle' pair deserted their children, as well as their companions. They took with them two Negro men, one of which belonged to him and the other belonging to her. The people in their former community no longer deemed them worthy of notice."

The settlers on Shoal Creek did not need the presence of such a couple in their neighborhood. A committee, including Bill Coker, waited on Benjamin Jacobs and read the letter to him.

It was so plainly written that Benjamin made no denial of any of the accusations. At the close of the reading the committee informed him that it would be prudent for him to take the woman and depart for some other county. Benjamin and Catherine loaded their household belongings into the wagon after the meeting. The horses were hitched to it and Benjamin, Catherine, Elijah, Nelse, and Haywood moved on down the river.

By December of 1859 they had settled in Sebastian County on the Arkansas River, renting a small cabin in Fort Smith from a man named Samuel Edmondson. They had not been there long when Benjamin and Catherine died under suspicious circumstances. Holleman's letter doesn't give us the exact date of their deaths.

Edmondson was a justice of the peace in Fort Smith. Despite his long years of service to the courts he was not without legal problems and controversy of his own.

Unfortunately the Sebastian County Courthouse burned shortly after their deaths. Some records were removed to the hotel in Fort Smith, which also later burned. If there was any record of an inquiry into the deaths of Benjamin and Catherine, or any public records which might have mentioned them, those records were most likely destroyed.

H. L. Holleman took out Letters of Administration on the estate of Benjamin Jacobs. On March 8, 1960 he called on Samuel Edmonson for the purpose of doing an inventory of Benjamin's and Catherine's possessions. There was very little to inventory, two trunks of clothing, one watch, a deguerreotype, supposedly of Catherine's brother, and a lock of Catherine's hair. Despite the fact that Samuel Edmonson had a recent bill of sale for the two slaves belonging to Benjamin and Catherine, Holleman found no cash at all.

Most likely little Elijah had been cared for as often by the young slaves, Nelse and Haywood, as by his own parents. Both young men were sold by Samuel Edmondson soon after the deaths of Benjamin and Catherine. Consequently 14-month-old Elijah lost everyone he had been closest to in his short life, in a matter of days.

Benjamin and Catherine were most likely laid to rest in pauper's graves and their meager belongings sold to provide maintenance for little Elijah. Holleman hired Theresa Ermann to be Elijah's nurse. Theresa was the sister-in-law of Henry Kuper, a twenty-seven-year-old merchant tailor, who arrived in Fort Smith in 1859. As the Kuper's lived close by, it is likely they knew Benjamin and Catherine and were not total strangers to Elijah.

The Kuper household was a busy one as Henry and his wife Gertrude were running a business and already had three children. Elijah lived with Theresa and the Kupers for about a year. The 1860 census lists the following people in the residence of Henry Kuper; his wife Gertrude, his daughter Mary, his son Henry Jr, his second daughter Eliza, his sister-in-law Theresa, and Elijah Jacobs.

H. L. Holleman's letter telling of Benjamin's and Catherine's deaths was delivered to the Yanceyville post office in the spring of 1860. We do not know if the Yanceyville postmaster, Alexander McAlpine, gave it to Benjamin's wife, Martha, or if he gave it to some other member of the Jacobs family, who later gave it to Martha.

Benjamin's father, Elijah, was aware that Benjamin was dead when he made a new will on July 23, 1860. In this will he leaves property to the daughters of his dead son, Benjamin. However, it is questionable whether he actually saw the letter from H. L. Holleman as he does not mention Benjamin's son, Elijah. Did he know of little Elijah's birth?

Elijah Jacobs died suddenly on September 15, 1860. His granddaughter Eunice Jacobs was having dinner at his home. She had finished eating but was still sitting in her high chair. Elijah took a lump of sugar and handed it to her. She smiled as she plucked the little treat from his hand and put it in her mouth.

She was letting it melt slowly when Elijah bent down and said, "Is it good?"

Before Eunice could answer he fell to the floor dead.

An undated entry in Samuel Edmondson's 1860-1861 log book was printed in the Fort Smith Historical Society Journal in September of 1996 and reads as follows:

*Elijah Jacobs
Lear Burg (Leasburg)
Caswell Co.
North Carolina*

*Martha Jacobs
Married Benjamin Jacobs*

Post Office as above

*(Wm) Bradsher Senr
Lear Burg (Leasburg)
Caswell County
N.C.*

*Henry Kuper had the child of Jacobs and wife
And it was kept by Miss (Theresa) Ermann. The child
is in the hands of Mr. Coleman about one mile and a
half from here. Mr. Kuper and Miss Ermann kept the child
something over or about one year.*

When no family came to claim Elijah after a year, he was placed with a family who wanted him. James Coleman and his wife, Julia Moncrief Coleman had been married for some time but had no living children of their own. They took him in and changed his name from Elijah Jacobs to Elephelit Coleman. Julia loved her little son. She died when he was about 6. However, he never forgot her love and kindness and for the rest of his life he thought of her as his mother.

So far as we know, no one from North Carolina ever answered Harmon L. Holleman's letter concerning Elijah. Benjamin's brother, Lewellyn, who lived in southern Arkansas almost surely heard about him when he went back to North Carolina for his father's estate sale on November 1 & 2, 1860. If Lewellyn made inquiry in Fort Smith concerning Elijah, by then he would have already been placed with the Colemans.

The letter from Arkansas was in the possession of my great-great grandmother, Martha Banks Bradsher (Jacobs) (Davenport), when she died on June 26, 1887. Eunice, found it among her mother's important papers after her death.

Eunice was only 6 when the word came that her father had died. It is doubtful that Martha would have discussed this little brother with her youngest daughter at the time. Finding out at 33-years-old that she had a little brother was a bit of a shock. However, once Eunice learned of little Elijah's existence, she very much wanted to know what had happened to him. Did he even survive long after the loss of his parents? If so, who took care of him? Did he grow up and have children of his own?

She dreamed of taking a wagon train out west to find Elijah. However, she could not talk any of the family into going on this adventure with her, so reluctantly, she gave up.

Yet, she could never quite give up on the idea of finding him.

Eunice's husband, James Fletcher Winstead, died in December of 1889. She lived many years as a widow, but in the early 1900s she was married to Clement McGilbert Wagstaff. She continued living in the same house with "Mr. Wagstaff", as she called her new husband, until his death, August 7, 1916.

Her youngest son, Harvey, was given his parents' homeplace when he married Mary Emma Watts in 1924. Until her death in 1949, Eunice continued to make her home in this same house with her youngest son, Harvey Winstead, his wife, Mary, and their eight children.

Harvey and Mary Winstead were my grandparents. Sometime before she died, Eunice showed Mary the letter from H. L. Holleman telling of Benjamin Jacobs' death and of his little son, Elijah. Eunice felt that someday, someone from Arkansas might come to Leasburg looking for our family. She wanted Mary to know the story and keep the letter in a safe place. Mary promised that she would keep it safe and if possible, do what she could to find Elijah.

Mary had a conversation with Catherine Bradsher's oldest daughter, Bettie Bradsher Brooks, (Elizabeth Sergeant Bradsher 11/04/1846-09/24/1937) and learned some details about the day Catherine left, specifically Catherine's leave taking of her children, the 3 shots fired by Benjamin Jacobs near the Harris place, and the fact that Catherine was a loving and fun mother to her children before she left. She also spoke to many of the older relatives and friends in the neighborhood who remembered both Catherine and Benjamin and their story. However, none of them seemed to know what became of little Elijah after his parents' death. Mary thought of Elijah often and prayed that he survived and was treated well.

However, Mary was very busy with her young family. Finding someone from almost a century before and a thousand miles away would have been a far more daunting task then, than it is today. She had no contacts in Fort Smith Arkansas and she had already talked to those familiar with the story of Benjamin and Catherine. Reluctantly, she put the letter away in a safe place and went on with her busy life.

In the 1980s I wrote stories of the Jacobs and Bradsher families for the Caswell and Person County Heritage books. I knew these books would be widely distributed to the genealogical sections of libraries all over the US and I hoped, once they were in print that someone from Arkansas would read the accounts and say to themselves, "You know, I think this may be the tie to our family."

While I was working on the stories for these books, Grandma Mary showed me the letter for the first time. I was thrilled and very much wanted to include it in my story of the Jacobs. However, Grandma felt it would reflect negatively on our family. We had quite a "discussion" over it. Like most families, ours did not have to go back a hundred years to find a relative that didn't behave. However, the letter had been left in her safekeeping and I respected her wishes.

I did get her to agree to my saying that Benjamin left his wife and two daughters and went to Arkansas with a "traveling companion" and they later died.

My uncle, Therit Winstead, was visiting Grandma when we were discussing whether or not the letter should be included in the Heritage books. He became interested in trying to locate Elijah's descendants.

On a vacation that took him near Fort Smith, Arkansas, he decided to do some research there. He started by copying all the names and addresses of Jacobs from the Fort Smith phone book. He then sent letters to everyone requesting information about whether or not they were kin to Elijah Jacobs, the son of Benjamin.

He did not receive a single reply. Some 20 years later, in the 1990s he went to Fort Smith a second time and actually did some research at the courthouse. He was able to find little Elijah on the 1860 census, when he was about 2 years old, living in the home of a Henry Kuyper. He found an Elias Jacobs, who was about 10, on a later census. However, after that he could find nothing more.

On one of his visits to the courthouse in Fort Smith the clerk said, "Someone was here last week looking for the same person." Unfortunately the clerk could not tell him who the other person was. He left his contact information with the clerk and asked that it be given to anyone inquiring about Elijah Jacobs.

He met a local genealogist and paid her to do further research. However, he never heard anything more from her.

Uncle Nash Winstead's daughter, Lizzie Winstead Dawson, had a friend living in Fort Smith. Lizzie had her friend research the records. She found about the same information Uncle Therit had, but nothing further.

Billy G. Coleman was the grandson of Elephelit Coleman. For most of his life he had heard the rumors that his grandfather might have been adopted. As a child he overheard part of a conversation between his father, Gus and his mother, Sybil.

Gus said, "...well you married a man with no name."

It is something Billy G. Coleman later assumed that his father had heard Elephelit say.

When the Fort Smith Historical Society published an article on Samuel Edmonson in September of 1996 Billy G. Coleman and his wife had just started to do some genealogical research on the Coleman family lines. Considering the adoption rumors Billy had heard about his grandfather, he found the following entry from Edmonson's 1860-1861 logbook quite interesting;

*...Henry Kuper had the child of Jacobs and wife
And it was kept by Miss (Theresa) Ermann. The child
is in the hands of Mr. Coleman about one mile and a
half from here. Mr. Kuper and Miss Ermann kept the child
something over or about one year.*

He and his wife copied the information down and tucked it away in their family history file. They had a look at the 1860 census for Fort Smith and found the child's name, Elijah Jacobs.

After the publication of the Heritage books I did receive several inquiries and letters from members of the Jacobs family who had settled in southern Arkansas. These were the descendants of Benjamin's older brothers, Learcus and Lewellyn Jacobs. I was happy to hear from these relatives and we enjoyed communicating. Unfortunately none of these correspondents knew anything about little Elijah or knew anyone who might be descended from him.

In 2006 I was discussing Benjamin's and Catherine's story with my cousin, Robbie Washburn, at a Winstead family reunion. He was working on a genealogical website for the Winsteads and asked me if he might include the story. I did not hesitate to provide him with a short paragraph telling the basic story and he did add it to his website. While she was alive Grandma Mary had

done what she thought best by not having the story included in the Heritage books, now I did what I thought was best.

This little paragraph on the internet would ultimately be the link that would join our family members with Elijah's after 155 years apart. Still, it did not happen immediately.

In 2012 Billy G. Coleman's son Bob and his wife, Martha had begun doing research on their family lines. Billy had given them the folder of information they had concerning the Coleman line. Martha decided to add the Coleman information to her family tree on Ancestry.com. Having entered names and dates, she started looking at the notes her father-in-law had made concerning the adoption rumors.

In December of 2014 Bob and Martha were discussing all the rumors that Elephelit was adopted. It was bedtime and Bob was tired.

He finally said, "Just forget about all that stuff. They are just a bunch of old rumors and there's nothing to them."

Martha, a retired research librarian, wasn't convinced. The rumors had persisted too long for there not to be some truth to them. After Bob went to bed she stayed up late that night researching on the internet and found the story Robbie Washburn had put on the Winstead Family website. After that she connected to several more stories and printed those out. When Bob got up the next morning and sat down with his coffee she handed him several sheets of paper and said,

"Here read this."

Bob started to read and we won't quote exactly what he said after the word, "Holy.....", but he was quite surprised by what Martha had found.

After 30 years I had about resigned myself to the fact that we would probably never know what had happened to little Elijah. Like those before me I thought of him often. Then on Saturday, January 24, 2015, I went out to walk my beagle, Rachel, at bedtime.

Before we went back inside, I took several pieces of mail out of my mailbox. Amongst the usual junk mail and bills was a letter from Bobby and Martha Coleman in Fort Smith, Arkansas. My first thought, before I even opened it, was that someone wanted more information on the Jacobs family lines that I had

written about 30 years earlier. I put the pup to bed and sat down on the couch to read my letter. I read it through three times before I could believe what I held in my hand. Bob wrote:

"Dear Linda,

I got your address from Rick Frederick, with the Caswell County Historical Association, and wanted to contact you regarding a possible family link.

My wife and I have been doing genealogical research on our families, and that research led us to the story of Benjamin Jacobs and Catherine Hall Winstead Bradsher leaving their families in North Carolina and eventually being murdered in Fort Smith, Arkansas, in 1859. Our interest in the story of this couple is because it is possible that my great-grandfather was their child, Elijah Jacobs....."

Bob went on to say that his great-grandfather, Elephlit Coleman (born 11/15/1858 and died 10/24/1941) had been a stumbling block in their research into the Coleman family lines. There always seemed to be family legends that Elephlit, was not a Coleman, but had been adopted by James Coleman and his wife, Julia Moncrief Coleman. These stories came in two forms; He was supposedly a Jacobs, from a wealthy family, either Dutch or Jewish, from back east. In these stories his family dies or is murdered and a black maid servant flees with the baby, arriving finally in Fort Smith, Arkansas, where the child is given to James Coleman. Or, in another version, Elephlit's family is traveling westward and stops in Fort Smith. There is a hotel fire and the parents are killed, but the child survives and is adopted by James Coleman. Bob says that it is likely his great-grandfather believed he was adopted as the stories remained a solid part of their family history.

Elephelit never knew exactly where he was born, a fact that most birth parents would have been able to tell their child.

After reading our little paragraph on the internet, Bob concluded that the stories of Elephelit's adoption could no longer be discounted. The new information gave them more substance than they had ever had before and he felt they deserved further investigation. He asked if we would be willing to give DNA samples to see if there was a genetic link between our family and his.

On January 26, 2015 I replied by email:

"Dear Bob,

My great grandmother, Eunice Bradsher Jacobs (Winstead) (Wagstaff) waited a good part of her adult life for a letter like the one I received from you this past Saturday. I am not sure she knew about her little brother, Elijah, until after her mother died and she found the following letter (this is a transcript from the original) in her mother's things..... After the Jacobs stories were published in the Heritage book I hoped I would hear from someone that little Elijah had survived. However, as time went on I assumed he had not survived or had been adopted by another family and his own history lost in the process.

(I concluded with).....My father is as excited as I am and will be happy to give a DNA sample. How do we go about doing that?

I very much look forward to hearing from you. Do you have a picture of your great grandfather?

Sincerely,

Mary Linda Winstead Janke"



Elijah Jacobs/Elphelit Coleman

Uncle Therit Winstead, who had inherited the 1860 letter when Grandma Mary died, was one of the first people I called.

He was ecstatic and said, "How did you find him!?"

I laughed and said, "I didn't. He found us."

On Friday, February 6, 2015 I received the DNA kits for my father and myself. We put our samples in the return mail the following day. It was fortunate that Bob's father, Billy G. Coleman and my father Samuel H. Winstead, could both be tested. Genetically that put us one generation closer to Benjamin Jacobs. Bob had also sent kits to his brother, Billy, some of his cousins, and some of the known descendants of Elijah's adoptive father, James Coleman.

There were several long weeks of waiting for some of the relatives to use their kits and get them in the mail. After that, there were more weeks of waiting for the results.

At 1:01 AM on Thursday, March 26, 2015 I looked at the 23 and Me website one last time before going to bed.

My results were available.

I sent Bob an email that said:

"We share some genes. However, I am not sure if that means that Elephelit is ours as well as yours. Tell me what you think!!! Send it to work, please, as I won't have time to check this email in the morning." MLWJ

At 2:01 AM Bob replied:

"Initial results look to be in the range I expected to see. If you look below, or at the chart I sent you, you and I would share 26 cMs. Your results say 30 cMs and your dad's about double that, which is right. Don't lose hope yet. I'll talk more in the morning." Bob

Finally all the results were available on the 23andMe website. There was a strong relationship between our family and Bob's, but no relationship whatsoever between Bob's and the known genetic descendants of James Coleman. We were both a little surprised at the lack of common genes between the Coleman descendants and Bob's family as we thought James Coleman might have been related to little Elijah in some way.

In June of 2015 Bob and Martha Coleman traveled to Leasburg NC for the Winstead Family Reunion and to see the places where the Jacobs family lived and were buried. It was a very joyful and emotional reunion for both the Colemans and the Winsteds.

In October of 2016 Mary Linda Winstead Janke spent a week in Fort Smith visiting Bob, Martha, and the extended family there. Some new details about

Benjamin's, Catherine's, Elijah's, Nelse's, and Haywood's adventure were discovered that week.

Our families have only begun putting flesh on this skeleton of a family story, but we look forward to uncovering more information in time. For now, we are very thankful to know that Elijah not only survived, but lived to see his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Mary Linda Winstead Janke



Elijah Jacobs/Elephelit Coleman and his wife Mary Denny Coleman



*Mary Linda Winstead Janke and Bob Coleman at Elijah/Elephelit's Grave
October 2016*

Notes:

1. I don't actually know which slave belonged to Benjamin and which belonged to Catherine. However, the name Haywood is a Winstead family name so I thought it was most likely that he was hers and Nelse belonged to Benjamin.
2. We knew that Benjamin and Catherine had spent some time in Dubuque, AR because H. L. Holleman mentions an envelope addressed to them there. During my visit to Bob and Martha Coleman in Fort Smith Martha found two stories written by S. C. Turnbo that mention Benjamin Jacobs. We have used that information here. Some of the information in the story was not accurate. For instance the story said they were from SC not NC. However, there was enough accurate information that there was little doubt that this was the same Benjamin Jacobs.

3. Elephelit Coleman's name has been spelled in a multitude of ways, much like his Uncle Lewellyn Jacobs' was. However, it is spelled Elephelit on his gravestone. With the exception of Bob's letter I have spelled it consistently Elephelit throughout this story.