

THE MANY MARRIAGES OF BENJAMIN CLARK PEARMAN AND MARIA (CASE) (DEATHERAGE) (FRY) (PEARMAN) RANDLE

The 1910 federal census is unique among United States censuses in asking married couples whether or not they had been married more than once. Instructions to census enumerators clearly state that “for married persons, inquire whether they have been married before, and if this is the first marriage, write “M1,” but if this is the second or subsequent marriage, write “M2” (meaning married more than once).”¹ Lona Machler, nineteen-year-old enumerator for Litchfield, Montgomery Co., Illinois’ enumeration district no. 99, did not follow these instructions.² Rather than restricting herself to M1 or M2 entries, she entered the exact number of marriages for each person in her district. B. C. Pearman, age 84 and married five times, was the most often married person in that district. His 45-year-old wife, Maria, was one of only five persons in the district married three times.³ How did this couple’s previous six marriages end?

Maria Case married Joseph E. Deatheridge on 13 September 1883 in Sangamon Co., Illinois. It was the first marriage for both of them.⁴ Joseph, a Civil War soldier who had been a private in Company E, 133rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry, drowned “while seining in the South fork of the Sangamon River” on 9 July 1893.⁵ Over the next thirty-plus years, as her marital status changed, Maria would apply and reapply for pensions. These various applications clearly document her several marriages. Joseph’s death in 1893 left Maria with two small children: Mary Edith, age four, and Harry Lee, age one.⁶ She remained Joseph’s widow for two years, but remarried, 16 July 1895, in Sangamon County, Robert S. Fry.⁷ The couple had a daughter, Marie Grace, born in Divernon, Sangamon Co., on 28 March 1896.⁸ This marriage didn’t last long after Marie’s birth. In the January term of the Litchfield City Court, Maria Fry filed for divorce complaining that her husband “has subsequently to his marriage with the complainant wilfully deserted and absented himself from the complainant without any reasonable cause for the space of two years prior to the filing of this bill in this cause and that the defendant is a person wholly unfit to have the care custody control or

¹ Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce and Labor, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: April 15, 1910 - Instructions to Enumerators* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), 29; digital images, U.S. Department of Commerce, *United States Census Bureau, Publications* (<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1910InstructionstoEnumerators.pdf> : accessed 1 March 2014).

² 1910 U.S. census, Montgomery County, Illinois, population schedule, North Litchfield twp., ward 5, ED 103, p. 190 (stamped), sheet 11A, dw. 272, fa. 277, Lona Machler; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com/> : accessed 1 March 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication T624, roll 313; Lona Machler, a resident of this enumeration district, is the enumerator of enumeration district no. 99.

³ *Ibid.*, South Litchfield twp., ward 1, ED 99, p. 135 (stamped), sheet 9A, dw. 203, fa. 209, B. C. Pearman household.

⁴ Maria Pearman, “Declaration for Remarried Widow's Pension,” 18 October 1921; Maria Deatherage, widow's pension certificate no. 389,332; Maria Fry, guardian, minor's pension certificate no. 421,053; service of Joseph Deatherage (Pvt., Co. E, 133rd Ill. Inf., Civil War), pension application no. 1,092,486; Pension Application Files Based upon Service in the Civil War and Spanish American War, 1861-1934; Civil War and Later Pension Files; Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁵ Coroner's Inquest on the body of Joseph Deathridge, 2 August 1893, Maria Deatherage, widow's pension no. 389,332, Civil War, RG 15, NA—Washington.

⁶ Maria Fry, “Declaration for Children Under Sixteen Years of Age,” 18 July 1895, Maria Deatherage, widow's pension no. 389,332, Civil War, RG 15, NA—Washington.

⁷ Robert S. Fry - Mrs. Maria Deatherage, marriage certification (1895), Maria Deatherage, widow's pension no. 389,332, Civil War, RG 15, NA—Washington.

⁸ Fry birth, *The (Springfield) Illinois State Journal*, 24 April 1896, p. 5, col. 5; digital images, “Historical Newspapers”, *GenealogyBank.com* (<http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/> : accessed 27 February 2014).

education of children.” Robert S. Fry did not contest the charges and the divorce decree was filed 23 January 1899.⁹

In Hillsboro, Montgomery Co., Illinois, on 19 August 1905, Maria (Case) (Deatherage) Fry married B.C. Pearman.¹⁰ The newspaper announcement of this wedding highlighted the multiple marriages each partner brought to the union.

Litchfield, Ill., Aug. 22. - B. C. Pearman, aged 70, and Mrs. Maria Fry, aged 41, both of this place, were married at the First M. E. parsonage at Hillsboro last evening, the Rev. P. C. Parson, pastor, officiating. It is the groom's fifth adventure upon the matrimonial sea, while it is the bride's fourth [*sic*] conjugal experience. They will take up their residence in the south part of this city, where the bride owns a home.¹¹

Benjamin Clark Pearman, the “oldest man of Litchfield,” died there on 29 August 1921, at the age of 95 years, 6 months and 26 days old.¹² This fifth marriage was his last – and possibly his longest.

Ben C. Pearman, a native of Kentucky, married first Sarah Eliza Elliott, daughter of Thomas and Sarah Elliott. This marriage probably took place about 1851 in or near Grayson Co., Kentucky. Tragically, this marriage ended when Sarah, only 23 years of age, died on 12 February 1854 of childbirth complications one week after the birth of their first known child, Charles Winfield, in Grayson County.¹³

Ben remarried on 10 July 1855, in Grayson Co., a young mother of two girls, Sarah Jane (Atterbury) Smith.¹⁴ The couple’s first child was a daughter, Sarah Eliza, born 5 July 1857.¹⁵ Soon after this birth, the blended family left Grayson County and settled in Montgomery Co., Illinois.¹⁶ Sarah’s untimely death on 7 June 1869, in Litchfield, left Ben with four children at home ranging in age from four years to fifteen years.¹⁷ He married for the third time, Mrs. Mary M. Putnam, 15

⁹ *Maria Fry vs. Robert S. Fry*, divorce decree, City Court of Litchfield, Illinois, January Term, 1889, Maria Deatherage, widow's pension no. 389,332, Civil War, RG 15, NA—Washington.

¹⁰ B. C. Pearman - Maria Fry marriage certificate (1905), Maria Deatherage, widow's pension no. 389,332, Civil War, RG 15, NA--Washington.

¹¹ "Pearman-Fry," *The Illinois State Journal*, 23 August 1905, p. 1, col. 6; announcement apparently misstates Maria's total number of marriages.

¹² "Oldest Man of Litchfield Dead" [Benjamin C. Pearman], *The Illinois State Journal*, 30 August 1921, p. 5, col. 4.

¹³ Kentucky Death Records, 1852-1953, Grayson County, Kentucky, deaths, 1854, unpaginated, image 4, line 20, Sarah Eliza [indexed as Monica] Pearman death (1854); digital images, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com/> : accessed 2 March 2014); note that both Ben and Sarah were enumerated in their fathers' households in the 1850 federal census, and no marriage between the two has been found in available online sources at *Ancestry* and *FamilySearch*; also, "Kentucky, Birth Records, 1852-1910," database and digital images, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com/> : accessed 2 March 2014), Charles Winfield Pearman birth (1854), Grayson County, Kentucky, births, unpaginated, image 6, line 16; citing Kentucky Birth, Marriage and Death Records (1852-1910), microfilm rolls 994027-994058; Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives [KDLA], Frankfort.

¹⁴ "Kentucky, Marriage Records, 1852-1914," database and digital images, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com/> : accessed 2 March 2014), Benjamin C. Pearman - Sarah J. Smith marriage (1855), Grayson County, Kentucky, marriages, unpaginated, image 5, line 40); *ibid.* KDLA, Frankfort.

¹⁵ "Ky., Birth Records, 1852-1910", Sarah Eliza Pearman birth (1857), Grayson County, Kentucky, births, 1857, unpaginated, image 2, line 31.

¹⁶ 1860 U.S. census, Montgomery Co., Ill., pop. sch., Town 9N, range 5W, p. 106 (penned), dw. 797, fa. 809, Benj. C. Pearman household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com/> : accessed 2 March 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication M653, roll 214.

¹⁷ "Montgomery County Illinois Research Databases," database and digital images, *Historical Society of Montgomery County Illinois Digital Archive* (<http://history.montgomeryco.com/> : accessed 1 March 2014), Sarah J. Pearman burial entry (1869); for children, see 1870 U.S. census, Montgomery Co., Ill., pop. sch., Town 9, range 5, p. 289 (stamped), p.

February 1870, in Montgomery County.¹⁸ The couple had two children; the second, Edward, died 6 September 1873 when only eleven days old. His mother soon followed him, dying in 1874. She was 33 years old.¹⁹

Left a widower for the third time, Ben soon remarried, 24 December 1874, Miss Lena Woodman.²⁰ Ben was almost 49 years of age; Lena was only twenty. The couple had at least five children within the next ten years: Benjamin C., Enos R. (died at ten days of age), Stella M., Keith W., and Clark E. Sometime soon after Clark's birth, 12 November 1883 in Hillsboro, Montgomery Co., the couple separated.²¹ Keith lived with Ben; the rest of the children with their mother. By 1900, the couple had divorced.²² Ben's fifth marriage, noted as such in the 1910 census, was to fellow divorcée, Maria (Case) (Deatherage) Fray, and this marriage lasted until his death, sixteen years later. He is buried in Litchfield in Elmwood Cemetery. The lot is marked with a large family stone listing Ben, wives Sarah J. (1834-1869) and Mary M. (1841-1874), son William (1859-1888), and five infants who died between the ages of ten days and five months.²³

Maria's marrying days were not over. On 10 October 1929, she married for the fourth time, Isaac L. Randle, whose wife of forty years, Elvira (Tosh) Randle, had died less than a year before.²⁴ Maria died 11 January 1937 in Montgomery County. She is buried in Brush Creek Cemetery in Divernon, Sangamon Co., Illinois, under a stone she shares with her first husband, Joseph Deatherage. No mention is made of any of her subsequent husbands.²⁵

In addition to the eight marriages directly involving Benjamin Clark Pearman and Maria Case, several of their respective spouses were married more than once: Sarah Jane (Atterbury) (Smith) Pearman, twice; Mary M. (Putnam) Pearman, probably twice; Lena (Woodman) (Pearman) DeHunt, twice;²⁶ and Isaac L. Randle, twice. Tennessee-born Robert S. Fry's marriage to Maria was his third, making a grand total of at least fourteen marriages surrounding this title couple.²⁷

11 (penned), dw. 73, fa. 73, B. C. Pearman household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com/> : accessed 1 March 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication M593, roll 262.

¹⁸ "Montgomery Co., Ill., Research Databases", Benjamin C. Pierman (Pearman)—Mrs. Mary M. Putnam marriage entry (1870), citing license no. 4076.

¹⁹ Find A Grave, Inc., *Find A Grave*, database and images (<http://www.findagrave.com/> : accessed 1 March 2014), Ben C. Pearman (1826-1921) grave marker, memorial no. 108690584, Elmwood Cemetery, North Litchfield, Montgomery Co., Illinois, photograph © Karen (Sharp) Saathoff, 2013.

²⁰ "Montgomery Co., Ill., Research Databases", Benj. C. Pearman-Miss Lena Woodman entry (1874), citing license no. 5219.

²¹ "World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918," digital images, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> <http://ancestry.com/> : accessed 2 March 2014), Clark Earl Pearman, serial no. 2656, order no. A3571, Draft Board 12, San Francisco, California; citing *World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, NARA microfilm publication M1509, roll not cited.

²² 1900 U.S. census, Montgomery Co., Ill., pop. sch., East Fork twp., ED 77, p. 63 (stamped reverse), sheet 3B, dw. 54, fa. 54, B. C. Pearman household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com/> : accessed 27 February 2014); citing National Archives microfilm publication T623, roll 331.

²³ Find A Grave, Inc., *Find A Grave*, Ben C. Pearman (1826-1921), Elmwood Cemetery, Litchfield, Ill.

²⁴ I. L. Randle - Mrs. Maria Pearman marriage (1929), Mike Godfrey, Clerk of the Montgomery County Court, certification, 15 November 1929, Montgomery Co., Illinois; Maria Deatherage, widow's pension no. 389,332, Civil War, RG 15, NA—Washington; "Montgomery Co., Ill., Research Databases", Isaac L. Randle - Elvira Tosh marriage entry (1888), citing docket no. 8629; Find A Grave, Inc., *Find A Grave*, Elvira Celeste (Tosh) Randle (1867-1928), Elmwood Cemetery, Litchfield, Ill.

²⁵ Find A Grave, Inc., *Find A Grave*, Maria (Case) Deatherage (1864-1937), Brush Creek Cemetery, Divernon, Ill.

²⁶ "World War I draft registration cards," Clark Earl Pearman, serial no. 2656, order no. A3571; names mother Mrs. Lena Pearman DeHart.

²⁷ Fry-Deatherage wedding announcement, *The Illinois State Journal*, 18 July 1895, p. 4, col. 3.