

John Riley Quesenberry, Sr. (1826-1865)



On memorial day, I'd like to remember my great-great-grandfather John Quesenberry, who fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, was captured in the battle of Spotsylvania Court House, and died while a prisoner of war in Elmira, New York.

John Riley Quesenberry was born in 1826 in the portion of Wythe County, Virginia that became Pulaski County in 1839. In 1845, at the age of 19 he married Nancy Moore in Mount Airy, North Carolina. Prior to the Civil War, John and Nancy lived as farmers in Pulaski County. In the 1850 US Census, he is the neighbor of Harvey Gray, whose son William later marries John's daughter Mary.

During the Civil war, he was a private in Company I, 50th Regiment of the Virginia Infantry that participated in the [battle of Spotsylvania Court House](#), one of the bloodiest and costliest battles of the American Civil War. John was one of about 3,000 Confederate prisoners captured on May 12, 1864. The photograph above, from the Library of Congress, shows Confederate prisoners at Belle Plain, Virginia, captured at Spotsylvania, May 12, 1864. I like to think that John Quesenberry is in there somewhere.

As a prisoner of war, on July 3, 1864, John was transported to Elmira Prison (called 'Hellmira'

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by the inmates) in Elmira, New York. While a prisoner, he contracted typhoid fever and died of the disease on February 13, 1865. He was buried at the [Woodlawn National Cemetery](#) in Elmira, Chemung County, New York state. On May 7, 1888, John's wife Nancy was awarded his military pension of \$30 per year.

John Quesenberry is part of a third family history that I'm researching and documenting on this site. This "Appalachian Spring" line is from my mother's family in Virginia and West Virginia. So far, the direct line includes the surnames Gray, Justice, Quesenberry, Hurd, Moore, and Breeding. As a young'un, I spent most summers with my mother's family in West Virginia. 'Appalachian Spring' refers to the mountain spring from which I had to carry pails of water to my grandmother's kitchen several times a day.