

## **Case 1 – CSA Soldier Robert Wilson Austin of Beauvoir Confederate Soldiers Home, Biloxi, Mississippi.**

After the Civil War, Jefferson Davis, the former President of the Confederate States, retired to a beautiful place on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. I believe it has the most idyllic view of the Gulf of Mexico. The location on Beach Road in Biloxi, was wreathed with huge moss-draped live oak trees. The residents had a clear view of the ocean from the wide verandas that wrap the living quarters located on the second floor level of the home. With a regal beach house like that, it is no wonder that the estate was named Beauvoir, “beautiful view”. It was so, at the end of the Nineteenth Century and it was still, in Nineteen Sixty when I first saw it, and toured the historic home. At that time, I was moved by the story of how it became a home for the disabled and homeless CSA veterans.

When the site was first located by Jefferson Davis, the home belonged to his friend. Davis built a small cottage on the property where he wrote his memoirs. The owner permitted Davis and his wife, Varina, to buy the home, and they lived there until he died in 1889. Mrs. Davis decided to sell Beauvoir, and Mrs. A. Mc Kimbrough, a long-time close friend to Jefferson and Varina Davis, began what many have called her life's work, the preservation of Beauvoir as the "Mount Vernon of the Confederacy."

Finally, in 1903, it was arranged for the Mississippi Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), to buy Beauvoir. When making arrangements for the sale, Mrs. Davis made some provisions to assure the carrying out of her intentions. They were, first, that a home for Confederate soldiers was to be provided, second, the SCV was to maintain the estate as a shrine to Jefferson Davis. The home was dedicated "to the memory of the ex-Confederate soldiers and sailors, their wives and servants". Two separate museums are presently maintained on the property, the Davis Family Museum and the Confederate Museum. The Beauvoir Cemetery is also taken care of by the SCV.

The Beauvoir site received significant damage from Hurricane Katrina, with five of the seven buildings destroyed and many artifacts lost. The stout columns and foundation held strongly throughout the Hurricane. The home was restored through help from government preservation funds and was reopened on June 3, 2010.

One of the veterans who lived at Beauvoir was Robert Wilson Austin, born about 1846 in Tennessee, probably near Saltillo in Hardin County. He enlisted at Monroe, Mississippi in Company F of the Eleventh Mississippi Cavalry Regiment of the Confederate States of America and was a Private for the period of the War.

Because of injuries or disabilities that occurred during his service and his proven residence in the State of Mississippi, for at least a year, Robert was eligible to become a resident at Beauvoir Soldier's Home in Biloxi. He lived there from before 1920 until he died.

The Mississippi 11th Cavalry Regiment was formed during the spring of 1864 using Perrin's Battalion State Cavalry as its base. The unit was in Ferguson's Brigade and it saw action in Georgia. Later it was transferred to Starke's Brigade in the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana and it was in Mississippi when the War ended. Ferguson's Cavalry was part of the cavalry escort of President Davis in Georgia, April, 1865. Some dismounted men of the brigade were sent to Mobile with Steede's Battalion. The 11th Regiment was included in the surrender on May 4, 1865. More detailed information about the military service of Robert could be found on microfilm of the Muster Rolls for his military unit at the Mississippi State Archives in Jackson. If he filed an application for a Mississippi pension it would also be at the State Archives.

I have found several census and related records for Robert W. Austin and his parents. His father was James J. Austin born 1815-1817 near Waterloo, Lauderdale County, Alabama. He was living by the Austin Family who came from Virginia down the Tennessee River to North Alabama, before it was a State, and then settled in Hardin County, Tennessee. Robert W. Austin's mother Dorcas Shipman was also part of that family group. Dorcas was a daughter of Daniel Shipman and Elizabeth Austin. That particular Elizabeth Austin, has been proven to be the daughter of Stephen Austin and Dorcas Pinson.

The Stephen Austin mentioned above, was born 1755 in Halifax, Virginia. He was a son of John Austin, Jr. and Mary Maybee. Stephen was a Revolutionary War Soldier who lived in several counties in Tennessee and in Lauderdale County, Alabama for three years and finally settled in Saltillo, Hardin County, TN near the Tennessee River. Many of his sons and relatives came with him to that area.

Hardin County is downstream on the Tennessee River from Lauderdale, Alabama. It is not far from Saltillo, TN. A float trip from Waterloo down to Saltillo would only take a few hours. On the 1850 Census of Hardin County, is James J. Austin, the father of Robert W. Austin born 1845, who, I believe, is the CSA veteran of Beauvoir.

James J. Austin and his wife Dorcas, left Saltillo about 1859 and crossed over to the South side of the Tennessee River. They followed the Old Natchez Trace for about 30 to 40 miles until they found a place to farm cotton just West of Booneville. They were on the Tippah County U. S. Census in 1860. In 1870, after Prentiss

County was formed from the east side of Tippah County, the Austin Family was located there. In 1880, Tabitha Austin and her children were living in Jonesborough, Tippah County.

There are some differences in the family data as listed on the two census. In 1860 Robert was called by his middle name, "Wilson". James wife Dorcas died after 1860 and he married Tabitha before 1870. James died before the 1880 census.

The children of James J. Austin were: Eliza Jane b 1837; Uriah J. b 1838; Camily M. b 1840; Daniel L. b 1842; Robert Wilson b 1844-1845; Mary Camilla b 1846; Milly C. b 1848; William J. b 1853; Martha A. b 1855; John B. b 1857; and Samantha E. b 1861 MS. Because of the dates of birth of the children and the estimated date of death of Dorcas, Elizabeth b 1866 MS is probably the daughter of James and Tabitha. Since James had five sons and seven daughters, the family had plenty of hands in the field to plant, pick and process cotton.

After the Civil War, Robert Wilson Austin was physically able to work and had returned to help his family as a laborer on the farm, before 1870. Later, in 1880, Robert was not living with his widowed step-mother, Tabitha Austin in Prentiss County. However, in Prentiss County, on the ninth of May, 1910 is a Robert W. Austin age 65, a single, man, who is a boarder in the household of Mr. and Mrs. William M. Files, a farmer. On this census, the birthplace of Robert W. Austin and his parents was not known by the informant. The wife of William M. Files is Mary Downs Files, age 47. She was born in Mississippi. Mr. Files was born in Alabama as were his parents. It is probably no coincidence that this William M. Files lived next door to the family of James J. Austin in 1870.

Further research for William M. Files shows him in Prentiss and Itawamba Counties of Mississippi. He married Mary Downs January 6, 1892 in Union County, Mississippi. He died in 1913 in Prentiss County. His father James M. Files 1824-1885 served in the Twentieth Regiment of the Mississippi Infantry, CSA.

The wife of James M. Files was Tabitha E. Carlton and they married December 2, 1857 in Itawamba County.

Sometime before the Third of January 1920, Robert W. Austin married a Mary M. who was born about 1839 in Alabama. The Mississippi City, Harrison County, Mississippi U. S. Census of 1920 shows the inmates of Jefferson Davis Beauvoir Soldiers Home, on page 128. Listed are Robert W. Austin, 74, inmate, married, born in Tennessee, parents both born in Alabama. Next on the list is his wife, Mary M. Austin age 81, born in Alabama. Her parents were both born in North Carolina.

The Beauvoir Cemetery records on Findagrave.com show photos of the memorial markers for both graves for Robert W. and Mary Austin. Robert W. died the Nineteenth of January 1925 and his wife died almost three years later on the Third of December, 1927.

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Sources: Website for Beauvoir Confederate Soldiers Home <http://www.beauvoir.org-vetshome.htm/>

Website for Sons of Confederate Veterans [http://www.mississippiscv.org/ms\\_Units/11<sup>th</sup>\\_MS\\_cav.htm](http://www.mississippiscv.org/ms_Units/11<sup>th</sup>_MS_cav.htm)

<http://www.Ancestry.com> for U. S. Federal Population Census, "Hunting for Bears" database online for Mississippi Marriages. U. S. Census.

<http://www.Findagrave.com> for Beauvoir Cemetery photos and listings.

<http://www.AFAOA.org> for "Descendants of John Austin of Southside Virginia".