

Mississippi Blue-Bloods

An imagined Hollywood film proposal
based on the ancestry and cousins of
maternal great-grandmother
Caroline Amanda (Lena) Frazier Bonner

Synopsis

In the years during and following the Civil War, my great-grandmother, Caroline Amanda “Lena” Frazier, and her younger first-cousin Lydia Tigner Noland grew up in Wilkinson County, Mississippi. The county seat, Woodville, had been the childhood home of Jefferson Davis. These two cousins were descendants and relatives of wealthy Mississippi plantation families—Tigners, Fraziers, Nolands, Ogdens, and McWillies. During their teenage years, women were sent away to private boarding schools. In their twenties, through relatives they met and married men of illustrious parentage with noted political and legal contributions to the states of Louisiana and Mississippi. Yet the two cousins lived their lives through the economic and social chaos of the post-Civil War South, struggling to maintain a semblance of their “blue-blood” heritage.

Characters

Lydia Ellen Noland Tigner
(Lena and Julia's Maternal Grandmother)
(1796–1863)

Lydia Ellen Noland, born in 1796, the youngest of six children born to Pierce Noland (c.1756–1816) and his wife Mary Field (c.1760–1846). Her paternal grandparents were Pierce Noland and his wife Sarah Awbrey; and her maternal grandparents were William Field, Jr. (c. 1726–1805) and his wife Lydia Elswick (1743–c.1829). Her parents moved from North Carolina to Georgia around 1793, where she was born. When she was a small child, in 1802 they came to the West Florida provinces, then Spanish territory. They eventually settled near Fort Adams, in what is now Wilkinson County, Mississippi; but they also owned land in the Feliciana Parishes of Louisiana. They established a 550-acre plantation named The Homestead, one mile from Woodville, Mississippi, with over 50 enslaved workers. Lydia Ellen lived most her life at this family plantation.

Lydia Ellen married plantation owner William Tigner (c.1787–1854) on 6 Nov. 1820. He was a major owner of the first railroad in Mississippi, the 1842 West Feliciana Railroad carrying cotton from Woodville, Mississippi, to Bayou Sara, Louisiana, for transport to Mississippi River boats.

They had the following children: Caroline Amanda “Carrie”, Lydia Julia, William Noland,

Eliza Ellen, Clark H., and Sarah Jane.

During the Civil War, she took refuge at Sligo Plantation in Bovina near Vicksburg, Mississippi, home of her youngest daughter Lydia Julia Tigner (her husband T. Vaughn Noland away in the war). There she helped care for her infant granddaughter, Lydia Field Noland.

In Confederate Greenbacks: Mississippi Plantation Life in the 70's and 80's*, written in 1940 by her granddaughter, Lydia Tigner Noland, two sad tales are reported, as told by Lydia Julia Tigner of her mother [MY 3RD GREAT-GRANDMOTHER] Lydia Ellen Tigner Noland's tragic last days at Sligo Plantation in Bovina during the Siege of Vicksburg.

First, her infant granddaughter caught dysentery in 1863:

“Mama and Grandmother Tigner did everything they knew to do for the baby...they brewed teas of many herbs which they knew to be beneficial for intestinal trouble. They sat up in turns night and day to care for the little one. They performed a christening for Lydia Field Noland. A few days later, the baby died. Mama cut up her wedding gown of white satin, which she and Grandmother Tigner made into a shroud for the baby...Mammy Kitty's husband made a little coffin in which the baby was buried in the family cemetery at Bovina. Mama was sobbing so intensely that she had to be carried back to the house. Grandmother Tigner held her arms toward Mama who fell upon her knees beside the bed. The most comforting words she was able to give were these: “As thy days so shall thy strength be.”

Second, ten days later Lydia Ellen Noland Tigner herself came down with dysentery and died:

“Before she left this world, she had requested that her body be taken back to “The Homestead” and there be buried beside Grandfather Tigner. Mama had to have a requisition from the Union Army. Mama's next step was to a jewelry store where she sold a large diamond brooch of her mother for enough money to buy a casket for her mother, and to pay the railroad fare from Vicksburg to Natchez to Woodville for herself, the coffin, Mammy Kitty, and Mammy Kitty's husband. That afternoon the party started from the plantation to the railroad. The coffin, containing Grandmother Tigner's body, was lying in the bed of the trap. Part of it extended beyond the back of the trap. Mama's oldest child, Maud, lay asleep in Mammy Kitty's lap. It was late at night when the bereaved little group finally reached the depot at Vicksburg and boarded the train which would eventually take them to Woodville and to The Homestead for the burial.”

*Julia Tigner Noland and Blanch Saucier, Confederate Greenbacks: Mississippi Plantation Life in the '70s and '80s, (1940, The Naylor Company).

Caroline Amanda Tigner Ogden Frazier (Lena's Mother) (1823-1887)

Caroline Amanda “Carrie” Tigner was born in 1823 to parents Lydia Ellen Noland (1796-1865) and William Tigner (1787-1854) in Woodville, Wilkinson County, Mississippi. She was raised on the The Homestead Plantation near Woodville.

Age-16, she married her first husband, Robert T. Ogden (1814-1841) in 1839 in Woodville, Wilkinson County, Mississippi. Her husband was a plantation owner. They had one son, William Tigner Ogden (1840-1915), who later acquired a plantation in what is now Liddieville, Franklin Parish, Louisiana.

Age-24, widowed, she married her second husband, William Lindsey Frazier, (1820-1862) in 1847 in Woodville, Wilkinson County. He was a plantation owner and land speculator. Their children were George Bender Frazier (1848), Caroline Amanda "Lena" Frazier (1852-1901), Allen Frazier (1857), Sarah Frazier (1858), and William Frazier (1859). In her father's will she inherited \$10,000 [\$100,000 in 2021 dollars] noting that far more had been given to her during his lifetime.

Widowed for 25 years, Carrie lived the last years of her life in Louisiana — first at the Franklin Parish home of her son George Bender Frazier and family on his farm in Extension, Louisiana, then in the Richland Parish, Louisiana, homes of her nieces and nephews by her late brother William Noland Tigner, who was murdered 1863 in a neighbor feud. Carrie died at age-64 in 1887 and was buried in the Tigner plot of the New Salem Cemetery in Girard, Richland Parish, Louisiana.

Lydia Julia Tigner Noland (Julia's Mother) (1838-1901)

Lydia Julia Tigner was born in 1838 to parents Lydia Ellen Noland Tigner (1796-1865) and William Tigner (1787-1854). She was raised on The Homestead Plantation in Woodville, Mississippi. She was sent to attend St. Joseph's Convent in Bardstown, Kentucky, considered then the safest school for girls, accompanied by her personal maid. The teachers were nuns sent from France. Many young women from the South were fellow classmates, including several of her cousins. She obtained diplomas in French, art, music, and English.

She married a first cousin, lawyer T. Vaughan Noland (1834-1908) on 12 Jan. 1859. He was a son of Judge Pearce Noland (1789-1857) and his wife Elizabeth Jane Galtney, of Sligo Plantation, Warren County, Mississippi. Vaughan, an attorney, was Mayor of Woodville, State Legislator, State Senator, and an author of the post-Civil War Mississippi Constitution.

Lydia and Vaughan Noland raised their nine children at The Homestead Plantation. They later inherited Sligo Plantation in Warren County. They also had a second home on the Gulf Coast, in Mississippi City. They are buried in the Mississippi City Cemetery, she in 1901 and he in 1908.

Caroline Amanda "Lena" Frazier Bonner John's Great-Grandmother (1852-1900)

Caroline Amanda "Lena" Frazier was born 1852 to Caroline Amanda "Carrie" Tigner and William Lindsey Frazier, a prosperous plantation owner land speculator in Woodville, Mississippi. She was educated at the Silliman Female Collegiate Institute, a private boarding school in Clinton, Louisiana.

At age 18, she moved to Franklin Parish with her mother, brother George Bender Frazier (age-20), and his fiancé Ellie Newman (age-16), on a farm in Extension, Louisiana. In 1878, she married Wesley McDonald Bonner, widowed, inheritor of a cotton plantation in Fort Necessity, Louisiana.

After years of struggling financially, her husband Wesley left Fort Necessity in 1888 for New Orleans to enroll in Tulane Medical School. But he died suddenly in 1891, age-44. Widowed, Lena taught schoolchildren in a local church to help support her family.

Lena died in 1900, age-48, leaving seven children ages 8-20. Among them was my maternal grandfather, Robert Paul Bonner, age-19, her eldest son, suddenly becoming head of the family.

Lena is buried in the Carraway Cemetery, Extension, Louisiana, alongside her brother George Bender Frazier, his wife Ellie, and other family members.

Wesley McDonald Bonner (Lena's Husband and my Great-Grandfather) (1857-1891)

Wesley McDonald Bonner was born in 1847 to Allen Wesley Bonner and Sally Reynolds Bonner. His parents owned a cotton plantation with enslaved persons in Fort Necessity, Louisiana.

In 1861, his father died in the Battle of Vicksburg, when Wesley McDonald was 14 years old and the eldest living son. Although his mother managed to retain ownership of their land, she taught a private school at her home to help maintain the family. Wesley McDonald also supplemented the family income by teaching at a private school in a cabin near the old Boeuf Prairie Methodist Church, located on Bonner property.

In 1870, Wesley McDonald married Zelia Elizabeth Buie and they had one son, Allen, in 1871. Zelia Buie Bonner dies in 1873. Their son would die in 1882 from drowning in a nearby bayou.

Wesley McDonald married Caroline Amanda "Lena" Frazier in 1878 and they have eight children: Bessie, Robert, Edith Lena, Sallie, Charles, Mark, and Agnes. They continued farming the Bonner Plantation under difficult economic conditions, supplementing their

income by teaching elementary school in their home.

In 1889 Wesley McDonald decided to begin a medical career and leaves his family for New Orleans to enter Tulane Medical School. After two years of medical study, he dies in 1891 at age 44.

He is buried in the Old Bonner Cemetery in Fort Necessity, Louisiana.

William Tigner Ogden (Lena's Half-Brother) **(1840-1915)**

William Tigner Ogden was born 1840 in Woodville, Mississippi, to Robert T. Ogden and Caroline Amanda "Carrie" (Tigner) Ogden. His younger half-sister was my great-grandmother Caroline Amanda "Lena" Frazier.

Upon the death of his father, he acquired a cotton plantation in Boeuf Prairie, Franklin Parish, Louisiana, and relocated there to manage the plantation.

William T. Ogden's first wife was Louisa Elizabeth. Brown; their children were Robert N. Ogden, Lydia Elizabeth (Ogden) Bundick, and William E. Ogden. His second wife was Frances "Fannie" Chew; their children were Caroline Bondeville (Ogden) Kelly and Howard Philemon Ogden.

In 1895 the U.S. mail route was extended northward from Fort Necessity. A post office was established on the plantation of William Tigner Ogden and he named the town Liddieville after his daughter, Lydia Ogden. He also established The Ogden School on his plantation, the first elementary school in Liddieville.

William Tigner Ogden died in 1915 and was buried in the Ogden Cemetery in Liddieville.

Julia Tigner Noland Noland **(Lena's First Cousin)** **(1872-1941)**

Julia Tigner Noland was born in 1872 to parents Lydia Julia Tigner (1838-1901) and T. Vaughan Noland (1834-1908). She had an extraordinary childhood living on her parent's Homestead Plantation near Woodville, Mississippi. Her father was a famous attorney, Mayor of Woodville, member of the Mississippi State Senate, and an author of the post-Civil War Mississippi Constitution. Julia was educated at home by her mother and local women who had attended private finishing schools.

During the decades after the Civil War, once wealthy families struggled to maintain the glamour of life before the war and raised their daughters to wed those with good prospects. Julia married the grandson of a Mississippi governor and son of a famous society matron and prosperous lawyer. Yet her inexplicable fate was to be the wife of a traveling salesman, raising three children in rented rooms in boarding houses from New Orleans to Memphis.

Before she died in 1941, she and a niece together published her evocative memoirs of the triumphs and tragedies of her early years at The Homestead Plantation.* She recalled encouragement for her to become a writer:

One cold, rainy day one of Mama's friends from New Orleans came to see her. She was Miss Julie K. Wetherell. The Wetherell family lived on their plantation some miles from Woodville opposite our plantation. Miss Julie was then connected in some way with the Times Democrat, the leading newspaper of New Orleans. She later married Page M. Baker, also of the Times Democrat. She became a writer of the column called "The Innocent Bystander." She asked me to tell her what I was reading. After I finished telling her every detail, she said, "I think Julia should be a great writer. She has a flair for telling a story and she is a prodigious reader, two very important essentials for a great writer."

My desire to write was born. Just as soon as she left, I began thinking about a story I would write, and curled upon my day bed. I called the story "Three Wretched Days." The next morning, I sent it with Papa to mail for me. After feverish waiting, I saw and read "Three Wretched Days" in print! I was excited and conceited beyond all words. The editor's introduction said that I was a budding young authoress and predicted a bright future for me if I continued.

The rest of the winter and next summer I spent with my books. Sometimes I played games with the boys; always I returned to the snugness of our home and the happiness of a book. But this budding young authoress never fulfilled the predictions made of her. In fact, I have written very little except letters, until I started to write these stories you are now reading.

*Julia Tigner Noland and Blanch Saucier, *Confederate Greenbacks: Mississippi Plantation Life in the '70s and '80s*, (1940, The Naylor Company).

William McWillie Noland (Julia's Husband) (1868-1943)

His Grandfather: William McWillie (1795-1869):

William McWillie was the last Governor of Mississippi prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. He was born in South Carolina. His father Colonel Adam McWillie was in command of the 2nd Regiment South Carolina militia during the War of 1812, and William served as an adjutant in his father's regiment during that war. After graduating from what is now the University of South Carolina in 1817, he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1818. He was first married to Nancy Cunningham (1799-1827), and then widowed, he married Catherine Anderson (1812-1873).

Between 1836 and 1840, he served in both the South Carolina House of Representatives and the South Carolina Senate. In 1845 he moved to Mississippi to establish Kirkwood Plantation, the largest plantation in Mississippi at the time, owning 200 enslaved persons. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives 1849-1851. In 1858 he became Governor of Mississippi, serving until 1860, as an ardent advocate for slavery and supporter of secession from the

United States. His son Adam McWillie (1821–1861) was killed in the Civil War during the First Battle of Bull Run. McWillie died in 1869 and is buried in Kirkwood Cemetery, near Camden, Mississippi.

His Mother: Catherine McWillie Noland (1832–1881): Catherine McWillie was born in 1832. She was the daughter of William McWillie and Catherine Anderson. She married attorney Aubrey Avery Noland in 1853, and they had six children, including son McWillie Noland. She became a famous society matron in Mississippi, lavishly entertaining at Kirkwood Plantation, which she inherited from her father. Her obituary stated: “The oldest daughter of Governor McWillie, Mrs. Kate McWillie Noland, was in her youth celebrated in the society of Washington City, and had a national reputation for the extreme beauty of her person, and the graces of her mind and manners.” She died in Canton, Mississippi in 1891.

McWillie Noland (1868–1943): The son of Catherine McWillie and Aubrey Avery Noland, he was born in 1868 at Kirkwood Plantation near Camden, Mississippi. In 1898, he served for a few months in the 2nd Mississippi Infantry Regiment, U.S. Volunteers, Company H, during the Spanish–American War, listing his residence as Rosedale, Mississippi.

McWillie Noland (then aged–32) married Julia Tigner Noland (age–26; his first cousin) in 1898 in the Gulf Coast town of Mississippi City, a second residence of her parents, Lydia Julia Tigner and T. Vaughan Noland. In 1900, the married couple appear in US Census records as “Boarders” in a house on Perrier Street in New Orleans, his occupation listed as “Salesman for a dry goods company” and hers as “Housekeeper.” In the 1910 Census, he is in Madison, Mississippi as “Salesman for Retail Dry Goods,” living with his wife and two children as “Boarders” in a residential house. In a 1917 draft card, their son Avery is listed as a Boarder in a house in Memphis. Avery Noland soon dies at age–19 of “malarial congestive chills” in Memphis. In the 1930 Census, McWillie (age 61) and Julia (age 52) are in Memphis, Tennessee, listed as “Boarders” in the house of his sister Victoria Noland Axum and her husband Edward Axum. McWillie’s occupation remains “Salesman, Dry Goods.” In 1940, Julia Tigner Noland publishes her memoirs entitled Confederate Greenbacks: Mississippi Plantation Life in the ’70s and ’80s. Julia Tigner Noland dies in 1941 in Memphis; McWillie Noland dies in 1943 in Memphis. They have no tombstones in the Forest Hills Cemetery, Elvis Presley Boulevard, Memphis.

STORYLINE

ACT I: “I JUST WANT TO DANCE!”

The Homestead: just one of the many plantation homes and agricultural lands of wealthy persons in Woodville, Wilkinson County, Mississippi — the Nolands, Tigners, Fraziers, and Ogdens. Their high-risk parents had immigrated to the territory of Mississippi in the 1700s and established cotton plantations. Their children and grandchildren were to lead privileged lives with servants, elite educations, and glamorous social occasions for meeting appropriate future blue-blood spouses.

ACT II: “THE WORLD IS FALLING ABOUT MY EARS!”

In 1861, Mississippi’s secession from the United States leads to the collapse of much of this Southern Way of Life. The plantation society of Woodville, Mississippi, is destroyed,

with many of the plantation homes burned to the ground by U.S. Army troops in revenge for providing clandestine support for Confederate troops.

The U. S. Army takes control of Mississippi, enforcing the abolition of slavery. Enslaved persons were the largest financial investment of white Mississippians in the early 1800s, with land secondary. This leads to the transition from a slave-based plantation economy to “share-croppers” and paid workers in large cotton agriculture.

The Civil War results in the combat deaths of many promising Southern youth; diseases run rampant, killing many civilians; property is looted or confiscated. Governor McWillie’s eldest son dies at Bull Run. Mary Ellen Tigner dies of dysentery at Vicksburg. My 2nd great-grandfather, Allen Wesley Bonner, a soldier, dies of dysentery during the Siege of Vicksburg.

ACT III: “AFTER ALL, TOMORROW IS ANOTHER DAY!”

With the economy of Woodville destroyed, the large estates are sold to German Jewish immigrants who hire agricultural workers, employing the latest technologies. For the next fifty years, these immigrants create a wealthy new cotton economy for Woodville, soon nick-named “Little Jerusalem.” (This ends with the devastating boll-weevil infestations in the 1920s, when the next generations of Jewish landowners and merchants sell their agricultural and city properties and move to the larger cities.)

In 1870, Lena Frazier age-18, with her mother and a brother, leave Mississippi blue-blood society to start a cotton farm in Extension, Franklin Parish, Louisiana. In 1878, she marries Wesley McDonald Bonner, the widowed owner of a nearby cotton farm in Fort Necessity. After years of financial troubles, she dies widowed at age-48, leaving seven children ages 8-19, including my grandfather, Robert Paul Bonner.

Robert Paul Bonner, age 32, marries Mary Florence Stafford (age 25) in 1912. They live the rest of their lives on his family cotton farm in Fort Necessity, Louisiana, struggling financially year-to-year with the vagaries of agricultural seasons, economic recessions, and the Great Depression. They have four children [Amy Lena (“Sissy”), Robert Stafford (“Buddy”), Allen Wesley (“Wes”), and Mary Florence (“Baby”), my mother] and twelve grandchildren. He dies in 1952 at age 72 from a stroke while out in his cotton field. She dies in 1978 at aged 91.

Lydia Tigner Noland, Lena’s cousin, marries her patrician first-cousin McWillie Noland, who leaves Mississippi blue-blood society for a salaried career as a dry-goods salesman. Throughout their 40-year married life, they raise three children in rented rooms in boarding-houses from New Orleans to Memphis. They are buried in Memphis without headstones.

*Scarlett O’Hara quotes from the film *Gone with the Wind* are hereby acknowledged.