

John West of Solon, Iowa

(Extracted from “Two John Wests”, Marilou West Ficklin 2024)

So who was John West of Solon, Iowa? This John West left many records in Solon: *several state and U.S. census records; one ME Church record; several records of civil proceedings; a cemetery record and an estate file.*

He probably had married a woman from Vermont named Clarissa.¹ He had at least two children both born in New York: *a daughter “Julia Ann West” born December 23, 1823² and a son “Orson Childs West” born October 1827.³*

Did John name his son, “Orson Childs West,” for a relative of his wife, Clarissa?⁴ One man named “Orson Childs” is of particular interest. **(Childs.pdf)**

By 1838 John had come with his wife and children—and probably a few relatives—to settle at the Iowa frontier in Big Grove Township, Johnson County, IA. It was part of the Blackhawk purchase.

¹ 1850 U.S. Census, Johnson Co., IA, Big Grove Twp. The 1850 Census does not show marital status. Clarissa appears immediately below John in his household which usually implies ‘spouse.’ However census takers interview whomever ‘answers the door,’ and sometimes get the wrong answer. (This is from personal experience as late as 2000 when I was myself a census taker.) It is possible that “Clarissa” was not the mother of John’s children, Orson Childs West or Julia Ann West. Until a marriage record for John and Clarissa is found—or baptismal records for the children-- I cannot be certain.

² Julia’s birthdate is calculated from her gravestone. Her birthplace from the 1850 U.S. Census, Johnson Co., IA, Big Grove Twp, household of her husband A. W. Blaine.

³ Orson’s birthdate and place are from U.S. Census 1900, 12th Census, California, NARA Microfilm T623 Napa Co., Roll 95, Vol.20 ED 96, Napa Twp., Sheet 5, line 126, June 1. Enumerated with Albert E. Hatt, 739 Main Street Napa City : Orson C. West, 72, Farmer, **b. Oct 1827 NY, f b. NY, m b. [VT]**. . His middle name is from the mortuary Record of his death in San Francisco, 1901. Record dated April 9, 1901, Age 73 y 5 mos , Rancher b. NY

⁴ “Childs,” is a name found living not far from John West, Sr. (*of Minerva*) in Vershire, VT in 1800. An “Orson Childs” is shown several lines above Ebenezer West in the 1830 census for Niagara, Niagara Co., NY. See Appendix E.

DETAILS

1. John West of Solon

John West, my great- great grandfather really did exist. He's in our family bible.

From the time he helped settle the town of Solon, Iowa, about 1840, he left identifying records for himself and two known children. There may have been other children who left no records. The origins of his family are unknown. This is his family group sheet. *(Red items are speculation)*

John West

birth date: 1796-7⁵

birth place: New York¹⁰

married: 1820-1823⁶

death: 4 Aug 1861, Solon, IA⁷



father: unknown

mother: unknown

Spouse 1: Clarissa ___ (Chiles?, Leonard?)⁸

birth date: 1801⁹

birth place: Vermont¹⁰

death: (Solon, IA, 1850-1853)¹¹

father: unknown

mother: unknown

Spouse 2: Hannah Hill

Married: Solon, IA: 17 June 1853¹²



Children with Clarissa:

Julia Ann West:

Born approx. 23 Dec 1823, New York¹³

Married Archibald W. Blaine, March 1839, Solon, IA¹⁴

Died 19 Oct 1852¹⁵



Orson Childs West:¹⁶

Born approx. Oct. 1827¹⁷

Married Catherine Griffith about 1850-1851,¹⁸

Died 8 April 1901, San Francisco¹⁹



⁵ 1850 U.S. Census, Big Grove Twp., Johnson Co. IA, NARA microfilm M432, Roll 208, p. 180, line

. 1860 U.S. Census, Newport, Twp., Johnson Co. IA, NARA microfilm M 653, 2d filming, Roll 327, p

⁶ Based on birth of daughter, Julia in 1823

⁷ Sandtown Cemetery, Hills, Johnson County, IA. Find-a-grave (FAG) Memorial # 32742976.

⁸ *Is it possible that Clarissa is not John's first wife nor the mother of his children?*

⁹ 1850 Census Big Grove, op. cit.

¹⁰ 1850 Census Big Grove, op. cit.

¹¹ Clarissa is shown in the 1850 Johnson Co., IA census in the household of John West. John West remarried in 1854.

¹² *Marriages of Johnson Co. IA, 1839-1910* (MJCI), John West to Hannah Hill, Bk 3, p. 1421 May 1854

¹³ Birth calculated from tombstone [FAG] and from 1850 census

¹⁴ Johnson County, IA marriage record for Archibald W. Blain to Julianne West, March 1839

¹⁵ Oakland Cemetery, Solon IA, Find-a-grave (FAG) Memorials # 20646022, 20646010, Julia [West] Blaine and Archibald Worley Blaine.

¹⁶ Photo supplied by email from 'Betty' at hortonhwy60@aol.com. It shows Orson West in San Francisco. Refers to him as Orson Childs West

¹⁷ 1900 U.S. Census., California, op. cit.

¹⁸ No marriage record found. Date estimated from 1850 census and birth records of the children of Orson and Catherine Griffith West.

¹⁹ Book P, Mortuary Records, City of San Francisco, 1901; obituary in *San Francisco Call*, 9 April 1901.

John West of Solon

Possibly others

Children with Hannah:

None

John of Solon is said to have married in New York before 1822. (His daughter, Julia, was born in 1823 and his son, Orson, in 1827.) Given the dates of birth of his children—both in New York—***John of Solon*** was probably in New York in the 1820's until late 1827.

The **1840 U.S. Census for Big Grove Township, Johnson Co., IA** shows ***John West*** with a large family -- possibly two families in one household. It also shows that John West possibly had other children born 1822-1836²⁰

It shows twelve people in John's household:²¹

1 male < 5 (b. after 1835--possible son)

1 male >5 and < 10 (b. between 1830 and 1835--possible son)

2 males > 10 and < 15 (b. between 1825 and 1830 - [Orson and one other](#))

3 males > 20 and <30 (b. between 1810 and 1820 --[probably not his sons](#)) (? A.B. Blain b. 1814)

1 male >40 and < 50 (b. between 1790 and 1800—[John](#))

1 male > 60 and < 70 (b. between 1770 and 1780--possible father of Clarissa or other elderly male)

1 female > 10 and < 15 (b. between 1825 and 1830--possible daughter.)

1 female > 20 and < 30 (b. between 1810 and 1820)([probably not John's daughter, Julia b. abt 1823](#))

1 female > 30 and < 40 (b. between 1800 and 1810) [Clarissa](#)

The persons not yet accounted for in John's family are:

3 males > 20 and <30 (b. between 1810 and 1820) [Related to Clarissa? Related to John? or unrelated](#)

1 male > 60 and < 70 (b. between 1770 and 1780) [Clarissa's father? Related to John? or unrelated](#)

1 female > 20 and < 30 (b. between 1810 and 1820) [Related to Clarissa? Related to John? or unrelated](#)

The **1844 Iowa State Census, Big Grove Township, Johnson Co.**, shows John West's household to contain "7 souls."²² That is 5 people less than in 1840. Shows that 5 persons shown in 1840 probably were not John's children and moved out of the household by 1844.

Group migration to Solon, IA

According to a history of Johnson County, IA, a group living in northeastern Ohio in the 1830s migrated to Johnson Co., IA about 1837/8. It included Moses Adams as well as Fanny and Cotton Pratt and ***John and Charles McCune of Portage/Summit Co. OH.***

Did John West of Portage, who lived in Portage Co. OH in 1830, meet the McCunes and join the migration? The Wests and Mc Cunes of Solon became prominent in the cattle business in Johnson Co.

The **1830 U.S. Census for Coventry Township, Portage County, Ohio** shows the household of John West:

2 males < 5 (b. after 1825) [Orson and one other](#)

1 male 20-30 (b. 1800-1810) [Unknown – could be younger brother of John or Clarissa](#)

1 male 30-40 (b. 1790-1800) [John](#)

2 females > 5 and < 10 (b. 1820-1825) [Julia Ann](#)

1 female >20 < 30 (b. 1800-1810) [Clarissa](#)

It is worthwhile to compare the **1840 U.S. Census of Johnson County, IA** for ***John West [of Solon]*** to the **1830 U.S. Census** for ***John West of Portage***).

²⁰ The 1840 census for Johnson County, IA shows a large household headed by John West. It may contain children who left home before the 1850 census. One or more males may have joined the California Gold Rush in 1849. (Son, Orson, later went to San Francisco in the 1850s. See portrait inscribed "Orson West, San Francisco, Cal." on previous page.)

²¹ 1840 U.S. Census, Big Grove Twp., Johnson Co. IA, NARA microfilm M704, Roll 101.

²² 1844 State Census, Iowa Johnson Co., Big Grove Township, transcription, p. 10, line 5, LDS film #1728630

John West of Solon

The above matches the 1840 household for John in Johnson Co. IA--*with the addition of daughter Julia still living in household because she was not yet married in 1830*. It does not contain the 2 males born after 1830.

John West of Solon