

Missed-Fortune in Catahoula Parish

An imagined Hollywood film proposal based on my maternal grandmother's forebears and early years...

SYNOPSIS



Mary Florence Stafford was born in 1887 and grew up in Catahoula Parish, Louisiana. In her immediate family, there were three full-siblings, four half-siblings, and four non-siblings. Her blended family was created through a tragic sequence of fatal disease epidemics and a post-Civil War racial murder. This legacy would haunt her the rest of her life...

CHARACTERS

Amy Lovelace (Her Mother)

Born in 1853, she was the descendant of wealthy plantation owners who had moved from Westmoreland, Virginia, via South Carolina, to Natchez, Mississippi, finally settling Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, during the late 1700s. She was belle of the ball! During the Civil War, she resisted when Union soldiers tried to rob their house Pine Hill Plantation of its silver



and jewels [already buried in the back woods] but relinquished her diamond earrings when they threatened to rip them from her earlobes. In 1873 she and her family traveled by riverboat to New Orleans where she married fellow Catahoula Parish “blueblood” John Gilman Peck in a lavish ceremony at the Church of the Immaculate Conception.

John Gilman Peck (Her Mother's First Husband)

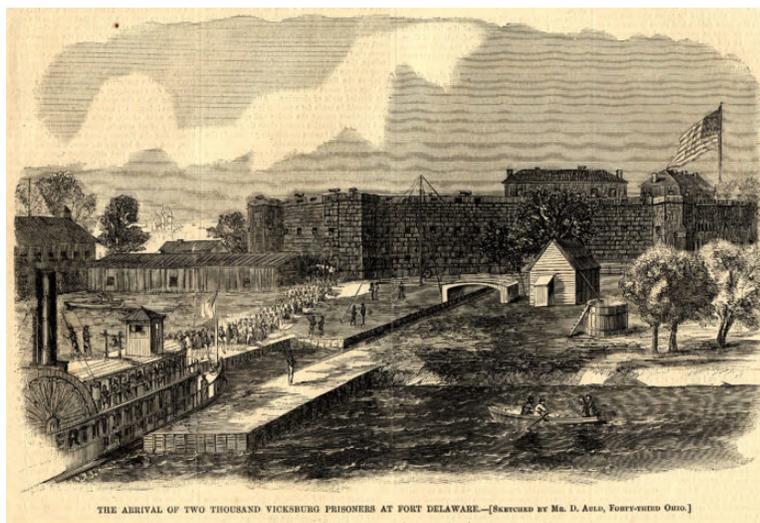


Born in 1837, he was the dashing son of wealthy plantation owners in Catahoula Parish. He was a lawyer educated at Transylvania University in Kentucky and was descended from a long line of distinguished medical and political figures who had begun in Boston, then to Kentucky, and finally to Louisiana in the early 1800s. He was noted as a brave captain in the Confederate Army of Louisiana. In the aftermath of the Civil War, he worked to save their family plantation. He also was a leader in the secret society of the wealthy known as the Knights of the White Camellia. He mobilized local militias to help thwart freed blacks’ efforts to gain local political power, notably in Colfax and Waterproof, Louisiana.



David Stafford (Her Father)

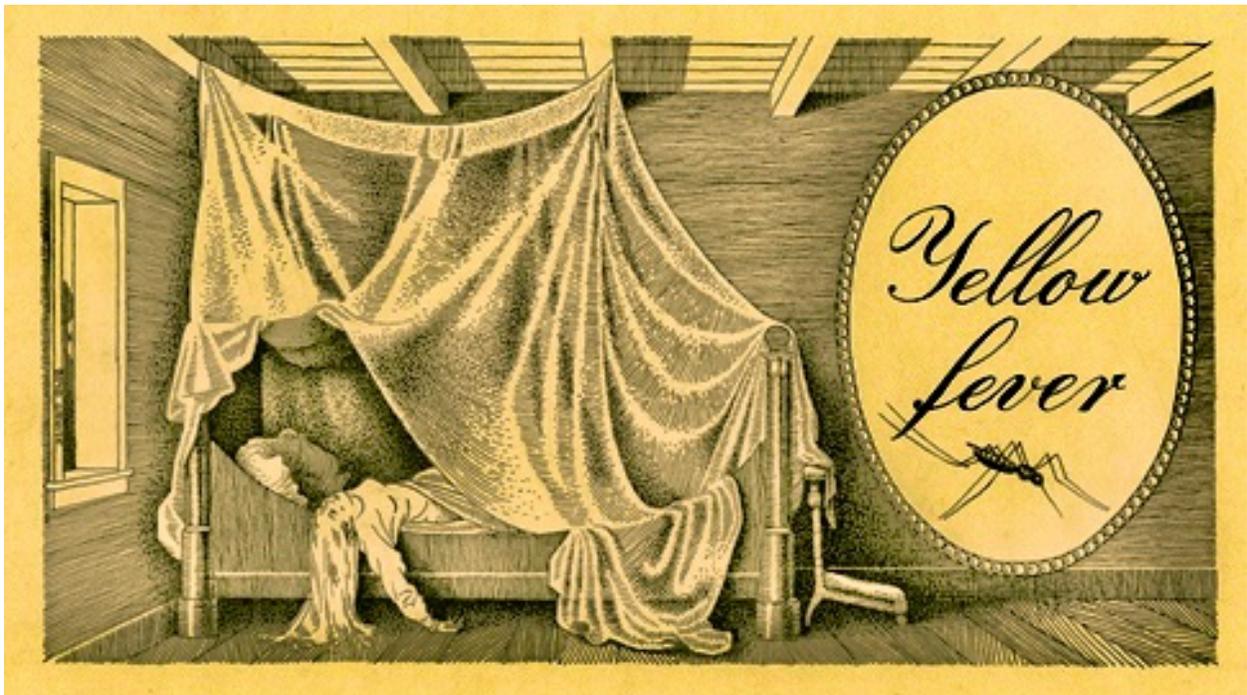
He was born in 1835 to immigrant German parents in Pennsylvania. Changing his name to David Stafford he left home as a teenager, laboring aboard riverboats traversing the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Legend has it that he was invited upstairs on a Mississippi riverboat to join the poker table, and he won a game with a deed in the pot to property in Catahoula Parish. He timbers that land and launches a riverboat business between New Orleans and Northeast Louisiana, based at Stafford's Point. He served as a Sergeant in the Confederate Army of Louisiana during the Civil War, and he was captured and exchanged twice. During 1864-1865, he was held in Fort Delaware, the infamous Union prison in the middle of the Delaware River.



Elizabeth B. Smith

(Her Mother's First Husband's Wife)

She was born in 1839 of an illustrious and prosperous family in Shelby, Kentucky. Her great-grandfather, Brackett Owen, was a hero in the Revolutionary War. Her grandfather was founder of her Kentucky hometown and aide-de-camp to (future president) William Henry Harrison. He was killed in 1811 in the Battle of Tippecanoe against Shawnee Indian Chief Tecumseh. She died in 1870 of Yellow Fever.



Caroline Desha (Her Father's First Wife)

She was born in 1848 in Catahoula Parish, to plantation owners Marcus Brutus Desha and wife Lucinda Lockett. Her great-grandfather was a U.S. Army General and her grandfather was Governor of Kentucky. Her parents died of Yellow Fever when she was two-years old. She and her older siblings were reared by relatives. She and her daughter died of Yellow Fever.

STORYLINE

ACT I: John Gilman Peck and Elizabeth Smith marry in 1857 in Kentucky and make their home on his family's plantation in Catahoula Parish, Louisiana. They have five children. Elizabeth dies of Yellow Fever in 1871.

ACT II: David Stafford marries Caroline Desha in 1872 in Catahoula Parish, Louisiana and have one daughter Annie. He owns and manages a riverboat service between New Orleans and Northeast Louisiana. Both Caroline and Annie (age 8) die of Yellow Fever during 1880-1881.

ACT III: The widowed John Gilman Peck marries Amy Lovelace in 1873 and they have four children. [Note: Amy's older sister Florence Lovelace was the wife of John Gilman Peck's older brother William.] In 1878, John Gilman Peck is shot and killed in a militia confrontation with black politicians in Waterproof, Louisiana. Amy Lovelace Peck is called to testify at a U.S. Senate Hearing regarding her knowledge of his militia activities prior to his death.

ACT IV: The widowed Amy Lovelace Peck marries the widowed David Stafford in 1883 and they have four children, including Mary Florence Stafford in 1887. David Stafford dies in 1895 and Amy Lovelace Peck Stafford dies in 1909. Unlike her Peck half-siblings, Mary Florence and her Stafford siblings inherit little land and money and so have to fend for themselves.

ACT IV: Mary Florence Stafford marries Robert Paul Bonner 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 age 91.