

The Puzzle of the Name of My Uncle and Its Relevance to Wake County Family History

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Authors Note: Appreciation is expressed to Royster Family Historian, Robert Royster of Granville County, NC for details provided in his letter to the author dated September 8, 2014 and to others who have read and corrected this document.

Growing up in Rhamkette just southwest of Raleigh, North Carolina in the 1935-1945 era, I became close with my Uncle Wis Upchurch. He was laconic and somewhat peculiar. I could write a great deal about this unique uncle and our bonding. My bachelor uncles Wis and Gettis took pains to nurture their wandering nephew. Uncle Gettis and I had to borrow the dog, Clyde Hoey, (named after the Governor) and tools from Wis to execute our 1942-1944 possum hunting expeditions. Uncle Wis trusted me to hold two gallons of blackberry wine to avoid them falling into the hands of Uncle Gettis. I returned them to Wis only after liberal sampling –still two full gallons but slightly diluted. But to move the story along, I focus on his name which in the 1950s was revealed to me as Wisconsin Lamar Upchurch. As I began to focus on family history in the 1960s, the basis for the unusual name of Wisconsin increasingly became a puzzle to me.

The answer about how Uncle Wis got his name was revealed to me in a phone call on April 5, 1979, I had with my cousin Frances Norris of Jacksonville, Florida. I was aware that her father was Wisconsin Norris. I asked her to explain if there was logic to the fact that my uncle and her father had the unusual name of Wisconsin. She said yes.

Frances explained that in the 1880-1890 era in Raleigh, NC, there was a prominent physician named Dr. Wisconsin Illinois Royster (1845-1930), who was a favorite of the ladies giving birth. The ladies liked Dr. Royster so much that some named their newborns

⁸ Phil Upchurch, a Wake County native, has spent 50 years researching the Upchurch family. He published the *Upchurch Bulletin* for 37 years and in 2013 founded Upchurch and Allied Families Association, Inc. which has its national headquarters in Wake County, NC – www.alliedfamilies.com

after him. Thus did my grandmother Aurora Olantha (Ray) Upchurch name her son Wisconsin as did the grandmother of Frances. But the story deepens in several ways. One is my realization that my grandmother, living three miles outside of the city, availed herself of the services of a city doctor. But there is more, requiring me to mention some Royster history.

In the 1700s the Royster family was located in Granville County, NC. About 1802, David Royster, Jr. from the group moved to the village of Raleigh, NC, where he became the patriarch of a very large Royster clan, which henceforth loomed large on the Raleigh scene. David was a cabinetmaker and served to furnish the new capitol building. Among his children was Adeline Susan Royster who married William Clinton Upchurch I, who had come from Western Wake about 1835, also leading to a major Raleigh family. Another child of David Jr takes me back to the moniker "Wisconsin." This child was James Daniel Royster, the father of the aforementioned Wisconsin Illinois Royster. James had eight children, and he named all of them after two states. It is reported that he did so in order that everyone would know that the said James was unmistakably the father of the eight children. Their names were:

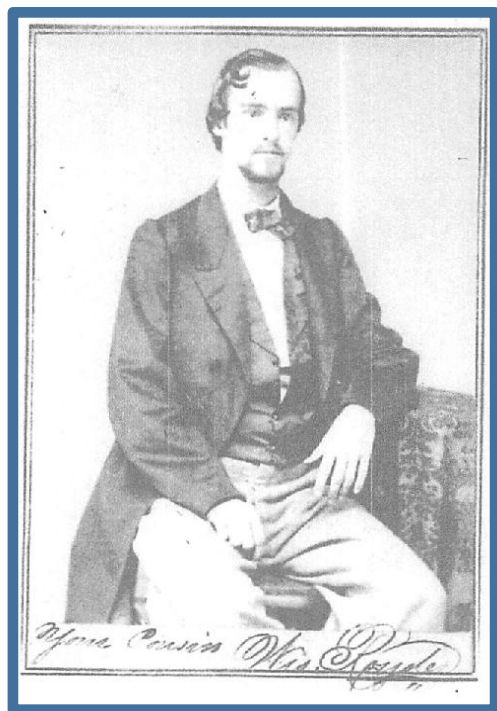


Figure 8, This photo of Wisconsin Illinois Royster was received by Robert Phillip Upchurch, PhD, in a letter dated 1 June 1998 from Francis Norris.

Vermont Connecticut Royster
Wisconsin Illinois Royster
Oregon Minnesota Royster
Virginia Caroline Royster

Indiana Georgia Royster
Iowa Michigan Royster
Arkansas Delaware Royster
Louisiana Maryland Royster

My memory is that somewhere in the Royster family room was found for a child named Confederate States Royster.

Several of these children are buried in Oakwood Cemetery. The family of James Daniel Royster and the families into which members of their families married cut a wide swath in Wake County, NC, and elsewhere. A grandson of Vermont Connecticut Royster named Vermont Connecticut Royster II was an outstanding editor of the Wall Street Journal.

A brief sketch of the large American Royster Family that provided a family segment to form the Royster Family of Raleigh, NC follows. (The total Royster story is very complex and deserves more attention.)

I. Jacob Royster—lived in Mecklenburg County, VA, where his will was probated in 1798---9 children.

A. David Royster, Sr. ---lived in Granville County, NC, and there on January 11, 1775, he married Mary Daniel---7 children. He returned to VA to serve in the Revolution.

1. David Royster, Jr. ---lived in Granville County, NC, and there in 1802, he married Susan Sims of Warren County, NC ---12 children.

a. James Daniel Royster 1807- 1890 He was a paper manufacturer in Raleigh, NC. ---8 children

b. Adeline Susan Royster ---married in Raleigh, NC, William Clinton Upchurch I, a son of Burtis Upchurch and a grandson of Nathan Upchurch I, of Green Level in Western Wake County, NC.

The Royster Family of Raleigh helped to promote religion in the city, forming in 1812, a Baptist church on Moore Square. Madison Bullock Royster and William Clinton Upchurch I became members. Subsequently, the original congregation split and the iconic First Baptist Church across from the Capitol was formed in 1858. It had a highly touted 125 member children's class, which Dr. Wisconsin Royster and his wife, nee Mary W. Finch, taught. Later this class would be led for 40 years by Mayor William Henry Dodd and his wife, nee Roxanna Upchurch, a daughter of William Clinton Upchurch I. Dodd was Raleigh mayor in the 1880s. He built the iconic Dodd-Hinsdale house on Hillsborough

Street. It has been restored and today serves as the acclaimed Second Empire Restaurant.

Another daughter of W.C. Upchurch I, Eleanor Marks Upchurch, married my great uncle William George Upchurch. In the 1860-1895 era, he was a prime mover of enterprises in Raleigh. In the late 1800s, the social and business circle in Raleigh was a tight, highly interwoven community.

The Royster Candy Company was a notable establishment in Raleigh for the late 1800-early 1900's era. When Vermont Connecticut Royster I (1846- 1897) died his obituary revealed that it was he and his brother Arkansas Delaware Royster who had owned the store. They acquired it from a Jewish merchant who returned to his northern roots. When the stocks were exhausted the aforementioned William George Upchurch, his brother-in-law, went with him to Baltimore to replenish the merchandise and "rode shotgun" on the train trip back to protect the purchases. The store was known as a place to gather for chats as A. D. Royster was known as a philosopher.

The heritage of the Upchurch and Royster families of Wake County, NC, is linked in many ways. Important facets from the Royster records have been captured and preserved in the Royster Biofile posted on www.alliedfamilies.com to which the reader is referred for more detail.

Those interested in family history will grasp the satisfaction this writer had as he progressed from fragmentary childhood knowledge about his Uncle Wis until it blossomed into a full-fledged story about the heritage of important families who populated Raleigh, NC, in the 1800s.