

Joseph Milton Griffith, Minnesota ancestor From Lumber to Lutefisk

Fanny Nowlin Griffith and Joseph Milton Griffith Junior

Our Minnesota Dame Lucy Wade Griffith Shepard is descended from Captain John Pinkard (Pinckard) (1635-1690) of England and later of Virginia. Lucy's mother Fanny Pannill Nowlin (1903-1998) became a Colonial Dame in 1967.

Fanny was born in Montgomery City, Missouri. She graduated from Stephens College with a degree in Classical Studies and the University of Missouri Columbia with a master's degree in Classical Studies and Education. Her thesis, *Colloquialism in the Satires of Horace*, did not lead to a job teaching Latin, as she had hoped, so she taught English in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Webster Groves High School in Webster Groves, Missouri.

She met Joseph Milton Griffith Junior at the age of 18 in Montgomery City, and he began courting her after her graduation from Stephens College. Almost ten years later, she married Joseph in Missouri in 1933 before moving to Minneapolis, where Lucy was born in 1935.

Once she arrived in Minneapolis, Fanny became involved in civic affairs, becoming president of the PEO Sisterhood, an organization that grants scholarships and provides a loan fund for college women. It had over 3,400 members in Minnesota in 1956 when she became president. She also served as President of the Stephens College Alumnae Club of the Twin Cities and edited the bulletin for the Minneapolis Women's Club. Fanny's parents Mary Sharp (1866-



Figure 1 Fanny Nowlin Griffith



Figure 2 Joseph M. Griffith Jr., Lucy, and Dash, 1936

1931) and Dr. David Morton Nowlin, (1866-1934) were born and died in Missouri. David Nowlin graduated from St. Louis Medical School (later Washington University) in 1890 and studied at the University of Berlin and at the University of Heidelberg, Germany.

Fanny was descended from Revolutionary War Major Benjamin Sharp, her maternal second great grandfather.

Joseph Milton Griffith Jr. was born in 1887 in Minneapolis and died in 1981 in Minneapolis at age 93. He was a Private in the U.S. Army during World War I and after the war, he served in the Army Reserve for 10 years. Joseph joined family-owned Kildall Company in 1913 and was Secretary and Treasurer until the company liquidated in the 1950s. He was a member of the Knights Templar. His father, Joseph Milton Griffith Senior, led a storied life.

Joseph M. Griffith Senior and Carrie Sharp Griffith

Joseph Milton Griffith (1833-1919) was an interesting and influential character in the early days of Minneapolis. Born in Germany, he came to America in 1846 and lived first in St. Clair County, Illinois, Montgomery City, Missouri and Virginia City, Montana before moving to St. Anthony, Minnesota and later, Minneapolis.

Family lore says that Joseph came to the U.S. with money from an estate that had been left to relatives in St. Louis. Upon delivering the funds, he was not treated well by that relation, so he ventured on to Montgomery City. In 1863, he moved to Virginia City, Montana, and went in with a partner to buy a crosscut saw – their first “sawmill” - then expanded into construction and gold mining, and later a general merchandise store.

Joseph Sr. returned to Montgomery City in 1868 to marry Carrie Sharp, a physician’s daughter, then returned to Virginia City, MT with his new bride.

Crime was rampant in the Montana mountain towns and byways. Joseph joined a group known as the Vigilantes to defend against roving bands of criminals that robbed and



Figure 4 Photo of the "Hangman's Building" in Virginia City, MT built by Joseph M. Griffith and used by vigilantes to hang members of the Plummer Gang. Photo courtesy of Montana Historical Society.

murdered travelers along stagecoach routes. Members of the Plummer gang, named after local sheriff Henry Plummer who was known to be a member of the gang, were rounded up by the Vigilantes and hung in the basement of a building Joseph constructed.

Research supports that Joseph Griffith and his partner were the first owners of the building, and that members of the Plummer Gang were hung from a beam of the unfinished building. The Montana Historical Society confirms this but states that five men, not three, were hanged that day. They were Jack and George mentioned above, and Frank Parrish, Boone Helm and Haze Lyons.

Joseph’s wife Carrie was not pleased by the risky, rugged mountain life. When her firstborn Ernest was still a baby, she took him back to Montgomery City, 1400 miles away, for a visit. She and little Ernest rode in a freight wagon, sitting on a load of bacon, to Fort Benton on the Missouri



Figure 3 Joseph Milton Griffith Senior

J. M. Griffith Sr. told the story to his children: He’d built the drug store building that held the prisoners overnight. John Wagner, Jack Gallagher and “Clubfoot George” Lane were found guilty of murder and hung the next morning, John Wagner was first, then Jack Gallagher, who said to George: “I will see you in hell in a few minutes.”



Figure 5 Carrie Sharp Griffith

River. From there, they rode on a raft to St. Louis. She stayed in Missouri for the summer before returning to Virginia City for a short time. In 1872 a huge fire struck Virginia City, and most of Joseph's buildings and inventory were destroyed. Carrie, Joseph and baby Ernest moved to St. Anthony, Minnesota as a result. Here, Joseph and Carrie had eight more children.

In Minnesota Joseph bought into a broom manufacturing business and later expanded into warehouse operations. He was appointed unclaimed freight agent for the railroads and was put in charge of the U.S. Customs warehouse for the region. In 1905 he sold the land and warehouses to the Soo Line Railroad and retired.

By this time, he had purchased The Kildall Company, importers and wholesalers of lutefisk, and hired son Henry as an executive of the firm. Both Henry, who became president, and Joseph Junior worked for the company for many years. A large portion of their business was sales of their "Genuine Old Style Lutefisk" to Scandinavian church congregations for their church suppers. At one time, the company was the largest processor of lutefisk in the United States. It imported dried cod from Norway and reconstituted it in large vats of water over a period of about ten days. It was particularly popular before the advent of refrigeration but can still be found today. The Kildall Company trademarked the name "lutefisk" in 1931 but was not able to renew its copyright in 1951 because the word had passed into common usage.



Figure 6 Ad for Kildall Company's product

Joseph Sr. died the day before his 86th birthday in 1919.

Colonial Ancestor: John Pinkard of Virginia

Lucy, Fanny and Carrie are descended from Captain John Pinkard (or Pinckard), born in England in 1635, who came to Virginia. He was elected to the House of Burgesses from Lancaster County, Virginia in 1688.



Figure 7 Watercolor of Major Benjamin Sharp Missouri Historical Society collection

The House of Burgesses was the lower level of Virginia's General Assembly. Burgesses served alongside the upper Council of State and the Colonial governor appointed by the British crown.

Captain Pinkard died in 1690 in Lancaster County, Virginia.

Both Fanny and her mother-in-law Carrie also were descended from Revolutionary War soldier Major Benjamin Sharp. Benjamin was born in 1762 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. At age 18 he wrote an eyewitness account of the Battle of King's Mountain in what is now North Carolina. It was a decisive victory by a volunteer militia over a well-trained British force. His account is still cited today for its realistic description of the battlefield conditions. After the war, Benjamin settled into government jobs at the county level such as justice of the peace and election commissioner.

In 1804, he served as a representative to the House of Delegates in the Virginia General Assembly. Benjamin and his wife Hannah had twelve children. Fanny is descended from their son Jacob and Carrie was descended from their son Benjamin. Benjamin Sr. died in 1846 in Missouri.

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