

Mattie Griffith Browne (1828-1906)

By Jerry Long, Owensboro, Ky., 1995-1998

Mattie Griffith Brown was born 2 October 1828 Owensboro, Daviess County, Ky. She married Albert Gallatin Browne, Jr. 27 June 1867 Manhattan, NY. She died 25 May 1906 Boston, Mass., and she was buried at Harmony Grove Cemetery, Salem, Essex County, MA. Her death certificate gave her age as 77 years, 7 months and 23 days which equates to a birth date of 2 October 1828. This birth date is consistent with other data on her parents that this researcher has uncovered.

Mattie's father, Thomas Griffith, was born 1 April 1791 to Caleb Griffith & Mary Richardson. Thomas died 25 January 1830; he was a resident of Daviess County, Ky. at the time. Thomas and Martha Young were married 8 January 1818 in Shelby County, Ky. Thomas Griffith married second, Catherine Frances Patton (1806-1878), 28 October 1829 Washington, District of Columbia. His widow, Catherine married Joshua Baker (1799-1885), 22 December 1832 Daviess County, Ky. (marriage book A, p.56). Joshua Baker during 1867-68 served as military governor of Louisiana. Joshua and Catherine Baker are listed in the 1850 & 1870 censuses of St. Mary's Parish, La.

Estate and Circuit Court records of Daviess County, Ky. prove that Thomas Griffith was survived by two heirs – Catherine and Mattie. Mattie's sister, Catherine ('Kate') Griffith married Thomas P. Slattery (also spelled Satterie), 12 October 1846 Trimble County, Ky. Kate Griffith Satterie was born c1824 Shelby County, Ky., by 1867 she was residing in New York City. Catherine died 16 May 1906 New York, NY. She had daughters – Mattie Griffith Satterie born 8 January 1852 Trimble County, Ky. and died 6 December 1917 Manhattan, New York City and Mary G. Satterie born c1853 Ky., died 5 August 1931 Manhattan, New York City. Both of Catherine's daughters were teachers and died single.

.....

From - Joe Lockard
1847 Spruce St.
Berkeley, CA 94709
(510) 204-0652
December 21, 1995

To - Librarian
Kentucky Room
Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library 450 Griffith Ave.
Owensboro, KY 42301

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am completing a doctoral dissertation on racial representation in nineteenth-century America at the University of California, Berkeley. Part of the dissertation involves biographical work on the life of Mattie Griffith, an abolitionist writer. Given your library's street address, I've a hunch that this may be the right place to ask questions.

First, some historical background. Mattie Griffith (mid-1830s - 1906) was the anonymous author of The Autobiography of a Female Slave (1856), a pseudo-slave narrative. What renders this especially intriguing is that Griffith was white, free and at the time of publication, a slaveowner herself. Thus she is an example of racial 'narrative transvestism.' Until very recently, no information has been available about Griffith. The first biographical article was published in 1994 (Larry Ceplair, "Mattie Griffith Browne: A Kentucky Abolitionist," Filson Club History Quarterly 68 [April] 2:219-231) and a portion of a 1993 Yale doctoral dissertation (Barbara Jean Ballard, "Nineteenth-Century Theories of Race, the Concept of Correspondence, and Images of Blacks in the Antislavery Writings of Douglass, Stowe, and Browne," DAI-A 53/11, 3959) was dedicated to Griffith. The available information on Griffith's life, even after Ceplair's article, has been so minimal as to render her nearly invisible. Ceplair tried to locate Griffith and her family through 1840 and 1850 Kentucky census records but could not do so.

I recently returned from an East coast research trip to Boston, New York and Philadelphia to sift through the historical traces regarding Griffith. Her death certificate in Boston listed her birthplace as Owensboro and a likely inaccurate birthdate of 1838 (she was probably born in 1833). Her father was a farmer named Thomas Griffith, and her mother's maiden name was Mattie Young.

Mattie Griffith turned against slavery, departed for Philadelphia in 1854, wrote the Autobiography, and returned to Kentucky only in 1858 to emancipate the slaves she inherited. The Autobiography was widely praised among abolitionists, including some who valued it above Uncle Tom's Cabin. Griffith also published a volume of poetry and newspaper fiction.

Griffith was active over the decades in abolitionist, women's suffrage, African-American community and temperance work. Griffith was a founding vice-president of the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1868, and a friend of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Stone Blackwell. Her rich set of friends, political allies and neighbors included Lydia Maria Child, Maria Weston Chapman, Richard Henry Dana, William Lloyd Garrison, the Grimké sisters, William Dean Howells, Lucretia Mott, Robert Dale Owen, Theodore Weld and others.

In short, Mattie Griffith is a fascinating if wholly unknown figure from nineteenth-century Owensboro.

I would thus like to request your library's assistance on several points:

- do there exist any histories --- genealogical, informal family, or oral --- of the Griffith family in the Owensboro area? How would I obtain this material? I am aware that a

concentration of Griffiths appears in Owensboro in the 1870 Western Kentucky census, but have no means of sorting out their relationships.

- can you recommend any books that would provide some historical sense of Owensboro in the 1830s and 1840s?
- does the library have any material or knowledge directly pertaining to Mattie Griffith?
- are there any local historical societies in Owensboro/Daviess County, one or more of whose members might be interested in tracing the local life of Mattie Griffith?

If there are any reproduction costs involved in xeroxing materials from your collection, please bill me.

Finally, realizing that these requests may well take of your time, thanks in advance for your assistance. I would be pleased to ensure that your library receives a draft of the relevant chapter of my final manuscript for deposit.

By the way, which Griffith is the avenue named for?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Joe Lockard

.....

23 January 1996

Joe Lockard
1847 Spruce St.
Berkeley, CA 94709

Dear Mr. Lockard:

I am writing in answer to your enquiry of 21 Dec 1995 concerning Mattie Griffith Browne. In 1994 I compiled for the Daviess County Public Library a five volume set entitled, The Griffith Family Papers. See enclosed article describing this collection.

Most of the Griffith families of Daviess County, KY descend from two first cousins, Joshua Griffith (1764-1845) and Caleb Griffith (1759-1843). Descendants of both have been among the most prominent and successful citizens of the county. The former came to Daviess County in 1805 and the latter in 1824-1825. The bulk of The Griffith Family Papers consists of material on the family of Joshua Griffith. However, in an addenda compiled from my research I included a section on the family of Caleb Griffith. Enclosed are pages (284, 288 & 291) from this section that pertain to the immediate family of Mattie Griffith Browne.

Caleb Griffith (1759-1843), the grandfather of Mattie Griffith Browne, was born in Maryland, where three prior generations of the Griffith family had lived. He married Mary Richardson in 1787 in Frederick County, MD. He left there 1795-1802 and moved to Virginia and between 1802-1804 migrated to Kentucky, settling near Shelbyville, Shelby County. Here his family resided for the next two decades.

Caleb Griffith last appears in the Shelby County, KY annual tax books in 1824 and first is in those of Daviess County, KY in 1825. At about this same time 9 of his 10 children, four of whom had begun their own families, also removed to Daviess County. Among these was Thomas Griffith, father of Mattie Griffith Browne. Thomas disappears from the Shelby County tax records after 1824 and in 1826 is first listed in the Daviess County, KY tax lists.

Thomas Griffith was born 1 April 1791 in Frederick County, MD. In Shelby County, KY he married Martha Young on 8 Jan 1818. He is not enumerated as a household head in the 1820 Federal Census of Shelby County. The tax records, however, indicate he was then a resident there. The 1820 Shelby County tax list records him as owning one lot in Shelbyville, a brick house, & he also had a tavern license. Both Thomas and his father were slave owners. Thomas was listed as owning six slaves in the 1827-1829 Daviess County tax lists.

Thomas Griffith died on 25 Jan 1830 according to the 1892 family history, Genealogy of the Griffith Family, by R. R. Griffith (p.165, copy enclosed). His death most likely occurred in Daviess County, KY, where his brother, Robert Griffith, was appointed the administrator of his estate on 10 May 1830. Thomas is listed in the 1829 tax list of Daviess County but is not in the 1830 or subsequent lists there.

The Genealogy of the Griffith Family by R. R. Griffith states that Thomas Griffith married second Catherine Patton in 1817. I have not located when and where (or if) this marriage occurred. If they did marry in 1817 she would have had to have been his first wife, since he married Martha Young in 1818 (Kentucky Marriage Records, From The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, 1983, p.737). I have found no further data on either wife. R. R. Griffith in his book states that Thomas had two children by Martha Young, viz: Katharine, eldest, married Dr. Slattery, and Martha, poetess, married Albert G. Brown.

In Daviess County, KY on 14 May 1838 Greenberry Griffith, a brother of Thomas, was appointed guardian for Catharine & Martha A. Griffith, orphans of Thomas Griffith, deceased.

I believe Larry Ceplair in his article, "Mattie Griffith Browne: A Kentucky Abolitionist", published in the Filson Club History Quarterly in 1994, was mistaken [p.220] when he states she "was born in Louisville (ca 1833)". Records I have found prove that Mattie was born within the years of 1825-1830 and since her father was a resident of Daviess County, KY during these years it is likely that she was born there.

A Circuit Court suit involving the settlement of the estate of Caleb Griffith was filed in Daviess County, KY on 1 April 1846 (suit #193). The eight surviving children of Caleb Griffith and two grandchildren, Catherine & Martha Griffith, "only children of his deceased son Thomas", were named as heirs to his estate. The initial petition in the suit states that Martha Griffith (daughter of Thomas) was not yet age 21. Thus Mattie would have to have been born subsequent to 1825 but before or during the year of 1830, when her father died. Her sister, Catherine, was over 21 since it was not stated otherwise. Catherine was thus born between 1818-1824. During the course of the suit it is stated that Catherine was married to Dr. Thomas Slattery. Their wedding took place sometime between 1 Apr 1846 & 20 Nov 1847. Their marriage was not recorded in either Daviess or Jefferson Counties, KY.

A summons dated 30 Aug 1846 filed in the Caleb Griffith estate suit suggests that Mattie Griffith was then a resident of Jefferson County, KY. On this date the sheriff of Jefferson County was directed to notify George W. & Catherine Barclay, Martha & Catherine Griffith, of action in the suit being contested in the Daviess County Circuit Court. Apparently Mattie Griffith Browne did spend some of her childhood in Louisville [Jefferson County]. Possibly after her father's death in 1830 she spent some time with her uncle & aunt, George W. & Catherine Griffith Barclay, who had resided in Louisville since their marriage in 1823. This possibly contributed to the assumption that Mattie was born in Louisville. In the household of George W. Barclay in the 1830 & 1840 censuses of Jefferson County, KY there does not appear to be a female of Mattie's age [these censuses list only the name of the household head and everyone else is counted in standard age categories]. Mattie Griffith was not in the home of George W. & Catherine Barclay as listed in the 1850 census of Louisville. Mattie was also not found in the 1850 censuses of Jefferson or Daviess Counties, or in the statewide census index for 1850.

In 1850 Mattie Griffith may have been living with the family of her sister, Dr. Thomas & Catherine Slattery. The Slatterys were not found in the index to the 1850 Kentucky census, possibly they were then nonresidents of the state. Another possibility is that in 1850 Mattie may have been with an uncle & aunt, Rev. Hiram A. & Emeline Griffith Hunter. The latter is the only one of the surviving brothers and sisters of Nattie's father not found in the 1850 census. Seven of them were found living in Kentucky and in none of their households was listed Mattie Griffith. Emeline Griffith Hunter, other records suggest was living in Philadelphia, PA in 1850.

I hope the above data is of some help. When you complete your dissertation our library would love to have a copy. Also any items that we could add to our biographical file on Mattie Griffith Browne would be appreciated. For example a copy of the death certificate that you located in Boston, or an obituary, etc. Good luck.

Yours truly,
Jerry Long
Kentucky Room
Daviess County Library

Owensboro, KY 42301
phone 502-684-0211

.....

Joe Lockard
1847 Spruce Street
Berkeley, CA 94709
(510) 2040652
[lockard@uclink2.berkeley.edu]

February 10, 1996

Jerry Long
Kentucky Room
Daviess County Public Library

Dear Mr. Long,

My sincere thanks for your letter of January 23. It certainly goes a long way towards answering my frivolous query as to how the Daviess County Public Library came to be located on Griffith Avenue.

I deeply appreciate the time and trouble to which you went in composing your detailed response. The letters information entirely recasts the meager information I possessed concerning Mattie Griffith's early life. You have provided a major source of information for my dissertation, for which I am deeply grateful. The only possible demerit is that you seem to have alleviated any need for me to visit Kentucky to pursue my inquiries.

There are a few parties interested in Griffith within the community of nineteenth-century Americanists, all of them scholars concerned with slave narratives or questions of race. You are familiar with Larry Ceplair's work; we've been in touch and I would request permission to forward him a copy of your letter to me. I generally prefer an open sharing of information

Another interested party is Barbara Jean Ballard, whose 1992 history dissertation at Yale addressed theories of racial typology in the writings of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Mattie Griffith. I have not been in touch with her and have preferred to avoid reading her work until my own is in full draft. The dissertation's director, David Brion Davis, is as distinguished a name as exists in American historical scholarship. Griffith's work has also been addressed briefly by Blyden Jackson, an historian of African-American literature.

Because of the peculiar circumstances of its composition, Griffith's Autobiography of a Female Slave is gaining new attention. The problem, put simply, has been that no one has the slightest idea of Mattie Griffith's personal history through which to contextualize her narrative choice. Yet it seems suggestive of a certain political confluence that several works have appeared in the past couple years that sketch whatever is likely to be known of MG's life. I am aware that

Larry Ceplair tried, without success, to interest the University of Kentucky Press in an edition of Griffith's novella Madge Vertner.

For myself, this past year I delivered a paper entitled "Racial Transvestism and Treason: The Career of Mattie Griffith" at a conference on nationalism and sexuality in Thessaloniki, a paper that will be published shortly in a Greek critical theory journal. Mattie's story proved quite interesting to that Greek and international academic audience, although I would no longer be able to write quite the same paper today. For a hitherto unknown lady from Owensboro, Mattie Griffith has been getting rather a bit of attention lately.

A few comments on the specifics of your letter and its information.

Regarding Mattie Griffith's birthdate, I find your argument and documentation persuasive. This leaves, however, a small biographical problem. Let me quote the "old" knowledge, as presented in a footnote to my current chapter draft

"Griffith's exact age and birthdate remain unresolved. Her death certificate dated May 25, 1906 lists her age as 77 years, seven months and twenty-three days, from which may be calculated a birthdate of October 2, 1838. However, this means that she would have published the Autobiography at age sixteen and the Poems at a rather precocious age thirteen. An 1836 birthdate can be calculated from Lydia Maria Child's 1857 reference to Griffith as nineteen years old when she published the Autobiography (Child to Sarah B. Shaw, February 20, 1857, Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child, fiche 36, letter 992; cited at Cepalir 223). This date is biographically implausible, but possible. Ceplair's (220) estimate of 1833 appears closer to accurate. Contrary to her death certificate data, Griffith probably lived to over age eighty."

Given your new information and assuming that she was born in the late 1820s or even 1830, this would render her age 26 minimum in 1856. These previous birthdates estimates for MG have had to contend with Lydia Maria Child's specifically setting MG's birthdate at nineteen when the Autobiography was published in 1856. Child would certainly have provided the same information the Griffith gave her. The conclusion seems to be that Mattie subtracted several years from her age, or even as much as 8-10 years, when she moved north. A younger age certainly made her book appear a more impressive accomplishment. For an unmarried woman of that day, this might well have improved marriageability too. Since Griffith would have been at least 36 years old when she married Albert Gallatin Browne, if not older, this might further explain why the marriage was without issue. From everything I now understand of Griffith's character and lifelong fascination with exterior pretence, this subtracted age would have been quite characteristic.

What your 'new' knowledge also does is problematize one feature of Mattie Griffith's life. In 1858 she received financial support from the American Anti-Slavery Society to return to

Kentucky in order to free her half-dozen slaves. She described this emancipation in one surviving private letter and Child also provided a description in an article that appeared in the National Anti-Slavery Standard. For Garrisonian abolitionists, Griffith represented a godsend of social hope. Maria Weston Chapman, Garrison's chief lieutenant, publicly singled out Griffith's act as a sign that a new southern generation was turning away from the slave system. The ominous clouds of national strife were dispelling of themselves.

The biographical predicate assumption had previously been that Griffith had not attained the legal age of majority in order to emancipate her slaves. Further, in Philadelphia she was just too poor and unhealthy to make the journey back to Kentucky. However, shifting her birthdate backwards problematizes what was held up by northern abolitionists as a shining, heroic act. Why didn't Griffith make the emancipation before she left Kentucky? Was her conversion of conscience on the matter of slavery quite as dramatic and sudden as she later suggested?

Your letter mentions also Mattie's older sister, Catherine Slattery. There is a discrepancy in our information here. In numerous letters, legal documents and city directories, the name appears as Satterie. Perhaps we should reconcile this discrepancy. Given the close proximity of the two names, it seems doubtful that a second marriage was involved.

Catherine, her children and Mattie all appear in Philadelphia at a Pine Street address in the late 1850s, apparently having arrived in that city in part, I now realize, through the offices of their aunt, Emeline Hunter. Catherine's son Harry, who Mattie spent months nursing, was apparently sickly and I gather died in the 1860s in New York. Catherine relocated there with her family, and actually joined households in New York with her sister in the mid-1870s, after Mattie and Albert Browne left Boston in 1872.

As someone with an interest in where the Griffith family has gotten to in the world, I might mention to you that there is a plausible case to be made that Albert and Mattie Griffith Browne were at least partial models for the March couple, protagonists in the William Dean Howells novel, A Hazard of New Fortunes. However, Mattie Griffith's story was substantially forgotten in her own day. In Albert Browne's obituary in the Boston Evening Transcript, for example, the story was grossly distorted: "Previous to the war he had married a wealthy lady of Tennessee whose property consisted principally of slaves. These, in accordance with the wishes of her husband, she freed." Mattie Griffith's life is as fascinating a story as occurs in nineteenth-century American literature, and one that I find profoundly instructive in dealing with questions of race in America. Stripping off the layers of misinformation and distortion, as with the birthdate question, has been a quite necessary and complex pursuit.

Under separate cover in the coming weeks I shall assemble an envelope containing the following items for the Griffith Family Papers collection:

- A reproduction of an undated daguerrotype of young Mattie Griffith, located at the Rare Books Room, Boston Public Library.

- A copy of Martha Griffith Browne' death certificate, dated 1905.
- A copy of MGB's estate papers.
- A copy of a conference paper by self on MGB.

Please accept them as a gesture of gratitude.

Since my dissertation as a whole deals with racial representation in nineteenth-century America, covering such diverse figures as Cooper, Whittier, Longfellow, Dickens, Thackeray and Martineau, the Kentucky Room probably would not be interested in its entirety when complete. I would be more than pleased, however, to provide the chapter on Mattie Griffith when it is in final draft.

Although I hesitate to presume, I would further like to provide a draft copy of the historical sections of that chapter for your comment and/or correction. It should be ready within several weeks. Any contributions in terms of catching historical inaccuracies would be deeply appreciated.

To further my own knowledge of the area, could you be so kind as to recommend a text or two relating to the early history of western Kentucky or Daviess County? I am interested in getting a sense of the social history and settlement of the area of Mattie Griffith's birth. I should be able to obtain any book recommendations through the University of California interlibrary loan system.

With kind regards,
Joe Lockard

.....

[Research by Jerry Long on Mattie Griffith's birth and Daviess County connections was done for Joe Lockard, an expert researcher on her literary career, and was used in his article, "A Light Broke Out Over My Mind': Mattie Griffith, Madge Vertner, and Kentucky Abolitionism", The Filson History Quarterly, Vol. 76, Summer 2002, pp.245-285. Jerry Long is referenced as source in footnote number one on page 245 of his article.]

.....

3 April 1998

Mrs. William D. Slocum
2591 Purvis Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70809

Dear Mrs. Slocum:

I am convinced that Mrs. Catherine Patton Griffith, who married Joshua Baker in Daviess County, KY in 1832, was the widow of Thomas Griffith (1791-1830). See enclosed articles.

A history of the Griffith family, written in 1892, states that Thomas Griffith married twice, Martha Young and Catherine Patton. He married Martha Young in Shelby County, KY on 8 Jan 1818. By this marriage he had two children: Catherine (born 1818-1824, m. Dr. Thomas Slattery) & Martha / Mattie (born 1825-1830, married Albert Gallatin Browne). The death certificate of Mattie Browne, recorded in Boston, MA in 1906, states that she was born in Owensboro, KY to Thomas Griffith & Mattie Young.

Thomas Griffith would have to have married Catherine Patton between 1825 and his death on 25 Jan 1830. Their marriage is not recorded in Daviess County, KY or in Shelby County, KY (his prior home). Apparently he and Catherine had no children. Only the above two children are listed as heirs of Thomas Griffith in several records pertaining to his estate. I wonder if Mrs. Catherine Patton Griffith and Joshua Baker met while the Griffiths were traveling up and down the river. Several of the Griffiths worked on riverboats. Thomas Griffith's brother, Robert, was captain of the steamboat "Orleans".

I hope you can figure out the enclosed pages. If you have any questions you can call be here at the library (502-684-0211) or at home (502-684-6299). For the enclosed copies please remit \$1.50 to the Daviess County Public Library, 450 Griffith Ave., Owensboro, KY 42301.

Yours truly,
Jerry Long

Kentucky Room
Daviess Count Library
450 Griffith Ave.
Owensboro, KY 42301

.....

New York Marriages, 1686-1980 (Familysearch.org):

Albert G. Browne, Jr. married Mattie Griffith 27 June 1867 Manhattan, New York, New York. Groom age 32, single, born Salem, Mass., son of Albert G. Browne & Sarah J. Cox. Bride single, born Owensboro, Ky., daughter of Thomas Griffith & Martha Young. [her age was not given]

.....

City of Boston, Massachusetts Death Certificate 1906 – certificate #653:

Mattie Browne died 25 May 1906 at 30 Newbury St., Boston. Age 77 years, 7 months and 23 days. Cause of death pulmonary embolism due to cancer of the breast. Husband's name – Albert G. Browne. Born Owensboro, Ky. Parents – Thomas Griffith & Mattie Young.

.....

Cambridge, Middlesex County, Mass. 1870 Federal Census, p.307, #969-984:

Brown, Albert G. 35 lawyer, real estate \$10,000 Mass.

Mattie	30	keeping house	Ky.
Donahue, Mary A.	30	domestic servant	Ireland
Conelly, Bridget	45	domestic servant	Ireland

New York City, New York County, NY 1880 Federal Census, p.40, #47 52, 142 East 19 St.:

Browne, Albert	45	journalist	Mass.-Mass.-Mass.
Mattie	40	wife	Ky.-Ky.-Ky.
Satterie, Kate	45	sister, widow	Ky.-Ky.-Ky.
Mattie	29	niece, single	Ky.-Ky.-Ky.
Mary	27	niece, single	Ky.-Ky.-Ky.
Mcnevin, Lizzie	27	cook, single	Ireland
Cross, Henrietta	23	maid	Va.-Va.-Va.

.....

**Articles related to Mattie Griffith Browne
Appearing in Owensboro, KY newspapers**

Owensboro Gazette, 10 February 1853, p.1:

"The Martyr of the Heart", published by Miss Mattie Griffith

Owensboro Messenger, 25 November 1896, p.5:

"After Thirty-Eight Years - Old Harrison Griffith, Colored, Visits the Home Where He Was Liberated – An intelligent old darkey presented himself yesterday at the cashier’s window of the deposit bank and inquired of Assistant Cashier Watkins for Mr. James Weir. Being told that Mr. Weir was not present, the old darkey said: “I’m sorry, for I wanted very much to meet him. I used to know Mr. Weir very well away back in 1858 and earlier. My name is Harrison Griffith, and I am one of the slaves to whom Miss Mattie Griffith gave freedom in 1858 when the estate of her father was divided and myself among other slaves became her property.. She gave all of us our free – papers in 1858. Miss Mattie had ever been an intense Abolitionist and finding it more congenial to her sentiments in that section she removed soon after her father’s death to New England, where she devoted her time and talents to the liberation of the slaves, writing a book on the subject, which at the time attracted considerable attention. She furnished much other literature on the same subject to newspapers and periodicals of that day.”

The old negro made inquiry after numerous of the old settlers of Daviess among them Messrs. John S. McFarland, Clinton and Dan Griffith, Ridley Ewing and many others who have long ago been gathered to their fathers.

Old Harrison is now in his 75th year, is a farmer living back in Indiana, and from appearances has been prosperous. He had brought his crop of tobacco to this market and disposed of it and was at the bank with his check for the money.

This was his first visit to his former home since he was liberated by Miss Griffith.

[Note – Daviess County, Ky. Negro Marriage Book A, p.221: Harrison Griffith married Betty Mills, 19 January 1869.]

Owensboro Messenger, 29 May 1906, p2:

Died In Boston

“Word has been received here of the death of Mrs. Mattie Griffith Browne, who died on May 25 at Boston. The deceased was the widow of William Henry Griffith. Her second husband, Albert G. Browne, survives her. No particulars were received in regard to her death. She has relatives in the county.”

[Note by Jerry Long – This death notice contains two errors, her husband, Albert Gallatin Browne, died in 1891 and there is no evidence she married a Griffith; her death certificate records that she was born 2 October 1828 in Owensboro, KY to Thomas Griffith & Martha Young; her father appears in the 1826-1829 Daviess County tax books and other county records of the period; she married Albert Gallatin Browne on 27 June 1867 in Manhattan, New York; she is buried at Harmony Grove Cemetery, Salem, MA. A similar death notice also appeared in the Owensboro Inquirer, 28 May 1906, p.1, "Death of Mrs. Browne".]

Owensboro Messenger - Inquirer, 7 September 2000, p.1C:

Owensboro native's slave 'autobiography' still in print

By Keith Lawrence of Messenger-Inquirer

"The first lick from Mr. Peterkin laid my back open," Ann, the heroine of "Autobiography of A Female Slave," writes. "I writhed, I wrestled; but blow after blow descended, each harder than the preceding one."

To modern eyes, it reads like lurid pulp fiction - one of those slavery novels that were popular in the 1950s and '60s.

But "Autobiography of A Female Slave" is a century older - written in 1857.

The author was an Owensboro native who became the toast of the abolitionist movement in the Northeast for a time in the late 1850s.

Chances are you never heard of her. But Martha Griffith Browne – Mattie Griffith to readers of her novels - wrote so convincingly that many of her readers believed the book was actually penned by "an almost white" former slave.

In fact, at least one Web site today attributes the book to "Martha Browne" whose father "was an unknown white man and her mother, a black slave owned by the Nelson family."

Unfortunately, that misinformation is on an education site.

Joe Lockard did extensive research into Griffith's life for his doctoral dissertation at the University of California at Berkeley a few years ago.

Griffith, he writes, was born in Owensboro sometime in the late 1820s. Her grandfather, Caleb Griffith, a Maryland native, moved here from Shelbyville about 1825.

Nine of Caleb's children - including Mattie Griffith's father, Thomas, who would have been about 34 at the time - also moved to Daviess County.

That was about the time that Josiah Henson, a Maryland slave, was brought to Daviess County. Henson would escape in 1830 and become a leading abolitionist in Canada and the role model for the title character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Mattie Griffith was born sometime between the move and her father's death on Jan. 25, 1830. She and her sister, Catherine, were orphans, raised by other family members. And Mattie inherited her father's six slaves.

When she moved to Philadelphia in the 1850s and joined the abolitionist movement, Mattie Griffith was a sensation - a slaveholder who denounced slave owning.

Griffith was living in poverty - supported by profits from the work of her slaves back in Kentucky - when she penned "Autobiography," Lockard says. She told friends she hoped to use the profits from the book to free them.

The profits were few, however. Only 2,000 copies of the book were printed. But it became widely distributed among abolitionists and the American Anti-Slavery Society provided Griffith with money in 1858 to return to Kentucky and free her slaves.

Griffith apparently wasn't the only one of Caleb Griffith's grandchildren to denounce slavery. Her cousin, James M. Holmes of Owensboro, served as a lieutenant colonel in the Union Army during the Civil War.

Griffith's writing includes "Poems" (1852), "Madge Venter" (1860) and "Ratie: A True Story of a Little Hunchback" (1862).

Her fans included John Greenleaf Whittier, William Lloyd Garrison and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The Louisville Journal - not knowing about Griffith's Kentucky roots - wrote that her first novel "evinces a high order of talent and literary genius. We much regret to see a perversion of ability."

Later, Griffith married lawyer and newspaper editor Albert Gallatin Browne Jr. of Boston and became active in the women's movement.

She died on May 25, 1906, of a heart attack - after suffering for two years with untreatable breast cancer.

Griffith's estate included 4,619 pieces of jewelry and "300 dozen" (3,600) handkerchiefs.

The genre of fictional slave narratives was popular in the 1850s. But today, Griffith's "Autobiography" is the only example still in print.

It's available in both cloth (\$45) and paperbound (\$18) editions from University Press of Mississippi. Or you can read it free on the Internet at

<http://ftp.oit.unc.edu/docsouth/browne/menu.html>

But don't hit print accidentally. It has 401 pages.

Lockard's research on Griffith is available at

<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~lockard/Ch6excerpt.html>

Owensboro Messenger - Inquirer, 28 July 2014, p.1C “

Abstract - "Museum program will highlight Kentucky abolitionists history", Mattie Griffith Browne born in the early 19th century to a family of wealth and privilege, she received a formal education, became a prolific writer and was raised with slaves serving her and her family - yet she freed the slaves she inherited; Browne is best known for her book, Autobiography of a Female Slave printed in 1857, followed by Madge Venter published in serial form in the National Anti-Slavery Standard in 1859-60.

Owensboro Messenger – Inquirer, 27 April 2017, p.1B:

Article - “Griffith fanned flames of Civil War”, by Keith Lawrence, of Messenger-Inquirer

.....



Mattie Griffith Browne

The National Cyclopedia of American Biography (Vol. 19, James T. White & Co., 1971, p.316):

BROWNE, Albert Gallatin, journalist, was born in Salem, Mass., Feb. 14, 1835, son of Albert G. and Sarah Smith (Cox) Browne. He was prepared for college at the Latin Grammar School in Salem and under Rufus Putnam, and was graduated at Harvard College in 1853. He began the study of law at the Dane Law School, and after a year at the University of Heidelberg, where he obtained his Ph.D. degree in 1855, he continued his legal studies in the office of John A. Andrew, who was later governor of Massachusetts, at the same time doing editorial work with Samuel Bowles on the Boston "Atlas." On being admitted to the bar in 1856 he became an associate in Mr. Andrew's office in Boston. During the Mormon troubles of 1857 he accompanied the United States troops which Pres. Buchanan sent to Utah, as a correspondent of the New York "Tribune." The years 1859-60 were spent in Washington, D.C. Col. Browne served as Gov. Andrew's private secretary during the entire civil war, the office of military secretary having been created for him. His duties were many and varied and some of them were of a confidential and diplomatic nature. After the war he resumed the practice of law in Boston, and in 1867 was appointed reporter of the decisions of the supreme judicial court. He substituted journalism for the law in 1874, when he removed to New York city to become managing editor of the New York "Evening Post." In 1875 he was on the editorial staff of the New York "Herald," and was later managing editor of the evening edition of that paper, the "Telegram." His relations with James Gordon Bennett assumed a confidential nature, and he was frequently summoned to Paris to advise about the conduct of both journals. During the last years of his life

he was a member of the banking firm of Cordley & Co., Boston, Mass. He was the author of "In Memoriam of John W. Browne" (1860); "Sketch of the Official Life of Governor Andrew" (1868); "the Growing Power of Chile" (1886); "Latin -and Saxon America" (1889); an elaborate review of the "Judicial Record of New York Courts in the Tammany (Tweed) and Canal Rings," codtributed to "Harper's Weekly" in 1875, and subsequently printed in pamphlet form, and numerous contributions to the leading magazines. He was married in New York, June 27, 1867, to Mattie, daughter of Thomas Griffith of Kentucky, and he died childless June 25, 1891.