

## The Tragic and Beautiful Life of Elizabeth Vermillion Watson Dennis

By David Dennis

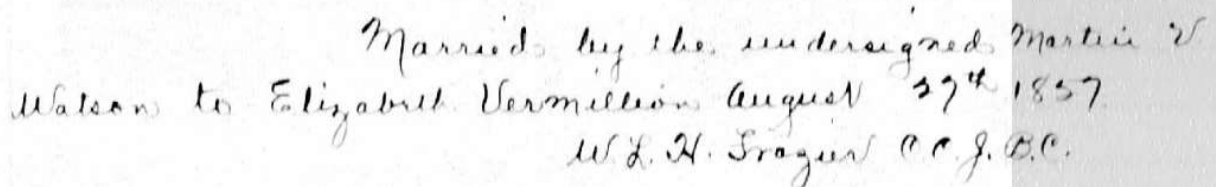
Elizabeth's parents, Reuben Vermillion and Rebecca Compston Vermillion, moved to Barry County, Missouri about 1838. By vocation, Reuben was a farmer, and a minister in the Regular Baptist Church. In Barry county, he owned 320 acres of land near present day Monett, Missouri. It was a hard life. The area was mostly unbroken wilderness. There were few good roads into the area, and travel was done mostly by boat on the rivers.

On August 27, 1840 Elizabeth was born in Barry County Missouri. She had 9 older brothers and sisters, ranging in age from 19 down. She would have three more younger siblings born after her. We can assume from her father's vocation as a minister that they were raised as Christians. In 1838, her oldest sister Lucinda married Joseph Dennis, a farmer in nearby Taney County.

At some point, Elizabeth met a farmer, Martin Van Buren Watson. Martin was 5' 9" tall, dark hair, and hazel eyes. He lived with his family in Ohio in 1850, but some time between then and 1857 he came to Barry County. They were married on Elizabeth's birthday on August 27, 1857.

### Missouri, U.S., Marriage Records, 1805-2002 for Martin V Watson

Barry > Record Images For Barry > 1837-1877



Married by the undersigned Martin V  
Watson to Elizabeth Vermillion August 27<sup>th</sup> 1857.  
W. L. H. Frazer C. C. J. C. C.

On March 3, 1860, their daughter Jenette Watson was born in Barry County. It must have been a time of great joy. But they were living under the shadow of the tensions of the coming war.

As the civil war drew near, their lives were thrown into chaos. Missouri was a slave state, but initially refused to join the confederacy. However, Missouri's governor, Claiborne Fox Jackson, was a southern sympathizer, and raised up a force to take control of St Louis's armory for the south. He was defeated on May 10, 1861, and he, along with his forces, fled to the southwest corner of Missouri, the area where Elizabeth lived.

Barry County is right on the border to Arkansas near the southwest corner of the state. Arkansas was a confederate state. The area of southwest Missouri and northwest Arkansas was contested throughout the war. Missouri was a deeply divided state, sending more than 109,000 men to the union armies, and about 40,000 to the confederacy. Adding to the danger, there were also "bushwackers," men who were not regular military, but who were southern sympathizers. These men would attack homes and families of union sympathizers.

Many of the Vermillion family members (as well as all the Dennis family members) left the southern counties, and settled in Laclede County, northeast of Springfield, Missouri. In 1859, Reuben sold his acres and made the move. The 1860 census shows Martin and Elizabeth Watson, with their young daughter Jenette, still living in Barry County. However, on August 1, 1862, Martin joined the 8th

Cavalry Regiment, Missouri as a Corporal (fighting for the Union). He eventually made sergeant. It is to be assumed that Elizabeth and her daughter went to the safety of her father's family in Laclede County.

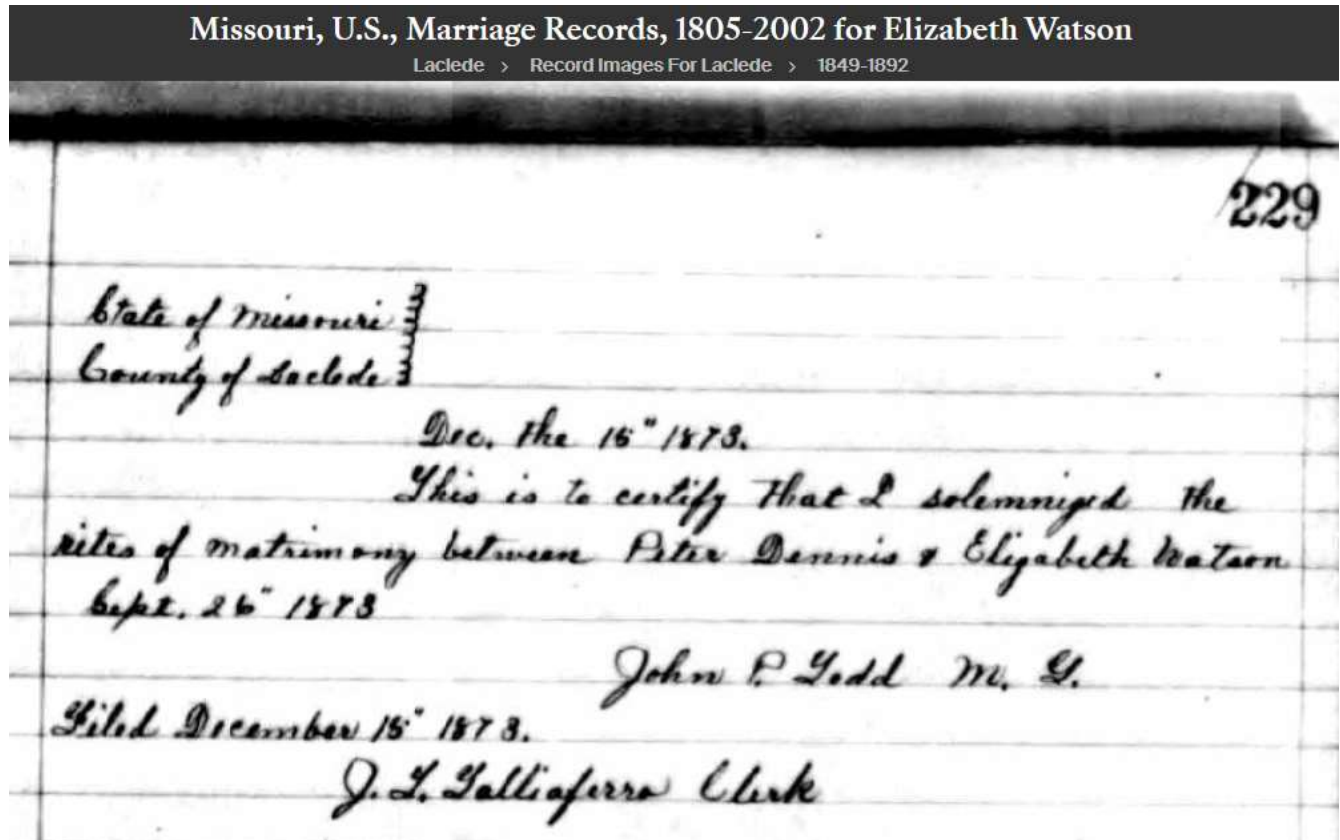
Martin's war record ends with the following statement: "April 1863 (Sergeant) Loss April 26 Spring Lake Died of disease." There is no more information than that.

<i>W.</i>	8 Cav.	Mo.
<i>Martin V. B. Watson</i>		
<i>Corpl.</i> , Co. <i>B.</i> , 8 Reg't Missouri Cavalry.		
<i>Sgt.</i>		
Appears on Returns as follows:		
<i>Sept. 1862. (Corpl.) Absent</i>		
<i>on detached serv. in</i>		
<i>Laclede Co. Mo.</i>		
<i>Oct. 1862. Absent. Sent</i>		
<i>to Gen. Schofield's</i>		
<i>Hd. Qrs. in Ark.</i>		
<i>Started on the 27</i>		
<i>Oct. 1862 with 5 days</i>		
<i>rations.</i>		
<i>Nov. 1862. Absent. Left</i>		
<i>at Springfield 14</i>		
<i>Nov. sick</i>		
<i>Apr. 1863. (Sgt.) Loss</i>		
<i>Apr. 26 Spring Lake</i>		
<i>Died of disease</i>		
Book Mark: .....		
<i>Stanton</i>		
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injured? One might guess that it was one of her siblings. I wonder if it was Lucinda Dennis, who definitely cared for her mother Rebecca for years to come.

One thing is for sure: Elizabeth Watson rose from the ashes to try one more time. On September 26, 1873, she married Peter Dennis. Peter was Lucinda Dennis' brother-in-law: a much younger brother of Lucinda's husband Joseph. He was described in war records as being 6' 2" tall with blue eyes, light hair and a fair complexion. Peter had survived his service in the civil war.



Peter had lost his wife, Clarinda Vermillion Dennis, very shortly before. (I am uncertain of Clarinda's ancestry, but she does not seem to be a daughter of Reuben and Rebecca. Reuben and Rebecca had a child named Clarinda, but she was much younger.)

Lucinda and Joseph Dennis were married long before either family moved to Laclede County. It is possible that they were the reason both families moved to within a mile of each other in Laclede. It is possible that Lucinda introduced Peter to Elizabeth, or maybe the two families had been close for years. But it was surely a union that brought hope to both of the grieving partners.

But alas, Elizabeth's sad story did not end there. On January 6, 1875, she gave birth to a son: Carey Lafayette Dennis. But Elizabeth died, the same year. I have found no record of how she died, but one might assume she died in childbirth: a painful end to a painful life. Did she die in peace, glad that she had left a son behind? Did she die in bitterness for all the tragedies that had happened in her life? We can never know. But we know that her only lasting legacy in this world was Carey, a son she did not live long enough to raise.

But what that legacy it was! Carey was raised by Peter Dennis and his third wife, Mary Tracy Dennis. Carey went on to marry Maggie Eisenheit, and have eight children. I talked with one them, Lola Lee Dennis (who I knew as Aunt Lee). She told me in great detail of what a loving and close family they were. She was so passionate about it, that I was very moved.

Born of Elizabeth's pain, great love and joy sprang. Most of Carey's children had children, and grandchildren as well.

Carey Dennis is my great grandfather, his son Ralph Chester Dennis is my grandfather, and his son George Ralph Dennis is my father. All of us owe a debt to Elizabeth for all the joy and happiness that we have experienced through the years. My son owes the same debt, as do my granddaughters, and all the other descendants of Carey Dennis.

God bless you Elizabeth, and thank you for persevering.

David Dennis – October 7, 2024

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Psalm 30:5