

John Thomas Braund

How many Lies can one Man tell on a Census Return?

Branch 1

Janet Few

In the 1900 U.S. census, John T Braund claimed to have been born in 1845; he was born in 1841. His birthplace was given as New York; he was born in Budock, Cornwall. He said he'd been married for nineteen years when in fact he'd been married for just two. His son Charles, who may not actually have been his son, was listed as having been born in New York, when he was born in Dunnville, Canada. Why would one person want to tell so many lies? What follows is a story of how John's web of lies was uncovered and suggests some reasons why he may have wished to cover his tracks. The story began with an enquiry from a new member on our Facebook group. Her husband was son of Robert Edwin Braund, grandson of Thomas and great-grandson of Charles. At this point I had no dates and didn't even know which continent we were on but I did have the slightly less common christian names Robert and Charles, so I was up for a challenge. A search at www.familysearch.org for the birth of a Robert Edwin, son of Thomas Braund, brought up an entry in the US Social Security Death Indexes for Robert, showing his birth date as 22 January 1929. There was also an entry in the 1940 US census for Thomas and Robert, living in Washington. Thomas had been born about 1904 in Idaho, his wife was called Nellie and there was another son called Charles. This was going to be so easy. The image of this census is freely available online, so I was able to discover that Thomas was working as a carpenter, helping to construct a dam and had earned \$2900 dollars the previous year. This was rather more than most of his neighbours so he was doing well. Now all I needed was to find Thomas son of Charles and I was on the right track.

Fortunately, in 1930, the household was a three generational one. Robert, his brother and parents, were with Charles W and Jessie M Braund in Rockwood, Multnomah, Oregon. Charles W Braund had been born about 1882 in New York. Charles and Jessie could also be located in 1940, in Alameda, California, when Charles described himself as a Benzine Man.

They were at different addresses in Washington in the censuses of 1920 and 1910. In fact they were enumerated twice in 1910. In each case Charles gave his birthplace as New York. Images of US second world war draft cards are available via Family Search and that for Charles W Braund showed him to be a cleaner working for Associated Cleaners in Oakland. His date of



Charles W and Jessie M Braund née Bliven 1958

birth was given as 10 May 1882 and his more precise place of birth as Buffalo, New York.

The only other record that I could find for Charles was from the index to Californian Deaths. This confirmed his date and place of birth and recorded his death as taking place on 22nd October 1958 in Shasta, California. An additional piece of information was his mother's maiden name: Shirton. Try as I might, I could not trace Charles any further back. I then looked for a Braund-Shirton marriage, without using any christian names. None was found but this search did reveal a brother for Charles. An index to Washington death certificates, listed John Joseph Braund, who died in Tacoma, in 1948. This index was more informative than that for Charles so I now had both parents' names. John Joseph Braund and Mary Ann Shirton. John Joseph junior had been born in 1890, so it seemed likely that there may have been other children apart from him and Charles.

Nothing I tried brought up a marriage for John Joseph Braund and Mary Ann Shirton. So I searched for them in the census. Finally, the image came up for the family in 1900, in Portland, Oregon. Charles was there, as Charlie and John Joseph junior as J J Samuel, which is why they hadn't been immediately obvious. As described at the beginning, John senior was listed as John T Braund, he stated that he had been married for 19 years and that both his parents were born in England. John T himself claimed to have been born in January 1845 in New York. John's descendants were keen to trace their origins back to the U.K. and it

seemed that I was nearly there. All I needed was a John Joseph, or John T Braund born about 1845 in New York.

The census said that John's wife Mary had had seven children, of whom five were now living and all five were present in the household. I therefore looked for the births or baptisms of children of John and Mary to no avail. Being well aware that Braund can be mangled in a number of ways, I searched instead for marriage for a Mary Shirton about 1881, without specifying a groom's name. The only one I found was in Dunnville, Canada on 1st October 1881, to a Robert Wait. Although I was aware of a Braund family in Dunnville, this seemed likely to be a red herring. I next considered that the eldest child, Charles, may have been born before his parents' marriage, so I searched for the birth of a Charles Shirton. This located the birth of Charles B Waite, son of Robert Edward and Mary Maude Waite née Shirton on 10th March 1882 in Dunneville. This no longer seemed like a red herring.

By this time, I had revisited what I knew about the Braunds of Dunnville. In 1844, Samuel and Mary Ann Braund née Newcombe (branch 1) had left Budock, Cornwall, in Falmouth registration district, with their five surviving children. The family, including a John Thomas Braund, born in 1841, settled in Dunnville, Ontario. In Dunnville, in the census of 1881, I found Mary Shirton aged eighteen, with her parents. Robert Wait was also there and next door to him, Thomas Braund, a forty year old carpenter and what appeared to be Thomas' wife, Mary Ann Braund aged forty two, born in Ireland. Further searches located Thomas and Mary Braund living in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1870. Thomas was working in a sack and blind factory. Although Mary was recorded with the surname Braund, both she and Thomas were said to be unmarried; no relationships are given in this census. In the same household were Canadian born brothers Robert and Charles Waite. Strangely it was Mary, not Thomas who was in possession of real estate, valued at \$800. Thomas had only personal estate worth \$300.

When eighteen year old Mary Shirton married twenty eight year old Robert Wait, in 1881 in Dunnville, she was four months pregnant, with the child who was born as Charles B Wait; was the B as a middle initial of significance? Was Mary pregnant by a forty year old married neighbour and married off to a compliant, or ignorant, Robert? Or did Mary's connection

with John Thomas Braund come later, after her marriage to Robert had broken down? The birth of Charles B Wait in 1882 was followed by another son, Agnew Wait in July 1884. Presumably he was one of the two children of Mary's that was no longer living by 1900. There is no trace of a death for Agnew or of the other child who was said to have died.

What happened next is still unclear. In 1885, John Thomas is recorded as working on a house on Dunnville for Dr McCallum. Annie C Braund, who may or may not have been John Thomas' biological daughter, was born in July 1885, allegedly in New York. What we do know is that, in 1891, Robert Wait was living with his brother Charles in Dunnville describing himself as married. Also in Dunnville was Mary Braund, now recorded as aged fifty seven, living alone but this time listed as married. Of their errant spouses there was no sign. The next sighting of John Thomas Braund and Mary Shirton is in 1900; when they appear to be married (to each other!) with five surviving children. John is described as a wheelwright. A marriage between John F Braund, a millwright and Mary A Shirton was finally located in Washington but not until 1898. Did this mean that they had recently heard of the deaths of their respective spouses, or had they decided they had been absent long enough for them to be presumed dead? The certificate confirms that this was indeed John, son of Samuel and Mary Ann Braund née Newcombe. He claimed that this was his first marriage although, as no marriage has been traced to the Irish Mary, maybe he was actually telling the truth this time. Mary Shirton admitted to having been married before but gave both her current and maiden surname as Shirton. John had knocked ten years off his age and was still claiming to have been born in Buffalo, New York, as was Mary. Mary too had reduced her age, from thirty seven to thirty one. There was clearly an attempt to confuse and to erase all connections with Canada.

The birthplaces of their children, given in the 1900 census, suggest that they were in New York in 1882. We know this is untrue as Charles was actually born in Dunnville. Their daughter, Annie, too was supposedly born in New York, in 1885, followed by Sarah born 1887 in Michigan, John Joseph Samuel born 1890 in Montana and finally Georgie H born 1891 in Washington. Apart from Charles' no births have been found for the children either in any of these places or elsewhere, using the surnames Braund, Shirton or Wait(e). John Thomas and Mary have not been found in the 1890 US or 1891 Canadian censuses. A

possible explanation for this is that they left Canada before the 1891 census was taken and arrived in America after their census was taken in 1890. Alternatively, this could just be another example of them trying to cover their tracks.

Historic Oregon newspapers are available online at <http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu> and John's death is reported in *The Morning Oregonian* of 21 February 1902, 'In this city, at the family residence, 109 Whitaker Street, 20 February 1902, John T Braund aged 56 years, 1 month, 9 days'. Sadly this was a tragic death, as a more lengthy account of John's demise appears elsewhere in the same issue.

Braund Commits Suicide—Aged Man Cuts his Wrists and Hangs Himself — John T Braund, 56 years old, committed suicide yesterday morning by cutting one of his wrists with a knife and then hanging himself with a towel tied to a post, at his home, 109 Whittaker Street. He had suffered from despondency, brought on by paralysis and an attack of paresis. For the past two years he has suffered and two months ago he was examined by a physician, who stated that Braund had paresis, and recommended that he be carefully watched, to prevent his harming himself. Early yesterday morning, shortly before 6 o'clock. Braund cut one of his wrists with a knife, but did not sever a vital part, and then he hanged himself. The Coroner's jury inquired into the case yesterday, and decided that Braund had taken his life while suffering from temporary aberration of the mind, due to paresis. Braund, who was a member of the Knights of Pythias, leaves a widow and four children.'

The report of his funeral adds that John was employed by Hogue Saw Mill on East Water Street. It is unclear which of the five children of the 1900 census was not included in the 'four children' of the newspaper report. Only Annie had not been traced after 1900, so perhaps she died between then and 1902. Or does this suggest that only four of the five were John's children?

What is strange is that, despite all this subterfuge, John Thomas seems to have maintained contact with his family in Dunnville. The Dunnville newspaper carried a, somewhat sanitised, report of his death '*Intelligence of the death of Mr. Thomas Braund, a former resident of this town, was received here last week. He was a brother of William N Braund and Samuel Braund and the youngest son of Samuel Braund Sr., who had lived many years in Dunnville*

and was well known to most of our older townsfolk. He passed away at Portland, Oregon, in the 61st year of his age [so in Dunville they had a better idea of his correct age. He was 61, so in his 62nd year] and we believe that, although he had not been in his usual robust health for the past year or two, death came to him not unexpectedly. Mr Braund spent much of his early life in Dunnville and being of a social and joyous disposition he was a general favourite. He was a member of the Masonic body and also of the Oddfellows and we believe that while he was in the United States he joined the Knights of Pythias. He was a carpenter by trade and a skilful mechanic. At the World's Fair in London some 28 or 30 years ago, he represented some large American firms of machinists and had charge of a department.'

No suggestion here that he had been married and no mention of any children. Someone back home was certainly aware of some of the children however. In 1911, when John Thomas' elder brother Samuel died intestate, three children of John Thomas were mentioned in Samuel's letters of administration. These were the three youngest, Sarah, Joseph (John Joseph Samuel) and Hannah Georgina, the Georgie H of the census. They were described as '*the only lawful children of John Thomas Braund*'. It is not clear in what sense these were lawful children as their parents weren't married at the time of their birth. This may suggest that Charles and Annie were not the biological children of John Thomas Braund, although they seem to have been brought up as such and are certainly Braunds in every other sense.

Communications between Dunnville and John Thomas' family seem to have ceased with his death as when the administration was taken out in 1911, there was no awareness that Sarah was married. She had married Nicholes Ferra in 1906 and they moved to Ohio. Her death is recorded there in 1930 as Sadie E Ferra. This links with annotations on family photos that describe Sarah as Sadie. There are several mentions, in the Oregon newspapers, of Sadie, Anna (who seems to be Hannah Georgina rather than Annie) and their mother, staying in Portland hotels in 1904 and 1905. In 1910, Mary Ann was living as the wife of Harry M Smith in Tacoma; John Joseph Samuel and Hannah Georgina Braund were with her.



Sadie, Annie, Charles, Mary Ann, Georgie and Joseph

The Oregon newspapers give us additional information about the family, not all of which presents them in a favourable light. Charles Braund enlisted in the militia in 1900. In 1901 a warrant was issued for militiamen whose fines for *'delinquency at drill'* were unpaid. Amongst them was Charles Braund. Charles later followed his step father into the police and he appears in the papers in his role as a detective. In 1921, Harry Smith a former Chief of Police, was accused of trying to cover-up for his stepson *'Joe Braund'* who had been arrested for being drunk.

Mary Ann died on 27th December 1929. According to her gravestone, she was born in 1870. As she was nine in the 1871 census, she had managed to maintain the fiction that she was considerably younger than she actually was.



Mary Ann and John Joseph junior's Grave

At this stage in the research came another revelation. A descendant of John Thomas' brother, sent a cutting from the Dunnville newspaper reporting the death of John Thomas' first 'wife', Mary from Ireland. *'In Dunnville on the 13th of October, 1893, Mrs. Thomas Braund, mother of Charles B. and Robert Waite, aged 64 years. Her remains were interred in St. Catharine's cemetery, on Sunday last.'* Further investigation showed that Irish Mary was the mother of the same Robert Waite who married Mary Shirton. Robert and Mary's son Charles B Waite (later called Charles Braund) was named for his uncle. This means that, not only did John Thomas run off with a much younger married woman but that she was the wife of his step-son! No wonder they were keen to cover their tracks. It is strange that the Dunnville newspapers seemed blissfully aware of the situation. Or were they just economical with their reporting to avoid revealing a scandal. Did perhaps John's membership of the masonic order help in this respect? Finally Robert Waite's death was

traced just a few weeks before John Thomas and Mary 'Shirton' married in 1898. So it does look as if, despite all their subterfuge, they were not confident enough to marry until both their existing spouses had died.

This story is far from complete and leaves many questions unanswered. Did John Thomas and the Irish Mary Waite marry? Did they meet in Ohio? Who was Mary Shirton's seventh child? Where were the younger children born and more to the point, whose children were they? It may be that none of this will ever be solved but not for the want of trying!

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