

## **All Shakespeares are not from England: Researching an African American Family from Leon County, Florida**

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EDMUND C. SHAKESPEARE

(1818- 1890)

**Edmund Shakespeare lived an extraordinary and rich life stitched together after gleaning historical documents and sharing public records to commemorate Juneteenth.**

Edmund Shakespeare was born into slavery around 1818 in South Carolina. He died on July 16, 1890, in Leon County, Florida, at 72. His parents are unknown, but they were born in South Carolina. Edmond had one known sister, Amy Wright; she was born about 1822 in Augusta, South Carolina, Aiken County, and brought up in the Barnwell District. On an 1870 Freedman Bank application, Amy identified Edmund Shakespeare as her brother, her mother as Katie Golphin, and her father as Stephen McKinney. Katie Golphin is likely Edmond's mother as well.

Edmund was most likely married three times, first to Jane, identified as the mother of his eight known children, then to Rachel Jackson, whom he married on December 12, 1865. On November 14, 1873, he married Clarissa, and she died in 1892. Edmund died intestate on July 16, 1890, in Bel Air. In the estate proceedings filed between July 16, 1890, and 1893, officials listed the following known relatives: his wife, Clarissa; his sons, Abram; and Samuel Shakespeare; his sons-in-law, S. J. Osborn (Katie Shakespeare's spouse) and Samuel Jackson (Elsie Shakespeare's spouse); and, his grandson, Edmund M. Shakespeare.

Until Emancipation Day, May 20, 1865, in Florida and South Georgia, Edmund was the "bondservant" of Dr. George Galphin, born about 1811 in South Carolina. Galphin migrated to Middle Florida before 1840, most likely with the wave of migrants from South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland who came to "Middle" Florida to take advantage of the rich fertile farmland for which the region was known. Galphin appeared on the 1839 Leon County Tax rolls with 12 enslaved people. By 1860, Galphin owned about 50 persons on his almost 1,000 acres in Leon County. Of the 1000 acres, 300 were in Bel Air, a plantation district in southern Leon County, Florida, occupied by wealthy planters. Dr. George Galphin died in Bel Air between April 1861 and August 30, 1861. During the 1840s to 1850s, Bel Air was a fashionable resort to escape hot summers and periods of yellow fever and malaria outbreaks.

Edmonds's life as an enslaved person seemed to have benefited from his being a house servant compared to other enslaved people. He and his family were frequently in letters written by the Galphins in the 1850s. In addition to being a farmer, he was a house carpenter, as were two of his sons, and he could read and write in 1870.

While most blacks could not purchase land immediately after Emancipation, less than a year, on March 7, 1866, Edmund purchased ten acres in Bel Air, including George Galphin's residence, for \$250 from Galphin's heirs. By 1870, he had amassed real and personal property valued at \$1240, as the 1870 U.S. Census reported.

### **Striving to Maximize New Opportunities in Finance, Politics, and Education.**

The 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments improved independence, education, land ownership, and suffrage opportunities. Thus, soon after the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, abolishing slavery, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment conferring citizenship, and before the passage of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, guaranteeing all males over 21 the right to vote, Edmond Shakespeare registered to vote in August 1867 in Leon County along with his son-in-law Samuel Jackson.

The Freedmen's Bureau helped millions of formerly enslaved people, including Edmund Shakespeare, transition from enslavement to freedom. In 1868, the Freedmen's Bureau supervised a contractual agreement when Edmond rented 20 acres from J. S. Maxwell and received two rations from the Bureau for his family, including himself, his wife Rachel, and children: Abram, Sam, and Gracie. The 20 acres were in addition to the ten acres he purchased in 1866.

The Freedman's Bank sought to provide an avenue for black land ownership and wealth accumulation for formerly enslaved persons. In August 1866, a branch opened in Tallahassee, and between 1870 and 1874, Edmond's children: Maria, Abram, Samuel, and Gracie, opened accounts not only in Tallahassee but also in Savannah. Edmund's sister, Amy Wright, and his 15-year-old grandson also opened accounts. On his account, Edmond [E.M.] reported that he was an apprentice with *The Sentinel*, a local newspaper. He used his training with *The Sentinel* to publish the *State Capital*, the first black newspaper in Tallahassee.

Engaging in their civic duty, Edmond and other male members of his family joined the Republican Party, where they organized political clubs, attended political rallies and conventions, and ran for local office. For example, E. M. Shakespeare was elected treasurer of the newly organized Hayes Wheeler Club, according to the *Tallahassee Sentinel*, on September 30, 1876.

Samuel Shakespeare was a delegate to the Republican Convention in Gainesville, Florida, in 1880. He also ran on the People's Ticket of the Republican party as the Republican Nominee to the Florida State Assembly. In November 1882, Edmund's namesake, Edmund M. [E.M.] Shakespeare, was also a Republican Candidate for the legislature from Leon County. At 24 years old, he was a member of the StraightOut Republican wing.

Not only were Edmund and his male relatives involved in politics, but they also valued education. In 1870, nineteen-year-old Samuel Shakespeare and seventeen-year-old sister Grace were Bel Air Free School pupils. In a school performance, the *Tallahassee Sentinel* reported Grace as an excellent performer and, in essence, a "credit to her race." Between 1872-1874,

Edmond was one of the two teachers at the Bel Air School, along with Rev. James Page. His great-granddaughter, Gracie Mae Brown, graduated from Bel Air School in 1947.

In 1887 E.M. Shakespeare started the first Black Newspaper, the State Capitol, devoted to the interest of blacks in Middle Florida, according to the *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*. He also printed the Primitive Baptist Herald, a religious newspaper for the Primitive Orthodox Zion Baptist Association. In the Leon County Circuit Court, 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit of Florida, he filed a lawsuit against them for lack of payment in 1894.

After Edmond died in Bel Air in 1890, most of the family continued living there. However, Grace Shakespeare purchased a lot in Tallahassee, where she worked as a cigar maker. She died on February 9, 1918, and named Samuel her only heir.

Edmond's descendants continued living in Bel Air in the early twentieth century. Samuel Shakespeare died on March 2, 1925, in Leon County.

There was no death certificate or notice found for Edmond's children: Katie Osborn, Elise Jackson, and Abraham Shakespeare, who lived in Leon County, nor for Maria Shakespeare, who lived in Jefferson County.

Grandson Edmund or E. M. Shakespeare moved to Gainesville and died in Gainesville on March 12, 1918. He was born sometime in April 1858 in Bel Air.

The fifth generation of Edmund's descendants still live in Leon County, Florida, and carry on the Leon County educators' tradition.

(Documentation of Edmund Shakespeare's life is in the files of Juanita Gaston, J.G. Roots Finders, LLC.)

**At a Glance: Resources utilized in this case study:**

1870 and Post-1870 Records	Pre-1870 Records
Federal Censuses, Population Schedule, 1870 to 1950 (Online at Ancestry.com; FamilySearch.org; FindmyPast.org and MyHeritage.com)	1840 – 1860, U.S. Census, Population Schedule 1850-1860 U.S. Census, Slave Schedule (Online at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org)
Florida State Censuses, 1945, 1935, and 1885 (Online at Ancestry.com; FamilySearch.org)	1867-68 Voter Registration Rolls (Online at Florida Memory.com)
World War I and II Draft Registration Cards (Online at Ancestry.com; FamilySearch.org)	Leon County Tax Records (Location: Florida State Archives)
City Directories – Tallahassee and Gainesville Florida (Online at Ancestry.com; FamilySearch.org)	Freedmen Bureau Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands Records (Online at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org)
Local newspapers: <i>The Tallahassee Sentinel</i> ; <i>The Tallahassee Weekly Floridian</i> , & <i>Tallahassee Semi-Weekly Floridian</i> (Online: GenealogyBank.com; Newspapers.com and NewspaperArchives.com)	Freedman Bank Records (Online at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org)
Court records- lawsuits (Location: Florida State Archives)	Will, Probate, Estate, Inventories (Online at Ancestry and Florida State Archives)
Deeds (Online at Ancestry.com and Florida State Archives)	Local newspapers: <i>The Tallahassee Sentinel</i> ; <i>The Tallahassee Weekly Floridian</i> , & <i>Tallahassee Semi-Weekly Floridian</i> .

	(Online: GenealogyBank.com; Newspapers.com and NewspaperArchives.com)
Leon County Tax Rolls (Location: Florida State Archives)	Manuscript: Letters, Sarah Galphin Burroughs Collection  (Location: Florida State Archives)
	Homestead Records at BLM

**Sources Used in this Case Study**

**Primary Materials and Manuscripts**

Sallie Galphin Burroughs, MS 17 letters. Florida State Library, Tallahassee, Florida.

*Tallahassee Sentinel*, accessed at GenealogyBank.com, Newspapers.com, and NewspaperArchives.com.

*Tallahassee Weekly Democrat*, accessed at Genealogy Bank, Newspapers.com, and NewspaperArchives.com.

-----Leon County Tax Rolls, Florida State Archives.

-----Deeds, Florida State Archives, and online at Ancestry and FamilySearch (George Galphin, Edmond Shakespeare, 1866, Grace Shakespeare).

-----Leon County, Florida, 1825 Plat Maps and 1885 Cadastral Map.

-----Wills, Florida State Archives, and online at Ancestry and FamilySearch (George Galphin,1861).

City Directories, Tallahassee, Florida, and Gainesville Florida.

Probate Records, George Galphin, 1861; Edmond Shakespeare and Grace Shakespeare, 1918.

Florida Vital Records: Marriage and Death Certificates for members of the Shakespeare family from Florida Bureau of Vital Statistics, Jacksonville, and online at Ancestry.com.

## Government Documents

U.S. Bureau of Census, 1840 - 1950, Population Schedule, Ancestry.com; FamilySearch.org.

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records, George Galphin Patent, Tallahassee, Florida, December 1, 1857. Accessed at <https://glorerecords.blm.gov>. (This was a Cash-Sale Entry, which allowed the outright purchase of federal land after six months of residency at \$1.25 per acre.)

Schedule of the Florida State Census of 1885, Ancestry.com.

Schedule of the Florida State Census of 1935, Ancestry.com.

Schedule of the Florida State Census of 1945, Ancestry.com.

## Books and Journal Articles

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Brown, Titus. "The Twentieth of May, Celebrating African American Freedom in South Georgia," *The Journal of Southwest Georgia History*, Volume VIII, Fall 1993, pp. 12-28.

Colburn, David R., and Jane L. Landers, eds. *The African American Heritage of Florida*, University of Florida Press, 1995.

Ellis, Mary Louise. "North Florida and the Great Storm of 1873," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (April 1984), pp. 485-496.

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May, Mary Cathrin. *From Freedmen to Free Men: Black Political Leaders in Tallahassee and Leon County, Florida, 1865-1890 and 1950-1971*, Unknown Binding, 2009.

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