

# Nortons and McKnights

The first listing of the **Nortons** I could find in the North Carolina census was **Nicholas Norton (139)** in 1800. This would have been Nicholas, Sr. who was born in 1770 and lived in what was then Rowan County. As more counties were formed, they were shown in census records in Iredell, then Alexander Counties. They didn't necessarily move, the larger counties were split into smaller ones.

By 1850 the census records show more information than previously when they only named the head of the household. The 1850 census shows household #209 consists of Nicholas Norton, Sr., an 80 year old farmer with \$700 worth of property, born in Maryland. With him lived Sarah, 72 and Norman, 40 a doctor worth \$400.

In another household **Nicholas Norton Jr.(137)**, a 37 year old blacksmith is shown, worth \$200, along with his 34 year old wife, Lucy. (**Lucy Adilla Ellis (138)**) Children are named Sarah, 14, William 10, Louisa 7, Sidney 3 and (Nerusha?) 6/12.

In 1860 the two Nicholas Norton families are still shown in different households even though the senior one is 90 and his wife is 82. It is noted that he is deaf, has \$1,000 in real estate and \$10,800 in personal property.

Nicholas Jr. (now with property worth \$300) is shown to have seven children identified by their initials only, but the sixth one is identified as "M F", six years old, and is our ancestor **Melvina Florentine (116)**.

In 1870 the senior Nortons are gone and Nicholas Jr. is now worth \$1300! Hulet, Melvina and John are shown as "attending school" and the other children have gone.

I thought it quite remarkable that in 1860 with not much in the way of medical care available, the senior Nortons were

able to maintain themselves in their own household. One might expect that their son might enjoy the benefits of those good genes and also live a long and independent life, but the 1880 census has bad news. N.S. Norton, son of Nicholas Jr. is

shown as a "preacher" living with his wife, four children from 1 to 7 years old and his parents, Nicholas and Lucy, 65 and 63 years old. Nicholas has a notation that he is blind, dyspeptic and disabled.

Can you picture that household with 4 little children and the "elderly" parents in that condition? It seems a little odd that they mentioned it on the census form, but beside the one year old, Mary Edith, is the notation, "teething!" Maybe the teething with its accompanying crying, was just the last straw! Nicholas Jr. lived twelve more years until October 1892, whether it was always with this son, I don't know. Well, at least the baby was through teething before then.

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**Rebecca Melvina Florentine Norton Martin Smith (116)** was born in North Carolina, married **Robert Samuel C. (Sam) Martin (115)** and they had two sons, Hubert and Gatis, before her husband died of typhoid fever in 1881.

In those days single women did not live alone with their children, so her brother, Nicholas Norman Sidney Sylvester Norton, the straight-laced Methodist preacher referred to above, built her a "little house" near his own house. I wonder if his parents were still with them too but possibly they were living with other children. Anyway "Preacher" Norton did not look kindly on male suitors for Melvina, so when his two small children, Mary Edith and her brother, came running in reporting, "Gas Smith is going to the little house!" they

expected him to be grateful that they notified him. Instead they were spanked – not for tattling but because they didn't call him "Mr. Smith!" This story was told to me by Ava (Sutherland) Baker, daughter of Mary Edith. Ava was able to give me considerable information about the Norton family and their ancestors. She said that neither her grandfather, the straight-laced Norton, nor other relatives approved of "Gas" (Gaston) Smith, but she married him anyway.

Ava says that in those days many people from North Carolina looked on Arkansas as a vastly improved place to live. The soil in North Carolina was a reddish color whereas in Arkansas it was brown and looked richer, though often rocky. The saying among Arkansas "boosters" was "Arkansas soil would fertilize North Carolina!" Not surprisingly some came to Arkansas and found that an exaggeration and returned to North Carolina.

Melvina and her husband, with their children and Hubert and Gatis made the move to Arkansas probably around 1890. They moved down to an area near Wilburn where she became ill with malaria. She died in 1899 and was buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery at Wolf Bayou.

The will of **George McKnight (141)** was dated July 11, 1811 and "proved" February 1814. He left everything to his wife, **Mary**, during her lifetime; after her death the estate was to be divided equally between daughters, Elizabeth Ellis and Sally Norton. Executors were Ethelred Ellis (older brother of Lucy) and Nicholas Norton (George's son-in-law.)

**Sarah McKnight Norton (140)** died at the home of her son, Nicholas Norton, Jr. on February 2, 1867. She was at that time the oldest Methodist in the Alexander circuit. She was a member of the M.E. church for 75 years, had heard renowned evangelists speak including Dr. Coke and Bishop Asbury.

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Rev. N.S. "Sid" Norton, about 1900.

### **NORTON**

Nicholas Sidney Norton moved to this area in December 1889. He had relatives here and no doubt had information about the place before moving. He lived in several locations before finally settling at Crossroads (now Drasco) where he had a store. He spent the last years of his life at this place. "Uncle Sid" as he was called, was a Methodist preacher. Many descendants still live in this vicinity. The census show Nortons in the area much earlier, but we have not been able to make any connection with this family, nor find what became of the earlier settlers.



Nicholas Sidney Norton and wife Amanda McClelland. Standing behind is his brother Shelton and wife Dea, at Sidney's home

in Drasco, about 1931.



Rev. N.S. Norton (1847-1932)  
Amanda McClelland Norton (1849-1939)

Rev. N.S. "Uncle Sid" and Amanda Norton at their store in Drasco about 1928. Note hand operated gasoline pump, thought to be the first at Drasco. Uncle Sid is said to be the first post master but the records shows his daughter Mertie in that capacity. She served from 1917 to 1935. The Norton family came here from North Carolina as did many others