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SUBJECT: Parentage of **Sarah Sessums** (1816–aft. 1900), Wife of Rev. Samuel Courtney; Daughter of Jacob Sessums (c1777–c1856) & Penny Fisher (c1780–c1845): A Proof Summary

Direct evidence identifies Sarah Sessums' maiden name and establishes her birth in Mississippi about 1816. No known document directly evidences her parentage. That connection is proved beyond reasonable doubt by a body of indirect evidence placing Samuel and Sarah Courtney amid one specific Sessums (*var. Sessims, Sessoms, Sessions*) family as it migrated through two Mississippi counties. The most-relevant points are these:

- Sarah's maiden name is provided on the death certificates of three sons: **Vincent Madison Courtney** (b. 5 Jan. 1845; d. 28 Mar. 1929, Angelina Co., TX), which calls her Sarah "*Sessions*";¹ **Isaac Newton Courtney** (b. 27 Jan. 1851; d. 4 August 1934, Jasper Co., TX), which cites her as "*Sessums*";² **Solomon Courtney**, b. 16 Feb. 1838; d. 22 Feb. 1928, Navarro TX), which cites her as "*Sessims*."³ All three sons were born in Mississippi. All three documents name Samuel Courtney as father.
- The marriage of Sarah Sessums to Samuel Courtney in **Simpson Co., Miss.** (whose marriage records are destroyed)⁴ can be dated between 1830 and 1833. Samuel was not a household head on the 1830 U.S. census that enumerated his brother Jesse Courtney (newly married to Sarah's sister Charity Sessums) between and next door to Jacob "*Sessons*" and Neal Williams (husband of Jacob's daughter Polly).⁵ Samuel as a head-of-household makes his first appearance on the 1833 state census, an enumeration for which residential patterns cannot be determined because heads-of-households are alphabetized. The composition of Samuel's family (1 male, 1 female, 0 children) suggests he and Sarah were newly wed.⁶ **No other Sessums lived in Simpson or surrounding counties from whom Samuel could have found a wife, aside from the family of Jacob Sessums whose daughter Charity had already married Samuel's brother.**⁷

¹ "Texas Deaths, 1890–1976," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GY19-3R8L>), "Vincent Madison Courtney."

² "Texas Deaths, 1890–1976," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GY14-7PWS>), "Isaac Newton Courtney."

³ "Texas Deaths, 1890–1976," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GY1W-FWM>), "S. L. Courtney."

⁴ "Simpson County, Mississippi, Genealogy," *FamilySearch Research Wiki* (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Simpson_County,_Mississippi_Genealogy).

⁵ 1830 U.S. census, Lawrence Co., Miss. P. 186, lines 22–24.

⁶ 1833 State Census, Simpson Co., "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687>) > Browse > Simpson > County tax rolls 1824–1845, Box 3764 > image 92–93 (Courtney), 95 (Sessums).

⁷ For abstracts, transcriptions and/or images of all documents found to-date for the Jacob Sessums family in Mississippi and Texas, see E. S. Mills, "Jacob Sessums (c1777–aft.1850) & Spouse Penelope "Penny" Fisher (c1780–aft.1840): Research Notes,"

- Beginning in 1834, Jacob and Penny Sessums, with their offspring, moved to the newly opened Indian lands in East Mississippi that became **Newton County**. Samuel Courtney moved with them (as did Jacob Sessums' older son-in-law, Neal Williams and his wife Mary). Samuel Courtney is cited on the semi-alphabetized tax rolls of 1838, 1839, and 1840 adjacent to Samuel and John Cooksey, whose sister had married Thomas Sessums, son of Jacob.⁸

When the Sessums began their migration to Texas, Samuel returned to his Courtney kin in Simpson Co., where he is enumerated in 1850, before moving out to Texas 1856–1860.⁹

- The choice of names that Sarah and Samuel gave to their offspring also reinforce the placement of Sarah as a child of Jacob and Penny (Fisher) Sessums. **Sarah's children included both a Jacob and a Penny—in addition to Reuben and Solomon**, two not-particularly common male names that are prominent in every generation of the Sessums family and would become so among the Courtneys.¹⁰

86 pp., a work in progress last updated 17 January 2022; archived online at Mills, *Historic Pathways* (<https://www.historicpathways.com/download/JacobSessumsPennyFisherResearchNotes.pdf>).

⁸ "Mississippi, State Archives, Various Records, 1820–1951," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687>) > Browse > Newton > County tax rolls **1838**, Box 3711 > images 3 (Courtney, Cooksey), 11 (Sessums). *Ibid.* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687>) > Browse > Newton > County tax rolls **1839**, Box 3711 > images 3 (Courtney, Cooksey), 6 (Sessums). *Ibid.* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919687>) > Browse > Newton > County tax rolls **1840–1859**, Box 3711 > images 4 (Cooksey, Courtney), 11 (Sessums). Also see the unalphabetized 1840 U.S. census, Newton Co., Miss., showing Thomas "Sessums" living between his brothers-in-law Samuel Cooksey and "Neil" Williams (m. to Mary "Polly" Sessums).

⁹ **1840** U.S. census, Simpson Co., Miss., p. 219 *verso* (stamped), line 24; indexed by Ancestry as "Saml Caitay." **1850** U.S. census, Simpson Co., Miss., pop. sch., p. 318, dwell./fam. 436/436. **1860** U.S. census, Trinity Co., Tex., pop. sch., p. 61, p.o. Sumpter, dwell./fam. 370/369.

¹⁰ Sarah and Samuel Courtney also named a daughter Mary, the name of Jacob and Penny Sessums' oldest daughter who married Neal Williams; but the name Mary is too common to use as a marker for naming patterns.