Both Sides of the Border
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Hezekiah Lincecum, my great-great-great-great grandfather, was born in 1770 in Warren County, Georgia, and died in 1839 in Lowndes County, Mississippi. Most of what we know about his life was recorded by his eldest son Gideon in an autobiography, which has been published as *Adventures of a Frontier Naturalist: The Life and Times of Dr. Gideon Lincecum* (College Station; Texas A&M University Press, 1994).

One of the most interesting Hezekian accounts which qualifies as a family saga story concerns his involvement with the Baptist church before Gideon was born. A rule about family saga stories is that they will be more interesting if you get them second- or third-hand, rather than straight from the source. In this case Gideon said, “For this portion of my narrative I am indebted to Stephen Camp, an old man whom I found dwelling in the hill country on the head waters of New River in Alabama in 1843. I spent six weeks at some mineral springs near his residence, and the old man spent many days at my camp telling me about the life of his old army friend and messmate Hezekiah before I knew him as my father.” You will also notice that since Hezekiah died in 1839, this story was collected four years after his death, meaning that he could not contradict it.

However, in this age of the Internet you never know what kind of historical records will become available, and I recently discovered that the minutes of the church with which Hezekiah was
involved have not only been published but also posted online. Thus I was able to compare what the church records say with the story that Gideon collected and published. Let’s consider first the saga story, preceded by some background information. This version is paraphrased from *Adventures of a Frontier Naturalist* (pp. 10–15).

Hezekiah’s father and two brothers had been killed in a skirmish with Indians during the American Revolution, leaving him as the only male in a household with his mother and three sisters. When he was thirteen, he fell under the influence of Thomas Roberts, an Englishman who had deserted the British service and had joined and done good service in the Rebel Army during the last three years of the Revolution. Roberts was a highly educated man but notorious for his profane and obscene language. In search of a wife, he visited the widow Lincecum’s girls, but they did not fancy his bold, balderdash manner. However, Hezekiah pleased him, and he used all his powers of fascination to gain the boy’s affection, in which he succeeded fully. At this time a bounty was offered to enlist two or three regiments of men to protect the border country against the Muskogee Indians. Mr. Roberts enlisted in the state service and also induced his pet, Hezekiah, to take the bounty. It grieved Hezekiah’s mother, who had already lost two sons and her husband in the Army. Besides all this, Hezekiah was at that time the only male of the name Lincecum in the known world, and on this account particularly, she opposed his enlistment. But he had received the bounty, was already in camp, and all her efforts availed nothing.

At the expiration of three years, a treaty of peace was concluded with the Indians and the army disbanded. Hezekiah, now sixteen years old, had grown to be a very large and extremely active man, highly educated in all the arts, strokes, and punches of the pugilistic science. He returned to the old stamping ground fully
able to (and did) whip every man in the settlement who dared to oppose him. He could also hold his hand with any of them in the use of strong drink. Roberts, who had been his teacher in these attainments, was always on hand. Soon after their return Roberts married, and he advised his pupil Hezekiah to do likewise.

At this juncture of time came Abram Brantley, a Baptist preacher, who by his earnest eloquence began to stir sinners up, and make them stop and think. It was a new thing and the first religious stirring in that vicinity since the war. Parson Brantley, viewing the irreligious condition of the people, was anxious to see what he could do towards producing a change amongst them. For this purpose he visited every family, praying with them and exercising his persuasive powers in familiar conversations. In making his rounds in the neighborhood he called at the house of widow Lincecum. Having been a conscientious religionist of the Baptist persuasion all her life, she was thankful for the preacher’s attention. Her daughters were now all married and gone, leaving the household to consist only of Hezekiah and herself. Hezekiah was not only a large, portly, well-formed man but was also very handsome, with a most musical voice.

As the parson prayed and sang with them, Hezekiah took a full part in the singing, and his firm, manly, melodious voice fairly made the heavenly arches ring. The parson was surprised at the wonderful scope and power of his voice, so much so, that he could not help speaking of it. He told Hezekiah that the Lord had done a great deal for him, for which he should be very thankful. That fine form, handsome face and sweet musical voice abundantly fitted him to be a preacher of the Gospel. He should lose no time, but go right to work, studying and improving his mind and praying God to aid him in his preparation for the ministry, for that was surely what the Lord had intended for him. This flattering address waked up a new train of thought in the brain of the handsome young man.

He believed all the preacher had said and, forming a resolution to follow the advice, went to praying forthwith. He attended all
the meetings, singings, and prayings, and it was but a short time
till people noticed and talked of the progress he was making in his
religious exercises. Soon he confessed his sins, told his conversion
experience and was accepted, not only as a worthy member, but as
a bright star and ornament in the fold of God. He was baptized
and came out of the water shouting praises and exhorting the peo-
ple to flee from the wrath to come, to renounce their sins, come to
Christ and be baptized.

Hezekiah improved rapidly in singing and praying and it was
but a short time till he was closing meetings and making very
pretty public exhortations. No one hesitated in expressing them-
selves openly in reference to what was going to be the result of his
unprecedented rapid growth in grace. All said the same thing: He
was going to be a big preacher, sure and no mistake. The young
ladies all wanted to go to heaven with the goodlooking young
man. And now he, though very religious and prayerful, could not
resist the flattering attentions so frankly bestowed by the young
ladies. Out of the many that were being baptized, he selected one-
a most beautiful, saintly creature, whose name was Sally Strange.
She agreed to walk hand-in-hand with him before the Lord like
Zachariah and Elizabeth. They were married, and the nuptial day
was one of great religious rejoicing. It was talked about every-
where.

Under the gospel teaching of the kind, good-disposed Abram
Brantley, the whole people of that vicinity seemed to be looking
heavenward. The church was filling up rapidly and everything
seemed to be rolling on finely. By the encouraging lectures on lib-
erty, industry, and domestic economy, the people were enlarging
their farms, improving their dwellings; thrift and better conditions
of affairs were beginning to prevail everywhere. But from some
cause unknown, there were some whose worldly and spiritual
prospects seemed to be clouded.

It was becoming a noticeable fact that the ardor and spirit of
devotion of Hezekiah had considerably cooled down. No one
knew, or could say why, but it was certainly so. To his mother, who
had hoped so much, the decline of his religious devotions was a source of much concern. She sent for the preacher, who endeavored to cheer him up, but he could say nothing that had any effect. He grew colder and absented himself from attending church. Then Mr. Brantley called to know his reason for absenting himself from meetings. Hezekiah did not explain. Such sad things, however, cannot long be hidden from the public. The eyes and ears of the curious will listen and peep, and they will also talk and whisper about other people’s affairs.

It soon leaked out and rumor was busy circulating the precious morsel that there was a difficulty, a deadly split, betwixt Hezekiah and his beautiful and most saintly wife. No one could tell the nature and character of the difficulty, but one thing they could say was that it was awful. And sure enough, it terminated as badly as the most malicious could desire, for Hezekiah and his lovely Sally made a final separation of it. Sally went to her parental home and Hezekiah moped about, at first becoming very religious. He attended all religious gatherings, singing and praying vociferously. It had now become a settled fact among the brethren that he was to be a preacher, and a good one too.

Hezekiah began to think so himself and to prepare himself for the sacred service. He practiced the ceremonies, repeating and committing them to memory carefully. Some of the young church boys and Hezekiah being down on Powell’s Creek one Sunday, amusing themselves playing in the water, they began talking of Hezekiah’s prospects for becoming a preacher. It was proposed that he perform the ceremony of baptism on some of them. This he refused, but consented to baptize a cat that had followed them to the creek. And while he was performing the holy rite on the poor cat, some of the older brethren who were fishing that day happened to be passing at the time and saw him. To their notions of religious propriety, it was very offensive.

They reported the case to the leading members of the society, whereupon it was thought proper to church the presumptuous Hezekiah. While on trial he would make no penitential concessions
but remained very still and intractable. His accusers said that recently he had often been seen in company with Roberts, his old army crony, whom they now looked upon as one of the emissaries of his Satanic Majesty. They finally concluded that as long as he remained friendly with the said Roberts, he would do no better. The question was read by the clerk: Shall Hezekiah Lincecum be excommunicated from the Baptist church? The vote was counted and found to be unanimous in the affirmative. So they turned him out.

Stephen Camp told Gideon that as Hezekiah walked down the aisle going out, he turned and remarked to the members, “You have turned me out of your church but you are not able to turn me out of Christ.” I should have stated that Thomas Roberts was with him as he walked out of the church. And they went to a liquor shop nearby. They took some refreshments but none to excess. Hezekiah had made a resolution that he would, by a regular course of good behavior and sobriety, falsify the numerous predictions that had been made by the brethren in regard to the course he would pursue now that he was out of the protecting influence of the church.

There was a little log-cabin school started in the settlement, and Hezekiah, greatly feeling the need of an education (He was almost entirely illiterate.), enrolled. He strove with all his powers to learn the books, but he was a little too far advanced in years and had witnessed too many brain-racking vicissitudes to allow him to be a very apt scholar. And this was not all the brain-disturbing forces by which he was surrounded. The widow Hickman’s daughter Sally, a most beautiful girl, fourteen-and-a-half years of age, was also entered to the same school. Her power of attraction for him was very great. He felt the want of possessing the fair young creature more than he felt the want of an education. So, from his books he turned his attention wholly to the pretty Sally and they were soon married. Roberts was at the wedding, and on this joyous occasion succeeded in leading Hezekiah so far astray as to get him intoxicated. And now, while his protégé was under the excitement
of brandy, Roberts told him that he had been greatly wronged and contemptuously treated in the church. Since several of the brethren who took an active part against him during the trial were present, Roberts suggested it was a very pretty time to retaliate and get satisfaction. Hezekiah was of the same opinion and went charging into a bunch of five or six of them, knocking them down like children and kicking and cuffing them terribly.

Parson Brantley, who had performed the marriage ceremony, observed that Hezekiah turned his eyes toward him; and to avoid any difficulty with the young inebriate, the parson hurried away in a pretty tall trot. Hezekiah, seeing the hasty departure of the preacher, gave chase, pursuing him two or three hundred yards. The parson, however, made good his escape. Hezekiah returned, vociferating in a very loud voice, and asked if there were any other of the damned rascals who wished to be fed with the same spoon. But he found no one there but the bride and Roberts. The rest of the company had dispersed, so the three of them concluded to go home.

Thus ends Gideon’s account of his father’s dalliance with the Baptist church. This marriage turned out better than Hezekiah’s first, and Gideon was the first-born of ten children, including seven sons. Hezekiah’s mother’s fears about the Lincecum name dying out were not well founded. As for the historical record, recently another Lincecum descendant, Bob Kelly, sent me the “URL” (uniform resource locator) for a site on the World Wide Web where the minutes of the Long Creek Baptist Church, Warren County, Georgia, have been posted. I read these minutes with considerable interest, for they include some new information about the relationship of Hezekiah Lincecum with that particular church.

First let me give you some idea about the nature of these church records, which were copied on microfilm in 1954 and have been certified by the Secretary of State of Georgia to be authentic and accurate copies. Volume I begins with this statement: “This Book is the property of the Baptist Church of Christ at Long Creek Warren County Georgia Containing a record of the Deed
for the Lot of Land on which the Church was built together with
the Constitution of the same, and a record of the actings and
doings of the same from its Constitution, . . . which was sometime
in the year 1786.” Significantly, the year given for the founding of
the church corresponds with the chronology in Gideon’s story
about the arrival of Parson Brantley and his efforts to generate
some religious fervor in the community.

The record book seems to have two major purposes: one is to
provide a list of the church members, with an indication of how
they came in and how they went out. There is a list of the male
members and a separate list for the female members. Number 114
among the male members is “Kiah Linsicomb,” who came in “by
Baptism” and went out by being “Excommunicated.” Number 41
among the female members was Hezekiah’s mother, “Milly Linsi-
comb,” who also came in “By Baptism” and was listed as
“removed & out of our fellowship,” which appears to be a way of
denoting former members who have moved away. This church
practiced excommunication rather freely, as the three members
listed right before Hezekiah Lincecum enjoyed the same status:
Number 111, Zephaniah Fowler, Number 112, Samuel Jones, and
Number 113, Abalom Beardon, all were excommunicated.

This brings up the second purpose of the book: to record min-
utes of church actions, such as excommunicating members, that
were carried out in conference meetings, once a month. In this
regard, 1788 was an active year in the life of Long Creek Baptist
Church. Consider these excerpts from the minutes:

**April 18th 1788.** Agreed on by the Church in
Conference that any person under the censure of
the Church may be admonished by the Church,
but the Church is not to make application to the
offender but the offender to the Church . . . Fur-
ther agreed that if any member of the Church
Shall neglect keeping their place in the Church in
Conference through negligence twice and still neglects to make the cause known, they shall be laid under the Sensure of the Church. . . . Proceeded to the tryal of John Berry who was charged with being concerned in stealing of an ox which being believed, it was agreed that he should be excommunicated and cut off from us.

**September 3rd Sunday 1788.** The Church in Conference unanimously agreed . . . that Mary Murphy should for the sin of Adultery be entirely cut off from us.

**October 25th 1788.** Agreed unanimously by the Church that on the first Thursday in Nov. all the male members of the Church are to meet to give an account of what they have done towards building the meeting house in order to remove difficulties from the minds of the Brethren.

2ndly–Agreed that any member exempting him or herself from the [Lord’s] Supper Shall make an excuse to the Church, or have a Brother to excuse for them. . . .

4thly–Several Brethren is desired to cite the members that have neglected attending Church meetings, to remove difficulties off of the minds of some of the Brethren. [There follow the names of several members as being “cited” by other members.]

**November 15th 1788.** Agreed that Jeremiah Oats, George Hearn and Elisha Mason Cite Wm Washington to the Church to answer the complaint of John Castleberry.

**December 17th 1788.** Rhoda Fort is excommunicated for refusing to keep her seat in the Church or to hear their reproof.
Now that you have a clear idea of exactly what the church records are like and what they reveal, here is the one that directly addresses Hezekiah’s case: “February 17, 1788. The Church of Christ on Long Creek of Ogechee, Being met in Conference Pursued to take into consideration the Irreligious conduct of Hezekiah Lensecom and unanimously agreed that he Should be excommunicated. First for riding a race on the Sabbath day. Secondly for refusing to hear the Church when called on. Thirdly for offering to commit a Rape on M Jonegen.”

Contrary to Gideon’s account, there is no mention of baptizing a cat or keeping bad company. The charge is “irreligious conduct” and there are three specific items: “riding a race on the Sabbath day,” “refusing to hear the Church when called on,” and “offering to commit a Rape on M Jonegen.” Curiously, there is no member named “Jonegen” or any variant spelling of that name, yet the vote against Hezekiah was unanimous.

There you have it. History in the form of an official document, certified by the Secretary of State of Georgia: “The minutes of the Long Creek Church of Christ,” published on the World Wide Web for all to read, contradicting the colorful Lincecum family saga account of Hezekiah’s separation from the church. Nevertheless, in conclusion, I would paraphrase the famous line from the Western movie, The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, to make it a rule of family sagas: “When the legend is more interesting than the facts, print the legend.”

SOURCES CONSULTED


Long Creek Baptist Church (Warrenton, GA). “Minutes.”