

CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN PROFILES
PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY
WITH PEOPLE, EVENTS & PLACES
By Jeannie Watson

JOHN L. PAGE II

John L. Page II migrated from Piccadilly Circus, Westminster, London, England in the 1840s, eventually settling in Wayne Township, Cass County, Michigan. He was a mercer, importer, and guild member by trade in Piccadilly, who came to North America to escape that which he feared most; the Black Death (bubonic plague). He lived in Canada for a short time. John, several men in his family and local friends, braved the perils of the California Gold Rush. He owned a trading post and sent traveling vendors to sell supplies to local farmers and town's people. In Cass County, John was a Glenwood based traveling merchant, farmed an apple orchard, and owned a cider press business. He was a gun collector, and expert rifleman, who brought his prized English gun collection with him to Southwestern Michigan." Forced by fear of an epidemic, he converted from an English shop keeper, to a North American adventurer, traveling and never regretted one minute of the life that fate laid at his feet. Many Page descendants and relatives live in the Southwestern Michigan today, most growing up in the rural Dowagiac, Michigan area.

The oldest known ancestor of the Page family was Sir Hugo de Pagham de Paige of Ebor, Yorkshire, England; born in circa 1240. Family historian, and author, Charles Nash Page (1860-1951), published the Page family's genealogy in 1911. Through the centuries the family surname has evolved from Pagham, to Paige, to Page. Their long family history is known due to England's land, courts, and titles documentation discovered by professional researchers. Ancestors of this family served as knights, acted as squires, and were couriers for court sovereigns. They performed the duties of "royal pages" for the crown, were rewarded for serving England in various military battles, and became land baronets. The Wayne Township branch of the family was descended from "younger sons" (who did not inherit titles), and became Piccadilly merchants passing family businesses (plus craft memberships) to their sons. While a number of Page descendants were part of America's colonial past, and Revolutionary days, this branch of the family were not. Family oral history states they were not seeking land as so many did, but rather in flight and escape from London's continuously dangerous, life threatening epidemics.

John L. Page II was born between 1805 and 1816 to John S. Page I and Martha Elizabeth Wollard in Manchester, London, England. His parents, and grandparents, were of the gentry merchant class, and owned a mercer business (retail store trading in imported items, cloths, fine wool fabrics, silks, rugs and furnishings) in Piccadilly Circus, Manchester (second district of Great London).

Piccadilly Circus is a unique area of London. In Great Britain, a "circus" is a circle, or round open air space and street junction, around which were built stores and entertainment businesses. Commerce was controlled by craftsmen guilds and "brotherhood associations who set prices and resisted outside competition for centuries." Originally, London was founded by the Roman empire, then invaded by Normandy, and finally conquered by the Anglo-Saxons. It has existed for two millennium (2000 years). Pages/Paiges are documented as far back as 770 years ago, a rare occurrence in genealogy, and only due to the fact that, in the early 1800s, the family became involved in a court battle over a land grant and title, involving some of England's oldest archives.

John L. Page II was educated in a London public grammar school, and then sent to a boy's preparatory boarding school, which was the custom of the day. He then attended a local university, and was finally apprenticed to his father. John lived in the family's gentry class London townhouse, and at his grandfather's small country estate, enjoying the parks. John played on the shoreline of "Round Pond" in Kingston Gardens Park, fed the ducks at Serpentine Lake in Hyde Park, and flew kites on the grass in Regent's Park. "He watched the steam powered riverboats, barges and ferries make their way up and down the Thames River (which flows through London), not far from Piccadilly. He watched part of the London Bridge being constructed (built between 1824-31). When he became partners with his father in the family business, he would cross the English Channel on buying trips to France for the store. Still, despite the obvious middle class upbringing he experienced, there were dark shadows that did not bode well for the Page family.

London of the early 1800s had many problems. It was crowded, and the docks were not far from Piccadilly. Sanitation systems were primitive, and as a result epidemics were common. If the winds were blowing in the wrong direction, London's early Industrial Revolution factories and "sweat shops" choked the air with pollution, despite its fashionable Piccadilly shopping areas. The Page family had experienced the horrors of the Black Death a number of times in their history. Once the infections started to spread, no one was safe. Nothing protected families from disease, especially merchants who were constantly coming in contact with London's citizens.

The "black death, so named because so many died," was very much feared by the Pages for a very good reason in the 1800s. The "Black Plague" of 1625-1665 (one of several bubonic epidemics to sweep London), "had killed millions in Europe." London lost 75,000 people in 12 months, 7,000 people died in one week in the autumn of 1644, and by 1665, parts of the City of London were deserted as the population fled to the English country side and other regions. Many Londoners, including Page family members died.

Historic accounts tells us that the bubonic plague was brought to London from Asia, and Europe, by trading ships that traveled up the Thames River from the North Sea. London's sea ports did not have restrictions on shipping and imports. Huge ropes were used to anchor ships to docks in the harbors, and flea infested black rats would use the ropes as bridges to reach land. Rich and poor alike lived in wooden structures, which were easily gnawed upon, for entry, where the rodents sought shelter in the upper floors (which they preferred) of those buildings.

The Bubonic Plague is a contagious infection of humans and rats. Once bitten by the fleas carrying the bubonic bacillus, great suffering followings. Fever, vomiting, agonizing muscle pain, mental disorientation, delirium, and death within a few days, is inevitable. There was no cure, and everything the person touched, and the bodies, were often incinerated out of fear. Londoners had a long memory of its epidemics, and even the hint of them reoccurring sent them running. The disease took the life of thousands, irregardless of their class, social standing, or positions.

London's worst Bubonic Plague was, finally stopped in 1666, when the "The Great London Fire" broke out and destroyed most of central London's wooden structures, including the black rats, and fleas that carried the plague. After The Great London Fire, wooden structures were outlawed, and London was rebuilt of brick and mortar (thus lessening the threat of spreading fires and access by rats). All ships, were, finally, required to have flat circular "rat stops" on dock anchorage ropes that prevented

rodents from leaving the ships. Today, of course, any ship that is rat infested would destroy them at sea, and great precautions are taken in all ports of the world to stop the transfer of infestation.

John L. Page II wed Rebecca Mary Clark (1/24/1812-1841), the daughter of a Piccadilly book seller. Her father was a scholar who translated manuscripts, a rare tome dealer, and published books on a hand operated press in the back of his shop. When Rebecca Mary died of childbirth, John married her fraternal twin sister, Hannah Mary Clark (1/24/1812-6/12/1869). Hannah often went by her middle name "Mary."

The marriage of John L. Page II and Hannah Mary Clark produced 11 children. One of which was Joseph Page (1842-1918) who married Alice Martha Watson and settled in Wayne Township Cass County, Michigan.

John's father, John Paige I (1775-1846) is recorded on the 1841 England Census as a head of household. The family home was in the Civil Parish of St James Westminster, Middlesex, London, England. (All family members were not always listed on an English Census.) The family business was in Piccadilly, Westminster, London.

In 1846, John's father and other family members became ill, and the physician diagnosed the "bubonic plague." When they passed away, John L. and his extended family, were afraid the epidemic would take them as well, and that rumors of the "black death" would destroy their Piccadilly businesses. They feared they must act quickly or everything would be lost. According to family stories, they bribed the doctors to remain silent long enough to sell all of the their holdings, which was done quickly because it was prime real estate. With their holdings converted to gold and other valuables, they left London in a matter of weeks.

The Pages headed for Liverpool, and boarded the ship Georgiana. It arrived in Philadelphia on October 13, 1846. They faced immigration to North America without a well planned destination, because they were rushing, believing that staying in London would have meant certain death, and financial ruin. History does not record a major London plague in this era, but even minor outbreaks, would cause this kind of panic, and had done so many times in London's past. The Pages went to Connecticut, then migrated to New Buffalo, New York. From Buffalo, they traveled by wagon train to Lenawee County, Michigan, arriving there in 1849. They were caught on the August 1, 1850 U.S. Federal Census while in Macon, Lenawee County.

Lenawee County, Michigan was formed 28 years before, in 1822, when Governor Lewis Cass "laid it out." When it was part of the Territory of Michigan, before statehood (1837), Lenawee "stretched all the way to Lake Michigan," and initially included what is now Lenawee, Hillsdale, Branch, St. Joseph, Cass and Berrien County. As statehood drew near, these counties were individually carved away from Lenawee. By 1850, it was settled, and Macon was a small but thriving community.

John, his wife Hannah Mary, and some of his children appear on the 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Macon, Lenawee County. It was while living in Lenawee, that John L. Page II heard about the California Gold Rush (1848-1864). He, several male relatives, and their sons debated the pro and cons of such an adventure. Finally, the men and boys decided to go, and sent their women and younger children to stay with relatives who were heading for Brantford, Canada and Columbia Township, Van

Buren County, Michigan. With gold fever firing their adventurous spirits, the Pages headed to Sacramento, California. Son Joseph accompanied his father. They stopped in Wayne Township of Cass County, Michigan, and then headed west.

Sacramento, California in the 1852 was a riotous, frenzy. Gold had been discovered at Sutter's in Coloma, California in 1848. Newspapers went wild with the news, and descriptions of fabulous wealth was spread across headlines. The population went from 92,600 residents to over 200,000 people "almost over night." Men panned for gold from streams, combed river beds, and opened dangerous mines into the hill sides. Boom towns in the area grew and died within months, depending on what was found in the excavations. The local Native American Indians were "pushed off their land, and fought back, attacking miners. Fights between "claim jumpers" and legitimate mine owners resulted in untold deaths. Robberies were rampant, and lawlessness ruled the land. In this era, California had few laws regarding property rights, and so claims were held by "force and gun fire." The sounds of miners dynamite blasting became a common occurrence. With each new "motherload" and passing year, the craze increased, as "ten of thousands of forty-niners" flooded the area. Those with gold fever were called forty-niners because that was the year the President of the United States declared the events "an official gold rush." Stamp mills sprang up that crushed "gold bearing quartz to rubble for sorting. The U.S. Geological Survey estimated that 12 million ounces of gold was mined. At today's inflation rate, that gold would be "worth ten of billions dollars." The people who made the most money were the merchants who sold supplies and entertainment at exorbitant prices. Opulent hotels, boarding houses, and elaborate saloons bilked the miners of their gold during "extended mining breaks," while the same miners lived in "scrubby tents and shanties on the hill sides when working their claims."

According to family stories, "John Page returned home poorer than when he left for California," as did most Michigan men who had succumb to gold fever. What they did have was "the adventure of a life time." For the rest of his life, John told stories of those exciting experiences, the joy of finding gold, the overpriced luxurious businesses, and the thrill of "the hustle and bustle" of constant activity. In the end, however, reality set in, and the "rags to riches" dream faded. John and his cousins dug one last "grub stake," out of their claim, abandoned it, and headed home. He had gone from a respected Piccadilly London entrepreneur, to a traveling Lenawee peddler, to a poverty stricken miner, and decided it was time to return home, to "make an honest living doing what he did best. The Pages were inherently merchants. There was no going back to London, but he had his intelligence, his family had been gentry class entrepreneurs for generations, and he knew how to make a profit by supplying the public with needed goods and services.

He headed for Glenwood, Wayne Township, Cass County, Michigan, where he spent several years working, in order to earn enough money to make the trip to Canada. There in Michigan, he started a traveling merchant business, and spent his days in relative calm, with son Joseph. They were "route merchants," based in Glenwood, who traveled Southwest Michigan by wagon selling their wares.

There were basically three kinds of retail businesses in sparsely settled Southwest Michigan at this time: First were the trading post store owners who brought in merchandise by freight wagons, and customers traveled to them to buy supplies. Second were peddlers, some times called "snake oil salemen," who were outsiders that came into the area, traveled from farm to farm or stopped in the

towns, were less than trustworthy, and then left (sometimes urged out by local sheriffs). Third were the "route men," like John and his sons. The route merchants were local people, who had trading posts or storage facilities, but would send out wagons on a route to sell and deliver goods to customers. They were trustworthy citizens, committed to the community, and sometimes brought the mail with them. They provided local customers with scheduled stops, carried staple merchandise, and had eastern or Chicago catalogs for which customers ordered goods. In an era where transportation was limited, farms isolated, and needs simple, route merchants filled the gap between monthly trips to a trading post, and unpredictable needs. The old milk wagons were examples of route men in the settlements, who would load up the day's supply of freshly filled milk cans, and make the rounds in town, delivering the milk before it spoiled.

When the American Civil War broke out, John, at age 57, joined the Nineteenth Michigan Infantry. He was "mustered in September 25, 1862 in Dowagiac, Michigan. There were 1238 total members, who served three years. John was "mustered out" on June 10, 1865 in Washington, D.C. Son Joseph kept the family merchant business a live, and farmed.

It is believed that John and son Joseph, moved to Brantford, Canada in 1866, where Page family members had already settled, and their family awaited them. Brantford, Brant/Wentworth, Ontario, Canada on the Grand River saw its first white settlers arrive in 1847. Census Reports document Page family existence in that area. John had a farm in rural Oxford County, not far from Brantford.

On July 10, 1869, John's wife Hannah Mary (recorded as Mary on the Ontario Death Registrations, #002436-69) died in Brantford County of "consumption," the old fashioned term used to describe pulmonary tuberculosis or the "wasting disease." She lingered for 2 months, suffering with the illness. She is buried there in Brantford, Ontario. Certain cemeteries in Oxford, Brant, and Wentworth Counties, Ontario, plus Brantford burial grounds, are the final resting place of many Pages.

John Page is on the 1871 Ontario, Canada, Census. His exact location, at that time, was listed as Dereham, and his occupation was given as farmer. According to family oral history, from Brantford, John and members of the family, came back to Wayne Township.

John accompanied his sons Joseph (born 1841), Franklin (born 1845), Fredrick (born 1845), and John, Jr. (born 1844), daughter Mary (born 1850), brother Nathaniel (born 1808), brother Joseph (born 1819), and several other Page relatives to Michigan. John, three sons and a daughter then went to Wayne Township, Cass County, Michigan. Son John, Jr. went to South Haven, Michigan, and then Mason Township, while the rest of the Pages continued on to Columbia Township, Van Buren County, Michigan. In Wayne Township, traveling vendor wagons became even more popular local means to sell merchandise in the later half of the 1800s.

In 1872, John Page's two twin sons each wed in a double marriage ceremony. First Fredrick W. Page, age 35, married Alcinda Lhado, 19 years of age. He bought land in 1905 from Isaac and Nancy Wright (Cass Co. Liber 99, pg. 300, Sec. 3, Twp. 7, Range 7), and in 1911 bought adjacent property (Cass Co. Liber 108, pg. 299, Sec. 3, Twp. 7, Range 14). Second, Franklin H. Page, age 35, married Rebecca in the same ceremony. In 1878, land records show that Franklin and Rebecca bought land from Kenigon Bly (Cass Co. Liber 54, pg. 440, Twp. 5, Range 13). More Cass Co. land

was bought in 1881 by Franklin. In 1911, they moved to Niles Charter Township, Berrien County, Michigan on Section 34. Son John, Jr. married Lovinia Walderman of Elkhart, Indiana in Mason Township, Cass County, Michigan on 11/21/1879. In 1880, Son Joseph Page, married Alice Martha Watson.

John Page's Gun Collection was brought with him from Piccadilly. It was said to have filled two steamer trunks. In England, he had been a member of the "Fellows of Military and Fire Arms Historians." Those buying trips he used to make for the Piccadilly Circus store across the English Channel or during travels in England, usually included visiting rare gun dealers and collectors. According to family stories, he collected dueling pistols, flint locks, carbines, military arms, and favored guns with silver in-laid handles. Two pairs of pistols were his favorite possessions; a set of "London Henry Ellis Pocket Pistols" and a pair of "Austrian Felix Werder Flintlock Pistols." These family heirlooms were sold during the Great Depression (1929-1939).

John was said to have been a member of the Wayne and Volinia Township Anti-Horse Thief Society. These gentlemen took it upon themselves to act quickly if a horse was stolen. Stealing a man's horse was considered a serious offense.

In his old age, John had arthritic knees and he walked with a cane. His Cass County death certificate, states that he passed away on August 25, 1893 at age 77 years, 8 months and 25 days. One interviewed family source thought that he was buried in a Benton Harbor Cemetery, and then moved to Elkhart, Indiana. The rest of the family were of the consensus that John L. Page was buried in an unmarked grave behind South Wayne Chapel, Wayne Township, Cass County, Michigan. To support that belief, it was pointed out that the tombstone of his son Joseph Page (and wife Alice) have a specific reference to unmarked graves. It states "Joseph & Alice Page AND FAMILY." The "And Family" was supposed to refer to John L. Page and other Page family members, whose wooden cross grave markers rotted away long ago. Cemetery records remain mute on this point, but the existence of unmarked graves behind the church are recognized. The odds are that John L. Page was, indeed, buried with his family in South Wayne Cemetery, behind the church. It might be noted that Southwestern Michigan has many such unmarked graves.

In conclusion, John L. Page was a Piccadilly Circus, London, England merchant, whose parents died of the bubonic plague. To avoid the loss of further family lives, he took his family to North America. Migrating from New York, to Michigan, to Canada, and then returning to Michigan, he finally settled in Wayne Township, Cass County. He became a farmer, trading post owner, and sent traveling merchants to sell his wares throughout the local area. He experienced the adventure of the California Gold Rush, and thought life should be a great adventure. He had an impressive gun collection, which were considered family heirlooms until they were sold during America's Great Depression. He was a family patriarch, settler and pioneer of Cass County, Michigan.

Copyright © 2011 by J. M. Watson

Author's Note: The Michigan branch of the Page family tended to use the same first names for generations, and cousins of similar age in one single generation are often named as such. For instance, Nathaniel Page (b. 1808) in Columbia Twp, Van Buren Co., MI, who married Wealthy (b. 1807), had a son Franklin Page (b. 1847). This Franklin is not the same person as the Franklin (born 1845), who is the twin of Fredrick, and son of John L. Page. Other examples are the repeated use of names John and Joseph. Such firsts names have been used for so many generations confusion has resulted on "who is whom." A thought to consider when naming children.

RESEARCH

- Page/Deming/Watson Family Tree & Genealogy
- Life of John L. Page as told by J.M.P.H.F., A.L.P.D. and C.D.P. (great-grandchildren of John L. Page)
- 1972 Page Family Interview Notes
- Book - "The Pages/Paiges of Piccadilly Circus, England Genealogy" by Nathaniel Wollard, 1923, privately pub. & on-line 2010.
- Book - "Page Family History & Genealogy From The Year 1257-Present," by Charles Nash Page, pub. by the author in Des Moines, Iowa, U.S.A., 1911
- "Standard Atlas of Cass Co., MI Plat Book of 1868, Wayne Twp., Cass Co., MI
- Plat Maps & Land Owner Indexes of Wayne Twp., Cass Co., MI, 1850-1893
- Alphabetical General Index, Civil War Soldiers & Sailors, National Park Service Index, Vol. 19, Union Infantry, Dowagiac, MI, 19th Regiment, Company G.
- Civil War, Union MI Volunteers, 19th Regiment, MI Soldiers & Sailors Record, Vol. 19
- LDS Genealogy Data Base, Utah
- Britain & Wales, Greater London & Middlesex Co., England Genealogy
- Cass Co., MI Marriage Liber of 1872 (C2, pg. 103), 1880 (C2, pg. 210)
- Dowagiac Library, Steamer Manifests of MI Pioneers, John Page
- Cass Co., MI Land Deeds, 1905 (Liber 99, pg. 300), 1878 (Liber 54, pg. 440), 1881 (Liber 62), 1911 (Liber 108, pg. 299)
- Cass Co., MI Death List (1800s)
- Cass Co., MI Death Liber of 1893, John L. Page
- U.S. Federal Census 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900
- England Census of Great Britain, England 1841, 1851 & 1861
- British History On-Line, Piccadilly, 8/24/2010, pg. 1-12
- Wikipedia, Piccadilly Circus (London, England), 8/24/2010, pg. 1-10
- History of Cass Co., MI, 1825-1875, by Howard S. Rogers, pub. 1875
- History of Cass Co., MI by Alfred Mathews, pub. 1882
- Brantford, Brant/Wentworth, Ontario, Canada On-Line
- Buffalo, NY On-Line, History
- Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 14, 2nd edition, 1970, pg. 263-290
- Cass Co., MI on-Line MI GEN WEB
- Lenawee Co., MI On-Line
- Newaygo, MI On-Line
- Arms & Armor Annual, Vol. 1, edited by Robert Held, Follett Pub. Co., Chicago, MCMLXXIII,
- Van Buren Co., MI On-Line (Columbia Twp.)
- Wikipedia on-Line, California Gold Rush
- South Wayne Chapel Cemetery, Wayne Twp., Cass Co., MI, MI GENWEB Tombstone Transcriptions
- Grand Junction Cemetery, Columbia Twp., Van Buren Co., MI, MI GENWEB, Grave Transcriptions
- Ancestry.com Family Trees: Page, Deming, Watson,
- Author's Local History/Family Lore/Legends Of The Past/Genealogy Files