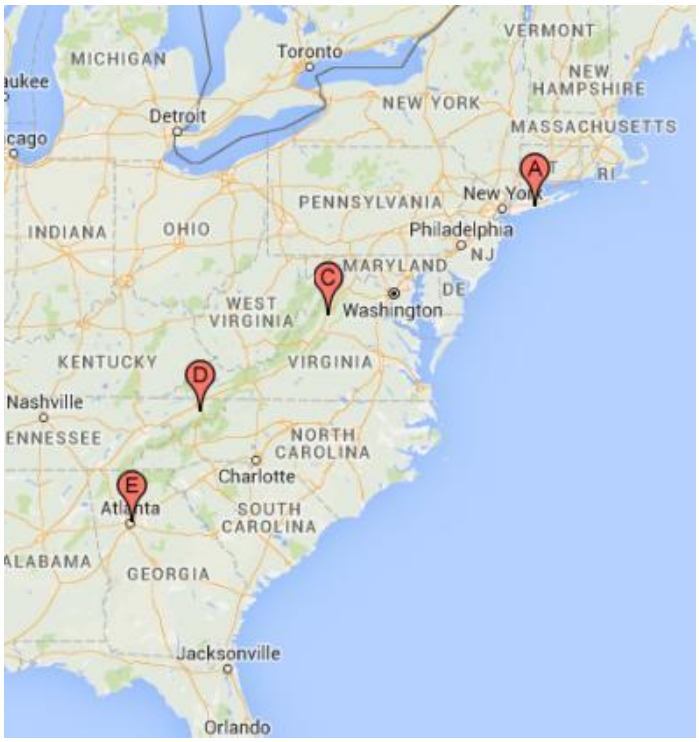
Long Gray Line on the Long Grey Trail

There is a line in our family that stretches farther back into early American history than almost any other branch—a line that begins in England in the seventeenth century and then moves steadily south and west through colonial America. It passes through Long Island, Delaware, Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, eastern Tennessee, Atlanta, and finally Cincinnati. It is the Harrison–Reagan–Hicks–Gray line, and for much of its journey it follows the great migration route remembered as the **Long Grey Trail**, or Great Wagon Road.



The family's migration route from Long Island to Atlanta. Original family history, page 12.

The story begins with **Isaiah Harrison**, my eighth great-grandfather. Born in Chester, Cheshire, England, in 1666, Isaiah crossed the Atlantic in 1687 aboard the *Spotted Calf* and landed at Oyster Bay on Long Island. He was a blacksmith, a particularly valuable occupation in a young agricultural settlement where iron tools constantly needed to be made and repaired. Oyster Bay granted him important land rights on the condition that he remain there for seven years—evidence of how badly the community needed his skills.

Isaiah established himself on Long Island, first at Oyster Bay and later at Smithtown. His family grew there, and among his children was **Daniel Harrison**, born in 1701. By the 1720s Isaiah had moved again, this time to Sussex County, Delaware, where he acquired a large property called Maiden Plantation. But Delaware would not be the family's final destination.

In 1736–1738, Isaiah and members of his extended family began one of the great movements of our family history. They traveled by water from Lewes, Delaware, around Cape Charles to Alexandria on the Potomac, and from there crossed through **Thornton's Gap into the Shenandoah Valley**. Sixteen members of the family party crossed the ridge. Isaiah died near Massanutten Mountain in 1738, before seeing his children permanently established in their new homes.

His sons carried the journey forward.

Daniel Harrison, my seventh great-grandfather, settled near what is now Dayton, Virginia. In 1749 he built the stone house that still stands today. During the dangerous years surrounding the French and Indian War, the solid stone house served as a place of refuge. Tradition holds that Daniel added a stockade around it, and the home became known as **Fort Harrison**. Today it survives as a physical reminder of the Harrison family's place among the early settlers of the Shenandoah Valley.

The Daniel Harrison House, also known as Fort Harrison, is the oldest house in Dayton, Virginia and one of the oldest in Rockingham County. The two-story stone house was built about 1749 by Daniel Harrison, first settler of Dayton.



Daniel Harrison's stone house, known as Fort Harrison. Original family history, page 4.

But the Harrisons were not simply living beside a road. They were helping build it.

In 1745, men from the Harrison, Craven, Herron and neighboring families were assigned responsibility for building and maintaining sections of the road through the valley. Men were expected to contribute labor to keep this important frontier route open. The road became the artery through which settlers, traders, wagons and families flowed southward.

That makes the title **Long Gray Line on the Long Grey Trail** especially appropriate. Our ancestors did not merely travel the trail. Some of them helped create and maintain the road that later generations of the family would follow.

Daniel's daughter **Abigail Harrison**, born in 1738, became my sixth great-grandmother. She married **Jeremiah Reagan** in 1764. They lived in Rockingham County during the Revolutionary era. Jeremiah supplied materials to the Continental Army and is recorded as having served during the struggle for independence. Later, Jeremiah and Abigail continued southward, leaving Virginia and following the old migration corridor into eastern Tennessee.

Their son **Jeremiah Reagan**, born in 1784, carried the family another generation farther down the trail. He eventually settled in **Monroe County, Tennessee**. The modern Interstate 81 corridor running southwest from the Shenandoah Valley provides a striking visual reminder of the route followed by thousands of settlers moving into the southern backcountry. The family had now traveled hundreds of miles from the Shenandoah Valley while remaining connected to essentially the same ancient migration corridor.

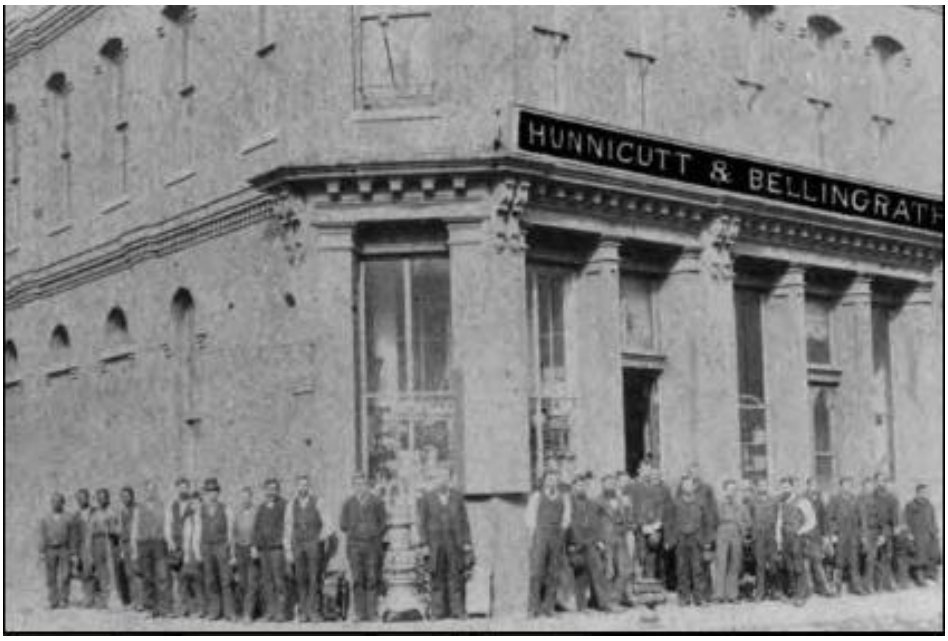


The valley corridor toward Monroe County, Tennessee. Original family history, page 8.

Jeremiah's daughter **Mary Ann Reagin**, born in Tennessee in 1819, married **Robert Walker Hicks** in Monroe County in 1842. Their daughter **Easter J. Hicks**, born in 1845, became my third great-grandmother. With Easter, two important family streams came together: the old Harrison–Reagan–Hicks migration line and the family that would give the later generations their surname—**Gray**.

Easter married **William H. Gray**, born in Atlanta in 1844. William's father, James D. Gray, came from a Scottish family and was recorded in the family history as having been born at sea in 1808 while his family was traveling to America. William lived and worked in Atlanta and died there in 1889 at only forty-five years of age. He was buried in historic Oakland Cemetery.

William Gray was a gasfitter working for **Hunnicutt & Bellingrath**, an Atlanta firm involved in stoves, house furnishings, plumbing and related trades. The photographs and advertisements preserved in the family history provide a wonderful glimpse of the world in which the Gray family lived—an Atlanta of workshops, storefronts and rapidly expanding urban industry.



Hunnicutt & Bellingrath in Atlanta. Original family history, page 11.

William and Easter had four children: Isabella, Annie, William H., and **Samuel S. Gray**, born in 1876. Samuel became my second great-grandfather.

Samuel represented another turning point in the family's journey.

He married **Anna Marie Molloy** in 1896 and worked as a printer in Atlanta. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the family made one more major move—northward from Atlanta to **Cincinnati**. The long migration that had begun with Isaiah Harrison's voyage from England more than two centuries earlier was approaching its final destination in this family story.



Anna Molloy Gray in a family photograph. Original family history, page 13.

Samuel died of tuberculosis in Cincinnati in 1923. His death certificate preserved a precious genealogical connection backward through the generations: it identified his father as William of Atlanta and his mother as Esther Hicks of Tennessee. Samuel and Anna's son **Clarence Ward Gray**, born in Atlanta in 1898, became my great-grandfather.



A family group photograph preserved with Samuel's history. Original family history, page 14.

Clarence's life reflects the family's transition from pioneer migration to twentieth-century city life. As a boy in Atlanta he worked as a paperboy. By about 1920 he was living in Cincinnati and working as a streetcar conductor. A few years later he followed his father's trade and became a printer, an occupation he continued until his death in 1949.



Family photographs accompanying Clarence Gray's story. Original family history, page 16.

Clarence married **Genevieve Wright**, and their daughter **Dorothy Gray**, born in 1932, became the next link in the line. Dorothy married **George Hensler**. From Dorothy came Thomas Hensler, and then another Thomas Hensler—the newest generation shown at the center of the family tree.



Dorothy Gray and George Hensler. Original family history, page 18.

So the **Long Gray Line** is far more than a sequence of names.

It is a journey.

Isaiah Harrison crossed an ocean.

Daniel Harrison crossed the Blue Ridge and built a stone home in the Shenandoah Valley.

Abigail Harrison and Jeremiah Reagan lived through the Revolutionary generation.

Their descendants followed the great road south into **Tennessee**.

Mary Ann Reagin and Easter Hicks carried the line toward **Georgia**.

The **Gray family** made its home in **Atlanta**.

And **Samuel and Clarence Gray** carried the family story at last to **Cincinnati**.

The map in the family history captures that remarkable progression: **Long Island → Delaware → Alexandria → Shenandoah Valley → Tennessee → Atlanta → Cincinnati.**

For generation after generation, these ancestors lived beside, worked upon, or traveled the great corridor known as the **Long Grey Trail**. The final chart in the family history makes the continuity visible: Isaiah Harrison, Daniel Harrison, Abigail Harrison, Jeremiah Reagin, Mary Ann Reagin, Easter Hicks, Samuel Gray, Clarence Gray, Dorothy Gray, and the Hensler generations that followed.

That is why the name of their story feels so fitting:

The Long Gray Line on the Long Grey Trail

A family line stretching more than three centuries.

A road stretching hundreds of miles.

And generation after generation moving along it—sometimes by ship, sometimes by wagon, sometimes by rail and streetcar—but always carrying the family story forward.