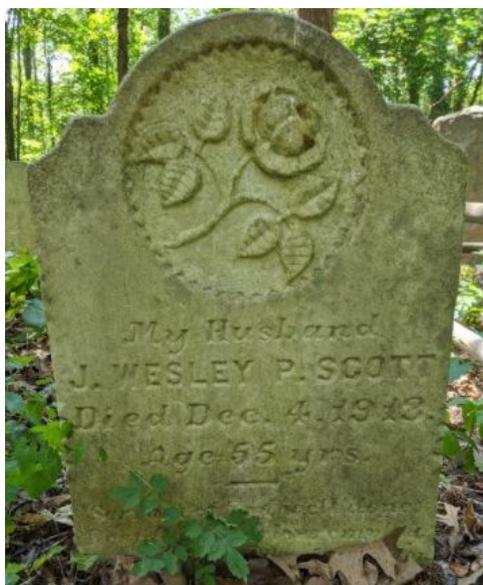


Biography of John Wesley P. Scott, 1858-1913

Buried in Historic East End Cemetery, Richmond, Virginia

By Sarah Hodges¹

Down a wide path at East End Cemetery, deep into the graveyard, and where the property nearly gives way to the trees, a visitor will find the final resting place of John Wesley P. Scott and his family. The words “My Husband” precede John Wesley’s name on his headstone, but



that is only one of many roles he fulfilled during his 55 years on this earth.² John Wesley was a son of slaves, a dutiful family man, a lifetime laborer, and a steadfast provider for his wife, children, and grandchildren. He witnessed history, living through the Civil War, Reconstruction, industrialization, and the transformation of Richmond, the place he would eventually call home. But, John Wesley’s life journey did not begin there. It began 35 miles away, surrounded by meager beginnings,

in rural central Virginia.

Records indicate that John Wesley P. Scott was born around 1858 in Amelia County, Virginia.³ His father, Pompey Scott, and his mother, Maggie Brown Scott, were most likely slaves at the time. In 1860, “Virginia had the nation’s highest population of enslaved African

¹ Questions, comments, clarifications, and other information about John Wesley P. Scott and his family are welcome. The author can be reached at schodges07@gmail.com.

² Information from headstone at East End Cemetery.

³ 1870 United States Census, Jackson, Amelia, Virginia, John Wesley P. Scott.

Americans, nearly 500,000,” and John Wesley’s birthplace was in the center of it.⁴ Amelia County was part of Virginia’s “tobacco belt,” and according to scholars at the Library of Virginia, “Many of the counties in the ‘tobacco belt,’ such as Nottoway and Amelia had population majorities of slaves rather than whites.”⁵ As depicted on this 1860 slave population map, Amelia County ranked second in the state of Virginia for total slave population at 72.6 percent.⁶

John Wesley may even have been a slave as a child, although no documents could be found to confirm that. Records from that year list at least five Scotts who owned, collectively, 144 slaves in Amelia County. Several Archers also appear as slave owners, and this name is linked with Pompey Scott, John Wesley’s father, later on.⁷



When John Wesley was born, Pompey and Maggie already had at least one other son, Morris (4), although there may have been other children.⁸ Plantation records of the time often didn’t list names or ages, and slaves were encouraged to have large families, so it’s likely that there were more children in the household.⁹ It’s also likely that John Wesley and his siblings didn’t have easy childhoods.

⁴ “Virginia Slave Population Map, 1860,” Education at Library of Virginia, Library of Virginia, <https://edu.lva.virginia.gov>.

⁵ “Virginia Slave Population Map, 1860,” Education at Library of Virginia, Library of Virginia, <https://edu.lva.virginia.gov>.

⁶ “Map of Virginia, Slave Population, 1860,” Library of Virginia, n.d., <https://edu.lva.virginia.gov>.

⁷ Tom Blake, “Amelia County, Virginia Largest Slaveholders From 1860 Slave Census Schedules and Surname Matches For African Americans On 1870 Census,” 2003, <https://sites.rootsweb.com>.

⁸ 1870 United States Census, Jackson, Amelia, Virginia, John Wesley P. Scott.

⁹ Heather Williams, “How Slavery Affected African American Families,” Teacher Serve, National Humanities Center, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org>.

History paints a bleak picture of enslaved people and their work on tobacco plantations in the mid-1800s. According to one expert, “Children as young as three or four were put to work, usually in special ‘trash gangs’ weeding fields, carrying drinking water, picking up trash, and helping in the kitchen...Between the ages of seven and twelve, boys and girls were put to work in intensive field work.” John Wesley and his siblings most likely performed this type of work growing up, and his parents most likely “worked ten or more hours a day, ‘from day clean to first dark,’ six days a week, with only the Sabbath off.”¹⁰

On May 13, 1861, when John Wesley would have been three, a curious article was published in *The Daily Dispatch*. His father, Pompey Scott, appears in a feature “worthy of

WORTHY OF NOTICE.—A correspondent writes as follows from Amelia Court-House, Va.:
“Pompey Scott, a slave of Adolphus Archer, of this county, to-day contributed twenty dollars to be expended for the comfort of the volunteers of this county. He is a very intelligent servant, and understands what he is giving his money for. I wonder what Abe and his myrmidons would think of this? He says he wants it known that he is ready to give his money to support the war.”

notice.”¹¹

According to the

article, Pompey

donated twenty

dollars to the

volunteer soldiers of

Amelia, which

calculates to over \$65 today.¹² The 1870 census would later confirm that Pompey had personal earnings. According to historian Kathleen Hilliard, this wasn’t unusual. Slaves “had long sold their labor power, bought property, earned credit, and incurred debts through participation in what historians and anthropologists call the slaves’ ‘internal economy.’” Slaves earned money laboring before, in between, and after work they performed for their masters “to provide material

¹⁰ Digital History, <https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>.

¹¹ “Worthy of Notice,” *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), May 13, 1861.

¹² Calculated using <https://www.wolframalpha.com/>.

comfort to themselves and their kin, to differentiate themselves from their peers, and perhaps most importantly, to acquire material markers of freedom in a world that hemmed them in at every turn.”¹³ It seems that Pompey was also willing to donate his earnings, and he may have had personal reasons.

In the article, the writer identifies Pompey’s owner as Adolphus Archer. Adolphus Archer, only 22 years old in 1861, mustered into military service four days before the article appeared. Perhaps Pompey’s contribution was in support of his owner. This show of support, however, wasn’t enough to save Adolphus’s life. A private in the Confederate cavalry, Archer would die one year later of disease in Stone Bridge, Virginia.¹⁴

In the intervening years between 1861 and 1870, the status of the Scott family changed drastically. Identified as a slave in 1861, the 1870 census found Pompey, John Wesley’s father, as the head of his household, a father of six children, and a property owner.¹⁵ By 1870, Pompey owned real estate in Amelia County valued at \$4000, which equates to \$83,080 today, and personal estate valued at \$250, which equates to over \$5000 today.¹⁶ “Personal estate” at that time referred to household goods and livestock.¹⁷

Pompey’s ownership of land is also confirmed by his occupation as “farmer” on the census as opposed to “farm laborer.” A census document of the era stated it this way: “If a person works on a farm for a stated wage (in money or its equivalent), even though he may be a

¹³ Kathleen Hilliard, “Slave Consumption in the Old South: A Double-Edged Sword,” *The American Historian*, Organization of American Historians, <https://www.oah.org>.

¹⁴ Historical Data Systems, comp. *U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2009.

¹⁵ 1870 United States Census, Jackson, Amelia, Virginia, Joseph Pompey Scott.

¹⁶ Calculated using <https://www.wolframalpha.com/>.

¹⁷ Amy Crow, “How Much Was Your Ancestor Worth?,” *Modern Genealogy Made Easy*, <https://www.amyjohnsoncrow.com>.

son or other relative of the person who conducts the farm, he should be entered as a laborer, and not as a farmer. On the other hand, if a person owns or rents a farm or operates it with or for another person, for a fixed share of the products, he should be entered as a farmer, and not as a farm laborer.”¹⁸ Three of Pompey’s sons, including John Wesley, *are* listed as laborers, indicating that they worked the farm for their father. Isa Scott (no age listed), Morris (16), and John Wesley (12) all worked on the farm in 1870. Their younger siblings, Adolphe (8), Nick (6), and another sibling (4), whose name is not listed, lived in the household as well. Their mother, Maggie (34), kept house.

No documents could be found that confirmed why the status of the Scott family changed so dramatically from 1861-1870, although one might speculate. Pompey’s owner, Adolphus Archer, died in 1861. In some cases, an owner might give his slaves freedom in his will.¹⁹ Additionally, in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation which “declared ‘that all persons held as slaves’ within the rebellious states ‘are, and henceforward shall be free.’”²⁰ The Scotts’ change in status is clear, even if the reasons behind it are not.

Then, for almost 20 years, John Wesley Scott’s whereabouts and activities are mostly undocumented. His father, Pompey, resurfaces on the 1880 census, remarried, still farming in Amelia, and having six children in the household.²¹ John Wesley Scott, however, is not one of those children. A John Wesley Scott of about the right age, 20 years, and a farm laborer, does appear in 1880 in Prince Edward County, which borders Amelia to the west. The mother’s name is Martha Scott, however, not Maggie. Martha is marked as being “widowed or divorced,”

¹⁸ “Report on Occupations,” *Occupations at the Twelfth Census*, <https://www2.census.gov>.

¹⁹ “What Happened to Slaves When Their Owners Died?”, *The Valley of the Shadow*, <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu>.

²⁰ “The Emancipation Proclamation,” *National Archives*, <https://www.archives.gov>.

²¹ 1880 United States Census, Jackson, Amelia, Virginia, Joseph Pompey Scott.

which might imply a break from Pompey, but doesn't explain the change in first name.²² A daughter, Dolly Fowler (11), is also listed.²³ Whether this is the correct John Wesley is uncertain, but what is certain is that he never lived with his father or in Amelia County again for any length of time.

In 1881, John Wesley's life changed drastically again. He wed Rosanna Harris of Jackson Ward in Richmond, and probably found himself in a totally different world.²⁴ The city of Richmond was a far cry from Amelia County, the home of sprawling tobacco plantations and farmland. At that time, Jackson Ward was on its way to becoming the bustling hub of the African American community. According to one historian, "Freed slaves began moving into the neighborhood during Reconstruction, and by 1920 Jackson Ward was one of the most active and well-known centers of African-American life in the country."²⁵ This photo, taken in the 1870s by an unknown photographer, shows the corners of 6th and Broad Streets in Jackson Ward.²⁶

John Wesley would have experienced the busy streets on a day-to-day basis, but he was also



witnessing history. People like Maggie Walker, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, and John Mitchell, Jr., civil rights advocate and the editor

The Adolphe is most like John's brother, been old enough to be living on their own. ley Scott.

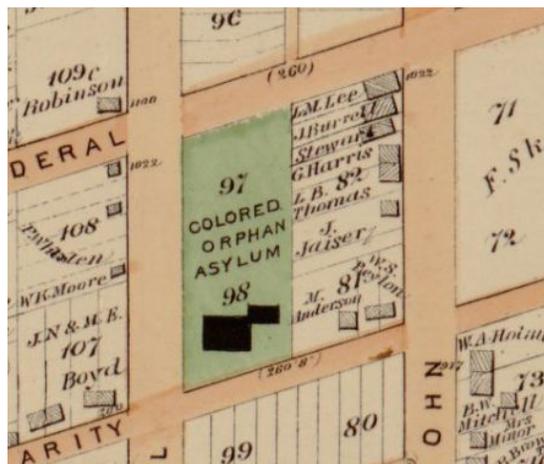
1900 United States Census, Henrico County, Richmond, Jackson Ward, Richmond City, Virginia, John Wesley Scott.

²⁵ "Jackson Ward Historic District," VCU Libraries Digital Collections, <https://digital.library.vcu.edu/islandora/object/vcu%3Aajwh>.

²⁶ *Richmond's Jackson Ward, 1873-1878*, Photograph, Valentine Museum, https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/media_player?mets_filename=evr7452mets.xml.

of the *Richmond Planet*, all had ties to Jackson Ward.²⁷

John Wesley's marriage to Rosanna spanned 22 years, the rest of his lifetime, and brought eight children into the world.²⁸ When he married Rosanna (20), she was living with her mother, Adaline Harris (60), and her brother, William (23), at 1016 St. John Street. This home, purchased by Rosanna's father, George, sometime before 1877, would be John



Wesley's home until his death. An image from F.W. Beers's *Illustrated Atlas of the City of Richmond* shows the name, "G. Harris" on the property.²⁹ The back of the property touched that of the Colored Orphan Asylum, whose offshoot still survives today as the Friends Association for Children in Jackson Ward.³⁰

Because the 1890 census was destroyed in a fire, John Wesley doesn't appear on another official document until 1900. During these twenty years, America transformed around him, technologically and socially. Some historians generalized it this way: "Light and sound transmitted across the nation. Bridges were built. Railroads lines were extended."³¹ Closer to home, the government implemented laws that affected John Wesley and his family. By 1885, Virginia "had laws requiring separate schools for Black and white students, and by 1900, 'persons of color' were required to be separated from white people in railroad cars and depots,

²⁷ "Jackson Ward Historic District," VCU Libraries Digital Collections, <https://digital.library.vcu.edu>.

²⁸ 1900 United States Census, Henrico County, Richmond, Jackson Ward, Richmond City, Virginia, John Wesley Scott.

²⁹ Beers, F. W. *Illustrated atlas of the city of Richmond, Va.* [Richmond, Va.: F. W. Beers, 1877] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2005630891/>.

³⁰ "Friends Association for Children," <https://friendsrva.org/>.

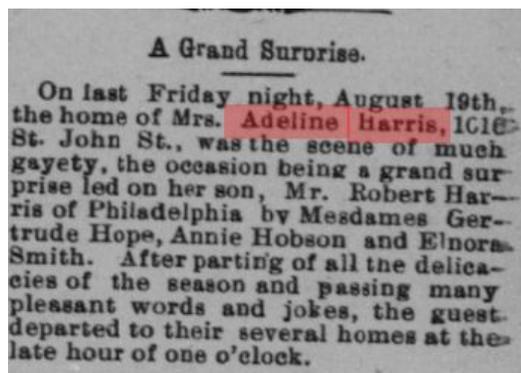
³¹ "1890s," *America's Best History*, <https://americasbesthistory.com>.

hotels, theaters, restaurants, barber shops and other establishments.” Most of these laws wouldn’t be reversed until *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, long after John Wesley’s death.

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By 1900, John Wesley Scott and Rosanna had been married for 19 years. Six of their eight children were still living: Adalena (18), Fannie (16), William (12), Celestine (10), Robert (8), and George (3). John Wesley’s mother-in-law, Adaline, now 74 years old, was listed as the head of the household, and owned their home on St. John Street, free of mortgage. John Wesley worked as a store porter. The word “porter” may have indicated a worker who carried packages for customers or someone who provided custodial services for a building. His wife, Rosanna, kept house. Fannie, William, and Celestine attended school.³³

But life during that time wasn’t all hard work. John Wesley’s mother-in-law, Adaline, appears in a society piece in the August 27, 1898 issue of *The Richmond Planet*, the prominent African American newspaper of the time. Although John is not mentioned in the article, he and his growing family were living with Adaline at the time, and one can assume he enjoyed the festivities along with her family and friends.³⁴



Sadly, these happy times would be countered by a period of tremendous grief. Between 1905 and 1910, John Wesley and Rosanna would lose three of their loved ones. On December 21, 1905, Adaline, the longtime matriarch and John Wesley’s mother-in-law,

³² “Black History Milestones: Timeline,” *History*, <https://www.history.com>.

³³ 1900 United States Census, Henrico County, Richmond, Jackson Ward, Richmond City, Virginia, John Wesley Scott.

³⁴ “A Grand Surprise,” *The Richmond Planet*, August 27, 1898.

passed away. His wife and sisters-in-law composed a touching obituary in honor of their mother that appeared in the *Richmond Planet* on January 6, and her funeral was held at Ebenezer Baptist Church, of which she had been a member for almost forty years.³⁵ Although Adaline's death would have shaken the family, she had lived well into her old age, dying close to her eightieth birthday. This wasn't true of the next two losses John Wesley and Rosanna suffered.

Nearly a year later, Rosanna and John's oldest daughter, Adalena, passed away at the age of 24. No death record could be found, however, to indicate the circumstances around her passing. Fannie, the second oldest, would die four years later in 1910.³⁶ Her death appears to be undocumented as well. Adalena's headstone, located in East End Cemetery, reads, "Unveil thy bosom faithful tomb/take this new treasure to thy/trust." Fannie's headstone, also in East End, includes a finely-engraved rose, similar to the one on John Wesley's grave. In this picture taken by the author, one can see that the final resting places of both Adalena and Fannie are scarcely more than a few steps away from their parents.

³⁵ "Gone Before," *Richmond Planet*, January 6, 1906.

³⁶ Death date from headstone in East End Cemetery

By 1910, Rosanna and John Wesley had been married for 28 years. While Rosanna kept



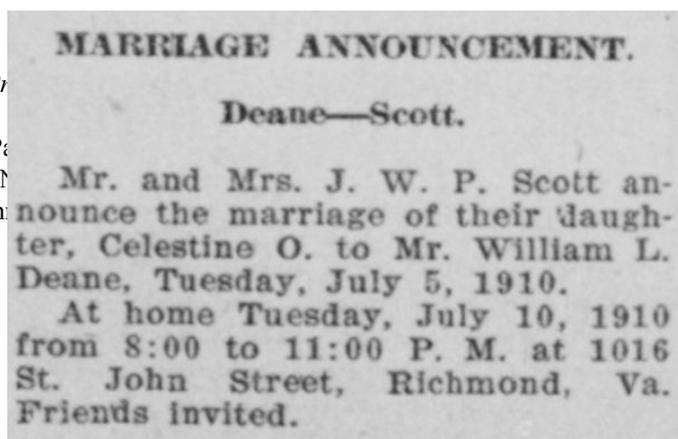
house on St. John Street, John Wesley was working as a teamster for an implement company, a business that sold agricultural equipment. According to Neal Tepel, a labor expert, “In 1910 a teamster referred to someone who led a team of draft animals employed to cultivate a farmer's fields or to carry wagons with market goods from one place to another.”³⁷ John Wesley’s farm experience most likely gave him skills in this area, and his handiness with horses may have rubbed off on their son, Robert, who drove a wagon and would later handle horses in World War I.³⁸

Most of John Wesley and Rosanna’s children were now adults. William (22) worked as a baker, Celestine (20) worked as a clerk for an insurance company, Robert (18) drove the wagon for the local bakery, and George (13) attended school.³⁹ This busy household became busier still on July 5, 1910. Celestine married William L. Deane, then 34, in the family home on St. John

³⁷ Neal Tepel, “Teamsters: The Beginning,” *LaborPr* (July 23, 2020).

³⁸ The National Archives at College Park; College Park, Md., *Quartermaster General, 1774-1985*; Record Group 118.

³⁹ 1910 United States Census, Henrico County, Richmond, Va., Scott.



Street. Their marriage announcement was published in the July 16 edition of the *Richmond Planet*.⁴⁰ John Wesley's new son-in-law had lived in Washington Ward, another section of Richmond, and waited tables for a living.⁴¹ Now, he would move into the house on St. John St. permanently.

The next three years were full of more blessings for the Scott family. William Deane and Celestine gave birth to Eunice in 1911 and Adalena in 1912, becoming John Wesley's first and only granddaughters. The entire Deane family lived with John Wesley and Rosanna, and they would continue to live in the house on St. John Street for at least the next two decades.⁴²

In March of 1913, William, John and Rosanna's oldest son, wed Mary Quarles, a fellow Richmonder. Mary and William had their first and only child four months later.⁴³ They named him William Wesley Scott, partially in honor of the family patriarch, John Wesley. William Wesley was the last grandchild and only grandson for John Wesley and Rosanna. Little did the family know that William Wesley's grandfather and namesake would depart from their lives nine months later.

On December 4, 1913, John Wesley Scott passed away in what must have been a shocking and heartbreaking blow to his family. His death certificate attributes his sudden passing to complications following appendicitis.⁴⁴ He was only 55 years old. The certificate also identifies him as a teamster, so it's clear he was working right up until his death. On December 7, he was interred in the family plot in East End Cemetery. His headstone reads

⁴⁰ "Marriage Announcement," *Richmond Planet*, July 16, 1910.

⁴¹ 1910 United States Census, Henrico County, Richmond, Jackson Ward, Richmond City, Virginia, John Wesley Scott.; in some records, the "e" at the end of "Deane" is eliminated

⁴² 1920 United States Census, Henrico County, Richmond, Jackson Ward, Richmond City, Virginia, Rosanna Scott.

⁴³ "Virginia, Birth Records, 1912-2015, Delayed Birth Records, 1721-1911," digital image s.v. "William Wesley Scott" (1913-1997).

⁴⁴ "Virginia, Death Certificates, 1912-2014," digital image s.v. "John Scott" (1858-1913), Ancestry.com

“Servant of God well done” and includes the same rose engraving that would later adorn his wife’s headstone.

John Wesley’s family would go on, although death would continue to strike and strike early in some cases. His oldest son, William, would die of influenza in 1918, leaving behind five year-old William Wesley and his wife, Mary.⁴⁵ John Wesley’s youngest son, George, would die of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 41.⁴⁶ John Wesley’s wife, Rosanna, however, would live until the ripe old age of 82, surviving WWI, the 1918 Flu Pandemic, the Great Depression, and the first years of WWII.⁴⁷ His only remaining son, Robert, would go on to serve in WWI and then support his mother right up until her death. He lived until 1961.⁴⁸ Although John Wesley’s only remaining daughter, Celestine, would die just months after Rosanna, her daughter, Adalena, would continue the family bloodline.⁴⁹ Her son, John Wesley’s great-grandson, Robert Graham, would go on to attend Hampton University Institute, Colgate University, Stanford University, and Harvard University. He would also marry twice and have four children. An ambitious student, a man of faith, and a successful businessman, Robert passed in January 2020.⁵⁰

John Wesley P. Scott’s name, carved in bold, granite letters in East End Cemetery, leaves no doubt that he left a clear legacy. His initials and last name guard the gateway to his family plot, a peaceful square of earth surrounded by short, rounded granite columns and shadowed by soaring oaks and poplars. Buried right beside Rosanna, near his mother-in-law, Adaline Harris,

⁴⁵ “Virginia, Death Certificates, 1912-2014,” digital image s.v. “William Scott” (1888-1918), Ancestry.com

⁴⁶ Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; *Pennsylvania (State). Death certificates, 1906–1967*; Certificate Number Range: 005251-008250

⁴⁷ “Virginia, Death Certificates, 1912-2014,” digital image s.v. “Rosanna Scott” (1861-1943), Ancestry.com

⁴⁸ “Robert Harris Scott,” Find a Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com>.

⁴⁹ “Virginia, Death Certificates, 1912-2014,” digital image s.v. “Celestine Deane” (1890-1943), Ancestry.com

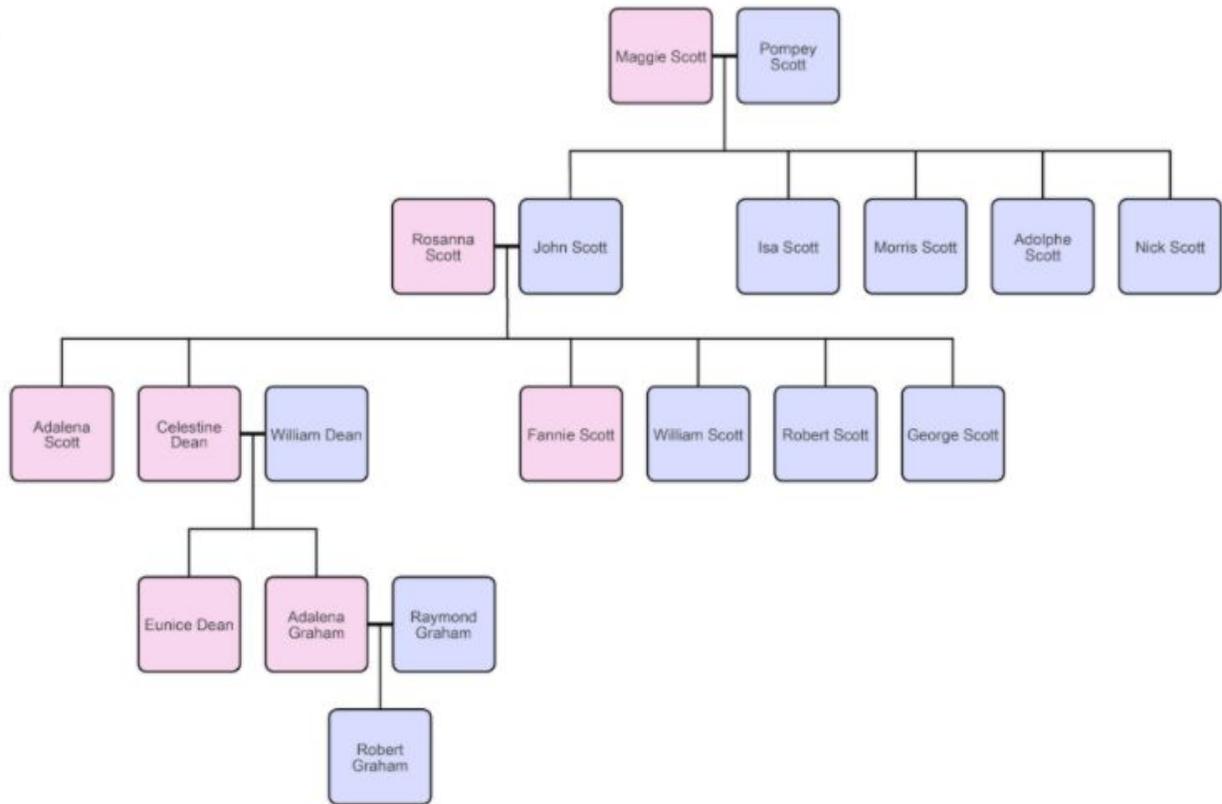
⁵⁰ “Robert Cecil “Bob” Graham Sr.,” Find a Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com>.



and within arm's length of two of his daughters, Fannie and Adalena, he continues to be the mainstay of his family, even a century later. ⁵¹

⁵¹ Names from headstones in East End Cemetery; "East End Cemetery Map," East End Cemetery, <https://dsl.richmond.edu>.

Scott Family Tree



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