

John W. "Crip John" Meeks, Jr. (1838-1913)

by Jackie Layne Partin (2022)

Why has no one ever asked why Mr. John W. Meeks was always called "Crip John"? For as long as I can remember finding out who my Meeks g-grandfather was—he was always called Crip John Meeks. A friend recently told me that stories handed down suggested that Crip John was wounded in the Civil War. While searching on Fold3, I came upon numerous John W. Meekses on both sides of the conflict. None gave me one hint as to which was my g-grandfather. It does appear in research that he was crippled in some way, by some incident, and for much of his adult life.

Crip John was the son of Britain and Emeline (Rhea) Meeks. Why he was called John W. Meeks, **Jr.** is beyond me. He married Mary "Polly" Cope on **June 7, 1859** in Grundy Co., TN; the license was bought, but there is no date for registration. They had a common law marriage which was just fine. Polly was the daughter of Stephen Payne Cope, Sr. and Comfort (Bolin) Cope who in 1860 lived in the next household to Polly. The couple filled their house with these children: Mary Ellen, Thomas Jefferson, Matilda Josie, Arzena, Joseph, James, George Mack, Margaret, Alfred, Eudora "Dora," Clouse, Lillie Marie, John Vester and Bessie. Polly gave birth to fifteen children, but I could only list fourteen of them. George Mack Meeks was my maternal grandfather.

His father Britton/Britain Meeks owned land on the rocky acreage on the south side of Paynes' Cove and maybe some along the edge of the plateau. When Britton gave his second wife Hannah Minerva Meeks forty-five acres, half of his and Hannah's home place, the land bordered or cornered with Seagroves, Bill Cope, and Rob Sartain. He so kindly asked Hannah to let him live in the house till his death; then she and her heirs could have it all. How sweet! Under these circumstances, Crip John lived near, but not on Hannah's property. Crip John and his huge family first lived above Big Spring on the right side of Clouse Hill Road as one descends the mountain today (**2022**). Scrub, bull pines were a nuisance, and water was lacking. Crip John wanted to operate a grist mill, but the small creek, nor spring, "Stovall Spring," supplied enough water pressure for his mill to operate.



Crip John W. Meeks and wife Mary Polly (Cope) Meeks

A move was necessary, so further up into Paynes' Cove Crip John, Polly and the unmarried children moved. They set up housekeeping next to the main creek that ran through the cove. He felt with the creek and a good spring already present, there would be enough force to run his mill, plus supply water for his family and fields. The spring became known as "Crip Spring." This is more evidence that Crip John was injured at some time in his early life.

On **June 19, 1883**, Crip John bought one hundred acres of land "*lying in Paynes' Cove on the waters of Elk River*" from William Irvin and Tom Levan. He never left the area of home, Paynes' Cove. On **Dec. 23, 1890**, Clerk and Master M. L. Nearn saw to it that John got things straightened out in a lawsuit brought by Nancy Summers against him.

Her husband J. P. Summers had sold John 200 acres of land at the head of Paynes' Cove wherein notes were due at certain times, plus any interest, but John let her down. In the end, his debt was paid, and he saved his land hopefully for some of his many descendants. However, on *April 22, 1898*, he and Polly sold A. H. Sanders fifty acres of land for fifty dollars in Grundy Co. District 7. Crip John was not alone in his struggles to acquire land, keep up the payments, and hold onto what he believed was his. Ever since the Mountain District of land grants were distributed, there have been land feuds.



John W. "Crip" Meeks and his wife Mary "Polly" (Cope) Meeks

Eventually, Crip John got his grist mill set up; it was operated the paddle mill style. He would grind corn for the public and for all the Meekses around him. The bottom wheel of his grist mill is in safe hands, but the top wheel is lost to his descendants. He set about farming which he did till the day he died, literally.

This newspaper clipping came
from the *Sequachee Valley News*
on December 25, 1913.

DEATH HELD PLOW WITH AGED FARMER

That death held the plow with an aged farmer is appaerent from information which reaches here of the death of John Meeks of Grundy county, last week. He was found dead beside his plow in the field. He lived in Payne's Cove, and although an aged man of over seventy years, insisted on tilling his little farm himself, and death found him at his post of duty in the field. It is supposed that his plow was knocked back by striking a stone and the handles bit him over the heart, causing heart failure. A bruise on his body near the heart occasions this belief as to the cause of his death. He was a well known resident of the section, having lived in the Payne's Cove neighborhood all his life.