The Buckeye Rovers were a group of men in their 20s and 30s from Athens County, Ohio who took the overland trail to the California gold fields in 1849, probably the first group to do so from Athens County. The 13 men from Athens County, many with old New England roots, were mostly neighbors, sons of farmers, several the grandsons of Revolutionary War veterans. Some were married with children, many were still single. On the first day of their journey, in early April of 1849, heading south toward the Ohio River, they stopped in Rutland, Meigs County, Ohio, where they joined with another group of 10 men, The Meigs County Boys, who were also headed to the gold rush. The Meigs County "Boys" were mostly middle aged men aged 40-62, though there were a couple of younger men in the group. They were bound by ties of kinship, most being relatives by marriage, or were close friends and neighbors. Many of them also had New England roots. Several were ardent abolitionists who went to the gold fields to recoup their fortunes after financial losses suffered helping runaway slaves for more than 20 years. In truth both the Athens and Meigs County men had ties and had lived or later lived in both counties. After the two groups joined forces they became collectively known as The Buckeye Rovers.

The Rovers took steamboats as far as Lexington, Missouri, where they apparently pooled their resources and pledged each other mutual aid and there they formed their "outfit," purchasing stock, wagons and supplies. They started their journey with three wagons and 24 head of cattle. A few other people joined their wagon train, probably at or after St. Joseph, Missouri. They went overland to St. Joseph and over the California Trail to the Humboldt River in California. At the beginning of July the majority of the Meigs County men, wanting to move faster, left the group and proceeded at a faster pace.

Two Athens County men, Elza Armstrong and John Banks, kept diaries of the overland journey. In addition, John Banks continued to keep a weekly journal throughout his two and a half years in the gold fields. The Buckeye Rovers agreed to meet once a year and they continued to keep in touch with and help each other. They formed various partnerships throughout their time in the gold fields and lived together in different combinations and bought into the same mining claims with each other. The majority of the Meigs County men hit lucky the first season and returned to Ohio in late 1850 with modest to substantial fortunes. Some of the other Rovers returned to Ohio in 1851 and the last group, including Banks and Armstrong, in late May of 1852, by ship via Panama, reaching Athens County in late July of 1852. All returned safely except two brothers who were killed early on after reaching California. All came back with at least a modest return and most made enough to aid them in purchasing a farm or starting a business. Their adventures inspired other groups to set forth, most of which were not nearly as successful.

The Buckeye Rovers were successful and returned safely because they had enough money to purchase adequate supplies, most were physically hardy due to hard work on farms, and most appear to have been intelligent and well educated, judging by their later accomplishments in life. They were well organized, with each man having a specific job. The key element of their success was their pledge of mutual aid, which they fulfilled faithfully, attending each other in illness, lending each other money, the more successful hiring the less successful to work for them or allowing them to buy into successful claims, gathering to share news, holidays and housing.

Some of the Rovers served in the Civil War, some returned to California or other parts of the West, some moved on to farm in Iowa, but the majority remained in Ohio, enjoying success as local officials, merchants, physicians, farmers or businessmen, raising their families, and resting at last in country graveyards with their forbearers and descendants. From the time of their journey in 1849 until the
1960s when the Armstrong and Banks diaries were first published, local newspapers periodically ran articles about the Buckeye Rovers, their overland journey, their families, and the lives of some of the more prominent members of the group. One Rover even has the fact that he participated in the overland journey engraved on his tombstone.

* US census maps: US Census/US Government work is public domain, modifications by User:Ruhrfisch licensed under the GNU Free Documentation License

** Maps of Alexander and Lee Twps. (www.perrycountyohio.us/AthensAtlas/AthensAtlas003.jpg and 089.jpg) The Centennial Atlas of Athens County, Ohio, 1905 show family names and land of Buckeye Rovers or their relatives
Age 22 in 1849, probably one of the youngest in the group. Farmer, stock raiser. Born in Ohio. He was one of the diarists of the Buckeye Rovers' overland journey to the California gold fields in April, 1849. One of his main jobs during the overland journey seems to have been looking after the stock. When Indians made off with some of the cattle, Armstrong and others chased them for a whole day, but found only the skin and bones of one of the oxen. Upon reaching California Elza and two other Rovers went farther south to winter in the town of Cold Spring, where they built a house. In later years Armstrong recounted how he helped vote California into the Union in 1850. During the winter of 1850-51 Armstrong teamed up with Elijah Ferrel, another Rover, to run a ranch and horse merchant business in Ophir. In the spring of 1851 Armstrong and Ferrel went back to the mountains to prospect. In the winter of 1851-52 Armstrong was once again in the vicinity of Ophir. In the spring of 1852 he bought into the Ophir mine with fellow Rovers Banks, Barnes and Ferrel. He returned to Athens County, Ohio in late May of 1852. For some years he was a farmer and prominent stockman. In 1883 he became Superintendent of the Athens County Children's Home with wife Lydia (nee Carpenter) and served until his death in 1905, at age 78.

Elza Armstrong came from the same Armstrong family that later produced astronaut Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon. His parents were cousins, children of two brothers who came to Ohio about 1799. Elza's mother's branch of the family went to St. Mary's in Mercer (now Auglaize) County. The St. Mary's branch produced Neil Armstrong. Elza's paternal grandfather, Thomas Armstrong, stayed in Alexander Township, Athens County, where he and his brother John had first settled. The Armstrongs were pioneers in Ohio and Pennsylvania, coming originally from the Borderlands of Scotland and England. The family probably immigrated to America in the late 1730s.
Elza's father did business with his cousins in Mercer County. He died about 1837. Elza remained with his mother until about age 12, and then went to live with his grandfather Thomas Armstrong in Athens County. He remained close to his uncle Elmer Armstrong, 15 years his senior, who was still living at home when Elza joined his grandfather's household. Elmer named one of his sons Elza.

No descendants. Elza's only child, a son, died at age 18. His diary was donated to the Ohio Historical Society by his grandnephew John G. Keller, grandson of Elza's sister Rebecca.

Sources:

- *History of Western Ohio and Auglaize County* by C. W. Williamson, 1905, Google Books
Age 30 in 1849. **Shoemaker, farmer and school teacher.** Main diarist of the group, he kept an extensive diary for the entire overland journey and the two and a half years he spent in California. Banks was one of the last group of Buckeye Rovers to return to Ohio. He became very ill on the ship home and nearly died, after surviving a six month overland journey and two and a half years in the gold fields of California. He eventually bought a farm in Iowa and moved there with his parents and most of his siblings. He married at age 42 after courting a young lady named Cynthia Judson from Connecticut by mail. He had seven children. He continued to keep a diary off and on throughout his life and taught his children his love of learning and books. Banks died in Iowa at the age of 77. His descendants preserved his diaries. In 1965 part of his 1849-1852 diary was published, along with that of fellow Rover Elza Armstrong in a book called *The Buckeye Rovers in the Gold Rush*, edited by H. Lee Scamehorn, a professor of history at the University of Colorado. A lost portion of Banks' gold rush diary was discovered in 1987 and in 1989 a revised edition of the book, including Banks' complete overland and California diaries, was issued, edited by Scamehorn and two of Banks' descendants.
John Banks was born in Ireland and came to the U. S. at the age of two. For 13 years his family lived in New York City where his father was a shoemaker. John helped his father in his business. The family moved to a farm near Albany, Athens County, Ohio. John was a very religious man and close to his family. After much thought, he joined the Buckeye Rovers in their venture. His diary does not just record the mundane events on the overland trail, but also his observations of nature and his fellow man, his thoughts and emotions, his philosophy, and events happening around him. His diary is unusually lengthy and detailed, providing an extensive source of information about the overland trail, the Buckeye Rovers, and life in gold rush era California.

Banks seems to have been something of a mother hen. He cared for the ill, chastised those he thought were being intemperate and fretted over the troubles and flaws of his fellow Rovers. He always built a house for the winter and yearly gatherings with the other Rovers usually took place wherever he was. He did not succeed in finding gold until he bought into the Ophir claim with some of the other Rovers in 1852. When he returned to Athens County there was a drought and farming was not good there, so he sought out new, better land in Iowa, moving his entire family to Marion County, Iowa.

John Banks is buried in the Breckenridge Cemetery, Knoxville Township, Marion County, Iowa.

Sources:
- www.IowaWPAGraves.org
- U.S. Census
Age 19 in 1849, one of the youngest of the Buckeye Rovers. Born in Ohio, his parents came from Saratoga County, New York. He lived in Rutland, Meigs County, Ohio, then in Athens County, Ohio. With Wilson, a fellow Rover, he formed a partnership with two Illinois men in California. They found a nugget worth $1200, but sold their claim and the new owners took out $50,000 in gold. According to a biography by a descendant, he took out more than $50,000 from placer mines on the Feather River. After returning to Ohio from California in late 1850, he studied medicine at Cleveland Medical College and received an M. D. degree. He is said to have met his wife at a ball given for the returning gold seekers. He married in 1855 and moved to McArthur, Vinton County, Ohio, where he practiced medicine. By 1870 he had moved to Pettis County, Missouri. In 1872 he bought land in Camden County, Missouri. In 1874 he moved to San Diego, California and a year later moved to San Bernardino, California, where he died at the age of 49 of a sudden heart attack and was buried in the Pioneer Memorial Cemetery. During his travels he practiced medicine and speculated in oil, coal and iron. He was married and had three sons—Charles, Albert, and Robert Asa. Charles was a title and abstract expert, Albert was a mining engineer, adventurer and world traveler, and Robert was president of the California Board of Agriculture. Robert died on Oct. 4, 1930, of a heart attack and his brother Charles died Oct. 5, 1930, also of a sudden heart attack, while discussing Robert's funeral arrangements with his wife. Both brothers were widely known and respected. One newspaper article described Robert as a nephew of former California governor Friend W. Richardson. Charles Condee
is credited with introducing ostrich farming in California. Albert Condee contracted for transportation of the first mining machinery that was taken into Tombstone, Arizona, hauling it with mules. All three of Asa Condee's sons are considered important early developers and promoters of Southern California.

Sources:

- Ray Banks at World Connect, http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com
- U. S. Census records at www.ancestry.com
- Ancestry.com Family Trees PhillipOshea poshea@cox.net & e-mail from Mike O'Shea of Norfolk, VA, March 24, 2011
- "Portrait Genealogy" Condee Ancestors, 1944, by Newcomb Condee, Los Angeles, courtesy of Mike O'Shea

Photo of Asa Condee's gravestone at FindAGrave.com, courtesy of Barbara LeClaire
The Dickson/Dixon brothers are buried in Grave 111, Pioneer Cemetery, Coloma, El Dorado County, California, part of the Marshall Gold Discovery Park, at the site of the historic gold discovery at Sutter’s Mill. Dr. Joseph Dickson was among the first 12 burials in this cemetery.
The Dickson brothers, whose name is spelled in the census and other records half the time as Dickson and the other half as Dixon, were probably older sons or other relatives of John Dickson/Dixon and his wife Jane Herron, who are the only couple old enough to be their parents listed in the census in Albany, Lee Township., Athens County, Ohio, which is where Dr. Joseph Dickson came from, according to a Meigs County, Ohio history book entry about his wife's second marriage. This family came from Pennsylvania to Morgan and Muskingum Counties, Ohio, then to Athens County, Ohio and most of the family moved to Vernon County, Wisconsin in the mid-1850s.

Hugh Dickson was probably in his late 20s or early 30s in 1849. He was killed in a skirmish with Indians, near Johnson's Ranch in California, in November of 1850. Banks' diary contains a vivid and brutal description of his death. He fought bravely, was wounded in the leg and later in the bowels. The Indians kept and mutilated his body for several hours. Eventually it was recovered and he was laid to rest near his brother, Joseph, who died the year before. Hugh and his brother, who accidentally shot himself shortly after arrival in California, were the only Rovers to die during the Buckeye Rovers' gold rush adventure. All the other Rovers returned safely to Ohio. It is unknown whether Hugh was older or younger than his brother Joseph. Banks' description of Hugh's death says a brother-in-law was with him, but it is unclear whether or not Hugh was married or if the brother-in-law had married a sister of the brothers.

Dr. Joseph D. Dickson may have been about age 30 in 1849 and was already a physician. He married Catherine Dawson in 1841 and in the 1850 census she and their four daughters and one son are listed on the same page as the young wife and one-year-old child of fellow Rover Reuben Barnes.

Dr. Dickson was chosen as captain of the Rovers' wagon train to "enforce general regulations adopted by mutual consent against the dangers and uncertainties of the trail." He assigned specific jobs to each man, kept a night watch at all times, and moved more slowly than some of the Rovers wished, seeking to preserve the strength of the oxen. He scouted ahead for water, grass and a good camp site, at which time William Logan was elected as interim captain. Eventually Seth Paine and most of the Meigs County men left the wagon train to move ahead more rapidly. John Banks describes meeting up with them later, worn down from fatigue and exposure, their cattle exhausted. It seems ironic that such a prudent leader, who obviously ran a tight ship, met his end almost as soon as he reached California when his pistol, which was stashed in his breast, fell out while he was prying up a rock looking for gold, discharged, and shot him through the heart. According to Banks, "he died without a groan." He was buried on a lonely hill near Coloma, under a solitary tree.

Only two daughters out of Joseph Dickson's five children survived childhood. One daughter remained unmarried and the other married late in life and had one child that died young. Dr. Dickson has no direct descendants. What little information we have about him comes from a Meigs County, Ohio history discussing the second marriage of his wife to a man named Joseph Simpson, a widower, and from the U. S. Census and Banks' diary of the 1849 overland journey to California.

Sources:
- FindAGrave.com
- U. S. Census
- World Connect [http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com]: Lance Dickson
- The Pioneer History of Meigs County pp. 120-121 & 183, by Stillman Carter Larkin, 1908, Berlin Printing Co., Columbus, OH at http://books.google.com
In the 1860 census there is a Dennis Drake, blacksmith, age 50, born in Pennsylvania, and wife Olivia (nee Day) next to Harvey Graham, a Buckeye Rover, in Albany, Lee Township, Athens County, Ohio, but this Dennis Drake was also in the 1850 census in Athens County, Ohio, when the Buckeye Rover Dennis Drake was in the gold fields in California. Another Dennis Drake, nephew of the Dennis Drake who was a blacksmith, was born in 1826 and the births of his children seem to have a gap around the time the Buckeye Rovers were in California; however, this Dennis Drake is also listed in the 1850 census in Athens County. Diarist John Banks and newspaper articles put the Buckeye Rover Dennis Drake returning from California to Athens in October 1851. No other Dennis Drake of the right age who might have been a member of the Buckeye Rovers is found in Athens or Meigs County, Ohio.

Dennis Drake born in 1810 was a neighbor of Buckeye Rovers Armstrong, Graham, Reeves and Banks' uncle. Drake and Banks mined together the first year in California. Drake and Reeves also partnered up in California. One entry in Banks’ diary says that Mr. Drake made shoes for the cattle near the beginning of the overland journey to the gold fields. The 1810 Dennis Drake was a blacksmith. Later newspaper articles and historical accounts say that all the Rovers were dead by 1896 except Armstrong, Stedman, and Wilson. The 1810 Dennis Drake died in 1891, while his nephew, the 1826 Dennis Drake, died in 1915. Both men moved away from Athens County after the return of the Buckeye Rovers. Dennis born 1810 moved to Ross County, Ohio and later to Ashtabula County, Ohio, where he died. Dennis born 1826 moved to Edgar County, Illinois, then to Lucas County, Iowa, where he died near Russell, Iowa. Both were married with children and have many descendants. No mention of either man going to the California gold rush is made in genealogies and family histories of the Drake family.

Despite being a bit older, at age 39, than the other Athens Rovers, who were in their 20s or early 30s, it seems likely that Dennis Drake born 1810 was the Buckeye Rover, mainly because the younger Dennis Drake was not a blacksmith and unlikely to have made shoes for the Rovers' oxen and because the older Dennis is listed on the same census page as several of the other Rovers.

Dennis Drake partnered for the first year in California with John Banks, then later partnered with George Reeves, and returned to Athens with William Stedman. Banks reported in his diary that Stedman exaggerated his success in the gold fields, but that "Drake don't tell."

Both Dennis Drakes came from the family of Jeremiah Drake and his wife Elizabeth Dennis, who emigrated from Washington County, Pennsylvania to Athens County, Ohio in 1832. The Drake and Dennis roots go back to Morris County, New Jersey. Dennis Drake born 1810 was a son of Dennis Drake Sr., born 1768, son of Jeremiah; the younger Dennis, born in 1826, was his nephew, son of his brother John Washington Drake.
Elijah Ferrel
1823-1886

Age 26 in 1849; farmer, horse merchant (in California). Probably Elijah Ferrel, son of Edward Ferrel and Rebecca Reece. Elijah's grandfather, John Ferrel, was in Lee Township, Athens County, Ohio in 1840. His father, Edward, was in Trumbull County, Ohio. Later Elijah's brother John (who had a son named Elijah) was in Athens County, Ohio, and later Elijah and John are found together in Wayne County, Iowa, near Allerton. Living next to them in 1870 were Rovers George Reeves and William Logan. Elijah Ferrel was married twice and had a number of children, though several died in childhood. Along with fellow Rovers John Banks and George Reeves he bought a farm in Iowa where he spent the rest of his life.

Elijah was born in Pennsylvania, probably in Washington County. He came with his parents to Trumbull County, Ohio in 1828 and the family moved to Athens County, Ohio about 1840. Elijah came back from California with the last of the Buckeye Rovers, arriving in the summer of 1852. His father had already moved to Indiana and Elijah may have gone there, as his first wife was born in Indiana. Elijah's father then moved on to Wayne County, Iowa, where Elijah and his brother John also later went. Elijah's brother John returned briefly to Washington County, Pennsylvania, where he married and Elijah may have gone too, as his first two children were born Pennsylvania. By 1860 Elijah and John Ferrel were in Wayne County, Iowa, where they remained for the rest of their lives. They are buried in the Allerton Cemetery, Wayne County, Iowa. Elijah is in Section 5, Row 8, Lot 1.

Ferrel's name is variously spelled Terrill, Ferrill, Farrell, and Ferrell in various records, but the family seems to have mostly spelled it Ferrel. Elijah Ferrel must have been easy to get along with because he partnered at various times with a number of the other Rovers and is frequently mentioned in Banks' diary. He bought into the Ophir mine with Armstrong, Reeves, Banks and Charles Giles and seems to have amassed a decent fortune. He also made money early on in California cutting wood with Townsend and Reeves.
**Harvey Lasley Graham**

**1819-1865**

**Age 30** in 1849. In 1860 he lived next door to fellow Rover Dennis Drake with real estate worth $3500 and personal estate worth $1869. He is listed as a farmer in the census. His history suggests he might have been a soldier and was **good with weapons**. In Banks' overland diary he is described twice as having killed antelope for the party to eat. It seems his job in the wagon train was to be a hunter. Graham was also described by Banks as going out in the middle of the night to chase off Indians the party thought were trying to steal their cattle. Harvey Graham had many ups and downs during his time in California, as recorded in Banks' diary. He was sick with dysentery, accused of stealing a stray ox which he and Reeves found wandering in the desert, was sick most of the time due to exposure and fatigue during the first winter in the gold fields, lost $1100 he had deposited with some kind of company that went bust, was a merchant on "Buckeye Row" in Ophir during the winter of 1850-51, went far upriver with Armstrong in the early spring of 1851, and eventually was reported to have a claim worth $20,000. Other entries in Banks' diary describe him making $20 per day and prospecting on the Yuba with Townsend and Ferrel. In November of 1851 he was at Ophir with Armstrong and Ferrel. In January of 1852 he was working with Reeves and hiring other men to work their claim. James and Joshua Gardner, along with Graham, Paine and three others found rich deposits at Gold Hill in California and Graham returned to Athens in February of 1852.

A descendant of Revolutionary War soldiers, Harvey L. Graham was born in Gallia County, Ohio; served in county offices such as Justice of the Peace in Lee Township, Athens County, Ohio; in 1852 was chairman of the Albany, Lee Township Free Soil Party; and later apparently moved to Rutland Township, Meigs County, Ohio. He died in 1865 at age 46, said to have been killed by Indians in the Black Hills. A headstone for him and his wife and the grave of his son Ira are in the Miles Cemetery, Rutland Township, Meigs County, Ohio.

Harvey Graham may have been returning to the West leading gold seekers. Gold seekers and white homesteaders started going into the Indian territory near the Black Hills about 1864-65, setting off war with the Indians.

Harvey L. Graham married Almira H. Nobles and had three children.

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**Photo courtesy of Connie Hitchings**

William Logan

Interim captain of the wagon train when Joseph Dickson was away; wintered with Armstrong and Barnes near Deer Creek the first winter in California; came back to Athens in late 1851 with part of Banks' diary, which was lost; returned to California. This is all the information contained in Banks' diaries about the Buckeye Rover William Logan.

He may have been from the Logan family of Athens and Meigs Counties, Ohio descended from John Logan (born 1753 Dublin, Ireland, died 1821 Alexander Township, Athens County, Ohio), a Revolutionary War veteran buried in Alexander Township, who married wife Mary about 1796; served from Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. Children: James b. 1798; Samuel b. 1800; John Jr. b. 1802; and Rebecca b. 1805. The census records of Athens and Meigs Counties, Ohio show John Logan, probably Sr., in Alexander Township in 1820; he died in 1821; John Logan (probably Jr.), 1840, 1860 Alexander Township; Samuel Logan 1830 and 1840 Alexander Township, 1850 Scipio Township, Meigs County, Ohio; 1860 and 1870 a number of Logans in Salisbury, Rutland, and Scipio Townships in Meigs County, Ohio. John Logan Jr. married Eleanor Lattimer and was perhaps the father of: the Buckeye Rover William Logan (Eleanor's father's name was William); Henry Logan b. 1832 who was a prominent farmer, businessman and local official who eventually became mayor of Athens, OH in 1902; and John W. Logan born about 1835 of Alexander Township, Athens County, Ohio.

A William Logan born in Ohio about 1830, who would have been just age 19 in 1849, is found in the 1860 census in Alexander Township, Athens County, Ohio, listed as a tanner and currier, with a wife Martha born about 1831 in Ohio and daughter Mary F. born about 1858 in Ohio. They are not in the census thereafter that I can find in Ohio or California.

OR

On the same page in the 1870 census in Benton Township, Wayne County, Iowa, as John Ferrel, brother of Rover Elijah Ferrel (next page in census), are George Reeves, fellow Buckeye Rover, and a William Logan. This William Logan appears to have lived briefly in Williams County, Ohio, in the mid-1840s, in the far northeastern part of Ohio, where he married Mary Russell in 1843, and to have no connection with Athens County, Ohio. He stayed in Wayne County, Iowa until his death in 1904, which does not fit with the Buckeye Rover William Logan having returned to California, as reported in Banks' diaries. However, this Iowa William Logan has a gap in the births of his children between 1849 and 1855 and his wife is living alone with her children and her brother Thomas Russell in the 1850 census in Florence, Williams County, Ohio with children surnamed Logan born in Ohio in 1845, 1847 and 1849. In 1855 William and his wife have a child born in Iowa, in 1856 a child born in Missouri and in 1858 a child born in Iowa. This William Logan was born in 1819 in Pennsylvania or Virginia, would have been about age 30 in 1849, and died in 1904 in Wayne County, Iowa and is buried in Row 5 of the Corydon Cemetery, Corydon, Wayne County, Iowa with his wife, Mary, and unmarried children Thomas (1847-1905) and Sophronia (in some records mislabeled as his wife.)

William Logan the Buckeye Rover might have returned to California, then gone to Iowa and settled near his fellow Rovers Reeves and Ferrel. There is a William Logan in the mid-1860s listed in tax lists in California at Tuttles Gulch near the gold fields, a liquor merchant. However, none of the birth dates or birth places derived from census records match up for that William Logan and the Iowa William Logan.

It seems not impossible, but somewhat unlikely, that a William Logan who was not the Buckeye Rover William Logan would be living side by side with two fellow Rovers in Iowa, so I tend to think that William Logan returned to California, then went to Iowa and this fact was just not known to the Rovers who remained in Athens County, Ohio, who were the main informants for subsequent
newspaper articles. However, Banks lived in nearby Marion County, Iowa, and his life long journals were the source of much of the information about the Rovers after their return from the gold fields and one would have thought he might have known if the Rover William Logan was living in Iowa. At this point the identity of the Buckeye Rover William Logan remains a mystery.

Grave of the Wayne Co., Iowa William Logan who might have been a Buckeye Rover
Corydon Cemetery, Wayne Co., Iowa

Sources:

- U. S. Census
- Ancestry.com: Calif. tax lists
- www.familysearch.org: extracted marriage record; IGI
- Iowa WPA Graves: http://iowawpagraves.org
- The Centennial Atlas of Athens County, Ohio, 1905, p. 86
George W. Reeves
1824-1901

Age 24 in 1849; **farmer**, from an old pioneer family in Meigs and Athens Counties, Ohio; son of George Reeves Sr.; grandson of early settler Richard Reeves, a Revolutionary War veteran from Pennsylvania, and his wife Elizabeth Dix.

According to Banks' diary Reeves was sick with dysentery early in the trip and recovered and was ill again when they arrived in California and again recovered. He mined with Banks and Drake the first season. He also made money cutting wood with Townsend and Ferrel. He helped build and shared a house in Cold Spring with Banks, Drake and Townsend in the winter of 1849-50. In the spring of 1850 he partnered with Drake and shared a house with him; he also worked with Stevens. He made at least $1500 working with Graham and hiring others to help work their claim. He returned by steamer from California in May of 1852 with the last of the Rovers, Armstrong, Banks, Ferrel and Charles Giles.

In the 1870 census George Reeves is on the same two census pages with fellow Buckeye Rovers William Logan and Elijah Ferrel. George went to Warren County, Iowa near the rest of his family who had moved there; was supposedly married in Marion County, Iowa, where fellow Rover John Banks moved; then went to Wayne County, Iowa near Logan and Ferrel, then moved back to Warren County, Iowa near his extended family and died there in 1901, age 76.

In 1855 George Reeves married Louisa Caroline Smock. They had eight children.

George W. Reeves or his father George Reeves is believed to be buried in the Sandyville Cemetery in Warren County, Iowa.

James Shepherd/Shepard

James Shepard joined Graham in hunting to provide meat for the Buckeye Rovers. He had headed home by October of 1850 with $1800 made cutting hay; he lost $300 in gold that he had deposited with a firm that went bust and did not pay its depositors. Fellow Rovers Graham, Rathburn and Stevens lost their deposits as well.

One possible James Shepherd/Shepperd was born about 1817 in England and is found in the census in York, Athens County, Ohio in 1850 with wife Margaret, born about 1818 in England, and children Thomas, born about 1842 in New York, and Elizabeth/Ellen, born about 1846 in New York. He was an iron founder. In 1860 this James is listed as a "molder" in Nelsonville, Athens County, Ohio in the census, with his family. In 1870 and 1880 his son Thomas, with wife Maria/Mariah and children, are found in Nelsonville, with mother Margaret. Thomas was first a coal miner, then a mine boss. Margaret is listed as a widow, doing plain sewing. Thomas' children were Margaret Ella born about 1868, James T. born about 1871, Gertrude E. born about 1877 and Charles G. born about 1879.

The identity of the Buckeye Rover James Shepherd is unclear, though it could have been the James Shepard above.

There was also a James Shepard who married Mary Ann Norris in 1851 in Carthage Township, Athens County, Ohio and a Mary Ann (Sheppard) Buck whose death certificate says she was born April 13, 1852 in Albany [Lee Twp.], Athens County, Ohio to James Shepard and Mercy A. Noyce of New Hampshire.

In the 1840 census in Alexander Township, Athens County, Ohio there is a James Shepherd age 20-30 [born 1810-1820] with a male and a female child less than five years of age and a female age 20-30. On the same census page are David Reaves, age 40-50; Samuel Dickson, age 20-30; and John Logan, age 30-40---these are surnames of other Buckeye Rovers--George Reeves, Hugh and Joseph Dickson, and William Logan.

William Stone Stedman
1817-1899

Age 32 in 1849. Carpenter. His father and at least one brother were carpenters, sometimes listed as house carpenters. Another brother was a wagon maker. William Stedman was from an old New England family from Connecticut and Vermont, originally from Scotland. His father came to Athens, Ohio in 1802 and William was born about 1817 in Ohio. William’s grandfather was referred to as Judge Alexander Stedman and was said to have been an architect by profession and to have come to Ohio in 1804.

William Stedman endured two rigorous journeys to the California gold fields, one overland with the Buckeye Rovers and one by steamer and ship via Panama. On the overland journey in 1849 his gun burst, but no one was injured. At one point he left the group with the wagons and backpacked ahead to reach the gold fields faster, as provisions were running out. He worked with Drake on the Feather River and was reported by Banks to be doing well. In October of 1850 he attended a reunion of the Buckeye Rovers in Ophir. Stedman returned to Athens County, Ohio in October of 1851 with Dennis Drake, and apparently told such tales of his success in the gold fields that they inspired a new expedition. A second group set out for California from Athens in December 1851 with Stedman and a total of 42 people. They had an arduous trip by steamer from New York City. They were adrift for 72 days, then had a tough trip across the Isthmus of Panama, and then went by ship to San Francisco. Banks reports in his diary in March 1852 that William Stedman came to visit, sick and out of money. Stedman stayed in California for a total of eleven years. He returned to Athens County about 1860 and was "a successful man of affairs." He was also a building contractor and he operated the Stedman House (later the Palmer Hotel) in Athens, Ohio. He died in 1899 at the age of 82, one of the last remaining Rovers.

William S. Stedman married Rhoda Glass in Athens County, Ohio in 1839, and had three children. He told his tale of the Buckeye Rovers' overland trip to California to his granddaughter Elizabeth Hackman for a school essay that she wrote in 1887. The essay was discovered among her effects and the story was published in The Athens Messenger July 24, 1951. The second journey via ship to Panama was recounted in vivid detail in an article published in The Athens Messenger Sunday Magazine on January 2, 1927.

Sources:
- www.familysearch.org extracted marriage record
- U. S. Census
- Genealogical data base, John B. Lisle [stedman@tqsi.com], accessed Nov. 14, 2009
Age 22 in 1849. Descendant of New England Revolutionary War patriots, the family moved to New Hampshire and Connecticut and on to Ohio. Wilson returned to Athens in the fall of 1850, having had early success in the gold fields. William S. Wilson made some and lost more money, eventually selling his claim for $2300; he sold another claim for $1000 and saw the new owners take $50,000 of gold out of it; he found a gold nugget worth $1285. He formed a partnership in the gold fields with Asa Condee and two other men. Later he fought four years in the Civil War in Co. H 36th Ohio Infantry, emerging as a Lt. Colonel, and returned to an illustrious career in Athens County, Ohio as a probate judge, sheriff and eventually mayor of Athens, Ohio. He was also a marble manufacturer at one point. In the 1870 census two jail prisoners are listed in his household! He was married twice. He was one of the last remaining Buckeye Rovers in the waning years of the century and held reunions with Banks, Armstrong and Stedman. He was frequently quoted in newspaper articles about his adventures in the gold fields. In several sources he is listed as William T. Wilson; Paper Trail and other sources list him as William S. Wilson. He was quite evidently a lively spirit. Banks' diary recounts him singing along the overland trail and coming to visit Banks with tales of bears, panthers and Indians. When provisions ran low near the end of the overland journey, Wilson signed up with a man from Illinois to drive his wagon in return for his board.

Judge Wilson, as he was later known, is buried with his wives Amanda Day and Abigail Whipple in the Alexander Union/Old Cumberland Cemetery in Athens County, Ohio. He had several children with his first wife, Amanda Day.

The Meigs County Men

Reuben Barnes
1824-1885

Age 28 in 1849; a shoemaker and merchant in later life; New England roots, born in Massachusetts. He went home from the gold fields in October of 1850 with $2000. In the 1850 census Barnes' young wife Ruhama (nee Hall), age 18, with a one-year-old son, is alone living next to her parents, on the same page as Buckeye Rover Joseph Dickson's wife Catherine, also listed alone with her children. Reuben is listed in the 1860 census in Salem Township, Meigs County, Ohio as a farmer. In the 1870 Albany, Athens County, Ohio census he is listed as a shoemaker, and in the 1880 census as a retired merchant living in Albany. He died at the age of 61 and is buried in Temple Cemetery near Mt. Blanco, Meigs County, Ohio, in the same cemetery where fellow Rover Solomon Townsend is buried. Reuben Barnes had three sons--Francis, Charles and William.

Reuben Barnes is variously listed as R.P. or R.J. Barnes, Reuben J., Reuben P. or Reuben B. Barnes. His tombstone lists him as R. B. Barnes. His parents were Russell M. and Elizabeth Barnes. R. M. Barnes is buried with his wife Elizabeth in Danville Cemetery, Salem Township, Meigs County, Ohio.

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- www.familysearch.org--extracted marriage record
James Gardner

In December 1850 Banks reported in his diary that James Gardner had made $1000 from monte, lending money to gamblers. A further entry notes that Gardner is now broke. James and Joshua Gardner, along with Graham, Paine and three others found rich deposits at Gold Hill in California. James was considered the best prospector and the most daring of the Buckeye Rovers. He was eventually killed in Nicaragua, where he had joined a group of insurgents. He was most likely the son of Joshua Gardner and perhaps about age 20 in 1849.

A court record about the estate of Addison F. Gardner, one of whose heirs was a James Gardner of California, suggests that James may have been a son of Joshua Gardner. Census records show an Addison Gardner living in 1850 with an Ann Gardner of the right age to be his mother. This same Ann is with Joshua Gardner, it appears, in the 1860 census. Addison Gardner married in 1853 and died in 1855 and his heirs appear to have been his widow and siblings. This suggests that James was a brother of Addison and therefore a son of Joshua Gardner, but no positive identification of James has been made to date. Joshua Gardner's wife's father was named James. The 1850 census of Butte County, California, shows a James Gardner, age 21, born in Ohio living with three other young men, two of whom were also born in Ohio. Butte Co., CA included the Feather River, where the Buckeye Rovers were prospecting.

Americans joined an insurgency against the ruling party in Nicaragua in the mid 1850s. The insurgency failed by about 1857 and the leader of the American forces was executed.

Joshua Gardner

Joshua Gardner was a farmer and member of the "Meigs County Boys" who joined up with the "Buckeye Rovers." Thereafter the entire party was often referred to as the "Buckeye Rovers." Joshua Gardner was 56 years old when he went to the gold fields and Banks notes in his diary "Mr. Gardner sick; too old for such fatigue, fifty-six."

John S. Giles and Charles Giles were closely associated with Joshua Gardner, who was about the same age. All were abolitionists who aided runaway slaves. John S. Giles was even jailed in Virginia (now West Virginia) for two months for aiding runaway slaves. Joshua Gardner lost so much money defending himself against a lawsuit by the owners of a runaway slave he aided that he went to the gold fields to recoup his losses. The Giles, Rathburn and Paine families were all related by marriage and most of "The Meigs County Boys" were a generation older than the Buckeye Rovers of Athens County.

Joshua Gardner is in the census near neighbors Paine, Rathburn and Giles in Rutland Township, Meigs County, Ohio. In 1825 he was a constable.

James and Joshua Gardner, along with Graham, Paine and three others found rich deposits at Gold Hill in California. Joshua Gardner left the California gold fields in April of 1852 to return to Ohio. The assumption is that James Gardner was a relative of Joshua Gardner, but no positive identification of James has been made to date.
Joshua Gardner married Nancy (known as Ann) Caldwell and had children. His son, Albert Gallatin Gardner, was known in Meigs County and had five sons and one daughter. Joshua died in 1869 in Meigs County, Ohio, age 76.

Grave of Joshua Gardner's grandson, Alpheus, surveyor of Meigs Co., Ohio
Miles Cemetery, Rutland Twp., Meigs Co., Ohio
photo courtesy of Connie Hitchings

Sources:
- The Pioneer History of Meigs County by Stillman Carter Larkin, 1908, Berlin Printing Co., Columbus, OH at http://books.google.com
- U. S. Census
- www.familysearch.org: Ohio Marriages
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- U.S. GenWeb Archives: http://files.usgwarchives.net/oh/meigs/newspapers/gnw38meigscou.txt
  Meigs County Telegraph Pomeroy, Ohio, Tuesday, December 18, 1855--article re the administration of the estate of Addison Gardner

NOTE: Joshua Gardner's great-grandson Keith Morrow Martin, was a well-known abstract/surrealist artist.
Charles Giles
1804-1860
John Siras (Cyrus) Giles Sr.
1795-1889

John S. Giles Sr., age 54 in 1849, and his brother Charles Giles, age 45 in 1849, were from a large Giles family in Meigs County, Ohio. John S. Giles Sr. and Charles Giles were closely associated with Joshua Gardner of the Meigs Co. Boys/Buckeye Rovers, who was about the same age. All were abolitionists who aided runaway slaves. John S. Giles Sr. was even jailed in Virginia (now West Virginia) for two months for aiding in the escape from jail of his brother-in-law, John Adams Smith, who had aided some runaway slaves in Ohio and who had been taken to jail in Pt. Pleasant, Virginia (now West Virginia). Charles Giles was also in on the escape, but was not identified by the outraged Virginians. The Giles, Rathburn and Paine families were all related by marriage. John S. Giles' first wife was Elizabeth Smith, sister of John Adams Smith, who was married to Buckeye Rover Seth Paine's sister, Deborah Paine. John S. and Charles Giles' sister Polly Giles was married to Elisha Rathburn, whose nephew Dr. James C. Rathburn was also a Buckeye Rover. Elisha and Polly's daughter, Roana Rathburn, was married to Buckeye Rover Seth Paine.

John S. Giles Sr. is in the 1850 census, but Charles is not. Many of the Meigs County group hit lucky early. John S. Giles left California in late 1850 and returned to Athens County with Seth Paine, both having made their fortune. Apparently John went home and Charles stayed, coming home with the last of the Buckeye Rovers in the spring of 1852. Charles gave the town of Ophir, where many of the Rovers eventually made their fortunes, its name.

John S. Giles Sr. lived a long life in Rutland Township, Meigs County, Ohio as a farmer and was the father of 22 children by two wives. His second wife was Nancy Grimes, many years his junior. Charles was off again to Pike's Peak in the spring of 1860, from his home in Perry Township, Gallia County, Ohio, but died of a "putrid sore throat" shortly after his departure, at age 56.

Charles and John S. Giles Sr. were born in Boothbay, Maine, their mother's home town. Their father, Joseph Giles, was from New Hampshire, with roots back into Massachusetts.

John S. Giles is buried in the Miles Cemetery, Rutland Township, Meigs County, Ohio, the same cemetery that fellow Rovers Harvey L. Graham and L. D. Stevens are buried in.
Seth Paine II
1809-1895

Seth Paine, age 40 in 1849, a merchant, made his fortune in California and returned to Meigs County, Ohio in late 1850 a wealthy man. During the overland trip he and most of the Meigs County men disagreed with wagon train captain Dr. Joseph Dickson over the pace of travel and perhaps other matters. Paine and most of the Meigs County group left the wagon train in early July and forged ahead at a faster pace to the gold fields.

He was said to have been worth $80,000 at the time of his death, the richest man in the county. James and Joshua Gardner, along with Graham, Paine, John S. Giles and some others found rich deposits at Gold Hill in California.

Seth Paine II, born in Maine, was the son of Seth Paine Sr., born in Massachusetts, who came to Ohio in 1816. Seth II married Roana Rathburn, the cousin of fellow Rover Dr. James C. Rathburn, and had two children, a son John and a daughter Marilla. He continued to live in Rutland, Meigs County, Ohio until his death at age 86, for many years operating a general store with his brother Samuel.

Picture of Seth Paine's house from an Athens Messenger article about his gold rush adventure, published Aug. 23, 1953
Dr. James Cullen Rathburn  
1827-1890

James C. Rathburn was born in 1827 in Ohio, the son of Dr. Alvin B. Rathburn and Selenda Harding, grandson of Daniel Rathburn Sr. and his wife Desire Rice, who came from Granby, Connecticut to Ohio in 1803. James' father, brother and other Rathburn relatives were doctors.

James was 22 years old in 1849 at the start of the Buckeye Rovers' overland journey. In October of 1850 Banks notes in his diary that Rathburn had deposited $1400 in a company that failed and suspended payments to its depositors. It is unclear when Rathburn returned to Ohio, but probably he returned with the majority of the Meigs County men by late 1850. In 1853 he married Anna C. House in Gallia County, Ohio, where he established his medical practice in the town of Gallipolis on the Ohio River.

Gallipolis Businesses in 1876
Transcribed by Henny Evans

From the Gallipolis Bulletin, June 7, 1876

"Dr. J.C. Rathburn on Court Street between 2nd, and 3rd, keeps the Eagle Drug Store. This is a handsome establishment fitted up in fine style and the Doctor is one of those gentlemen it is a pleasure to have dealings with. He is well-known to our citizens having been a successful practicing Physician in this county for many years. He moved into his present establishment last January from Priestley’s corner and keeps the usual stock pertaining to the Drug business such as Patent medicines Lead, Paints, Dye Stuffs, notions, Perfumeries, Tobacco, Cigars, Liquors and Wines for Medical purposes and an Ice Cold Soda Fountain for the thirsty. He calls particular attention of the ruptured to his line of Trusses. Physician’s prescriptions and Family Receipts prepared out of the purest drugs and best materials. Remember the place, one door west of John Dages establishment."

Dr. J. C. Rathburn and his wife Anna had two children, Joseph and Fannie, and probably a third child that died young. Fannie married Charles G. King. Dr. Rathburn died in 1890. The 1900 census lists his wife as a widow living with her daughter and son-in-law. She is recorded as having borne three children, 2 living. Fannie had no children. Joseph and his mother Anna died in 1906.
Alonzo Smith

Alonzo Smith moved to Wisconsin after returning from California. There was a Smith family in Rutland, Meigs Co., Ohio related to the Paine, Giles and Rathburn families, all of which contributed men to the Buckeye Rovers. There were also other non-related Smith families in Meigs County. None of the Alonzo Smiths of Meigs Co., Ohio found on record were the right age to be a member of the Buckeye Rovers. None of the Alonzo Smiths of the right age found in the census in Wisconsin seem to have any connection to Ohio. Thus, for the moment, the Buckeye Rover Alonzo Smith remains a mystery.

Lorenzo Dow Stevens
1827-1895

Age 22 in 1849. Lorenzo D. Stevens was born in Maine, lived in Meigs County, Ohio and was the son of William M. Stevens Jr. of Piscataquis County, Maine. In July 1849 he was likely part of the group with Seth Paine who went ahead of the wagon train to reach the gold fields faster. By January of 1850 he was making $16 per day. In October of 1850 he planned to head back to Ohio, but turned back because cholera was raging in the area and the passage fees were high on ships returning to the east coast. He lost $500 he had deposited in a company that went bust. In March of 1851 he was prospecting with Reeves in Shirt Tail Canyon. Some time after that but before the last group of Rovers returned in May 1852, Lorenzo returned to Ohio.

In 1854 Stevens married Aner Bryne. Lorenzo served in the Civil War as a 2nd Lt. in the Ohio Volunteer Infantry. He farmed in Rutland Township, Meigs County, Ohio until his death at age 67 and was the father of four daughters; one died as a child, one died unmarried. He is buried in the same cemetery (Miles Cemetery, Rutland Township, Meigs County, Ohio) as fellow Buckeye Rovers Harvey L. Graham and John S. Giles. On his tombstone is inscribed “Made the overland trip to California in 1849.”
Solomon Townsend
1787-1854

Solomon Townsend was the son of a Revolutionary War veteran, an early pioneer of Meigs County, Ohio, and 62 years of age, the oldest of the Rovers, when he went to the gold rush. He may have gone because he had just finished building a large home on his family farm, which remained in the family for more than 135 years. He died not long after returning from the gold fields, at age 67. His descendants were still living on the family farm as late as 1953. Solomon and at least five generations of his family are buried on land donated by Solomon for a church, school and cemetery next to their farm, near Mt. Blanco, Columbia Township, Meigs County, Ohio. An extensive family history of Solomon Townsend and his family mentions nothing of him going to the California gold rush, though a 1953 newspaper article asserts that he was one of the Buckeye Rovers. The family history mentions a letter written to him from the gold fields in 1853 by his son James L. W. Townsend and describes a pouch and money belt owned by James containing a remnant of gold dust and used by him in the gold fields. Both Solomon and James were said to have made most of their money by sawing wood and cutting timber in California. I did not find any other Solomon Townsend of suitable age to be the Buckeye Rover Solomon Townsend, but wonder if he was confused with his son James L.W. or some other Solomon Townsend, as this Solomon would have been somewhat elderly to be taking on such an arduous trip. Banks’ diary mentions S. Townsend and has mention of Townsend in the gold fields through at least November 1851, yet this Solomon is in the 1850 census in Columbia Township, Meigs County, Ohio.

Solomon Townsend married Rachel Howell in Glenville, Virginia in 1817. He came to Meigs County, Ohio in 1818 with his father, James, who was born in Maryland. Solomon and Rachel had six children.

Solomon and many generations of his family are buried in the Temple Cemetery, on the land he donated, near Mt. Blanco, Meigs County, Ohio.

photos courtesy of Greg & Jennifer Kull
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