

Descendants of Thomas Martin Sesler and Elizabeth Mahala Aldridge

Generation No. 4.1

THOMAS MARTIN⁴ SESLER (*Jane³ Hibben, Thomas², John¹*) was born Abt. 1829 in Clinton Co., OH, and died December 08, 1876 in Herring, Bath Twp., Allen Co., OH. He married **ELIZABETH MAHALA ALDRIDGE** February 08, 1855 in Greene Co. OH, daughter of **SAMUEL ALDRIDGE** and **SARAH BRAGG**. She was born January 10, 1833 in Bloomington, Clinton Co., OH, and died January 20, 1913 in Bridgeport, Morrill Co., NE.

Children of **THOMAS SESLER** and **ELIZABETH ALDRIDGE** are:

- i. **LAURA EMILY⁵ SESLAR**, b. September 09, 1854, Bloomington, OH; d. April 22, 1935, Northport, Morrill Co., NE. She m. **CHARLES E. YOUNG** April 1872; b. Abt. 1842; d. Bef. 1893.
- ii. **GEORGE ALEXANDER SESLAR**, b. March 12, 1856, Lima, Allen Co., OH; d. January 27, 1932, Northport, Morrill Co., NE. He m. **FLORA BELLE POOLER** December 25, 1888, Lima, Allen Co., OH; b. December 31, 1869, Broadway, Union Co., OH; d. September 29, 1938, Northport, Morrill Co., NE.
- iii. **SARAH JANE SESLAR**, b. June 12, 1857, Lima, Allen Co., OH; d. April 17, 1937, Bridgeport, Morrill Co., NE. She m. **CHARLES ELLIOTT LOGAN** December 09, 1888, Camp Clarke, Cheyenne Co., NE; b. May 30, 1861, Mansfield, Richland Co., OH; d. February 20, 1940, Bridgeport, Morrill Co., NE.
- iv. **VIRGINIA ADELINE SESLAR**, b. October 19, 1859, Bloomington, OH; d. September 09, 1916, Bridgeport, Morrill Co., NE. She m. **GEORGE BENJAMIN KUSHMAUL** December 18, 1879; b. June 15, 1852, Cairo, OH; d. August 17, 1930, St. Helens, Columbia Co., OR.
- v. **MARY MARGARET SESLAR**, b. June 19, 1860, Bloomington, Clinton Co., OH; d. Aft. 1920. She m. **JOHN PATTON** Abt. 1880; b. 1855, OH; d. Aft. 1920
- vi. **WILLIAM TELPHIRE SESLAR**, b. June 19, 1862, Bloomington, Clinton Co., OH. He m. **ADDIE** (unknown).
- vii. **CHARLES MILTON SESLAR**, b. July 18, 1863, Bloomington, Clinton Co., OH; d. March 30, 1904, Bridgeport, Morrill Co., NE. He m. **HELENA VERONA YOCHER**; b. May 31, 1868, IN.
- viii. **ROSABELLE SESLAR**, b. October 16, 1864, Belmont Co., OH; d. March 23, 1928, Cook Co., IL. She m. **JOHN BROOMFIELD** December 19, 1888, Chicago, Cook Co., IL; b. August 1864, Belmont, Ontario, Canada; d. October 14, Cook Co., IL.
- ix. **JOHN BALDWIN SESLAR**, b. September 18, 1867, Lima, Allen Co., OH; d. June 28, 1930, Northport, Morrill Co., NE. He m. **CAROLINE ELISE MILLER** June 29, 1910, Northport, Morrill Co., NE; b. May 07, 1888, Evans, Weld Co., CO; d. May 04, 1963, Laurelwood, OR.
- x. **SUSAN ARWILDA SESLAR**, b. June 16, 1869, Lima, Allen Co., OH; d. January 20, 1954, Houston, Harris Co., TX. She m. **ELLIOTT HIRAM BISBY** February 27, 1889, Pullman, Cook Co., IL; b. April 19, 1863, Vandalia, Cass Co., MI; d. March 11, 1945.

Revised 06/09 & 01/10

THOMAS MARTIN SESLER Abt. 1829 - 1876
and
ELIZABETH MAHALA ALDRIDGE 1833 - 1913

The land office promised each adult male 21 years of age or older 160 acres of virgin soil to develop. In exchange, he was to build some sort of living quarters on the land and occupy it for at least two years. This law was passed to encourage people to develop the raw prairie and sandhills of western Nebraska.. Decisions were made and families came—some from Michigan, others from Ohio, and elsewhere. We came full of hope and enthusiasm for our new life which lay ahead. ‘Anyone with that much land could surely support his family,’ we thought. Well the virgin soil proved to be sand. The weather was harsh—blizzards and subzero temperatures in the winter, and dry, hot and arid in the summer. But there was no turning back. We must make provision for our families who were to follow when we had a house built for them.’¹

Freida M. Steenrod

Thomas Martin Sesler’s life was disrupted and shortened by the Civil War. He was the oldest son of Jane Hibben and Thomas Sesler, born about 1829. At the end of the conflict his record of discharge stated: *“Said Thomas M. Sesler was born in Clinton County in the State of Ohio, is Thirty Six years of age, Five feet Four & Three-fourths inches high, Fair complexion, Blue eyes, Dark hair, and by occupation when enrolled, a Farmer.”*²

A Farmer With A Large Family Serves Twice During The Civil War

Thomas was raised in rural Silver Creek Township, Greene County, Ohio and is recorded as a farmer, age twenty-one, in the US Census of 1850.³ On February 8, 1855 he married Elizabeth Mahala Aldridge in Greene County.⁴ Laura Emily Seslar was born September 9, 1854,⁵ before Thomas and Elizabeth were married. Four more children were born prior to Thomas’ enlistment in the Civil War. Elizabeth delivered a sixth child, William Telphire Seslar, on June 19, 1862,⁶ four months after Thomas had mustered.

*“Thomas M. Sesler, private of Captain I. A. [A. S.] Ballard’s⁷ Company (A) of the 74th Regiment of United States OVI was enlisted by Wm Sesler of the 74th Regiment of OVI at Jamestown, Green Co., O on the 16th day of Feb. 1862 to serve 3 years.”*⁸ Thomas’ military records are contradictory. They record that he deserted at Camp Chase, Ohio on March 16, 1862, but also that he was on sick furlough at Jamestown, Ohio from March 15th through May of 1862. He then was recorded at Nashville, Tennessee in July and discharged with a certificate of disability on September 11, 1862 at Columbus, Ohio. This did not end his military service. He was drafted on September 26, 1864 and assigned to Company E of the 18th Regiment of the Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Again, he became ill. *“Priv. Thomas M. Sesler, Co. 18th Ohio Vols, was admitted to No. 1 B. H., Chattanooga, Tenn. May 3, ‘65 from Regt. with Pneumonia and returned to duty Sept. 22, ‘65.”*⁹ However, by then the Confederates had been defeated and he was mustered out at Atlanta, Georgia on October 9, 1865.

During the War, Elizabeth gave birth to Charles Milton Seslar on July 18, 1863 and Rosabelle Seslar on October 16, 1864.¹⁰ After the War, Thomas returned to farming and in 1866 moved his family to Lima, Allen County, Ohio. Born in Lima were John Baldwin Seslar on

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September 18, 1867 and Susan Arwilda Seslar on June 16, 1869. All ten children survived and married.¹¹

Thomas Dies Of Illness Contracted During The Civil War

Thomas' neighbors, Theoderick Sheley¹² and A. J. Christopher, stated in a pension affidavit:

*"Up to the time of his enlistment into the service above named was a sound healthy man, able to do full hard days work of any kind. They are able to state this fact by reason of having lived near neighbors to him, and from the fact the said Sesler worked for the said Theoderick Sheley for eight or nine years at farm labor before he entered the Army."*¹³

Thomas' sister, Sarah (Sesler) Manges, described his physical condition after the war. *That at the time said Sesler returned from the service he was sick and broken down in health and unable to do any manual labor, that he continued in this condition something like three years, but gradually improved, so that for a few years he was able to perform some labor, but never recovered his health entirely, and was never able to do more than a half days work in one day. That after he moved to Allen County, Ohio, he was not able to do any hard work and very little labor of any kind, he had then become quite feeble from the effect of his disease, and gradually grew worse until he died.*¹⁴

The US Census of 1870 reveals several interesting facts about Thomas and Elizabeth Seslar. At the age of forty Thomas was a farm laborer; his personal property was only valued at \$150; and neither he or Elizabeth could write.¹⁵ Ten years after the war, Thomas Seslar *"died in Bath Township Allen County Ohio on the 14th day of December 1877¹⁶ from the effects of a throat or lung disease contracted while a member of the organization [74th and 18th Regiment OVI] above mentioned in the service of and in the line of duty."*¹⁷

Elizabeth And Her Family Move West To Homestead In Nebraska

When Thomas Martin Seslar died, only his oldest daughter, Laura, had been married. The other nine children were under twenty-one years of age. To survive, Elizabeth put her children to work and, after her daughters married, accepted support from their families. The oldest sons, George Alexander and William Telphire, were sent to live and work on the nearby farm of Elmond E. Hadsell.¹⁸ Daughter Rosabelle lived with Cassius and Eliza Aldridge, employed as a servant.¹⁹ Mary Margaret married John Patton, and at the time the Census was taken she was living with John's family in Clinton County, Ohio.²⁰ Virginia Adeline had also married and moved out with George Benjamin Kushmaul.²¹ Only John Baldwin and Susan Arwilda, the youngest children, remained with their mother.²² The other children were not found in the 1880 Census.

When she applied for a widow's pension in 1883, Elizabeth was living in La Port, Indiana. The family then moved on to the Chicago, Illinois area. Elizabeth is located next in Nebraska in 1886 where she and several of her children homesteaded²³ (Plate 18)

From 1836 through 1868 thousands of emigrants followed the Oregon Trail along the south side of the Platte River. South of Bridgeport the emigrants passed the sentinels of Chimney and Courthouse Rocks. In 1867 the Union Pacific Railroad was built through Nebraska. The same year a toll bridge was built at Bridgeport over the river to Northport and the

towns became a freight junction for trade north and westward. The County of Cheyenne was established in 1870 encompassing 5,100 square miles, and yet, in 1880 had only 1,535 inhabitants. The Court House Precinct which included Bridgeport had just 262 settlers.²⁴ It was in Northport that George Benjamin Kushmaul built a sod house for his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Seslar.

I [Freida Todd Steenrod]²⁵ walked across the prairie to the old abandoned sod house. The door was askew, hanging by only one hinge. The threshold was worn and barely visible, having sunk into the sandy soil. The brush which used to cover the roof had been blown asunder, but still sprigs of prairie grass were clearly visible here and there. I pushed back the door, stepped over the sill, and down on to the dirt floor. I reflected back in time to when a grand old matriarch and one of the original pioneers [Elizabeth Mahala Aldridge Seslar, widow of Thomas Martin Sesler] had lived in this very house. The silence was interrupted by the sound of a rattle snake which had taken up residence in the abandoned sod house. It slithered off and disappeared through a small opening on the other side of the house. Once the snake was no longer a threat, my thoughts turned again to when and how the old house had come into existence.

My grandfather [George Benjamin Kushmaul, husband of Virginia Adeline Seslar] had built the old soddy. He was a kindly, patient old gentleman, and seemed never to tire of answering my many questions about the early 1900s.

“In Ohio, where we came from, there were trees to be chopped down and made into logs, or stone to be gathered and mortared for a stone house. But upon arriving in western Nebraska on the prairies and sandhills, there were no trees for logs and no stones for houses. The only building material we had was the dirt on which we stood, and it was sand.”

“Some of us found that the soil along the North Platte River was clay. Also, in the clay soil grew a weed which was called Black Root. These roots were wire-like and almost impossible to sever. We found by cutting into the sod that these roots meshed together making a thick mat. The sod was either cut with a spade or later with what they called a grasshopper plow which cut the sod deep and square, keeping the wiry roots intact. The sod was cut a foot wide and two feet long, and several inches thick, either by hand or with the plow. Then it was placed on a platform or skid and pulled to the building site. A soddy was usually 16X24 feet, so we first cleared the building site to accommodate this size room when finished. The turf was then laid up quite the way we had done with bricks in Ohio. The first row was laid side by side around the base, except where one door and a window were to be. Two more layers were placed on top and the cracks were filled with sand or clay when we could find it. Every third course was laid crosswise to bind the sides together. A door frame and one window frame were set in the wall and the sod laid up around them. The gables were built of sod. We would then use a forked pole in each end of the cabin for support of the ridge pole. Used boards were then used for rafters and brush covered the roof with a layer of prairie hay for the sheeting. . . .”

Today, it seems good to remember Grandad and this part of my roots. The rattlesnake—well it went about its own devices. I pulled the door

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*closed on the old soddy—abandoned but having been such an integral part of the early pioneer life and the settling of western Nebraska.*²⁶

The caption of an accompanying photo in Frieda's book reads: "*One of first pioneer sod houses built in North Platte Valley owned by Matriarch, Elizabeth Seslar, showing addition and stucco surface, with sod showing through.*" In another photograph, taken after 1910, Elizabeth and six of her children, spouses and grandchildren are posed in front of the sod house. This old soddy was Elizabeth Seslar's home in Nebraska for all of her life. (Plate 18)

In 1910, Elizabeth's health began to fail, and Caroline Elise Miller, a friend of Pearl Inez Kushmaul, came to care for Elizabeth. Caroline noted in her journal:

*I went to stay with Pearl's grandmother Elizabeth Seslar Jan. 18th 1910. . . . John's mother had a stroke of Apoplexy May 21st 1911 at our house. . . . John's mother fell the 21st of Sept. and hurt herself badly. . . . John's mother took another sick spell Mar. 7, 1912, but got better again. . . . John's mother passed away Jan. 20, 1913 and was buried Jan. 22nd.*²⁷

Two obituaries record the length and scope of Elizabeth's life.

*Mrs. Elizabeth Seslar, Morrill County's oldest citizen passed away last Monday, at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Laura Young. At 2:00 o'clock last Monday afternoon, January 20, Mrs. Elizabeth Seslar passed away at the age of 84 years and 10 days. She took up homestead one mile west of where Bridgeport now stands, and for 27 years had been a resident of this community. She leaves nine children, Mrs. Laura Young, George A. Seslar, Sarah Logan, Virginia Kushmaul, Mary Patton, John B. Seslar, Wm. Seslar, Rosa Broomfield, and Susan Bisby.*²⁸

Grandma Seslar was one of those kindly disposed women who was never so happy as when doing a kindness for someone else. A pioneer in the early days of Ohio, she was in demand far and wide at the birth of children and laying out the dead for their final resting place in the bosom of mother earth, at a time when physicians were few and undertakers with modern equipment were unknown. Elizabeth Aldridge was born January 10, 1829 at Bloomington, Ohio. She was married to Thomas Seslar in the place of her nativity in 1855. The fruit of this marriage was six daughters and four sons; Laura Young and George A. Seslar of Northport, Sarah Logan of Bridgeport, Virginia Kushmaul and Mary Patton of Northport, William Seslar who lives in Wisconsin, Rose Broomfield, in Chicago, Charles Seslar, who died March 30, 1904, John Seslar of Northport, and Susie Bisby of Deep Water, Texas.

The funeral services were conducted at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Laura Young, where she died Monday afternoon. Rev. Edmund Thickett, Pastor of the Methodist Church of Bayard, conducted the service. The body was laid to rest beside that of her son Charles in the old Camp Clarke Cemetery, west of Bridgeport.

*When the baby eyes of this woman first looked upon the world, Andrew Jackson was President. There were no railroads, mowers, reapers, sewing machines or any of the modern electrical appliances.*²⁹

Perhaps Elizabeth was re-interred in the Oregon Trail Cemetery. A monument engraved with her dates of birth and death and those of her husband, who died in 1876 have been found in that cemetery.³⁰

Generation 4.1 End Notes:

- ¹ Frieda M. Steenrod, *Blowouts, Blizzards and Bunk, Ghost Town, Northport, Nebraska*, 1989, Tigard, Oregon, [B&B Litho.], Chapter IV, "The Old Sod House," page 26. Recollections of George Benjamin Kushmaul, husband of Virginia Adeline⁵ Seslar (*Thomas Martin⁴ Sesler, Jane³ Hibben, Thomas², John¹*).
- ² Civil War Pension Records, National Archives and Records Administration, Elizabeth Seslar application #262,208, Discharge Certificate dated October 9, 1865 at Augusta, Georgia.
- ³ US Census 1850, M432-683, page 405, household 774, Silver Creek Township, Greene County, Ohio.
- ⁴ Marriage Certificate, certified copy from Probate Court, Greene County, Ohio, July 20, 1882.
- ⁵ Thomas Martin Sesler Family Bible, "Laura Emley Seslar was borned September the 9, 1854."
- ⁶ Ibid. "George Alexander Seslar was borned March the 12, 1856"; "Sarh Jane Seslar was borned June the 12, 1857"; "Virginia Adema Seslar was borned October the 19, 1858"; "Mary Maget Seslar was borned June the 19, 1860"; "William Telfhire Seslar was borned June the 19, 1862."
- ⁷ Major Alexander Selkirk Ballard, husband of Mary Jane⁴ Hibben (*James³, Thomas², John¹*). Mary Jane Hibben was a first cousin of Thomas Martin Sesler living in Jamestown, Silver Creek Township, Greene County, Ohio.
- ⁸ Certificate of Disability for Discharge, September 11, 1862 at Camp Chase, Ohio.
- ⁹ Civil War Pension Records, [Note 2], Widows Pension #205,452, Surgeon General's Office affidavit.
- ¹⁰ Thomas Martin Sesler Family Bible, "Charles Milton Seslar was borned July the 18 1863"; "Rosa Bell Seslar was borned October the 18, 1864."
- ¹¹ Ibid., "John Baldwin Seslar was borned September 18, 1867"; Susan A. Seslar was borned the 16, 1869."
- ¹² Nephew of Margaret Sheley born 1763 and William Hibben born 1767.
- ¹³ Civil War Pension Records, [Note 2], neighbors affidavit, November 11, 1881.
- ¹⁴ Civil War Pension Records, [Note 2], Widows Pension #205,452, neighbor's affidavit.
- ¹⁵ US Census 1870, M593-1168, page 18, household 132, Bath Township, Allen County, Ohio.
- ¹⁶ Civil War Pension Records, [Note 2], Widows Pension #205,452, revised affidavit of Elizabeth Seslar correcting date of death to December 8, 1876.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., original affidavit of Elizabeth Seslar.
- ¹⁸ US Census 1880, T9-990, page 394C, Bath, Allen County, Ohio.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., page 399B, Bath, Allen County, Ohio.
- ²⁰ US Census 1880, T9-1001, page 258A, Bloomington, Clinton County, Ohio.
- ²¹ US Census 1880, T9-990, enumeration 1, page 222, line 25, Shawnee Township, Allen County, Ohio.
- ²² US Census 1880, T9-990, page 399A, Bath, Allen County, Ohio.
- ²³ US Census 1900, T623-919, enumeration 49, sheet 11, line 78, Camp Clarke Precinct, Cheyenne County, Nebraska.
- ²⁴ A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, 1882, Chicago, Illinois, (The Western Historical Company).
- ²⁵ Freida⁷ Todd (*Alice Rose⁶ Kushmaul, Virginia Adeline⁵ Seslar, Thomas Martin⁴ Sesler, Jane³ Hibben, Thomas², John¹*).
- ²⁶ Steenrod, *Blowouts, Blizzards and Bunk, Ghost Town, Northport, Nebraska*, [Note 1], pages 25-28.
- ²⁷ Caroline Elise Miller Seslar journal 1903 to 1914, page 7 to 12; Widows Pension #205,452, Pensioner Dropped Report, Postmaster, Northport, Nebraska; Death Certificate #818, Morrill County, Nebraska, January 23, 1913.
- ²⁸ Newspaper, (unknown), Bridgeport, Nebraska, obituary, about January 25, 1931.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Tombstone engraving, Oregon Trail Cemetery, Bridgeport, NE.