

The Search for Ezra Graham or Was Ezra Graham Really Ebenezer Ryan?

One of the most enigmatic characters in Guernsey County history is the man in whose honor we date our birth, Ezra Graham, said to be the man who operated the ferry across Will's Creek from 1798 to 1800.

But, was there ever a man by that name operating the ferry?

Or was his name, perhaps, Ebenezer Ryan?

In an attempt to find out more about Ezra Graham, the man that is mentioned in all of the Guernsey County histories as having operated the ferry, an intensive search has been made of the records in the courthouses of Guernsey, Belmont, Muskingum and Washington counties, and nothing at all can be found about a man by that name. The card files at the Ohio State Historical Society library in Columbus were checked for that name, and again, nothing can be found. The census records for 1800 were checked, and his name does not appear. In short, aside from our own county histories mentioning him, that name is no where to be found in any records that we were able to search dealing with that period of our history.

It then occurred to us that perhaps the name was wrong. If so, then what name that does appear in our histories is similar enough to Ezra Graham to perhaps have been confused with it after the passage of many years? Immediately, it was noticed that one of the men with Ebenezer Zane when the Trace was established through Guernsey County was Ebenezer Ryan. (Another was Levi Williams, and a Levi Williams did settle in Guernsey County). Again a search was made to see if anything could be found out about Ebenezer Ryan, and the census of 1800 does list him as living in Newton Township, Washington County, Ohio. (George and Henry Beymer are also listed in this census) Since Newton Township took in practically the whole northeastern part of the state, however, the census

alone is not evidence that he was actually living in Guernsey County territory. But at least he was here somewhere, and Ezra Graham was not listed in that census at all. The Muskingum County histories also mention an Ebenezer Ryan as "drifting around" the county in the early 1800s. (Of course, most of Guernsey County was in Muskingum County until 1810.)

It is also highly possible that the name of Graham as the ferry operator mentioned in all of our histories came from one source, the Sarchet family. Henry Howe, in 1846, mentions Graham and he undoubtedly talked with the Sarchet family while in Guernsey County. The Household Guide, in 1882 mentions Graham, but the author undoubtedly also got a lot of his information from the Sarchets. Of course, the Sarchet history speaks for itself. And Wolfe very probably relied on these earlier histories when he wrote his book. So, in 1846, when a Sarchet was talking to Henry Howe, and was telling him about the ferry operator, it seems at least a possibility that, after the passage of 46 years, he remembered the name as Graham instead of Ryan, and that all of our later histories have continued to call the man by the wrong name.

It should be emphasized that we are only setting forth the name of Ebenezer Ryan as a *possibility* in this connection, for except for the fact that there was, in fact, a man by that name with Zane, and who settled somewhere in this part of the state, there is no evidence at all that we have been able to find what links him to the ferry over Will's Creek. Until stronger evidence than we have presently found appears, we will still probably have to assume that the name of the ferry operator was Graham.

But, at least we feel that future historians of Guernsey County, while trying to find out more information about Ezra Graham, should also keep their eyes and ears open for any information that they can find about Ebenezer Ryan, just in case.