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UXORNECRONYMS: A LITTLE-KNOWN NAMING PRACTICE

by Aaron Goodwin



In his slim and excellent volume, *The Name Is the Game: Onomatology and the Genealogist*, NGS Fellow Lloyd de Witt Bockstruck coins the term *uxornecronym*: “the name of the first daughter born unto a second wife honoring the name of the first wife, who had died.”[1] The word combines the Latin term *uxor* (wife), the Greek term *necro* (death), and the Greek term *nym* or *onym* (name or word).

Wait. What?! Is that really a thing? And could it possibly be useful in solving any genealogical problem?

In his 1876 will, Hartley White of Cooper County, Missouri, left his estate “both personal and real” to his wife Nancy White. After her death, however, he willed any property that may be left by her to his “legal heirs[,] the children of my own body hereafter named.” The first child he named was *Aury* Baxter, wife of Edward [*sic*; Edmund] Baxter.[2]

Decades earlier and in another state, Charles Clay and *Orrey* Townsend were married in 1807 in Madison County, Kentucky.[3] Their one known child, Martha Ryan Clay, was born in 1815. Whether Charles and Orrey divorced or whether Charles died young, *Ora* Clay married her second husband, Hartley White, in 1821, also in Madison County.[4]

By 1830, the Whites had migrated to Cooper County, Missouri, where they were enumerated in the federal census. Though Hartley is the only one named, both Ora and her daughter Martha are accounted for as females aged 30–39 and 10–14.[5] Whether Hartley and Ora divorced or whether Ora died shortly thereafter, Hartley married his second wife, Nancy Estes, in 1833, also in Cooper County.[6]

The fact that *Aury* was the first child of Hartley and Nancy (Estes) White is suggested by the order of names in her father's 1876 will, above. Her birth order is confirmed with the 1850 census in which *Aury* Baxter was 16 [born about 1834, a year after Hartley White and Nancy Estes's marriage], and she and Edmund Baxter had been married within the year.[7]

In this case, the use of an uxornecronym solved two problems. First, it helped clarify the first Ora Townsend's name, which has been spelled differently in nearly every record. Further complicating matters, indexers have had a field day trying to determine what that big loop followed by a few short strokes was intended to represent. Her name has been presented as Aura, Aury, Awry, Ora, Orra, Orrey, Oney, Onia, Amy, and Anna. Aury (White) Baxter's name was much more consistently represented over her lifetime, confirming the fact that the name is Ora/Aura, regardless of spelling; not Onia/Oney, Amy, or Anna.

Further, though no divorce or death record has been found for Ora (Townsend) (Clay) White, Hartley White's use of an uxornecronym for his first daughter with his second wife confirms Ora's death between 1830 and 1833.

Going back to my original questions: Is that really a thing? And could it possibly be useful in solving any genealogical problem? The answers are "yes" and "yes."

[1] Lloyd de Witt Bockstruck, *The Name is the Game: Onomatology and the Genealogist* (Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2013), 25–26.

[2] Hartley White will, 17 January 1876, Cooper County, Missouri, Record of Wills, volume B2, 1870–1894, 145–146.

[3] Clay-Townsend marriage bond, 3 June 1807, Madison County, Kentucky, marriage bonds, file 6, 1807–1808 (FHL #183,305, item 2), unpaginated, loose bonds in no apparent order; images from file 6 are not included in FamilySearch's online collection. Also, Annie W. Burns Bell, compiler, *Madison County, Kentucky, Marriages, 1785–1851*, an unpublished typescript

dated 1934 (FHL bound volume 976.953 V25b). Bell mistranscribes her name as *Oney* and the month as January. The general index to Madison County marriages (FHL #1,943,390) does not include this marriage, nor does Madison County, Kentucky, record of marriages, vol. 1, 1792–1843 (FHL #183, 302).

[4] White-Clay marriage bond, 4 January 1821, Madison County, Kentucky, marriage bonds, file 12, 1819–1821 (FHL #4,542,889), unpaginated, alphabetical by surname, image 924 of 1025 at FamilySearch.

[5] Hartley White household, 1830 U.S. Census, Cooper County, Missouri, page 216, line 7 (NARA M19, roll 73); 1 male 15–19, 1 male 30–39, 1 female 10–14, 1 female 30–39.

[6] White-Estes marriage, 31 March 1833, Cooper County, Missouri, marriage certificates book B (FHL #902782), 1.

[7] Edmund Baxter household, 1850 U.S. Census, Cooper County, Missouri, District 23, page 315 (stamped 157), lines 26–27 (NARA M432, roll 397).

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