

# The Road To Poplar—Stewards

By Dave Jordan

The scene is a small home at 1130 Jenifer Street in Madison, Wisconsin, a few short blocks from picturesque Lake Monona. It is 21 June 1907, and it is time to move the aging Elizabeth Holloway **STEWART**, age 82, from the family home to the Dane County Poor House in Verona. Mrs. Stewart, my ggg-grandmother, a longtime resident of Poplar, England, had arrived in America with her daughter and two grandchildren in the summer of 1893 on the *Britannic*<sup>1</sup>, details of which were described in *Cockney Ancestor* (CA 121), “The Road to Poplar—Jordan.” Elizabeth Stewart [c1825] then lived with her daughter, Elizabeth Priscilla **JORDAN** [1847], her son Charles **STEWART** [1853], and three grandchildren, James Oscar Jordan [1868], Charles Jordan [1873], and James Henry Jordan [1879], on Chicago’s west side near Douglas Park. Her son Charles Stewart and grandson James Oscar Jordan had arrived a number of years prior to 1893 and were variously employed with good jobs as electricians, iron fitters, and machinists.

Eventually, the youngest grandson, James Henry Jordan, developed a special skill for winding coils for small electric motors. Around 1904, this talent led to his employment at Wisconsin’s Polytechnic University and shortly thereafter at the large Northern Electric Company in Madison. In February 1907 he married Emma Selena **CHRISTOPHER**, and for a time his small home included his two brothers, James Oscar Jordan and Charles Jordan, his mother, Elizabeth Priscilla Jordan, and his grandmother, Elizabeth Stewart, all who had temporarily moved there from Chicago. It is unclear why they relocated, but perhaps because of James Henry’s improved prospects, his brothers decided to test their opportunities at the Northern Electric Company.

By 1907, Grandmother Elizabeth Stewart had become increasingly senile, so her daughter, Elizabeth Jordan, decided to place her in the Dane County Poor House, about 12 miles away. It was established in 1854 to care for the indigent elderly. By some conveyance, perhaps automobile, Elizabeth brought her mother there on Friday, 21 June. The admitting form stated that she could read and write and that the cause of her pauperism was “old age.” Old Elizabeth would spend almost 10 months here in a quiet country setting, far from the bustle of the city. Perhaps while there, she had peaceful days sitting in the sun and occasional moments of clarity when distant memories peaked through her clouded mind.

The scene reverts to 60 years earlier. It is February 1847 and young 22-year-old Elizabeth **HOLLOWAY** finds herself in one of those timeless predicaments. She is pregnant, unmarried, and without funds. She has been admitted to the *Poplar Union Workhouse*<sup>2</sup> to give birth.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Road to Poplar—Jordans,” *Cockney Ancestor* (CA 121)

<sup>2</sup> [British History On-Line](#), then Poplar High Street South side, then Workhouse.

The Poplar Workhouse was an older facility than the poor house in Wisconsin. Its origins on the south side of High Street date to 1757-1758. Reconstruction of more substantial and larger quarters took place between 1815-1817 and included the large East Wing and a town hall fronting High Street. The buildings were four stories and contained various wards for men and woman. The East Wing, where Elizabeth most likely stayed, paralleled Queen Street, and the impressive front was directly across from Hale Street.

There are not many pregnant women at the workhouse compared to the number of aged and other infirm. In fact, from January 1847 through early March, there were only eight births, half of which were legitimate. Elizabeth delivered a girl on 27 February 1847 and named her Elizabeth Priscilla Holloway. No father's name was listed for Elizabeth Priscilla, and the birth was marked "illegitimate." The child was probably baptized at the workhouse, though the entry is ambiguous. The birth was registered on 22 March in Poplar under the name Elizabeth Priscilla **HOLLOWAY** with no father's name listed. It took many years to find this registration as it was not known she was illegitimate. The custom of the times in such cases was to use only the mother's surname and not enter the father's name. However, the uncommon middle name Priscilla has helped me immensely because she regularly used it in documentation. The guide *Illegitimacy*<sup>3</sup> suggests that one of the child's given names may be the name of the father's mother or grandmother to encourage the father to accept his responsibility. To date this linkage has not been made.

Why Elizabeth went to the workhouse is unknown. Each census indicates that she was born in Poplar around 1825, and thus, her parents must have been nearby. Perhaps they were embarrassed and preferred not to offer their home.

Elizabeth's father was William Holloway. At the time of Elizabeth Priscilla's birth, he worked as a "trenail mooter." A trenail (treenail or trunnel) was a wooden peg used to hold planks together. A moot, or ring gauge for checking the diameters of trenails, helped make them a standard size. Thus, William's job was to bring trenails to the "moot." One can imagine a shop down at the East or West India Poplar docks with men working at all sorts of jobs and William carefully shaving and filing a wooden peg to fit in a standard size ring. What a scene it must have been with wooden ships coming and going, cargo being loaded and unloaded, and ships in dry-dock being constructed and repaired. Our William was likely born about 1800 and married between 1820-1825, but neither of these events nor his wife's name have yet been discovered.

The scene advances to June 1848, 16 months after the birth of little Elizabeth Priscilla. Her mother, Elizabeth, is about to be married at St. Mary's Stratford Bow, which is situated in an island of land in the middle of Bow Road about a mile north of the Poplar Workhouse. The ceremony takes place on Sunday, 11 June, between Joseph **STEWART**, bachelor,

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<sup>3</sup> A McLaughlin Guide: Illegitimacy by Eve McLaughlin, third edition 1985.

and Elizabeth Holloway, spinster. Their witnesses were Edward and Jane Ann **CLARK**. Elizabeth was only able to make her mark “X” on the register.

Joseph Steward’s father, John Isaac Steward, was a shipwright by profession, that is, a builder or repairer of ships. John Isaac was born between 1793-1796, about 110 miles to the northeast of Poplar in Norfolk County. On 26 November 1820, he married Sarah **RICHMAN** at St. Dunstan in Stepney. Sarah was born between 1801-1803 in Chatham in the county of Kent, about 25 miles to the southeast of Poplar. They had five children: 1) Robert Melville (or Melvin), born about 1821-1824; 2) Joseph John, born about 1825; 3) John Isaac, born 2 July 1828; 4) Mary Ann, born 2 May 1832; and 5) Elizabeth Sally, born 3 October 1836.

Our Elizabeth Holloway and Joseph John Steward experienced a 44-year marriage and lived in Poplar all those years. Besides Elizabeth, born 27 February 1847, they had at least four other children: Joseph John, 18 June 1849; Charles Hooper, 27 February 1851; William Robert, 23 August 1853; and Henry, 22 March 1858. Husband Joseph worked as a rigger, which probably involved setting up or replacing the rope rigging for the old wooden sailing ships at the docks. At times he was also employed as a general dock laborer or stevedore.

Joseph and Elizabeth Steward’s son William Robert later chose to use William Holloway Steward; William Holloway being his mother’s father’s name. Son Henry Steward chose to use Robert Henry Steward later in life; Robert Steward being his deceased uncle.

In their early years, the family lived on William Street and then for a number of years on Chrisp Street. At Chrisp’s southern end lies the East India Dock Road and nearby All Saints Poplar parish. In 1851, something must have moved their religious spirit for on 19 March, Elizabeth Priscilla, then 4, Joseph John, almost 2, and newborn Charles Hooper, 3 weeks old, were baptized at All Saints. Although Elizabeth Priscilla may have already been baptized at the workhouse, the ritual was administered again. For Elizabeth Priscilla and her brother Charles Hooper, sharing the same birth date of 27 February appears to have built a lasting bond between them.

After several moves in the 1850s, Joseph and Elizabeth Steward settled in at 20 Wade Street in Poplar sometime before 1871 and continued to reside there for more than 20 years, a long time in one location back then. The area was part of the old Wade estate that had been divided up around 1820 by developers building new homes. Dwellings on Wade Street were attached, multistory brick buildings.

By 1871, daughter Elizabeth Priscilla had married her first husband, but the four sons, aged 14-20, were still at home and working — Joseph, Charles, and Henry as stevedores, and William as a paper hanger. But by the 1880s, the boys had moved on. Charles Hooper Steward, born 1851, appears to have been the first to travel to America. The *Montreal Daily Star* listed a marriage for Charles Hooper Steward and Eveline Annie **MATHERS** for 28 September 1876. Charles and Eveline were still in

Montreal in 1881 and that year's census showed a child named Annie born about 1877. Certainly Charles and probably his entire family then moved to Chicago in the 1880s. Family history suggests that he and Eveline had a daughter, Alice, though probably it was Annie, and that Charles and Eveline (Evelyn) eventually divorced. Charles' choice of Chicago soon became a magnet for others in the family.

Joseph John Steward, born 1849, is said to have migrated to San Francisco, and the family lost track of him.

William Holloway Steward, born 1853, at age 18 married Caroline **HOYLES** on 19 May 1872 at St. Thomas Church in Bethnal Green. He was a paper hanger and by 1891 resided in West Hackney. They had a son William born about 1874.

Robert Henry Steward, born 1858, at age 22 married Mary Ann **SMITH** on 8 March 1881 at St. Jude in Bethnal Green. Robert Henry was with his parents in Poplar for the 1891 census. Robert was a stevedore laborer at the docks. It is not known if he was visiting for the night or if something happened to his wife.

Family history suggests that either William or Robert Henry became a Member of Parliament. It is not known which son achieved this status, though some family history data suggest it was Robert Henry Steward.

Elizabeth Priscilla's life story is complicated and will be the subject of a future article. However, you may be wondering if Joseph John Steward is her biological father. Although we will never know for sure, I believe there is a high likelihood that he is. The publication *Illegitimacy* suggests that a review of those documents that state the relationship between the child and the supposed father can provide clues. For example, in a census listing, is the relationship "daughter" or "daughter-in-law"? In the first census after Joseph and Elizabeth's marriage (the 1851) the relationship is stated as "daughter." Her baptismal records list Joseph John Steward as the father. On both of her marriage registrations, she indicates her father as Joseph John Steward. Another confirm might have been found on the 1861 census, but the Stewards were not found. Elizabeth Priscilla also lived near her parents, generally just blocks away, and her children lived in the Steward household without her on both the 1881 and 1891 census nights. Thus, it does appear that Joseph John certainly accepted Elizabeth Priscilla as his own. The analysis cannot be definitive, but the evidence does appear to tilt towards him as her father.

On 23 October 1892, the vestiges of old age hit 67-year-old Joseph. While still employed as a rigger and supporting his household at 20 Wade Street, he lost consciousness due to a "sudden syncope from heart disease." His resulting death and the presumed need for household income set in motion a sequence of events that led to a change in destiny. By the early 1890s, Poplar's rapidly expanding environment had resulted in a more congested and at times hostile place. There were riots, labor marches, the famous Matchbook Girls strike of 1888, and the nearby Whitechapel murders. Around the same time as Joseph's death, Elizabeth Priscilla's second husband, James Jordan, appears to have died. Thus, we have two widows trying to determine how to survive. Ultimately,

Elizabeth Priscilla Jordan decided to take her two children and widowed mother, Elizabeth, to join her brother Charles Steward and her first son, James Oscar Jordan, in Chicago. In August 1893, they took a few possessions, said goodbye to family and friends and a lifetime in Poplar, and set sail on the *Britannic* from Liverpool to New York. Steerage was £5 per person one way and may have been paid by the boys in Chicago.

This brings us back to the beginning of the story. Elizabeth Steward remained at the Poor House in Verona for 10 months until her death due to pneumonia on 12 April 1908. She was buried in Forest Hill Cemetery in Madison in an unmarked, single grave, far from her beloved Joseph and, as it happens, from everyone else in the family. Seventy years after her death, I re-discovered her.

Her obituary in the *Wisconsin State Journal* of 13 April 1908 states:

Mrs. Elizabeth Steward died at Verona at 4 o'clock Sunday morning at the age of 83 years. She was born at St. Albans, Eng [land]. Her husband Joseph Steward died in England 16 years ago. There are three grandsons, J.H. Jordan of Madison, and Charles H. and J.O. Jordan of Chicago. A daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Jordan, also lives in Chicago. The funeral service will be held at the Schroeder undertaking rooms in this city tomorrow after-noon at 2 o'clock. Rev. A.A. Ewing officiating. Burial will be at Forest Hill.

The reference to “born at St. Albans” is quite puzzling, as the 1851, '71, '81, and '91 censuses clearly state that Elizabeth was born in Poplar. St. Albans is about 25 miles northwest of Poplar. Also curious is the lack of mention of Elizabeth's four sons: Joseph, Charles, William, and Henry.

My father, Edward, loved telling a story about his father, Herbert, who, as a young boy, traveled with his family to Wisconsin one day from Chicago. Upon their return in an old Model-T, the Jordans had seven flat tires. Every few hours they had to jack up the car and put on another patch. My grandmother Elizabeth M. Jordan also recalled that her husband, Herbert, (born 1898) told her that he once visited his g-grandmother Elizabeth Steward in an old people's home. He remembered it being a long trip near a big river. And so the story of Elizabeth Holloway Steward ends, a life bookended by poor houses, but tempered by a long, stable marriage and the care not only of her children, but also her grandchildren. Joseph Steward's grave has not been found but is presumed to be in Tower Hamlets Cemetery. While they cannot be united, I can at least tell their long forgotten story.

## Notes

1. The original *Road to Poplar - Stewards* article was written in August 2009 and submitted to the East of London Family History Society's quarterly publication, the *Cockney Ancestor* for publication. The article was published in August 2010 in *Cockney Ancestor*, No. 127, Summer 2010.

2. This updated version contains recently obtained information about John and Sarah Steward, their son Robert, and also the children of Joseph and Elizabeth Steward.
3. Special thanks are in order to my sister Marianne Garcher for her excellent proofreading and input in the creation of this document.

## File Information

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## What's New

Going forward it is intended to briefly describe what major items were added since the last version of this document.

1. 10/18/2017: Miscellaneous format changes.
2. 12/16/2012: Primarily formatting changes and fixes of a few typo's.
3. 8/11/2010: Initial Jordan Web Publication. Includes additional information not available when published in *Cockney Ancestor*, No. 127, Summer 2010. In particular, there is new information about John and Sarah Steward, their son Robert, and also the children of Joseph and Elizabeth Steward.

## File Connections

As follows are other files that connect with The Jordan Story. All are available at [Jordan PDF Downloads](#) as individual pdf documents with titles and file names as listed below.

The Jordan Story

File: Stories\_Jordan.pdf

Summary: The Jordan Story provides a written history of the origins of our Jordan family. As part of this story there are many appendices and sections.

Recollections of the Jordans

File: Recollections\_Jordan.pdf

Summary: Recollections of the Jordans provides a collection of short anecdotes and memories of our Jordan family.

The Road to Poplar - Jordans

File: Stories\_The\_Road\_To\_Poplar\_Jordan.pdf

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The Road to Poplar - Jordans

File: Stories\_The\_Road\_To\_Poplar\_Steward.pdf

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The Road to Poplar - My Surname is What?

File: Stories\_The\_Road\_To\_Poplar\_Name.pdf

Author: Dave Jordan

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