Maj. James W. Spratley

(2 Feb 1818–14 Dec 1858)

of

Cabin Point, Surry County, Virginia,

Son of Capt. Walter Spratley Sr. & Elizabeth Shackleford,

Husband of Lucy M. Ruffin

by Timothy Dean Hudson

James W. Spratley (2 Feb 1818–14 Dec 1858) was the third son of Walter Spratley Sr. and Elizabeth Shackleford to survive to adulthood [1]. James' mother was still alive in mid-1820 but died later that year or in early 1821 [2]. He grew up on his father's plantation near Cabin Point, an important center of commerce in Surry County, Virginia near the James River.

James' father became terminally ill by 1833 when James was only fifteen. Walter Spratley wrote his will on 25 May 1833, making this bequest to James:

I give and bequeath to my son James W. Spratley my Negro boy William.

Walter Spratley also left his son an interest in his slaves after the death of James' stepmother [3]. Walter Spratley's first cousin, James W. Sebrell, served as the guardian of James W. Spratley during the 1830s. On 12 April 1837, Sebrell gave James W. Spratley $1739 as his portion of the estate of his older brother, Benjamin [4].

It appears that during the latter 1830s, James W. Spratley left Surry and attended school in Petersburg, then in Dinwiddie County. In 1840, he lived in his own household there by himself, but near a group of many other young men aged 20–30, all also living alone. This suggests they were students at a school, perhaps a military academy [5].

Evidence indicates that James W. Spratley enlisted in the military in early 1846 at the beginning of the Mexican-American War, and that he saw action in the conflict. In early 1847, Oscar E. Edwards, a Surry County native but then a resident of nearby Norfolk, was appointed as a captain in the U.S. Army and assigned as commander of Company B of the Voltigeurs Regiment under Col. Timothy P. Andrews for service in Mexico. Edwards recruited men from southeastern Virginia, including many from Surry County, for service in his company. It appears that Spratley served in Capt. Edwards' unit. However, in early 1848, all the recruiting records Edwards had accumulated

were lost, possibly explaining the lack of military service files for Edwards, Spratley, and the other soldiers in the company [6].

In early June 1847, Col. Andrews' Voltigeur Regiment boarded the steamship Massachusetts at Norfolk, Virginia destined for Mexico. When they arrived in New Orleans on June 10th, Capt. Edwards' company only had seventy-one men [7]. The regiment saw active service in Mexico during the summer campaign of 1847 and returned home as victorious heroes. On 29 December 1847, the citizens of Norfolk threw a public dinner to honor Capt. Edwards during his recruiting trip there [8].

In early 1848, the soldiers under Capt. Edwards returned home to southeastern Virginia. On 13 April 1848, Surry County officials held a public dinner to honor Edwards and his men. After dinner, many leading citizens offered toasts to the soldiers present, lauding their courageous efforts at the Battles of Contreras, Churubusco, and Chapultepec the previous August and September. One of the celebration's organizers, Dr. John Nicholas Faulcon, honored his cousin, James W. Spratley, with this toast:

> *Our countryman at Monterey, James W. Spratley: Our best wishes, won at home, attend him in a foreign land.*

This strongly suggests that Spratley enlisted in 1846 and saw action at the Battle of Monterey fought 21–24 September 1846. Spratley's presence at the celebration also implies he was a member of Capt. Edwards' Company [9]. Although the surviving records are fragmentary, the cumulative evidence strongly suggests that Spratley saw active combat in Mexico.

After his discharge, James W. Spratley had joined his older brother, Albert, at his home in Smithfield, Isle of Wight County, presumably helping him operate his planting operation. As hostilities in the Mexican War ceased in early 1848, many United States troops began returning home. In need of an efficient organization in Richmond, Virginia to pay the returning Virginian soldiers, on 23 June 1848, U. S. Secretary of War William Learned Marcy appointed James W. Spratley as paymaster in the U. S. Army. Spratley replied to Secretary Marcy from his residence in Smithfield on July 31st, accepting the position that became effective on August 1st. On that very day, he appeared before a justice of the peace to take the required oath of office [10].

James W. Spratley soon received a commission as major in the United States Army, and he went to Richmond, Virginia to set up his organization to pay volunteers or their heirs three months' salary as authorized by the Act of 19 July 1848. He set up his offices in the Union Hotel in September and issued payments to volunteers in that area in late September. After finishing there, he moved to Alexandria, across the Potomac from Washington, D. C. and issued payments

beginning in late October. Maj. Spratley concluded his work in early 1849 and received an honorable discharge on 4 March 1849 [11]. His appointment as paymaster reflects both his literacy and the trust he held within the region's political networks.

Maj. James W. Spratley returned to Isle of Wight County after his discharge. On Monday, 3 June 1850, he attended a meeting of *"the Democracy of Isle of Wight county"* held at the courthouse. The primary purpose of the meeting was to nominate candidates to represent the district at the upcoming Constitutional Convention. Those present elected Jas. M. Jordan, Esq., as chairman and Maj. James W. Spratley as secretary [12]. When the federal census enumerator visited in October 1850, Spratley lived in the household of his brother, Albert [13].

When Walter Spratley Sr., James' father, wrote his will on 25 May 1833, he named as his executors *"my dear Cousins Peter T. Spratley, Edwin T. Spratley and my dear son Benjamin R. Spratley."* On September 23rd, Walter's son, Benjamin, and first cousin, Peter T. Spratley—son of Thomas Spratley—, filed his will with the Surry County Court and qualified as his executors. Edwin T. Spratley, the son of Walter's first cousin, John Spratley—son of Capt. William Spratley Sr.—, refused to qualify [14]. The Spratleys of Surry formed an extensive kin network, and James moved easily within it.

Peter T. Spratley became a successful planter and businessman in Surry County between 1820 and 1850, and by 1850, he operated two large plantations, one known as *"The Glebe"* of 882 acres, and the other a 1099-acre tract on Cypress Swamp. He wrote his will on 22 March 1852, naming his *"friend and relation James W. Spratley"* as his executor, directly that James be allowed to qualify as executor *"without the usual requisite of giving surety"* [security]. Nevertheless, before allowing James Spratley to qualify as his cousin's executor, the Surry County Court required him to sign a $75,000 bond on 26 September 1853. He spent the next several years administering the affairs of Peter Spratley's estate [15].

On 22 March 1853, James W. Spratley married in Surry County, Virginia to Lucy M. Ruffin (c1833–c1881), daughter of William Edwards Browne Ruffin (c1796–30 Jan 1860) and Martha Ruffin Edwards (c1804–13 Aug 1853). James and Lucy had one child to survive infancy, William Edward Ruffin Spratley, born about 1854. In his will written on 20 April 1858, William E. B. Ruffin left the bulk of his property to his daughter, Lucy M. Ruffin Spratley, and son, and he then added this codicil [16]:

> *I desire that as soon as my debts are paid that my executor above named purchase a gold watch to cost not exceeding a hundred dollars, and present it to my beloved little grandson, with my*

blessing, which watch I request his father my son in law to wear until William Ruffin Spratley my said grandson arrives to the age of twenty one years, unless he may choose to give it to him sooner.

James W. Spratley did not live to fulfill his father-in-law's request. Even when his father-in-law wrote his will in April 1858, James already undoubtedly suffered with that deadly scourge of the era, tuberculosis. James wrote his own will on 24 November 1858, naming his older brother, Albert, as his executor and directing him to *"pay all my Just debts, as soon after my death as possible."* He then directed Albert to take all money owed to James, all money on hand, and that raised from the sale of his property and *"the balance to be paid by my servant John"* and place it in *"some Savings Institution in the City of Richmond paying 6 pr Cent interest."* He directed his executors to use this money to educate his son and help support his wife during her widowhood. James gave *"to my dear wife Lucy"* all the slaves given to him by Lucy's father, William E. B. Ruffin, and as much kitchen and household furniture as she wanted, and he stated: *"I do wish her to take such of the fowls as she may wish or all of them."*

James W. Spratley made careful provisions for the manumission of the enslaved man, John, that he inherited from his older brother, Benjamin:

My Servant John placed in my hands on the 7th January 1858 in part purchase for himself the sum of $512.50. Now if the said Servant John will make up and pay to my executor a sum sufficient when added to the sum of $512.50 already paid, with interest on the same, from 7th January 1858 to make up the sum of nine hundred dollars, then I emancipate and set free the said John, and direct my exor. to furnish him with the evidence of his freedom, but if my servant John cannot at once raise a sum sufficient to make with that already paid, but sum of $900, then he shall have the benefit of his annual hires, until the same shall have been paid to my estate, when he shall be free'd and emancipated as before directed.

Next, James Spratley made this generous bequest to his brother, Albert:

At the death of our Step mother Mrs. Rebecca Spratley my dear brother A. G. Spratley will be entitled to slaves sufficient to work his farm, until that event occurs, my dear brother has not the means of supporting his numerous family without help from me. I therefore loan my said Brother during the life of our Step mother Mrs. R. Spratley the following slaves towit. James, William, Mary, and Fanny with the increase of the females thereof at the death of Mrs. R. Spratley the said slaves will return to my estate and will pass as hereinafter directed to my son William E. R. Should my brother A. G. Spratley desire to purchase any of the slave loaned him as aforesaid it is my will and desire that he may do so by paying my estate such a valuation as may be fixed by any three disinterested persons.

Finally, Spratley left the remainder of his estate, including all interest he had in the estate of his stepmother, to his son, William W. R. Spratley, and he if should die, it went to the children of his brother, Albert G. Spratley [17].

On December 14th, two weeks after writing his will, James W. Spratley succumbed to *"consumption"* [18]. On 13 October 1859, James' widow, Lucy, appeared before the Surry County Court Clerk with her father and brother, William E. B. and William J. Ruffin, and uncle, Jacob Faulcon, and filed notice that she renounced the provisions made for her in her husband's will. Presumably, she did not agree with his generous bequest to his brother [19].

Lucy M. Ruffin Spratley and her son, William Ruffin Spratley, lived with her older brother in 1860 [20]. On 5 January 1864, she married Richard B. Spratley (c1826–1864), son of William Hamlin Spratley (1790/1797–1830) and Sarah B. Pierce. Richard had married on 15 January 1853 to another woman who died before 1860, when he lived alone near Lucy. James W. Spratley and Richard B. Spratley were second cousins, as their paternal grandfathers, Benjamin and Thomas Spratley, were brothers [21].

Although of prime military age, we have no record of Confederate military service by Richard B. Spratley. Tuberculosis plagued many families in Surry and the surrounding region, and the disease may have already compromised Richard Spratley's health. He wrote his will on May 14th, only four months after he married Lucy. He left *"unto my dearly beloved wife Lucy M. Spratley"* all the property he acquired by their marriage. After directing his executor to pay his debts from Spratley's own funds and not using property that belonged to Lucy, he left the remainder to Lucy. Richard B. Spratley died a few months later, and on November 28th, his will was proved before the Surry County Court [22].

In 1870, Lucy and her son, by then sixteen, lived in Surry County on her husband's farm, then valued at $3000. It appears that William Ruffin Spratley died sometime between 1870 and 1880, for we have no further record of him. In 1880, Lucy and her single brother lived together in Surry County. She died about 1881, for the Surry Court appointed an administrator of her estate on 24 January 1882, and her inventory and estate sale were filed with the Surry County Court on 17 February 1882. These records identify Lucy's brother, William J. Ruffin, as her sole heir [23].

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Notes

1. Surry County VA Wills, Etc. Book 6 (1830–1834), pp. 554–557 (Will of Walter Spratley, written 25 May 1833, filed in court 23 September 1833). In his will, Walter Spratley Sr. left a bequest to *"my son James W. Spratley."* See the biography on Walter Spratley Sr. for references to his marriage to Elizabeth Shackleford in 1808.
2. 1820 Surry County VA Federal Census, p. 275a, line #16: Walter Spratley. His household included one male aged 10–16, three males under ten years, and one female aged 26–45. Presumably, Elizabeth is the adult female, as it appears that Walter's older sister lived in the household of their brother, Nathaniel Spratley. Documentation given below shows that Benjamin R. Spratley is Walter's eldest son, making him the male aged 10–16. We only have documentation for two younger sons of Walter and Elizabeth: Albert, born in 1815, and James Walter, born in 1818. The third male under ten is either another son who died young or an unidentified young boy.
3. Surry County VA Wills, Etc. Book 6 (1830–1834), pp. 554–557 (Will of Walter Spratley, written 25 May 1833, filed in court 23 September 1833). National Archives and Records Administration. Publication number: M567. Record Group: 94. Roll #392. *"Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General Main Series 1822–1860."* File #S687: James W. Spratley. Virginia Death Register (1853–1896), LDS Film #004225409, Surry County, Image #108, *"Jas. W. Spratley"* (died 14 December 1858). On 31 July 1848, in his letter to U.S. Secretary of War W. L. Marcy accepting the appointment as paymaster of the U. S. Army, James W. Spratley stated that his birth occurred in Surry County on 2 February **1818**. However, two other records suggest that he erred in giving his year of birth, with his birth actually occurring in **1819**. Both the 1850 census and his death record suggest a birth year of 1819. The date used here for his birth, 1818, is precisely the one included in Spratley's letter.
4. Surry County VA Fiduciary Account Books:
   Book (1831–1839), pp. 258–261: Account of *"James W Spratley orphan of Walter Spratley decd In account with James W Sebrell his guardian,"* filed 26 June 1837
   Book (1840–1848), pp. 200–203: *"James W Spratley orphan of Walter Spratley deceased In account with James W Sebrell his guardian,"* filed 22 April 1844
5. 1840 Dinwiddie County VA Federal Census, *"Petersburg Center Ward,"* p. 45, line #17: Ja^{s} W. Spratly.
6. *"New Orleans Weekly Delta"* (New Orleans, LA), 17 May 1847, p. 5, column 3 (*"Reg't U.S. Foot Riflemen and Voltigeurs…Captains…Oscar E. Edwards, 9 April, 1847, Virginia…"*). National Archives and Records Administration. Publication number: M567. Record Group: 94. *"U.S. Letters Received by the Adjutant General, 1822–1860."* Conflict Period: Mexican-American War. File #E39: Oscar E. Edwards (25 February 1847). File #E81: O. E. Edwards (9 March 1848). Gen. Roger Jones, Adjutant General, appointed Oscar E. Edwards as Captain in the U. S. Army in early 1847. On 9 March 1848, in a letter written in Norfolk, Virginia to Col. T. P. Andrews in Washington, D.C., Capt. Edwards described how he prepared his accounts on a trip aboard a steamboat on the Mississippi River, and upon his arrival in New Orleans, the person he gave it to take to the post office *"accidentally lost it."* Edwards stated of the package:
   > *…it contained one set of enlistments with all my vouchers for recruiting expences* [sic] *&c.. When I commenced recruiting last March I was not aware that it was necessary to take duplicate vouchers, consequently only took one sett* [sic] *which I lost in the package for the 2nd Auditor.*
7. *"New Orleans Weekly Delta,"* 14 June 1847, p. 1, column 2. The article reported the arrival of the Voltigeur Regiment under Col. T. P. Andrews, including Company B under Capt. Oscar E. Edwards with 71 men.
8. *"New Orleans Weekly Delta,"* 17 January 1848, p. 2, column 6.
9. *"Richmond Enquirer"* (Richmond, VA), 2 May 1848, p. 4, columns 5–6 (Proceedings of a public dinner in Surry County, Virginia for Captain Edwards).
10. National Archives and Records Administration. Publication number: M567. Record Group: 94. Roll #392. *"Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General Main Series 1822–1860."* File #S509: Jas. W. Spratley. File #S687: James W. Spratley. File #S916: James W. Spratley.
11. *"Richmond Enquirer,"* September 26 (p. 2, column 6) and 29 (p. 2, column 7), 1848. *"Alexandria Gazette"* (Alexandria, VA), 25 October 1848, p. 2, column 1. Heitman, Francis B. *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, from its Organization.* Vol. 1: *U.S. Army Historical Register*, Part II: *Complete Alphabetical List of Commissioned Officers of the Army*, p. 912 (James W. Spratley).
12. *"Richmond Enquirer,"* 11 June 1850, p. 2, column 1.
13. 1850 Isle of Wight County VA Federal Census, p. 166a, Household #749, line #32: Albert G. Spratley (age: 35); line #39: James W. Spratley (age: 30).
14. Surry County VA Wills, Etc. Book 6 (1830–1834), pp. 554–557 (Will of Walter Spratley, written 25 May 1833, filed in court 23 September 1833). Surry County VA Executors Bonds (1832–1858), p. 19 (Peter T. Spratley and Benjamin R. Spratley, Executors Bond, Will of Walter Spratley, 23 September 1833).
15. 1850 Surry County VA Land Tax Record, LDS Film #4126575, Image 25, Peter T. Spratley. Surry County VA Wills, Etc. Book 10 (1852–1863), pp. 74–76 (Will of Peter Spratley, written 22 March 1852, filed in court 26 September

1853); pp. 85–98 (Inventory, Sale of Peter Spratley Estate, 1853–1854). Surry County VA Executors Bonds (1832–1858), p. 158 (James W. Spratley, executor of Peter T. Spratley, 26 September 1853).

16. Surry County VA Marriage Register (1768–1853), p. 268 (James W. Spratley to Lucy M. Ruffin, date of marriage: 22 March 1853; minister: Jno. C. McCabe); p. 275 (James W. Spratley to Lucy M. Ruffin, license dated 21 March 1853; father of bride: *"Wm. E. B. Ruffin, father"*). Surry County VA Marriage Returns (1785–1854), LDS Film #4131988, Image #98, p. 148 (James W. Spratley to Lucy M. Ruffin, married 22 March 1853 by Jno. C. McCabe); Image #128, p. 4 (James W. Spratley to Lucy M. Ruffin, date of license: 21 March 1853; parent or guardian: *"Wm. E. B. Ruffin"*). Surry County VA Wills, Etc. Book 10 (1852–1863), pp. 411–412 (Will of William Edward Browne Ruffin, written 20 April 1858, filed in court 27 February 1860). 1850 Surry County VA Federal Census, *"the Parish of Southwark,"* p. 100a, Household #648: William E. B. Ruffin (age 53). Virginia Death Register (1853–1896), LDS Film #004225409, Surry County, Image #097, Martha E. Ruffin (died 13 August 1853, age 49, of *"Chronic Dycentary;"* parents: *"Thoˢ & Martha Edwards;"* birthplace: *"Surry;"* husband: *"Wᵐ E. B. Ruffin"*); Image #112, *"Wᵐ E. B. Ruffin"* (died 30 January 1860, age 64, of *"Inflammatory Rheumatism;"* parents: *"Wᵐ & Ann Ruffin;"* unmarried; Informant: *"Wᵐ J. Ruffin,"* son.
17. Surry County VA Wills, Etc. Book 10 (1852–1863), pp. 339–340 (Will of James W. Spratley, written 24 November 1858, filed in court 27 December 1858).
18. Virginia Death Register (1853–1896), LDS Film #004225409, Surry County, Image #108, *"Jas. W. Spratley"* (died 14 December 1858; cause: *"Consumption;"* age: 39; parents: *"Walter & Elizᵗʰ Spratley;"* birthplace: *"Surry;"* wife: *"Lucy M. Spratley;"* informant: *"Wᵐ E. B. Ruffin;"* relationship: *"father in law"*).
19. Surry County VA Wills, Etc. Book 10 (1852–1863), p. 385 (Lucy M. Spratley, *"do hereby forever renounce all the benefit which I…might or may claim,"* 13 October 1859; witnesses: Wᵐ E. B. Ruffin, Wᵐ J. Ruffin, Jacob Faulcon). The document stated:

    I Lucy M. Spratley widow of James W. Spratley…not being satisfied with the provision made for me the said Lucy M. Spratley widow…by the last will and testament of the said James W. Spratley deceased…that the said Lucy M. Spratley widow…do hereby declare that I will not take or accept the provision or any part thereof made for me…
20. 1860 Surry County VA Federal Census, P.O. Cabin Point, p. 89, Household #734, line #35: Wᵐ J. Ruffin (age: 29; Farmer); line #36: Lucy M. Spratley (age: 27); line #37: Wᵐ R. Spratley (age: 6).
21. Surry County VA Certificate to Obtain a Marriage License, LDS Film #4121714, Images #60, 61, 68 (Richard B. Spratley to Lucy M. Spratley, 5 January 1864). Surry County VA Fiduciary Accounts (1840–1848), pp. 15–17 (*"Richard B. Spratley Orphan of William H. Spratley decd.,"* 1837–1840). The Lucy M. and Richard B. Spratley marriage record stated that she was the daughter of *"Wᵐ E. B. & Martha Ruffin,"* he the son of *"Wᵐ & Sally B. Spratley,"* both widowers, he aged 38 and she 32.
22. Surry County VA Wills, Etc. Book 11 (1864–1875), pp. 17–18 (Will of Richard B. Spratley, written 14 May 1864, filed with the Surry County Court 28 November 1864).
23. 1870 Surry County VA Federal Census, Cobham Township, P.O. Surry Court House, p. 114a, Household #167, line #1: Lucy Spratley (age: 37; Farmer; real estate: $3000, personal estate: $150); line #2: William Ruffin [sic] (age: 16; no occupation); p. 126b, Household #347, line #15: William Ruffin (age: 40; farmer; real estate: $10,000; personal estate: $500). 1880 Surry County VA Federal Census, Cobham District, ED #107, p. 45/41b, Household #438, line #44: L. M. Spratley (age: 47; widowed female); line #45: Wᵐ J. Ruffin (age: 48; relationship: *"Bro"*; occupation: *"At Home"*). Surry County VA Administrators Bonds (1859–1891), p. 102 (Blair Pegram, Administrator of Lucy M. Spratley, deceased, 24 January 1882; securities: William J. Ruffin, R. E. Boykin). Surry County VA Will Book 12 (1876–1888), pp. 229–233 (Inventory and Estate Sale of Lucy M. Spratley, filed in court 28 February 1882). Surry County VA Fiduciary Account Book 2 (1867–1897), p. 208 (Lucy M. Spratley Estate, 1882–1883). Although the sixteen-year-old living in Lucy's 1870 household was identified as *"William Ruffin,"* it seems certain that this was a mistake by the enumerator, and he was actually *"William Ruffin Spratley,"* Lucy's son. He could have moved away after 1870 and lived elsewhere in 1880, but he had perished by 1882, when her estate records listed: *"W. J. Ruffin, brother and sole distribute of Lucy M. Spratley, deceased."*

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