Lewis & Lucinda Ogden

of

Union County, Arkansas, & Brazos County, Texas

by Timothy Dean Hudson

Lewis was a man of African ancestry and probably born into slavery. Very little is known of his early life. Two records from 1830 and 1840 indicate that Lewis' birth occurred between 1806 and 1816. A third record suggests that Lewis' birth occurred about 1792, but this one is probably inaccurate. The 1792 estimate conflicts with both earlier and later records and appears to reflect an enumerator's rough guess rather than obtained from a reliable age statement [1].

In 1822, Lewis became the property of Rev. Benjamin Ogden, a white Methodist Episcopal preacher born in North Carolina about 1765. The circumstances that resulted in Rev. Ogden coming into possession of Lewis are also unknown, but the records indicate that Lewis was the only enslaved person Ogden owned [2].

Rev. Benjamin Ogden married Susannah Moore in the early 1790s in North Carolina. They lived in Montgomery County, North Carolina until about 1811. After spending 1811–1816 in Stewart County, Tennessee, Ben and Susan Ogden moved their family west of the Mississippi River and settled in Hempstead County, then the southwestern corner of Missouri Territory. This region became Arkansas Territory when the original Missouri Territory was split in 1819. The Arkansas General Assembly divided Hempstead County in 1829, and Ogden's farm lay in the portion designated as Union County. Rev. Ogden's farm was located a few miles east of the present-day city of El Dorado.

The Ogdens were farmers, so Lewis almost certainly spent the 1820s and 1830s helping Rev. Ogden and his sons, Isaac and Stanley, cultivate the land on which they had settled near modern El Dorado, Arkansas.

By the mid-1830s, Rev. Benjamin Ogden had reached the age of about seventy years. On 28 June 1837, probably in poor health and realizing he was not going to live much longer, Rev. Benjamin Ogden manumitted Lewis, having the record notarized and recorded in the county records [3]:

> *State of Arkansas*
> *County of Union* *Know all men by these Presents that I Benjamin Ogden have this day Emmancipated [sic] my Negro Man Slave Lewis Which Slave I have oned* [sic] *15 years and I Benjamin Ogden do By these presents declare that I no no* [sic] *longer hold the right of property of said Lewis Neither for myself nor my heirs but that he is no longer a bound Slave but his own*

free agent Subject only to the Laws of the Country and God. Thomas Owens done in the presents of and Drury Andrews this twenty Eighth day of June 1837. [signed] *Benjamin Ogden*
Recorded April 24, 1838.

On 9 November 1837, some four months after giving Lewis his freedom, Rev. Benjamin Ogden died *"after a long and painful illness"* [4].

Lewis obtained his freedom at a moment when Arkansas's laws toward free black people were tightening, making his position precarious from the outset. He assumed the surname of his former owner, going by the name of *"Lewis Ogden."* In 1840, Lewis lived near Rev. Ogden's widow and sons, and it appears he remained in the area for the next several decades.

Lewis must have been an industrious man, for he accumulated enough funds to purchase his own wife, Lucinda, known also as Lucy. In 1840, he was enumerated as a *"free colored man,"* with his household consisting of himself and one enslaved female aged 24–36, undoubtedly Lucy [5].

The following year, Lewis had to mortgage Lucinda to a local merchant in order to obtain sufficient supplies to allow him to plant his 1841 crops. This document reveals one of the heart-breaking realities of nineteenth-century life for the enslaved. Arkansas law required that merchandise loaned on credit to farmers be secured by a mortgage recorded in the county records. Lewis owned no land, so he was forced to mortgage the only thing he possessed of any monetary value: his wife Lucinda [6]:

State of Arkansas
County of Union *Know all men by these presents that I Lewis Ogden (a free colored man) have bargained sold and delivered unto Hill & Sargent a certain female Negro Slave named Lucinda, aged about 25 years, of dark complexion, it being the one I purchased of A. Norris for and in consideration of that whereas I have this day given and delivered unto Hill & Sargent my promissory* [sic] *Note for the sum of Five Hundred Dollars and Sixteen cents, due one day after date, and drawing Ten percent per annum interest from date untill* [sic] *paid, it being for value received of them in notes given up and Merchandise, now, if I shall well and truly pay them the amount due on said Note, on or before the first day of March A.D. 1842 then this bill of sale is to be null, but failing so to do I covenant and agree with Hill & Sargent as aforesaid and for the considerations aforesaid that I will warrant and forever defend the right of the said Negro Lucinda unto the said Hill & Sargent free from the claims of any person or any persons claiming the same.* *Lewis Ogden* [his mark]
Attest: J. D. Hill
Recorded March 18, 1841.

It appears that Lewis paid his debt to Hill & Sargent after gathering his crops that year, and he retained possession of Lucy.

These records suggest that Lewis Ogden was capable, resourceful, and self-supporting. Benjamin Ogden could not have manumitted Lewis if he were unable to support himself, for otherwise the court would have held Ogden and his family financially responsible.

The next glimpse of Lewis and Lucinda appears in the 1850 slave schedule of Rev. Ogden's eldest son, Isaac Ogden. He owned several enslaved workers, including an older male born about 1792 and a female slave born in 1816 [7]. Although the age of the enslaved male does not exactly fit Lewis' age, the female is precisely Lucinda's age. Despite the age discrepancy, it appears that older enslaved male was Lewis Ogden.

Although technically a free black man and not enslaved, the enumerator may have classified Lewis as a slave either through clerical error, deliberate misclassification, or because local officials refused to recognize his manumission. Between 1830 and 1850, Arkansas and many other states in both the North and South passed strict laws governing the rights of *"free colored persons."*

Many states passed laws severely restricting the ability of slaveholders to manumit their slaves, and thirteen states, many in the North, passed laws requiring freed slaves to leave the state. These laws and the incredibly harsh climate for free blacks, including the constant threat of being sold back into slavery, caused a marked decrease in the free black population throughout the South in the three decades prior to the Civil War. In 1830, slightly over 8% of the black population was free, while in 1860, only 5.5% were free [8].

Although not clearly documented, it is quite plausible that Lewis and Lucinda Ogden were the older enslaved couple enumerated as part of Isaac Ogden's 1850 household. After 1850, the documentary trail for Lewis grows thin, but the Ogden family's movements can still be traced through the records of Isaac's sons.

Isaac Ogden died in 1859, and his property passed to his sons Nathaniel and Robert. In 1860, Robert Ogden owned eight enslaved people, mostly children with only two adults: females aged 23 and 25. Both of them are too young to be Lucinda, who may have lived with Nathaniel Ogden [9].

During the Civil War, Robert Ogden sold his farm and joined his uncle, Stanley Ogden, and other relatives in Texas. By 1870, Robert Ogden lived in Brazos County, Texas, with Lucy and William Ogden nearby [10].

On 23 November 1874, Willis Van Hook sold Lucinda Ogden of Brazos County one acre of land *"…upon which the said Lucinda now resides…"* In 1875, Lucinda Ogden, described as a *"free colored woman,"* paid taxes on ¾ acre of land valued at $100 and one horse valued at $30. Living near her were *"free colored men"* Isaac Ogden and Jessy Ogden, who jointly paid taxes on one horse worth

$25 [11]. While we cannot be certain that the Lucinda in Brazos County was the wife of Lewis Ogden of Union County, Arkansas, it appears that she is.

Though the records are fragmentary, Lewis and Lucinda Ogden emerge as resilient figures navigating one of the harshest legal landscapes in American history.

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Notes

1. 1830 Union County AR Federal Census, p. 282, line #14: Benjamin Ogden. 1840 Union County AR Federal Census, Franklin Township, p. 220, line #14: Lewis Ogden. 1850 Union County Arkansas Federal Census, Slave Schedule, Harrison Township, p. 567, column 2, line #23: Isaac *"Ogdenrn"* [sic]. In 1830, Benjamin Ogden had only one enslaved person in his household, a male aged 10–24. In 1840, Lewis Ogden was enumerated as a *"free colored male"* aged 24–36. These two records place his birth between 1806 and 1816. In 1850, the only adult male slave owned by Isaac Ogden was aged 58 years and of black complexion. It is not certain that the 58-year-old man was Lewis, but presumably, due to the harsh conditions that free black people endured in Arkansas during the 1840s, he and Lucy chose to be listed as slaves of Isaac Ogden rather than free.
2. 1790 Wake County NC Federal Census, p. 271, line # 25: *"Benj^{n} Ogden."* 1800 Montgomery County NC Federal Census, p. 480, line #5: Benjamin Ogden. 1810 Montgomery County NC Federal Census, p. 23, line #11: Benj. Ogden.
3. Union County AR Deed Book A (1830–1845), p. 55 (Benjamin Ogden Emancipation of Lewis, 28 June 1837).
4. *"Arkansas State Gazette"* (Little Rock, AR), 26 December 1837, p. 2, column 5.
5. 1840 Union County AR Federal Census, Franklin Township, p. 220, line #14: Lewis Ogden.
6. Union County AR Deed Book A (1830–1845), p. 146 (Lewis Ogden mortgages his slave, Lucinda, to Hill & Sargent, 18 March 1841).
7. 1850 Union County Arkansas Federal Census, Slave Schedule, Harrison Township, p. 567, column 2, line #23: Isaac *"Ogdenrn"* [sic].
8. Fogel, Robert William & Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, University Press of America, Inc., 1984. Stampp, Kenneth M. *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. Random House, 1956, pp. 216, 232–234.
9. 1860 Union County Arkansas Federal Census, Slave Schedule, Johnson Township, p. 10, column 2, line #21: Robert Ogden. Unfortunately, both the 1850 and 1860 Union County, Arkansas federal census enumerations are incomplete. Nathaniel Ogden's household was omitted on both enumerations, so the data on any enslaved people he may have owned is unknown.
10. 1870 Brazos County TX Federal Census, p. 26b, Household #32: Robert Ogden (age: 42; Farmer); p. 31b, Household #17, line #36: Lucy Ogden (age: 30; black; *"K. House"*); #37: *"W^{m} Ogden"* (age: 40; black; Laborer).
11. Brazos County Texas Deed Book P, p. 201. Brazos County Texas Tax Returns, 1875.

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