# William Robert Ogden & Eliza Breazeal

**of**

**Hillsboro, Union County, Arkansas**

**and**

**Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana**

**by Timothy Dean Hudson**

William Robert Ogden (Bill) was born on 7 July 1852 a few miles south of Hillsboro in Johnson Township, Union County, Arkansas, the first child of Isaac Nathaniel Ogden [Nathan] (28 Nov 1822–1 Jul 1877) and Elizabeth J. Blanks (1 Dec 1832–6 Apr 1891). Both of his parental grandparents died within a year in 1859 and 1860, and he was only eight years old when the turmoil the nation had endured for years climaxed with the secession of the South and formation of the Confederate States of America. Two of his uncles, Seborn Robins and Robert Ogden, his future uncle and brother-in-law, Reuben S. Breazeal, and his future father-in-law Hosea B. Breazeal all served in various military units during the Civil War.

Bill's father, although about forty years old, was also required to serve in the Confederate Army, but his *"poor health"* prevented military service. In his place, Bill joined the army at the age of eleven or twelve years. No 1860s-era document has survived to show his service, probably due to his young age and the destruction of virtually all records of military units operating in the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederacy after the fall of Vicksburg in July of 1863 [1]. It is not clear if he were ever officially enlisted in a military unit. The only known information comes from Bill's Confederate pension applications in the 1920s and 1930s. A letter written on Bill's behalf dated 23 February 1931 states that he

> *...did not serve in his own name, but on account of his father's poor health the army accepted him as a substitute although he was not old enough to serve himself. He served in his father's place, I. N. Ogden, till the end of the war…He served in the army as I. N. Ogden...*

William Ogden stated that he enlisted in 1864 in Co. F, 5th Regiment of Louisiana Cavalry, under the officers Hammonds and Huddman. He said that he served as a *"Waggoner"* in the Provision Department, driving a delivery wagon at Monroe, Louisiana and performing guard duty at the Ouachita River there. Serving in this capacity, he was discharged in Monroe at the close of hostilities, which was in about June 1865. In an attempt to secure him a pension, two ex-soldiers who were of legal age to properly enlist, W. A. Henderson and John E. Ward, made affidavits in 1921 stating that they personally performed service with Bill in the Confederate Army.

Bill Ogden even wrote to Louisiana Gov. Huey P. Long asking for help obtaining his pension, and Long's reply survives. On 25 October 1930, Bill had a letter written on his behalf (he could not read and write) to the Louisiana Pension Board, stating *"I served in my fathers place (I. N. Ogden) in Civil War and all of my service was in his name..."*

Despite his service and three applications in 1920, 1921, and 1930, William Ogden never received a Louisiana Confederate Pension. The law made pensions available only to men who were *"regularly enlisted in the Confederate States Army."* As a result, despite his efforts, the Pension Board rejected all three of his applications [2].

William R. Ogden was only thirteen years old when the Civil War ended, so his teenaged years and early twenties were spent during the Reconstruction Era. It was an economically difficult period, and as the eldest son, the poor health of Bill's father probably forced more responsibilities on him. One striking way in which the war and the times in which Bill grew up affected his life was his lack of education. The records show that he could not write, as he did not sign his name to his deeds, but always made his mark to them.

Illiteracy was common among Southerners in that era. While many poor farmers had little time for education, illiteracy was rather uncommon for members of Bill's family. Back into the 1700s, the Ogdens had been well-educated: William's great-grandfather, Benjamin Ogden, was a Methodist preacher and signed his name to documents throughout his lifetime. Benjamin's son, Isaac Ogden, served as a Union County Justice of the Peace. Bill's father, Nathaniel Ogden, and all of Bill's siblings could read and write. Undoubtedly, the pressures of Nathan's poor health, Bill's being the eldest son, and his spending his school-age years were spent living through the Civil War, serving in the Confederate Army, and trying to survive Reconstruction all likely contributed to his lack of formal education [3].

On 8 April 1875 William married Sarah Ann Elizabeth Breazeal (7 Jun 1854–18 Sep 1929), daughter of Hosea Bright Breazeal (5 Apr 1813–19 Oct 1891) and Sarah Elizabeth Mayfield (17 Jun 1819–9 Jan 1888) [4]. Known as Eliza or Liza, she was born in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, where her family lived until she was about four. At that time, they moved to Union County, Arkansas, settling near Caledonia and near Nathaniel Ogden's farm. In 1866, William's aunt, Mary Ann Blanks, married Reuben S. Breazeal, Eliza's older brother, just before Eliza's family moved across the state line to Spearsville, in Union Parish, Louisiana. While Eliza's family settled there, William and Eliza remained on his parents' farm in Union County.

Arkansas law required that every credit purchase be recorded with the farmer listing sufficient property to cover the bill and the merchant paying the recording costs. On 10 March 1876, William R. Ogden mortgaged to the firm of William & Smith for $150 [5]:

> *...my entire crop of cotton, corn & fodder that I may produce or cause to be produced through whatever source it being in consideration of supplies furnished me as an advance to enable me to produce said crops. The cotton to be delivered to said William & Smith in good order by the first day of January 1877 either at their store in the town of Hillsboro or at Pigeon Landing…*

Isaac Nathaniel Ogden, Bill's father, died on 1 July 1877, probably succumbing to tuberculosis, the same malady that claimed this life of mother in 1860. Bill undoubtably helped his brothers finish raising the crops that year and paid the debts for the supplies Nathaniel had received that spring. The next year on 27 February 1878, Bill signed a mortgage to J. N. Langford for $80.80 one yellow horse nine years old, ten head of hogs [6]:

> *...marked with split and miller bit in right and under bit in left ear and all the crop of cotton and corn raised or caused to be raised by me on the place I now reside or on any other land I may cultivate during the present year 1878....for the purpose of securing the payment of said note and interest and any other indebtedness that I may contract with said J. R. Langford for supplies, merchandise, etc. which may be furnished me to raise and produce a crop of cotton and corn…*

Sometime during the 1870s, Bill Ogden obtained an 80-acre tract of land adjoining his parents' farm. On 24 March 1879, for $100 due the next December 1st, he mortgaged this 80-acre tract and

> *...all Rents that may acrue* [sic] *from said lands this year (The space now being Rented to J. M. Cabiness) and also all the Cotton I shall raise or cause to be raised the present year 1879*

to J. W. and J. R. Langford [7]. This J. M. Cabiness was the same man to whom Nathaniel had rented before his death. The following spring, on 3 April 1880, Bill again mortgaged his 80-acre farm to Cabiness for $150 due December 1st. He also mortgaged one bay horse aged four years and one cow [8]. There is no further record of Bill's owning or selling this 80-acre tract in Union County, Arkansas. He did not mortgage any crops in this last deed, for he had moved south to Louisiana by this time, farming there instead of in Arkansas.

During the winter of 1879–1880, Bill and Eliza, their three-year old son James Robert, and their newborn daughter Bettie moved from William's homeplace near Hillsboro a few miles south to northern Union Parish, Louisiana [9]. They settled near her parents on land that adjoined that owned by Liza's brother, Hosea Woodford Brazeal, renting the property for a fixed sum of money. The enumerator of the 1880 federal census recorded Bill and Eliza's family as adjoining Woodford's [10].

The census enumerator recorded in the spring of 1880 that Bill's rented farm was valued at $300, consisting of 15 acres of tilled land and 60 acres of woodland and forests. He had apparently left the bulk of his cattle and hogs in Arkansas, for his livestock was only valued at $75, including one horse, five hogs, and ten chickens that yielded 10 dozen eggs in 1879. He had one cow who died or strayed and was not recovered. The census marshal valued Ogden's 1879 farm production at $300, including [11]:

**1880 Union Parish, Louisiana Federal Census, Agricultural Schedule**
**Rented Farm of *"Wm Ogdon"***

Value of 1879 Farm Production: $300

| Acres in Indian Corn | Bushels Indian Corn | Acres in Cotton | Bales of Cotton | Bushels of Cow Peas | Acres in Sweet Potatoes | Bushels Sweet Potatoes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 120 | 10 | 4 | 20 | 1 | 50 |

Bill and Eliza Ogden remained at Spearsville for the next six or seven years, with their second son, Minor, born there in 1882, and their daughter, Martha, in 1885. Bill paid Union Parish taxes each year between 1880 and 1886. By the latter year, they either moved or Bill rented additional land, for he was assessed parish taxes on 120 acres of land in 1886. In 1888, Bill was only assessed for his white poll tax, not any livestock or other property. By that year, they had undoubtedly moved back across the state line into Union County, Arkansas, where they farmed for the next decade [12].

In the 1880s, William R. Ogden acquired ownership of an 80-acre farm located about four miles west of his parents' farm and nearly two miles east of Catesville, on the north side of Bayou de Loutre. William farmed this land himself during the late 1880s and 1890s. His and Eliza's last two children were born there: Annie in 1890 and Rosa Lea in 1892. On 20 February 1889, for an advance of supplies valued at $250, he mortgaged to the firm of Alphin, Tatum, and Cummings one dun mare aged nine years, one white milk cow, one black milk cow, and their two calves marked with an underbit in each ear and split in the right ear. He also mortgaged *"…all the cotton and corn which he may make or cause to be made in Union County…,"* with payment due later that year on November 1st. Bill stated that he planned to cultivate 18 acres in cotton and 14 in corn [13].

The same day next year, 20 February 1890, Bill again signed a mortgage to Alphine & Pinson for the same property as the year before for an advance of supplies valued at $300, with payment due December 1st. He again planned to plant eighteen acres in cotton and fourteen in corn on his farm [14]. On 3 April 1891, for an advance of supplies valued at $400, he mortgaged to Alphin & Pinson his 80-acre farm, one thimble skein wagon, one sorrel mane mule 15 years old, three head of cows, and his corn and cotton crops raised in Union County due October 1st. He increased his acreage for 1891, planning to plant twenty acres in cotton and fifteen in corn [15]. The next spring, he mortgaged his Union County crops, consisting of fifteen acres planted in cotton and fifteen in corn, to J. B. Moore and J. H. Pinson for $150 due November 1st [16].

It took Bill Ogden and his siblings at least forty years to dispose of their interest in their parents' farm. On 4 December 1885, Bill, his mother, and other siblings sold a portion of it to their brother, Isaac. Bill's mother, Elizabeth J. Blanks Ogden, died on 6 April 1891 at the age of only fifty-eight, and on 5 June 1897, William and his siblings sold another forty acres of their parents' old farm to Isaac [17].

Twenty-eight years later, on 2 April 1925, Bill and Eliza Ogden made a quit-claim deed to his brother, Isaac N. Ogden, for 10 acres in Union County, Arkansas. This was apparently land that at one time belonged to their parents [18].

Bill's maternal grandmother, Temperance Riley Blanks, lived to the age of nearly ninety-three, dying on 6 March 1894. William's uncle, Seborn Robins, did not live but slightly more than a week after his mother's death, as he died on the 18th. Seborn had lived alone with his mother since the end of the Civil War, a widower whose wife died childless before 1870. Since Seborn Robins had no children, Bill and his siblings, along with their aunt, Mary Ann Blanks Breazeal, were Robins' surviving heirs. They all sold Robins' 116-acre farm that adjoined that of Nathan and Elizabeth Ogden on 26 January 1900 [19].

In 1896 and 1897, the north Louisiana and south Arkansas region suffered a devastating drought, with most crops failing or producing only a fraction of what they usually did. Bill and Eliza seemingly survived the crisis, and on 20 January 1898, for an advance of supplies valued at $400, they mortgaged their 80-acre farm in Union County plus all their cotton and corn grown there that season to the firm of A. L. Alphine. They planned to plant twenty-five acres in cotton and twenty in corn [20].

The effects of the drought or the deaths of Bill's mother and grandmother may have caused Bill and Eliza to move back across the state line and settle near her relatives at Spearsville, Louisiana. Bill Ogden last planted a crop in Union County, Arkansas for the year 1898, and on 31 October

1898, they sold their Union County farm to W. M. Swilley for $225 [21]. They then moved across the state line to a 160-acre tract of vacant government land north of Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana near Eliza's brothers Hosea Woodford and Elijah W. Brazeal. They established residence on this property on 23 December 1898, according to their Homestead Application for the tract. When he filed his application, Bill stated,

> *…that on account of the great distance and my limited financial means, I am unable to appear at District Land Office to make affidavit...*

The homestead process required Bill and four neighbors to give depositions pertaining to his settlement on and cultivation of the land. On 26 April 1904, S. Richard Templeton, aged 63, and William J. Shimpock, aged 25, of Spearsville testified that the 160-acre tract of land on which Bill Ogden had settled was *"ordinary timbered agricultural land,"* and that Bill *"…has never been away over 2 days at a time & only one time has the entire family been absent as long as overnight."* He cultivated thirty-five acres of this tract in 1899, 1900, and 1901, forty-five acres in 1902, and 1903, and he had fifty acres cleaned, fenced, and ready for cultivation by 1904. Bill stated that his family consisted of himself, his wife, and four children (Bettie, Minor, Annie, and Rosa Lee), and that they had continuously resided on the land. He also stated:

> *…when I established residence on the land I lived in a log house which was already on the land. My present dwelling was put on the land in the winter of 1901, and my former dwelling was converted into a (?). Improvements: Frame house–four rooms, hall, gallery in front and behind, wells, garden, orchard, 2 cribs, 2 cotton houses, cowshed, wagon and buggy shed, yard, 20-acre pasture fenced, & 50 acres cleared fenced and in cultivation.*

Bill Ogden valued the improvements he had made to the land at $250, and he received a final certificate for the tract on 3 May 1904. The 1900 census shows Bill, Eliza, and their children living on this land [22].

For the next fifteen years, Bill and Eliza Ogden lived on their farm north of Spearsville. Although Bill was raised as a Methodist and probably attended the Olive Branch Methodist Church as a child, as an adult, he became a Primitive Baptist like the Breazeals. Eliza's father had joined the New Hope Primitive Baptist Church at Spearsville and served as the church clerk between 1880 and 1887. Bill and Eliza joined the Smyrna Primitive Baptist Church near their home in Union County during the 1890s, and after they settled in Spearsville in 1898, they joined the New Hope Church.

On 2 September 1909, Bill Ogden signed an oil and gas lease to J. W. Elder for 130 acres of his farm [23]. By 1910, the only unmarried child of Bill and Liza was Annie. However, their married

children Bob, Minor, and Rosa Lea Smith all lived on adjoining farms, and Bettie Rockett and Martha Templeton lived nearby with their families [24].

William cultivated his land a few miles north of Spearsville until about 1917. On 13 January 1912, he obtained farming supplies from W. R. Swilley at El Dorado, Union County, Arkansas. For an advance of $90.00 of supplies, he mortgaged to W. R. Swilley one two-horse road wagon, one *"black horse mule 5 years old named Nig,"* and one *"black horse mule 15 years old named Alex."* On 8 January 1914, on letter-head stationary reading *"W. M. Swilley & Sons; El Dorado, Arkansas,"* addressed to Clerk, Farmerville, La, is a note signed by W. M. Swilley stating [25]:

> *Dear Sir, Please satis*[sic] *record against W. R. Ogden in favor of me for $90.00 he has paid us in full.*

Between 1915 and 1917, Bill and Liza Ogden began the process of retiring. They disposed of their farm, selling forty acres in 1915 and ninety acres in 1917 [26]. The land sold in 1915 and 1917 appears to have been their fields, with Bill and Eliza retaining possession of the 30 acres that included their home. On 25 March 1920, they sold their home to H. T. Rockett and his wife, Verma Davis Rockett, for $300 [27].

After selling their home in 1920, Bill and Eliza Ogden lived with their children, primarily with their daughter, Bettie Ogden Rockett, and son, James Robert Ogden. William and Eliza's youngest child, Rosa Lea, died on 20 February 1929. Later that same year, Sarah Ann Elizabeth Breazeal Ogden died on September 18th at the home of her daughter, Bettie Ogden Rockett.

William R. Ogden spent the remainder of his life living with his children. One granddaughter recalls him eating rice with milk for breakfast [28]. Shortly before Christmas Day 1942, he had a heart attack. He died at the home of his eldest son, Bob Ogden. Elder Reason W. Rhodes, pastor of New Hope Primitive Baptist Church, conducted the funeral services [29]. Bill Ogden is buried beside his wife and near her siblings and parents in the Spearsville Cemetery [30].

Bill Ogden and Eliza Breazeal's lives reflect the resilience and instability of small farmers navigating war, Reconstruction, and the shifting agricultural economy of the South.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

## Notes

1. For many soldiers in Confederate units stationed in Louisiana in 1863, 1864, and 1865, there are no military records after their paroles at Vicksburg in July of 1863. However, their or their widow's pension applications do prove they served during this period. Many records of the Trans--Mississippi Department of the Confederate States of America, which included Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, were burned before the end of the war to prevent their falling into enemy hands.
2. Louisiana Confederate Pension Application #16723 (filed 21 May 1920, 1 October 1921, and 5 November 1930; rejected 15 June 1931), William R. Ogden, Union Parish. The last time he applied, William filed his application under the name of *"William Robert Ogden, Served for Nathaniel Ogden."* The letter quoted here was written by Hugh T. Rockett, a neighbor of William's in Union Parish, Louisiana.
3. The statement that Bill Ogden could not write is based upon the numerous legal records made between 1876 and 1930 to which he made his mark rather than sign his name. The county recorders did indicate that William signed a crop mortgage in 1879, as well as the deed of Nathaniel and Elizabeth's heirs in 1885. However, those records are presumably mistakes, given the large number of other records that he made his mark to. Oddly, the 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 Federal Censuses show William could read and write.
4. Union County AR Marriage Book D, p. 2. Her name was incorrectly given as *"Mary Eliza."* Throughout the 1600s, 1700s, and early 1800s, this surname was spelled in a variety of ways, depending on who was writing the records. *"Brazeal"* seems to have been the most accepted spelling, pronounced like the South American country. However, during the mid-1800s, some of the family began spelling it *"Breazeale," "Brazzeal,"* and later, *"Breazeal."* Although an educated man who served as church clerk and justice of the peace, Hosea was inconsistent with how he signed his own surname, using both *"Brazeal"* and *"Breazeale."* He seems to have paid little attention to the spelling he used, as he signed it in differing ways even within the span of a few months. In his own family Bible, he would use one spelling for one child and another spelling for the next child. During the 1870s and 1880s, Hosea and his sons typically used the spelling *"Brazzeal,"* which is how their names are spelled on Hosea's and his wife's tombstones in the Spearsville Cemetery. By around 1900–1910, his children began consistently using the spelling *"Breazeal,"* which is the one in use today.
5. Union County AR Deed Book U, p. 478.
6. Union County AR Deed Book Y, p. 154. J. R. Langford certified that the mortgage had been satisfied on 13 August 1879.
7. Union County AR Deed Book Z, p. 507. This land was the SE¼ of SE¼ of Section 5 and the NE¼ of NE¼ of Section 8, Township 19 South, Range 14 West. There is no deed in Union County showing Bill Ogden's purchase of this tract, nor is there any recorded deed in which he sells it.
8. Union County AR Deed Book BB, p. 200.
9. The date of the Ogdens' move is based on the birthplaces of their children, and their appearance on the 1880 Union Parish, Louisiana Federal Census. William's daughter Bettie was born in Arkansas in September, according to this census. Later records give Louisiana as Bettie's birthplace, where the next few of William and Eliza's children were born in 1882 and 1885. However, in 1880, Bettie was only eight months old, and that document would likely record her correct birthplace as opposed to the later ones. In the 1980s, Bettie's stepdaughter, Odessa Rockett Post, said Bettie was born *"across the Loutre"* from the Camp Creek Community, putting her birthplace in Arkansas.
10. 1880 Union Parish LA Federal Census, Ward 3, ED #87, p. 461a–b/14–15, Dwelling #124, line #45: Woodford Brazzeal; Dwelling #125, line #48: *"W^m Ogdon"* [sic].
11. 1880 Union Parish LA Federal Census, Agricultural Schedule, Ward 3, ED #87, p. 9, #4: *"W^m Ogdon"* [sic].
12. Union Parish LA Tax Assessments, 1880–1884, 1886–1888. In the 1885 and 1887 assessments, the names beginning with the letter "O" are missing.
13. Union County AR Deed Book LL, p. 187.
14. Union County AR Deed Book LL, p. 481.
15. Union County AR Deed Book MM, p. 352.
16. Union County AR Deed Book NN, p. 28.
17. Union County AR Deed Book JJ, p. 164; Deed Book 14, p. 645.
18. Union County AR Deed Book 196, p. 629. It was for the W¼ of SE¼ of SE¼ of Section 5, Township 19 South, Range 14 West. This was part of the land owned by William in 1879 and 1880, for which we have no record of his selling.
19. Union County AR Deed Book 14, p. 303
20. Union County AR Deed Book PP, p. 361. It was marked *"satisfied,"* on 8 December 1898.
21. Union County AR Deed Book 258, p. 281. Bill and Liza's farm was the SE¼ of the SE¼ of Section 34 and the SW¼ of SW¼ of Section 35, Township 18 South, Range 15 West.
22. New Orleans, Louisiana Land Office, Homestead Application #19764, filed 14 January 1899 (William R. Ogden, for the NE¼ of NW¼, the W½ of NE¼, and the NE¼ of NE¼ of Section 19, Township 23 North, Range 2 West, 158.13

acres). 1900 Union Parish, Louisiana Federal Census, Ward 3 *"all west of ten mile creek,"* p. 77, #132: William Ogden. On the day he filed his application, William said he was born in Johnson County, Arkansas, but he meant to state that he was born in Johnson Township, Union County, Arkansas. He paid $13.95 at that time for the land. The final certificate was #11957. William was not issued a U. S. patent for his homestead until 24 April 1925. This was recorded in Union Parish LA Deed Book 55, pp. 473, 490.

23. Union Parish LA Deed Book 22, p. 237. Lease was for the N½ of NE¼, the SW¼ of NE¼, and 10 acres in the SE¼ of NW¼ of Section 19, Township 23 North, Range 2 West. The deed said this was only for 130 acres, so presumably this excluded the 30 acres containing his home.
24. 1910 Union Parish LA Federal Census, Ward 3, 22 April 1910, p. 61, #79 William Ogden.
25. Union Parish LA Mortgage Book P, p. 244.
26. Union Parish LA Deed Book 26, p. 37; Mortgage Book Q, p. 424 (William R. Ogden to J. F. Risinger, 17 February 1915). Union Parish LA Deed Book 30, p. 434 and Mortgage Book R, p. 492 (William R. Ogden to J. M. Sumners, 31 October 1917). In 1915, for $100, Ogden sold this 40-acre tract to Risinger: NE¼ of NE¼; in 1917, for $550, Ogden sold this land to Sumners: NE¼ of NW¼, the NW¼ of NE¼, and 10 acres on the north side of SW¼ of NE¼ all in Section 19, Township 23 North, Range 2 West.
27. Union Parish LA Deed Book 38, p. 422; Deed Book 54, p. 386. He sold the SW¾ of SW¼ of NE¼ of Section 19, Township 23 North, Range 2 West. They made a correction deed to Rockett on 19 March 1924 since the land description given on the 1920 document above was in error. The correct description of the thirty acres they sold is S½ of SW¼ of NE¼ of Section 19, Township 23 North, Range 2 West.
28. Recollection of Aletha Rockett Everett, granddaughter of William R. Ogden.
29. *"The Gazette"* (Farmerville, LA), 31 December 1942, p. 1.
30. Spearsville Cemetery (Spearsville, Union Parish LA), tombstones of *"William Robert Ogden"* (7 Jul 1852–28 Dec 1942) and *"Eliza Ogden"* (7 Jun 1854–18 Sep 1929).

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦