

**Barbara Blount\*** (1792 Sept 16 - 1836 Nov 30)  
(Eighth child and third daughter of William & Molyse Blount)

Compiled for Blount Mansion Association by Dean Novelli, 2020.

**GENEALOGICAL DATA:**

**BORN:** 1792 Sep 16 Barbara's Hill, Knoxville, Tennessee  
**DIED:** 1836 Nov 30 Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama  
**AGE AT DEATH:** 44 yrs., 2 mos., 14 days  
**BURIED:** Church Street Cemetery, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama

**PARENTS:** William Blount (1749 March 26 - 1800 March 21) age 50  
MARRIED 1778 Feb 12  
Mary "Molyse" Grainger (1760 -1802 Oct 7) age 42  
William and "Molyse" Blount had nine (9) children; five  
(5) boys and four (4) girls, seven (7) lived to adulthood

**SIBLINGS:** Eighth of nine children of William and "Molyse" Blount; see list  
of siblings under parents' genealogical entries

**MARRIAGES:** Married once, preceded her husband in death  
**HUSBAND:** Edmund Pendleton Gaines (1777 Mar 20 - 1849 June 6); this  
was his second of three marriages  
**MARRIED:** 1815 August 7 at Blount Mansion, Knoxville, TN  
**AGES :** Barbara 23, Edmund 38; a fifteen (15) year difference

**CHILDREN:** Barbara and Edmund are reported to have as many as three children;  
confirmed records exist for only one child

Edmund Pendleton, Jr. (1820 Oct 14 - 1904) age 84

**EDUCATION:** Received some education at home and later at Blount College, with  
Rev. Samuel Carrick president/teacher; as a result of her  
attendance at Blount College, Barbara is considered the first  
university-level co-ed in American history

\* There is some dispute as to whether Barbara had a middle name or not. Some sources call her Barbara Gray Blount for father's mother. While another list's her as Barbara Grainger Blount, using her mother Mary Grainger's maiden name. After she is married her name is sometimes written as Barbara B. Gaines where her maiden name Blount is apparently being referenced. However no Blount family records or other civil documents list a middle name for her. Hence "Barbara Blount" (no middle name) has become the accepted use at Blount Mansion National Historic Landmark.

## **Barbara Blount** (1792 Sept 16 - 1836 Nov 30)

### **CHRONOLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS:**

- 1792 Construction of Blount Mansion begins; family lives on farm where "The Hill" (aka Barbara's Hill or Ayres Hill), UTK is located today  
Sept 16 BORN: Barbara Blount on Barbara's Hill; eighth child / third girl of William and Molsey Blount; their first child born in Knoxville
- UNKNOWN MOVED: into Blount Mansion (probably late 1792 or early 1793)
- 1793-94 September TRAVELED: Likely went with her mother, Molsey to North Carolina, where some or all of the family (except her father William) spent the winter
- 1794 RETURNED: to Knoxville with her mother, Molsey after spending the winter in North Carolina
- 1796 Fall TRAVELED: Likely went with her mother, Molsey to North Carolina where she stayed with her aunt Mrs. Harvey while her parents travelled to Philadelphia
- 1797 July INJURED: Barbara's mother Molsey shattered her arm in a carriage accident near Raleigh, NC en-route to Knoxville  
July: Barbara's father William Blount, a US Senator from TN is EXPELLED by the US Senate and IMPEACHED by the US House
- 1798 June RETURNED: to Knoxville with her mother, after Molsey spent a year convalescing in North Carolina following a carriage accident
- 1800 March <10 DIED: Mrs. Mary Grainger, Barbara's maternal grandmother  
March 21 DIED: William Blount, Barbara's father  
May ATTENDING SCHOOL: Barbara, age 8, was reported to be attending school in Knoxville but not at Blount College
- 1802 DIED Oct: Mary "Molsey" (Grainger) Blount, Barbara's mother
- 1804 ATTENDED: started at Blount College where Barbara was described as being "attentive, diligent and ingenious"
- 1805 May 21 DIED: Anne "Nancy" Gray Blount at "Blount Mansion" in Knoxville; buried as "Annie Harvey" in First Presbyterian Church Cemetery, State Street, Knoxville, TN
- 1815 MARRIED: Barbara Blount to Edmund Pendleton Gaines

- 1815 - 36 LIVED: Over the next twenty (20) years, Barbara, now an "army wife" moved with her husband as he was posted around the country including: Alabama, Georgia; Florida; Ohio; New York; West Tennessee; and finally New Orleans, Louisiana
- 1819 TRAVELLED: Gen. and Mrs. Gaines escorted President James Monroe and wife from South Carolina to Tennessee
- 1820 BORN: Edmund Pendleton, Jr. (1820 -1904), at Charleston, South Carolina, a son, Barbara and Edmund's first child
- 1836 POSTED: to New Orleans, Louisiana where Barbara caught Yellow Fever when an endemic broke out that summer  
Nov 30 DIED: Barbara (Blount) Gaines, age 44, at Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama of Yellow Fever; buried in Church Street Cemetery, Mobile, Alabama
- 1892 ADMITTED: to the University of Tennessee for the first time, women  
FOUNDED: newly admitted University of Tennessee Co-eds form the Barbara Blount Literary Society  
NAMED: an existing building is dedicated as Barbara Blount Hall, the first women's dormitory on University of Tennessee campus
- 1903 NEWLY NAMED: a new building designed and constructed as a women's dormitory was dedicate as Barbara Blount Hall; previously named hall is razed
- 1943 REPURPOSED: the Barbara Blount Hall is turned into a men's dormitory during World War II
- 1977 RAZED: Barbara Blount Hall is razed to the ground; no other buildings on campus are currently named in her honor (Blount Hall honors Wm Blount)

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH of:**

**Barbara Blount** (1792 Sept 16 - 1836 Nov 30)

### **FAMILY BACKGROUND**

See entry under parents William Blount (1749-1800) and Mary "Molsey" Grainger (1760 - 1802) for Family Background

### **LIFE SUMMARY**

Barbara Blount, reportedly a striking redhead, was born September 16, 1792 to William Blount and Mary "Molsey" Grainger in a log cabin on a hill — later called Barbara's Hill, now a part of the University of Tennessee campus — just west of Second Creek near Knoxville, Knox County, Tennessee. William and "Molsey" Blount had nine (9) children; five (5) boys and four (4) girls, seven (7) lived to adulthood (four (4) girls, three (3) boys). Barbara is the eighth child and third girl born to the Blount's. She was named Barbara for her father's mother Barbara Gray.

William Blount, like his father Jacob, was a successful businessman involved in plantations, mills and distilleries, import and export, lending money for interest, and as a means to further his business ambitions politics — local, state and national. But above all else, William was a land speculator. Blount's success and his failure, as well as that of his siblings, notable Thomas and John Gray, casts a long shadow that his children will grow up under.

Shortly after Barbara was born the family moved into the newly complete Blount Mansion. Because of her age it is likely Barbara travelled with her mother to North Carolina on the several extended trips that Molsey Blount made there in 1793-94 and 1796-98. It is also probable that Barbara was in the carriage accident, July 1797, when her mother's arm was shattered. But apparently she and her little sister Eliza, five and three years old respectively, were uninjured.

In March 1800, when Barbara was eight years old, tragedy struck a double blow to the family when a deadly "bilious fever" swept through Knoxville. First her maternal grandmother, Mrs. Mary Grainger and then her father, William Blount died less than two weeks apart. (See Wm. Blount bio sketch for details.)

Further tragedy befell Barbara and her siblings when in October 1802 their mother Molsey died. The five minor children were now orphans. (Nancy and Mary Louisa were already married.) The girls, Barbara and Eliza, became wards of their married sister Mary Louisa and her husband Pleasant Miller. The boys, Billy, Richard and Jacob, became wards of their Uncle Willie Blount and Hugh Lawson White. Where Barbara lived (as well as Richard, Jacob and Eliza) after her mother's death isn't known. Most likely the four youngest Blount Children went to live with the Millers on Barbara's Hill. Their Uncle Willie had recently married and moved to Montgomery County (Clarksville area) north of Nashville with his wife. Their oldest brother Billy, soon to turn twenty-one, apparently inherited or at least continued living in Blount Mansion. Little else is known for certain of Barbara's early childhood except for several references to her education.

Barbara's uncle, Willie Blount (her father's younger half-brother), writing to another Blount brother Jacob, shortly after William Blount's death detailed the school arrangements that had been made for the children:

"— I have put my Nephews William, Richard and Jacob to School about ten miles from here under a good teacher — they learn with much ease to themselves any thing they attempt the Study of — Barbara goes to school in this town and is sometimes accompanied by Eliza, the principle benefit children of their ages receive at school is to be kept out of mischief and free from contracting bad habits —"

[Willie Blount to Jacob Blount, 1800 May 25, from Knoxville, TN]

The "good teacher" was the Rev. Samuel Carrick. The school was Blount College which at the time met at either Rev. Carrick's home or the near-by Lebanon-in-the-Forks Presbyterian Church, in east Knox County. Later a two story building was constructed for the college at the southeast corner of what is today Gay and Church Streets, where the Burwell Building is located. A brass plaque on the modern building denotes the site of the original Blount College.

Located only four blocks from Blount Mansion, Barbara (soon to turn twelve), began attending Blount College in 1804, as her aunt, Mrs. Anne Harvey (Anne "Nancy" Gray Blount) then living in Knoxville related to John Gary Blount:

"Barbaraly has this week begun her English Grammer with Parson Corrigh [Samuel Carrick] who is said to [be] a very good teacher she has made as great progress as any one of his scholars has before done the first week..."

[Anne Harvey to John Gray Blount, 1804 Aug 3, from Knoxville, TN]

Apparently Mrs. Harvey was not exaggerating about "Barbaraly's" progress in school. Only a single record book labeled "College Book of Students and Accounts" by Rev. Carrick of his pupils at Blount College survived (it is now lost). It covered the years 1804 to 1809 and recorded the progress of both boys and girls. Notations such as "approved," "well approved," even one "very well approved" are listed with an occasional *mediocre* or *bene* next to the boys names.

The girls, of which there were five enrolled in 1804, were graded on a different scale. In 1879 James White's grandson Moses White, writing in his *Early History of the University of Tennessee*, explained:

"To indicate the standing of the females the adjectives, attentive, diligent, and ingenious were employed. One was attentive, another diligent, and sill another was ingenious. A few combined two of the marks of merit, but Barbara Blount had them all. She was attentive, diligent and ingenious. No wonder she

afterward captured Major-General Gaines, of the United States Army."

How and when the superlative student Barbara Blount met her future husband, Edmund Pendleton Gaines isn't know for certain. Most likely it was when Gaines, then a major in the US army was recruiting troops in Knoxville at the outset of the War of 1812. Edmund, the seventh of fourteen children was born in Culpepper County, Virginia in 1777. His father, James Gaines was a distinguished Revolutionary War veteran and former member of the North Carolina legislature. James eventually moved the family to Sullivan County, Tennessee where he prospered as a farmer. It was here that Edmund grew up farming, studying law and serving in the local militia. In 1799 at the age of twenty-two Edmund's four years of local militia service earned him an appointment as an ensign in the US Army.

Gaines advanced rapidly in the military, and during a lifetime in the US Army amassed a distinguished service record. By 1807, he was in command of Fort Stoddert in Alabama when he personally capture former Vice President Aaron Burr, who was fleeing treason charges. After his first wife's death in 1811, Gaines took a leave of absence from the army and was considering a career in law when the War of 1812 broke out. He immediately reentered service as a Major, was promoted to Lt. Colonel, and then in 1813 to full Colonel. In 1814, he was promoted to Brig. General and that August took command of the recently seized Fort Erie in British Canada. It was during his command's successful defense of the fort against a force of 3,000 British regulars, that Gaines was seriously wounded by enemy shell fire. In recognition of his service at the Siege of Fort Erie, Gaines received an official "Thanks of Congress." It was the highest military honor then bestowed by the United States government; an honor also accorded to, George Washington, Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor, among others.

As noted above, the "attentive, diligent and ingenious" Barbara captured the soldier's heart. In August 1815, they married in a ceremony at Blount Mansion. A large crowd was reported to have gathered for the occasion as the bright redheaded Barbara married the tall hansom war hero, fifteen years her senior. It was Gaines' second marriage. (He had a then four year old son from his marriage with Frances Toulmin.) He would out live Barbara by over a decade and remarry for a third and last time three years after her death.

Barbara, or rather Mrs. Gen. Edmund P. Gaines was now an "army wife." Where her husband was posted she followed as was typical of officers' wives of the day. And especially true of a general's wife who would be looked to for leadership among the women, just as her husband was looked to by the men. Postings ranged from Alabama to New York, Florida to Louisiana. They were living in Charleston, South Carolina in 1819, when President Monroe made a tour of the south, disembarking at South Carolina and travelling through Georgia and Alabama to Tennessee. It was the war hero and his charming wife who escorted the presidential couple on their journey. Still in Charleston in 1820, Barbara and Edmund's only known child, a son was born. (They are reported to have had as many as three children but apparently only one survived to adulthood.) Edmund Jr. outlived both

his parents, dying in 1904 at the age of eighty-four, making him the only grandchild of William and Molsey Blount known to have lived into the Twentieth Century.

Later Gen. & Mrs. Gaines lived in Cincinnati, Ohio where Barbara's little sister Eliza, recently widowed, visited in 1826. Eventually Gaines, now a Major Gen., was posted to New Orleans, Louisiana. It was there in 1836, that Barbara contracted Yellow Fever during one of the frequent summer outbreaks to plague the city. As her illness grew more serious, Gaines sent her to Mobile, Alabama where he had relatives who could care for her. The move was to no avail. Barbara died in Mobile on November 30th. Forty-four years old, Barbara was buried in the historic Church Street Cemetery, in Mobile. Major Gen. Edmund P. Gaines, Sr. will eventually be buried there in 1849.

But this is not the end of Barbara's story. Despite her husband's distinguished military career, (becoming the namesake of Gainesville, Florida, Georgia and Texas; Gainesboro, Jackson County, Tennessee; as well as the now historic Fort Gaines on Dauphin Island, at the mouth of Mobile Bay, Alabama), Barbara Blount has received a singular distinction that even her war hero husband couldn't accomplish. "Barbaraly" has gone down in the annals of American history as the first university-level co-ed in the United States as a student of Blount College the forerunner of the University of Tennessee (UTK).

The school embraced Barbara Blount as one of their own from its earliest days. The original campus of East Tennessee College was built on Barbara's Hill (referred to today as "The Hill"). In 1892 women were official admitted to UTK and shortly afterward the Barbara Blount Literary Society was formed by a group of co-eds. An existing building was converted into a women's dorm called Barbara Blount Hall. A new three story building replace the older building in 1902. The new Barbara Blount Hall, a designed and dedicated as women's dorm, included a reception room, parlor and dining room, a study hall, auditorium and, of course, the home economics labs. Ironically, it was converted into a men's dorm in 1943. That turn-of-the-century hall was razed in 1977. Since then no building on the UTK campus is specifically named for Barbara (although there is a Blount Hall named for her father). Local "Seen and Heard" columnist J. A. Dunn, writing in October 1931, noted that Barbara Blount being "the first woman admitted to an institution of higher learning in the United States" was an established fact Dunn attributed to Prof. Albert B. Hart of Harvard, one of the first professional trained historians in the country.

An eleven year old girl as the first co-ed in America is a bit of a stretch but here is the logic behind the claim. Blount College, established by Southwest Territory legislative act in 1794, was transformed by Tennessee state legislative act in 1807 into East Tennessee College. Then in 1879, East Tennessee College, by another Tennessee state legislative act (which was taking advantage of federal legislation), was transformed into a land grant university known today as the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Barbara Blount (along with Polly McClung, Jenny Armstrong and sisters Kitty and Matty Kain who are frequently credited with her) was one of the earliest

recorded female students enrolled at an officially established institution of higher learning; that being Blount College. No one is suggesting that the then eleven year old Barbara however "attentive, diligent and ingenious," was doing college level work; only that she attended a college at a time when no other such institution admitted women. (After Blount College became East Tennessee College in 1807, it became men only. It would be eighty-five years before women were admitted again.)

Blount College is the recognized predecessor to the University of Tennessee. Barbara was one of the first recorded female students to attend Blount College at a time when women were not admitted to university elsewhere in the nation. Hence William and Molyse's daughter, Barbara Blount has the singularly distinction of being the first university co-ed in American history.