

The Image of Oscar Lott Wozencraft

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I have a photograph of my great-grandmother, Emma Louise Wozencraft York, and her family dated about 1897. It is actually a black & white photocopy on copier paper, in poor quality, of what I assume was from the original photograph. I don't know who has the original so that I can ask for a better copy. One of my mother's cousins sent her this photocopy in the 1970's and, thankfully, wrote down the names of all ten people in the picture. I am intrigued by one person in particular, identified as Oscar Wozencraft, brother of Emma Louise.



Oscar Wozencraft, 1901

Emma Louise is sitting in a chair and sitting next to her is her husband, Abraham Huddleston York (Hud), and standing between them is one of their seven daughters, Madge. Sitting on the ground, between Emma & Hud, are their two youngest children, daughters Iona & Huddie Mae. I say sitting on the ground because the family is posing for the picture outdoors, with a carpet spread out on the ground for the young girls to sit on and Hud & Emma's chairs are set on it also. A traveling photographer may have passed through their hometown of Van Wert, Georgia, set up his camera and laid out a carpet encouraging residents to stop and allow him to photograph them. Or, they may be on their own land. It is hard to know because there is not a house in the picture, only a tree and a fence behind them. The family is nicely dressed, with the men in suits and ties and each of the women wearing a dress.

Standing on the carpet, directly behind Emma Louise are three of the oldest daughters: Ola, Fannie, and Lenna. There are a total of seven sisters living at this time and only Berchea is not present. There are two more people in the picture. My grandfather, James Josiah York, is standing next to his father, Hud and standing behind Hud is Oscar Wozencraft, Emma Louise's stepbrother. Oscar is twenty-four years younger than Emma Louise. They have the same father, James Lawrence Wozencraft, who remarried in 1869 after the death of his first wife in 1866.

The person in this picture that intrigues me the most is Oscar because I don't know anything about him except what my mother's cousin has written on this photocopy, that Oscar is the brother of Emma Louise. I wonder if he has been living with Emma and Hud and their eight children or is just visiting for the day. I decide to do some online research on him and get some links to records that include census, death, burial, city directories and newspaper articles.

What I learn is that Oscar was a student at Emory College in Oxford, Georgia. This college would become what is now Emory University in Atlanta. In 1899 he is a sophomore and on the debate team of the Few Literary Society. A newspaper article in the Macon Telegraph, dated 16 Jun 1899, says he is one of the best speakers at the college. Another article, this time in the Atlanta Constitution dated six months later, announces that Oscar has been elected leader of the Few Society with sixty-two votes out of sixty-three cast. The article goes on to say the selection of Mr. Wozencraft *"is a deserved compliment to his wonderful ability and achievements. He is universally conceded to be without doubt the champion debater of the college and time after time he has displayed his genius for argument. He entered the class of 1901 in the fall of 1898 and after a single speech was chosen by the franchise of his hearers, inter-term debater, when his speech won the day. His ability was so extraordinary that in his sophomore year he was chosen leader of the champion, an occurrence happening but twice before in the history of the institution, and his closing speech on that occasion so electrified the judges that, against fearful odds, he was given the decision."*

Now, I am even more intrigued by Oscar. I think any family would be proud of someone like this and I wonder why his story has not come down through the generations. I continue to look at the records that popped up with my initial search on Ancestry and FamilySearch. The 1900 Federal Census tells me that Oscar was born in July 1876, lives in Oxford, GA and is a college student. In a newspaper article in The Atlanta Constitution, dated 27 Mar 1900, there is an article about a mock trial at Emory College, attended by students and citizens of the town of Oxford. The mock case was a murder trial, where a Mr. Johnston was accused of murdering a Mr. Tate. The defendant was represented by three students, one of whom was Oscar. The article goes on to say fine speeches were made by all and especially by Mr. Wozencraft. With this article I now discover that Oscar was a Law student. Another article, also from the Atlanta Constitution, dated 26 May 1901, includes photographs of the members of the graduating 1901 Law Class of Emory College, and one of the eleven is Oscar Lott Wozencraft. Two weeks later another article names Oscar as winning the Emory Champion Debate. The Atlanta Constitution identifies O.L.

Wozencraft, of Buford in Gwinnett County, Georgia as one of the most prominent young attorneys in north Georgia in an article dated 24 Feb 1902.

I am amazed by all of this information and of Oscar's considerable talent and success and am stunned, when reading his death certificate that he died on 13 Jun 1904 from pulmonary tuberculosis in Phoenix, Arizona and is buried in the Loosely Cemetery, apparently in an unmarked grave. I also learn he is listed in the 1904 City Directory in Colorado Springs as a boarder at a residence on Nevada Avenue. Within three years of graduating with a Law Degree from Emory College, he has left Georgia for the west, Colorado and Arizona, probably in an attempt to find a cure from the disease that was so common at that time. It saddens me that he must have travelled alone and died so far from his home and family and then was buried in an unmarked grave.

One final article in the Atlanta Constitution dated 28 Jun 1904 states the Hon. D.M. Johnson is to be solicitor of the city court of Buford to fill out the unexpired term of Oscar Wozencraft, deceased.

I was inspired to search for Oscar because of a photocopy of a photograph that was given to my mother and because I became intrigued by his presence in this picture of my great-grandparents with their children. I feel like I have found a relative who had become lost in our family history because of his early death and not having any offspring of his own. Having found this information I wanted to honor Oscar's brief life by writing this story. It is also an example of how one can partially reconstruct the life of someone you know nothing about just by using a few records that are now easily available.