



Samuel Mansfield Bay's headstone at Bellefontaine Cemetery, St. Louis, MO, as pictured on FindAGrave, 08/08/2013

SAMUEL MANSFIELD BAY: What's Written in Stone Is Not Necessarily "Written in Stone"

By Erika Woehlk, Visual Materials Archivist

The Secretary of State's Office maintains a historical listing of all Missouri's statewide elected officials. The list, which is published online and in the biennial *Official Manual of the State of Missouri* (aka *Blue Book*), includes the officials' dates of birth and death. The Office undertook a reexamination of these dates in mid-2023, and discovered a discrepancy with the entry for Attorney General Samuel Mansfield Bay. Bay served as AG from 1839-1845, and according to our listing, was born in 1810 and died in July 1849. When I set out to verify these dates and hopefully add a month and day to his date of birth and a day to his death, things just didn't add up.

Historical Listing, Attorneys General

	Name and (Party)	Term	County	Born	Died
1.	Edward Bates (D)	1820–21	St. Louis	9/4/1793	3/25/1869
2.	Rufus Easton (D)	1821–26	St. Louis	3/4/1774	7/5/1834
3.	Robert William Wells (D)	1826–36	St. Charles	11/29/1795	9/22/1861
4.	William Barclay Napton (D)	1836–39	Howard	1808	1/8/1883
5.	Samuel Mansfield Bay (D)	1839–45	Cole	1810	7/1849
6.	Benjamin F. Stringfellow (D)	1845–49	Chariton	9/3/1816	4/25/1891
7.	William A. Robards (D)	1849–51	Boone	5/3/1817	9/3/1851

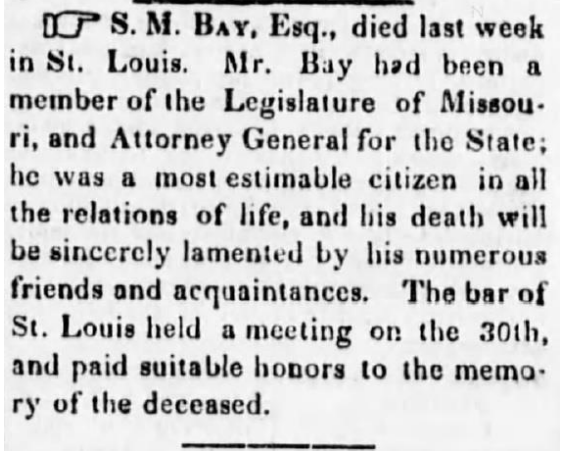
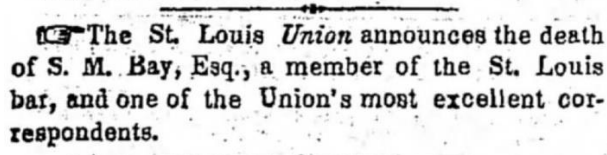
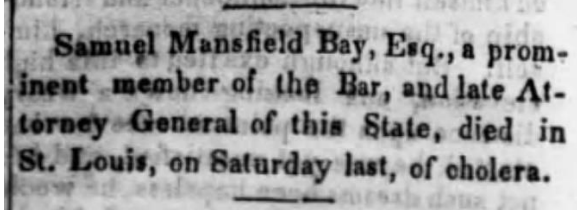
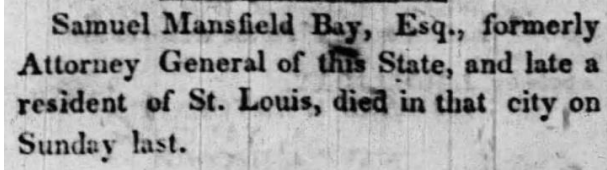
Samuel Mansfield Bay's entry in the 2021-2022 Blue Book, p. 74

Part 1: Death

The first step I took when looking up his dates was to locate a tombstone. Often, those serve as valuable resources because Missouri did not require births and deaths to be

officially recorded until 1910. Right away, something was amiss with our listing because Bay's stone reads that he died on May 29, 1849, not in July 1849. Next, I looked for newspaper death notices.

Usually when someone dies, especially a former state official, there is a notice or full obituary printed in the local paper within a day or week. I checked May and June newspapers, but found zero notices. Then I expanded to July and got several hits.

 <p>A. <i>Glasgow Weekly Times</i>, 07/12/1849 p. 2, says he "died last week," meaning <u>July 1-7</u>.</p>	 <p>B. <i>The Louisville Daily Courier</i>, 07/06/1849 p. 2.</p>
 <p>C. <i>The Weekly North Missouri Courier</i>, 07/05/1849 p. 2, says he died "on Saturday last," making <u>June 30</u> the date of death.</p>	 <p>D. <i>The St. Joseph Gazette</i>, 07/20/1849 p. 4, says he died "on Sunday last," making <u>July 15</u> the date of death.</p>

Here we have a confusion of dates, which meant I had to keep digging. I found that Bay's family initiated probate proceedings on July 10, 1849 (St. Louis Probate Case File no. 2710). That immediately eliminated news clipping "D," which more than likely was a story the *Gazette* picked up that had been printed elsewhere a couple weeks earlier. The *Glasgow Weekly Times* article "A" is significant because it gives a tantalizing clue. It states, "The bar of St. Louis held a meeting on the 30th, and paid suitable honors to the memory of the deceased." Given that, I think by "last week" they really meant June 23-30 because the Bar would not have honored him before he died. Article "C" is helpful, too, because it is the earliest mention of his death. The notice was printed on July 5, and gives a date of death of June 30. Next, I contacted the Missouri Bar Association, and

they replied that their records do not go back that far, so I was unable to confirm their June 30, 1849 meeting through other means.

The year 1849 was awful for St. Louis and much of the state and surrounding area because of a rampant cholera epidemic. Many thousands of people died and had to be buried quickly. The next logical steps in tracking down Bay's actual date of death were to a) check with the cemetery and b) check the 1850 Mortality Schedule. First, the Mortality Schedule: this census-related endeavor recorded the names, month and year of death, and cause of death for individuals who died in the year prior to taking the 1850 Census, meaning deaths that occurred from June 1, 1849 to June 1, 1850. There is, in fact, a record for S.M. Bay. Column 8 gives July [1849] as his death:

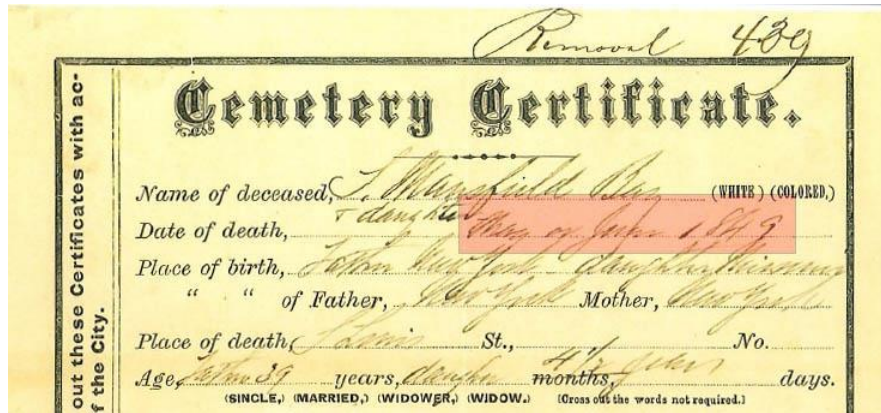
SCHEDULE 3.—Persons who Died during the Year ending 1st June, 1850, in St. Louis in the County of St. Louis State of Missouri, enumerated by me, John M. McHenry Ass't Marshal.

NAME OF EVERY PERSON WHO DIED during the Year ending 1st June, 1850, whose usual Place of Abode at the Time of his Death was in this Family.	DESCRIPTION.					PLACE OF BIRTH. Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	The Month in which the Person died.	PROFESSION, OCCUPATION, OR TRADE.	DISEASE, OR CAUSE OF DEATH.	Number of DAYS ILL.
	Age.	Sex.	White, black, or colour.	Free or Slave.	Married or widowed.					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<u>S. M. Bay</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Free</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Virginia</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>Memory of Saw</u>	<u>Cholera</u>	<u>21</u>

1850 Mortality Schedule for Missouri, p. 831 line 21, courtesy of Missouri State Archives

That throws a possible June 30 date of death off a little bit, but remember that this record was made one year after Bay's death. Moreover, there are other errors in the report. He was not 35 and he was not born in Virginia. Memory is a tricky thing, which is why it is usually best to trust sources made as close to the event as possible.

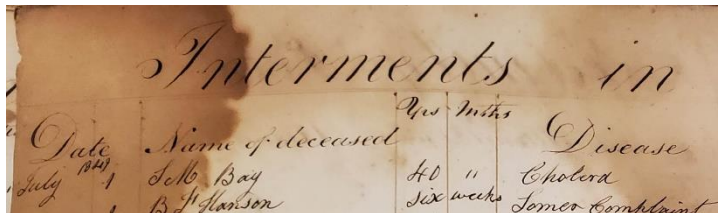
Moving on, I contacted Bellefontaine Cemetery staff and asked if they had any original records of Samuel Bay's burial. They did. Daniel Fuller with the Bellefontaine Cemetery Association was quick to respond and provided a variety of records. Here, we learn that Bay was not originally buried in Bellefontaine. Records show that his grave was relocated from Episcopal Cemetery to Bellefontaine on June 12, 1868, nearly 19 years after his death. Furthermore, the original Cemetery Certificate states that Bay's date of death was "May or June 1849." Very interesting!



Top portion of S. Mansfield Bay's Cemetery Certificate for removal to Bellefontaine, courtesy of Bellefontaine Cemetery Association

Now, to go back to the beginning, so to speak, Daniel contacted Sue Rehkopf with the

Episcopal Diocese of Missouri and asked if they maintain any original records of Samuel Bay's first burial in 1849. She responded with a copy of the Episcopal Cemetery's burial register that shows S.M. Bay was buried there on July 1, 1849.



S.M. Bay's original burial record with Episcopal Cemetery, St. Louis, courtesy of Episcopal Diocese of Missouri

S.M. Bay is listed as 40 years zero/blank months old, buried on July 1, 1849, and died from cholera. The May 29, 1849 date on Bay's tombstone makes less and less sense now. There would have been no reason to wait a month to bury him, especially given that he died of cholera. The newspapers and other records clearly contradict a May death as well. The burial date of July 1 also provides a possible explanation for July being listed as his month of death in the 1850 Mortality Schedule. I believe that the preponderance of evidence points to Samuel Mansfield Bay having died on June 30, 1849.

Part 2: Birth

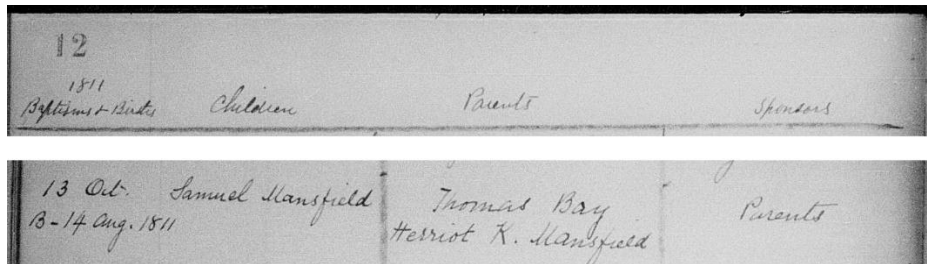
Already, there are conflicting dates of birth for Attorney General Samuel Mansfield Bay. We've seen his tombstone read June 1, 1810, his 1850 mortality schedule state he was 35 at the time of death in July 1849, his Bellefontaine Cemetery Certificate state that he was 39 when he died, and the Episcopal Cemetery burial register reported that he died at 40. Again, the best source for verifying anyone's date of birth is to find an original record made as close to the event as possible.

It is not unusual for people of this time period to not know exactly when they were born. Government officials were no exception. Take, for example, former Missouri Secretary of

State Priestly H. McBride. No original record of his birth exists. The closest we can get is an affidavit he signed himself on December 23, 1837 stating he was 39 years old and was born in the fall, "say sometime in September." Poor guy didn't know his own birthday. Thus, it is no surprise that Samuel Bay and his family members gave widely varying accounts of his age.

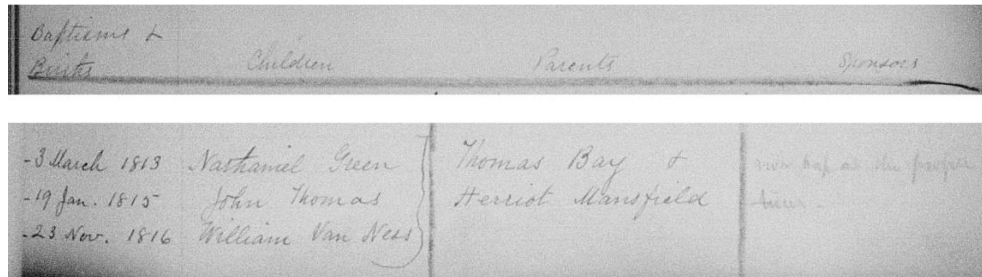
Certain biographies for Bay give us a place to start unraveling this mystery. *Reminiscences of the Bench and Bar of Missouri* (1878) by W.V.N. Bay (Samuel M. Bay's brother!), p. 165, states that Bay "was born in the city of Hudson, state of New York, in the year 1810." *Reminiscences* does not give Bay's parents' names, but a book *The Greenes of Rhode Island, with Historical Records of English Ancestry, 1534-1902* (1903) by George Sears Greene, p. 407, states that Samuel Mansfield Bay and William Van Ness Bay are sons of Harriet Keziah Mansfield and Thomas Bay of Hudson, New York.

A quick search of New York church records on FamilySearch revealed a baptismal record for Samuel Mansfield Bay, son of Thomas Bay and Herriot K. Mansfield, who was born August 14, 1811 and baptized October 13, 1811 at the Reformed Church in Claverack, Columbia County, New York. Claverack is a tiny town 13 miles from Hudson.



Baptisms in Reformed Church of Claverack, NY, 1810-1825, p. 12, courtesy of FamilySearch.org

As further confirmation this is the correct family, there is a baptismal record for William Van Ness Bay, Samuel's younger brother (as well as two other brothers), whose parents are also Thomas Bay and Herriot Mansfield. The record appears in the same volume as Samuel's. A note in the far-right margin says the brothers were, "not bap at the proper time." The triple baptism occurred in March 1817.



Baptisms in Reformed Church of Claverack, NY, 1810-1825, p. 81, courtesy of FamilySearch.org

Although the sources that *led* to the baptisms are secondary, I believe it is more than a coincidence that there were boys named William Van Ness Bay and Samuel Mansfield Bay born to parents named Thomas Bay and Herriot Mansfield in the same place mentioned in their biographies. I am certain this is the correct family. Samuel Mansfield Bay was born August 14, 1811, not June 1, 1810.

Conclusion

Why is the stone in Bellefontaine inscribed with the incorrect dates of birth and death? There were many factors at play here. Firstly, this stone was not originally made in 1849. It looks newer, and the style just doesn't match other stones from that time period. Alas, there are no records of when the stone was made. Secondly, Samuel's family did not seem to know when he was born. I can only hazard guesses as to the origin of June 1, 1810, and that is something archivists should not do. The same goes for the May 29, 1849 date of death.

In August 2023, the Secretary of State's Office updated the online historical listing of Attorneys General to reflect the new August 14, 1811 and June 30, 1849 dates for Samuel Mansfield Bay. The *2023-2024 Blue Book* is forthcoming.

<https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/history/historicallistings/ag>

September 13, 2023, Missouri State Archives