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## Documents Appear to Contradict Gingrich's Account of First Divorce

By [TRIP GABRIEL](#)

New court documents that have emerged seem to contradict Newt Gingrich's account of how his first marriage ended. On his campaign Web site, under the heading "[Answering the Attacks.](#)" the Gingrich campaign maintains that it was his first wife, Jackie Battley Gingrich, the mother of the couple's two daughters, who sought a divorce in 1980.

But documents from the court clerk of Carroll County, Ga., [cited Monday by CNN](#), indicate that it was Mr. Gingrich who filed for divorce and that his wife asked a judge to block the process because, she wrote, "defendant does not admit that this marriage is irretrievably broken."

The end of Mr. Gingrich's first marriage has long been shrouded in some controversy, a history that returned as he became a leading contender for the Republican nomination. Detractors say it reflects poorly on his character. Mr. Gingrich has admitted during the campaign that he made unspecified personal errors of judgment in his life and has sought forgiveness from God.

Earlier this year, Jackie Gingrich Cushman, one of two adult daughters of Mr. Gingrich and his first wife, [published an account](#) in which she denied long-standing rumors that her father had asked for a divorce while her mother was in a hospital being treated for cancer.

"My mother and father were already in the process of getting a divorce, which she requested," Ms. Cushman, who was 13 at the time, wrote. "Dad took my sister and me to the hospital to see our mother. She had undergone surgery the day before to remove a tumor. The tumor was benign."

The documents obtained by CNN seem to contradict at least part of this account. Mr. Gingrich's spokesman, R.C. Hammond, told CNN: "Carroll County Georgia court documents accurately show Newt Gingrich filed for a divorce from his wife Jackie Battley, but it was Jackie Battley who requested the divorce."

Ms. Gingrich Cushman has made a series of campaign appearances of her father's behalf, and she is often asked about her parents' breakup. "Most families have gone through terrible things, whether it's divorce or tragedy," she replied to one query last week in South Carolina, according to NBC. "That's life. We've healed, we've reconciled."

The first Mrs. Gingrich has rarely spoken publicly about the divorce, in which the couple agreed to a settlement three months after Mr. Gingrich's filing.

In 1985 she told The Washington Post: "He can say that we had been talking about it for 10 years, but the truth is that it came as a complete surprise."

It is unclear whether the latest twist on this account will damage Mr. Gingrich, who has been married three times, with voters. He has been under a fierce barrage by rivals in Iowa, where he returns to the stump on Tuesday, for his record in and out of office. But so far references to personal "baggage" have been only through innuendo and suggestion.