

Early Geneva County, Part Of Dale County - Heritage book

In the early days, the part of what is now Geneva County was a part of Dale County with its county seat at Daleville in 1845, but the seat moved to Ozark in 1869. In the early 1800's, this part of the county was troubled by roving bands of Muscogee Indians. These were bands of that part of the tribe that had refused to move to the trans-Mississippi Reservation with the remainder of the tribe when it was relocated. Capt. William Pouncey of the local militia was authorized to raise a mounted militia company to continue to arm themselves and to quell disturbances caused by these roving Indian bands. There exists today, in the Town Square of Newton (Ala.), a historical marker dedicated to the people in the surrounding communities, who helped put down the civil unrest caused by these roving bands of lawless rogues. Early settlers to the county were the William Lewis and Green Lewis families who migrated from Jackson County in the State of Florida due to malaria and yellow fever outbreaks in the 1830's. The younger, Green Lewis, participated in some of the exercises against some of these Indian tribes (Creek). The militia was finally successful in putting down the uprisings and the Indian disturbances ceased shortly before the midpoint of that century.

However, during and shortly after the Civil War, bands of deserters headed by a Joseph Sanders continued the harassment of the residents of Geneva and Dale Counties and the neighboring parts of north Florida. This man, Sanders, was a millwright by trade who had served well during the Civil War, but following his resignation he became allies with a band of deserters who sought shelter along the Florida state line. Sanders became their leader. He organized bands of 15 or 20 of these outlaws and obtained military supplies from the federal troops along the coast and made frequent and daring trips into the county to raid the farms and families. On one raid into Newton at night, the citizens shot three of the outlaws and the others fled the town quickly. In these raids, the outlaws took mules, horses, and other valuables. The raiding soon stopped and Sanders moved to Georgia where he was shot and killed by an unknown person.

The countryside of this area was covered with pine forests that had never been cut by man's axe and were plentiful and not like many of the other areas that were near saw-mills. The pine forests in those areas had been depleted. This part of the southern part of Alabama had no navigable rivers. The Choctawhatchee River flowed diagonally through the county but this part of the river to the east was shallow and could not be used by steam stern wheeler boats that traveled the lower part of the river from the coast to as far north as Geneva. In the early days of the existence of the County, several attempts were

made to bring a railway into the county in the early 1800's but without success. The railroads were to come later in the century. *Submitted by Richard A. Lewis, Jr., former resident of Geneva County, Alabama Sources: (1) Forgotten Trails - History of Dale County, c: 1968, by Fred S. Watson; (2) The Lewis Families... "The Carolinas, To Florida and on to Alabama", by Richard A. Lewis, Jr.*

The city of Geneva is perhaps most fond of its "Festival on the Rivers", which began in 1976, and takes place annually on the last weekend in April. The entire town celebrates this special weekend. Civic Clubs, schools, church groups, businesses and commercial vendors take PRIDE in being a part of this annual event.

Hard work and dedicated people have brought the festival this far. An "old county fair" type atmosphere fills the city and Contestants take part in canoe races, sculling contests, road races, greased pole climbing and beauty contests. You will see arts and crafts, parades, skydivers, helicopters and professional entertainment on the festival grounds. Mingling with home folk are visitors from all over the U.S. All of this takes place around Geneva's proud OAK. The Festival Committee is a volunteer organization with Dr. Tom Parrish as chairman.

"Geneva's Historical Big Oak Tree", as designated by the State of Alabama and the U.S. Government to be one of the largest in the state at 75 feet tall, with a limb spread of 175 feet. The tree is believed to be about 200-300 years old. This massive OAK began to have activity and life around its limbs when an old-time country fair was started at the junction. This big OAK stands tall and strong with its branches hanging proudly toward the ground. It seems to be reaching out for life. This area was renamed the Robert Fowler Memorial Park. Extensive work has been done by the local soil conservation District. A couple of friend's re-knotted ties between Alabama and Florida with the creation of the Geneva-Fort Walton River Rats. These two cities began voyages in April to be matched by a return visit in June. April would bring Fort Walton River Rats to Geneva. June would carry the Geneva River Rats to Fort Walton. They arrived at the Sea Gull docks and were welcomed by Billy Bowlegs and crew. This begins the Fort Walton week-long Billy Bowlegs Festival. The River Rats have disbanded but some former members still go to the Billy Bowlegs Festival and some still make the trip to Geneva each year. ***Submitted by: Committee***

Early Settlement of Geneva County

Among the earliest settlers of the Wiregrass was James B Ward born in 1796 who served as an Indian agent and did much to keep peace with the Warlike Creeks. He married Elizabeth English a charming Creek maiden, and they sleep peacefully on the Jesse Purvis farm near Malvern, now owned by Randall Collins whose mother was a Purvis. His labors were in Georgia, Washington County, Mississippi, Wakefield, Richmond, Daleville and Newton. This prominent couple has many descendants in the Wiregrass.

Many early settlers lived among the Indians, one of whom was Thomas Sellers born in 1813 and founder of one of our first schools named for him on Pate's Creek. He also helped to establish Mt. Gilead Church in 1838 and spoke the Indian language fluently. He has many descendants in Geneva County.

Another early settler was Mary Bass, born in the county in 1822 and married John A. Hughes, Sr., who died in Selma in 1848. His father was colonel Joseph Hughes of Revolutionary War fame, who fought with Sumter at Kings' Mountain while John A. Hughes, Jr. was the father of John J. Hughes a leading citizen and banker of Hartford, Alabama.

Mary Bass Hughes married Love Turner and had two sons, Jim and Rufe. She was a prominent slaveholder and member of Mt. Gilead, where she was buried upon her death in 1889. The Hughes family has traced their ancestry to King Alfred and also to King Henry II and Eleanor of England. Many representatives of the family fought in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and the Civil War, and are most prominent in Geneva County. Among these are Albert, a former State Senator; Grady, a former county board of education member; and David, a county commissioner.

Pate's Creek played an active part in the early settlement of Geneva County. Jeremiah Pate from Tennessee fought with Jackson at New Orleans and was a captain in the Creek War, gave his name to the creek and landing on the river and with Thomas Sellers, Samuel and Jerry Tindell, and John Kinsaul, a Revolutionary War veteran, helped to organize Mt. Gilead Church in 1835, the third oldest church in the county. It is most fitting that these four pioneers should sleep near each other in the church cemetery, which is partly in the baby county of Alabama, Houston. Not far from them are the remains of many slaves, some of whom were also members of the church before the Civil War. Big Creek east of Fadette was another early settlement for the young Geneva County. When the first Creek War closed with Andrew Jackson's great victories this territory was ceded to the whites, and

pioneers began settling the fertile Gulf Plain and among these was James *M.* Smith, who came originally from Georgia and finally settled in the Big Creek community. One of his sons was Daniel Smith, who had twelve children among whom were Henry, Bill, Levi, Aaron, Frank and Daniel. These took an active part in developing the churches at Pleasant Grove, Big Creek and New Hope and many of their descendants are buried there. Big Creek once had a post office, school, church and several stores; so did Fadette. Big Creek was Beat Two in the new county while Fadette still remains Beat Four. Geneva County's Beats One and Two became a part of Houston County when it was formed in 1903. In the early days Beats Two and Four were composed largely of Smiths and their polling lists showed about 80 percent with Smiths names or relatives.

Just over the line from Merritt's Store where Malan Merritt was reared, is a beautiful church with azaleas, dogwood trees, pines and massive oaks adorning its campus is New Hope Church and cemetery where the Smiths worshipped for many generations. Malan later became principal at Wicksburg High School and Hartford High School. Among its pastors were Elders J. W. Collins, H. A. Smith, J. W. Elmore, J. J. Smith, J. S. Bass, J. A. Tew, J. J. Collins, A. B. Chumney, E. R. Sorrells and Vessie Hartzog.

Vaughanville, south of Geneva was also a pioneer settlement in the Shoe String County, so called because it extended all the way from Hacoda and Lowery to Taylor and Big Creek in the early days.

About 1820 Neil McKinnon of North Carolina lead a band of Scotch Highlanders to the enchanted Euchee Valley in Walton County Florida, and founded our pioneer church Valley View Presbyterian. From this rugged settlement came many of the early residents of Western Geneva County. Among these were James, Mike, Powell and Margaret Vaughn, the latter marrying Abner Baker, an outstanding minister to the Creek Indians and Powell who died at Cow Ford where he was with Jackson in pursuit of the Seminole Indians. Mike Vaughn settled on the river but was killed by Indians at Big Swamp in Walton County Florida. James was born in 1793 and died in 1881 after founding the Vaughn homestead, post office, stores and school. He married Nancy Anderson in 1820 who had come from Scotland, as a charming maiden just 13 years of age. He was a representative in the Florida Territorial Legislature in 1837. He was a volunteer of the War of 1812 and a staunch Presbyterian. Among his sons was Kenneth, who settled at Bellwood and was the father of E. R. Vaughn who later became a County Commissioner and his son, Buck, likewise. The real humorist in the family was Frank, who was a student at Geneva County High at Hartford the first day of its existence. Angus, was a pioneer physician, Daniel, a charter member of Geneva Presbyterian Church and D. O. Vaughn, a prominent teacher,

staunch democrat, Mayor of Geneva and Chairman of the Executive Committee. He has a family in Vaughn-McDuffie Cemetery south of Geneva. This family has played a remarkable role in the Wiregrass.

According to Colonel Oscar L. Tompkins of Dothan and author of Wiregrass Sagas, Robert Gamble of Old Franklin was probably the first English child born in Henry County Alabama in 1817. Jesse M. Carmichael settled near Richmond in 1842 and founded a noble family. He had come from Milledgeville, the capital of Georgia at that time and lost an arm in the Civil War. He was a representative and Senator in the Alabama legislature. Later he served as Circuit Judge and State Auditor twice. He gave three sons to Alabama. A. H., who came near being elected Governor, M. S., who was a famous legislator and Jurist and C.D., who became so prominent as an attorney in Geneva. The latter's son, Albert A., became one of the most brilliant lawyers in the entire south. In 1926 he was elected State Senator, later as Attorney General and also Lieutenant Governor, and was also a serious contender for the Governorship. Truly this family meant much to Alabama and to the south.

As all understand our first settlers may have been the Mound Builders and the latter leave abundant evidence on Pea River, at Pate's Landing and on Claybank Creek and many other places in Geneva County that they were here before the Creek Indians. We find many relics of the latter Indians who were here, when the white man came. Many battles were fought in the Wiregrass in both the first and second Creek Wars, including Burnt Corn, the massacre of the Hart Family near Fairview, the Albertson's near Wesley Chapel, Open Pond and Vaughanville.

During the Second Creek War, Grandfather Thomas Sellers went to Eufaula for his yearly supplies when he met a War Party, but the chief was Uncle Tom's close friend and greeted him with "Eachie Aski and a Mosque." Gladly did he shake hands with each Indian in the party. Truly a friend in need is a friend indeed and Sellers went on in peace. The Creeks lived in close contact with him to the last.

Colonel Tompkins says a band of friendly Indians lived just east of where Dothan is today until about 1870 when they departed for parts unknown.

Perhaps, our leading Indians in the Wiregrass were:

1. Captain Alerk, who was largely instrumental in maintaining friendly relations with the English in the French and Indian War
2. Barnard Timpooshee who was born in what is now Russell County and became a Major in the First Creek War and saved Captain Broadmax's detachment in the Battle of

Calebee Creek. General Jackson said, "A braver man never lived. "He helped to rescue Mrs. Stuart in the Battle of Natural Bridge and was an honor to the Indian Race."

3. A true counterpart to Pocahontas was Milly Francis who made such a romantic plea that she saved the life of a young white man bound to a tree. He sought her hand in marriage but she remained true to her Indian lover. Later in life she received a pension in Indian Territory for being so loyal to the whites.

4. Perhaps our greatest Indian friend was William McIntosh, who led the Cowta Indians in the Battle of Autossee and also at Horseshoe Bend and Jackson called him "Major McIntosh."

He led a party of friendly Creeks against the Seminoles in Florida and at Natural Bridge Jackson called him his "General" so valiantly he did fight. He was killed and his home burned by hostile Creeks. A young son escaped from the flaming mansion and later became the great Confederate General Chilly McIntosh in the War Between the States. Truly the Creeks have left a lasting impression on the Wiregrass in names, mounds, relics, artifacts and deeds of heroism but they are gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds with many of their white comrades. For centuries they were our only people in what is now Geneva County.

Our first large settlements of whites, were our river towns of Geneva, Elba, Newton, Gordon, Saffold, Columbia and Eufaula. Perhaps we should discuss Newton at length, since it had much in common with our county. When Dale County was organized in 1824 it was named for the great hero of the Canoe Fight who was born in Virginia and rode Paddy to New Orleans with a message for General Jackson. For a time Richmond remained the county seat of the New Dale but the first court was at the home of Crede Collins near Daleville which became the county capital as soon as suitable buildings could be prepared. This, too, was named for the great Indian scout, Sam Dale, whom many Indians loved. A chief standing at his grave said, "Big Sam you sleep here, but your spirit is a great chief in the Happy Hunting Ground in the sky. "With the opening of Henry and Dale Counties many whites built their cabins at Bold Springs in what is now Geneva County and cleared the lowland for farms as the pine forest were thought to be too poor for cultivation. **Submitted by: The Book Committee**

Sources: This article appeared in The Creneva Reaper December 2,1971, and was written by Mr. J. J. Collins, now deceased.