

Connecting the Puzzle Pieces

Rather than presenting the sections about daily and community life as it is remembered by Alva Jacobs immediately following the family history information he related, this section breaks from form. The Jacobs family provides the opportunity to show how various pieces of research can be brought into “rebuilding” the past. As the archaeologist records each artifact and the context in which it was found, the ethnographer collects verbal and written “artifacts” and so must analyze their context and place in time. This section analyzes the family history as presented by Alva Jacobs, the memories of the late Lizzie (Bessie) Ward, and documentation obtained from Dennis Simpson about his ancestors supplemented with the research on those buried in a White cemetery conducted by John Rankin. Archival records photographed by John Rankin were examined. This section illustrates the steps made in connecting research during the course of this study.

The Rankin-Dixon Cemetery Research. A few years ago Mr. John Rankin offered to photograph cemeteries on RSA. Having completed that task, he went on to conduct archival research on those who owned the land and the families who were buried in the cemeteries. John has shared his research, his knowledge and his contacts.

Collectively, the Jacobs family owned a notable amount of land in the former communities of Mullins Flat and Pond Beat, with the largest landowner in the family being Frank Jacobs. The cemetery listed by RSA as the Rankin-Dixon Cemetery is within the parcel of land D-196 that was owned by Frank Jacobs. Thus, the researcher conferred with John Rankin regarding the history of the cemetery.

Through e-mail, John Rankin introduced the researcher to Dennis Simpson. In an e-mail dated April 21, 2005, Dennis Simpson provided information about the property where the cemetery is located and the history of the land’s ownership.

This history of the buying and selling of this property is typical of what was happening in Madison County during the 1800’s. The excerpt from Dennis Simpson’s e-mail letter, dated April 21, 2005, presented below will acquaint the reader with Frank Jacobs’ land purchase and the context in which it occurred:

The property where the cemetery is situated was purchased by John Simpson on June 23, 1855. He purchased the property consisting of 435 acres from [the] Dr. John Henderson Hundley family. The Hundley’s were a well-known family who moved to the southeastern section of Limestone County, Alabama. They were very wealthy, but like so many Southerners, lost everything when Union Soldiers stripped them of everything they owned during those dark days of the American Civil War. John Simpson paid the Hundley’s \$3000 for the property. It remained in the family all the way up to 1918 when after the death of Uncle Henry Clay Simpson on February 26, 1918, his brother-in-law, John Alexander Steger, petitioned the court to be administrator of the