



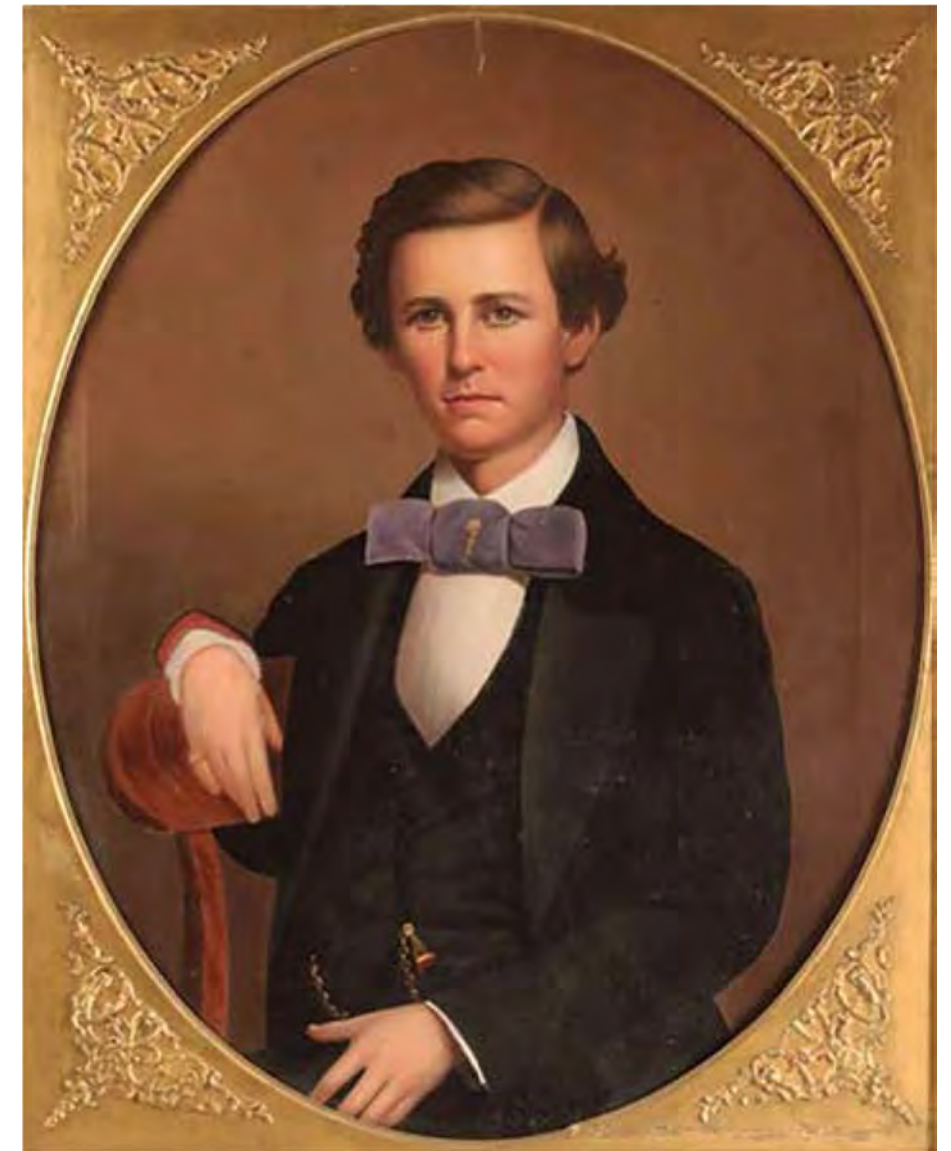
(Left) The House Purchased by Celeste Horton and Moved to Harvest by James B. Horton (Photograph by Jenna Tran, Courtesy Ms. Jordan)

Tracing a Family Tree

The week following the family reunion, five descendants of the communities of Pond Beat and Mullins Flat met in Harvest for a conversation that was guided and recorded by New South Historian, Jenna Tran. Some of the family members were meeting for the first time. Over the course of a couple of hours, they talked through how they were related. In attendance were Dr. Victoria L. Joiner, Ms. Deborah Horton Jordan, Mr. John Jordan, Mr. Thomas Lyle, and Ms. Elaine Watkins Patton. Most of the interviewees were descendants of William and Louisa Timmons.

William Hardie Timmons (1839-1906) was the son of John and Catherine Timmons. The Timmons came from South Carolina and squatted on land in what would become south Madison County. When William was only six years old, he was orphaned. Some speculate that the Timmons family suffered from tuberculosis. William grew up as the ward of neighboring families. His father and aunt left the estate and 93 slaves to William when they died. One of the young slave girls was named Louisa (born 1835). Being about the same age, Louisa and William grew up together. By the time William was 18 and no longer a ward to any guardian, he and Louisa had their first child together. Over 22 years, William and Louisa had five children: Zebedee (born 1857), Alexander (born 1859), Kate (1864-1934), Mary (born 1866), John (1873-1933), and Luther (born 1879).

This particular kind of history is not unique to the Timmons family, but it can hold some contention about whether or not such a relationship was consensual. The Timmons' relationship lasted at least 22 years. It spanned the antebellum period, the Civil War, and post-emancipation. Still, few records exist or survive to help the descendants and researchers understand the complexities of personal relationships, race, and history. Louisa was said to be very light-skinned and part American Indian. There are no images of Louisa, but there are images of her children, Kate and Luther, which give little to no suggestion of their ancestry.



(Above) William Timmons as a Young Man (Smithsonian Institution, Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian American Art Museums)

A certificate of marriage for William and Louisa from 1865 is on file with the county, evidence in favor of a consensual relationship. However, by 1868, the state of Alabama had passed strict anti-miscegenation laws against the marriage of white people to those of color. To confuse matters more, William Timmons had another woman, a white woman, as his wife, Annie Elizabeth Latham (1835-1905). It was not uncommon for white men to be married to a white woman and to also father children with a woman of color. Evidence of William and Annie's relationship can