

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ALABAMA AND HUEYTOWN

or

Early Settlers of the Wilderness Land

by Ruth Davidson (2009)

Long before Alabama was a Territory or State of the United States of America, the Native Americans discovered the wilderness land now called Alabama. Legends about the land tell a story about the Red Men and their search for God's Country. The old Chief led his warriors on a search for the perfect place to live.

They traveled from the North always heading south in search for a place to call home. When the sun was going down, the old chief stopped his men and drove his long spear into the ground. The next day at sunrise, he looked at his spear lying on the ground. This happened many days and the old Chief led his men onward in search for just the right place. One day as the sun was setting in the West, the tired old Chief and his warriors came to a beautiful stream of water. In every direction that he looked were tall trees; all around him were creatures of the forest looking at the strangers in their land; and the old Chief liked what he saw. We will camp here, he said and drove his long spear into the ground.

When the sun rose the next morning, the old Chief saw his spear standing straight and tall; it was pointing to the heavens above; and he smiled. The old Chief told his men, "Alibamo" and that word means "Here We Rest". He named the beautiful place Alabama and the five tribes who followed him settled the wilderness land we now call the State of Alabama. The Creeks, Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Muscogees settled all over the fertile land called Alabama. They had found a place to call home and for the most part were a peace-loving people. They built houses and farmed the land for many moons.

In 1540 an explorer from Spain named Hernando De Soto explored the land of Alabama. Some accounts of his travels say he discovered Alabama but when he first came into Alabama he found a town. An Indian Town called Costa in present day Cherokee County. The men of that village wanted to be friendly with the strangers but De Soto was his own downfall. He deceived the natives and soon found that he was no match for them. He had to move on in his trek across Alabama. De Soto thought he might find gold and have great riches to take back to his country of Spain. He found no gold and he continued to follow the rivers and came to a town called Talisi on the Tallapoosa River and not far from its juncture with the Coosa River.

What was an adventure to De Soto and his men became the biggest battle of their travels. It was in Talisi that he met Chief Tuskaloosa, chief of the Maubilians. De Soto had not learned from his previous experience with the Native Indians and again his own deceitful ways brought him down. He had to flee for his life and in his final days of his journey through Alabama, he found the Black Warrior River. De Soto and his men followed the river north and west and suffered many hardships before leaving Alabama. He did go on toward the west and crossed the Tombigbee River and went into the land that is now Mississippi. They pushed on and came to a place that is now the City of Memphis. It was on a high bluff overlooking a mighty river, the Father of Waters, the Mighty Mississippi River that De Soto first saw this great river. Again we read that De Soto died in the land of the Arkansas and was buried in the mighty river that he discovered. But the Father of Waters was already known to the Native Americans who first lived and roamed all over the country we love and call the United States of America.

The first white settlement in what is now the State of Alabama was in 1702. A small French fleet of ships sailed into the Gulf of Mexico and dropped anchor in the port city of Pensacola, Florida. This was not a good place to settle because the Spaniards already controlled Florida including this beautiful port. They sailed to the west and found another cove of water located between two islands. They dropped anchor and explored the island to the west and discovered a large mass of human bones. To them the bones spelled disaster and they named the

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little bit of land Massacre Island. They sailed on westward and tried to settle near present day Biloxi, Mississippi. This plan did not work out and they returned to Massacre Island.

Le Moyne Iberville was in charge of this little band of settlers. They searched out the island and began to build a Fort and named it Fort Louis. Iberville decided to sail for Cuba and left his brother, Bienville in charge of the new colony on Massacre Island. In 1702 there were 130 settlers, all of them men living in the Fort. Soon another shipload of settlers sailed into the cove that would become Mobile Bay and landed at Fort Louis. This spelled disaster for the settlers already there because the new colonists brought disease with them. Monsoon rains and floods threatened the little colony and yellow fever was attacking every man there. After the rains subsided and the floodwaters receded, a new colony was established on higher ground. They settled in what is now Mobile, the Port City of Alabama.

Settlers continued to come into the cove between the two islands and moved into the lands of Alabama. By 1714 Fort Toulouse was built near where the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers join to form the Alabama River. This fort was very near present day Wetumpka. The extensive waterways made travel easy from the bay of water that was later named Mobile Bay. All of the major rivers in Alabama flow to Mobile Bay and into the Gulf of Mexico.

England and France were engaged in the Seven Years War that began in 1754. This was a territorial war and each country wanted lands that the other claimed was their land. When the war ended England gained control of the land where Fort Louis was located in the land called Alabama. They promptly renamed Fort Louis and now the Fort was Fort Charlotte. Two flags have now flown over the port city that would become Mobile, Alabama. The French had been trading with the Native Americans who occupied all of the land called Alabama. England was quick to establish relationships with the Indians and began to trade with them.

There was a Botanist named William Bartram (1739-1823) who lived in the Colonies of America. He was very interested in all of the plants and trees native to North America. He traveled widely from Canada to the North to Alabama and Georgia to the South. Bartram kept extensive Journals of his explorations and wrote about all the plants and trees he found and the people that he met along the way. His Journal dated November 27th, 1777 told about his time in the Creek Nation that later become the State of Alabama.

Bartram began his journey that day from Mobile in a large flat boat with a Trader and a load of supplies. They traveled until evening of that first day and came to a place called Taens where horses and pack horse-men waited for them. The next morning they would begin their exploration of Alabama. The Trader with his merchandise and men plus the men who would go with Bartram and an Indian Guide were in their company as they continued north through what is now called Lower Alabama. He wrote in his journal of the heavenly fragrance of the Illicium Groves and Grape Vines that were so large. In his journal he does not say he is in Alabama, he is in the Nation and the Nation was the land of the Creek Indians. They followed a well-established Indian Trail that would later be enlarged and called The Old Federal Road. The Old Federal Road went through present day Butler County where my family settled and lived. He told of meeting a white family consisting of the man, his wife, three young men, one young woman and several younger children and they were headed for a place on the river where the Alabama and Tombigbee meet. Early settlers of a wilderness land in 1777 were searching for a place to call home.

As they continued to push on he wrote of the fatigue of both men and horses and they decided to stop in the early afternoon. This was a pleasant diversion and gave him the opportunity to study the flora and fauna of the region. They were nearing the Trading Post

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owned by the Trader and must cross the river. There was no bridge like you use today to cross the Alabama River in Montgomery, Alabama for them that day. They must build a raft. They cut logs about eight inches in diameter and about nine feet long from the stand of long leaf pine trees that grew in abundance. They took huge grape vines and lashed the logs together and even made ropes from the vines to serve as pulleys to move the raft into the water. Everything was loaded onto the raft and moved to the other side.

His writing about the crossing was interesting and also humorous. He wrote that this tall, strong Indian with nothing on but a breechcloth took the pulleys of the raft and put them into his mouth and dove into the water and swam to the other side pulling the loaded raft through the water. He was amazed at the strength of the man. This went on for several trips until all their supplies were on the other side and it was time for everyone to jump in the water and swim across the river. All of the men began stripping down and diving into the water. But Bartram wrote that he could not do that so his clothes were all wet when he reached the other shore. He loved the flora and fauna of the outdoors but he was no outdoorsman. He was a proper gentleman, always the gentleman.

The Trading Post was near Fort Toulouse and now Bartram must leave his friend and go on with his men to explore the Nation as he called it, the land of the Creeks, the land that is called Alabama. His journal covers many pages and he wrote of seeing Magnolia Grandiflora, Laurels, Azaleas, Irises, White Oaks, Maples, Hickory and Long Leaf Pines just to name a few of the trees and plants of Alabama that are native to the region. He wrote of the people, the Indians, the white men and the half-breeds that he met during his travels. And on January 2, 1778 he wrote that he crossed over into Georgia and was headed for Savannah. His journal told of visiting fifty-five Indian Towns or Villages. He saw farms, houses, and plantations and he was amazed at the civilized tribes of Indians that he found. They even observed the Sabbath and were friendly. He wrote about all the plants and trees he found in the wilderness land of Alabama.

There was unrest in the Colonies of America about this time and by the time the War for Independence began in 1775/6, the English traders were very busy trading with the Indians. Not all of the Indians sided with England. The lower Creeks remained neutral but the upper Creeks joined forces with England and the Tories. They fought the Colonists in Georgia and West Florida. In my own family history Benjamin Thompson wrote that his first engagement as a Soldier of the American Revolution was fought in 1778 against the Indians and Tories in what is now Warren County, Georgia. We read of many instances of Indian Depredation during this time as we researched The Thompson Family.

When the American Revolution ended in 1783 and the American Colonists won their independence, they claimed all the land to the Mighty Mississippi River. But Great Britain would not relinquish the part of present day Alabama below the 31st Parallel; they gave it to Spain who already controlled West Florida. Now the Spanish Flag was flying over the little seaport that would become Mobile, Alabama.

There was a man named Alexander McGillivray who lived near Little Talisi near present day Wetumpka. His father was a Scotch trader who lived with the Creek Indians as a young man. His mother was Sehoy Marchand, daughter of a Creek Indian woman and a French trader. Their son, Alexander was sent to the best schools in Charleston, South Carolina. When he completed his education, he returned to Alabama to live among his mother's people. He had a large plantation and Trading Post and even owned slaves. He traded with the American Colonists, Spanish and French settlers in Alabama and Florida and even with the English settlers

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and those who were at war with the Colonists. At one time he was being paid by several different countries to help them with negotiations with the Indians. His influence was needed. Even though he was more of a diplomat than a warrior, we have read of instances where he helped incite the Indians to go on the warpath. He also helped the colonists to reach some agreements with the Indians and some valuable treaties were signed to allow the white settlers to cross Indian lands. He died in 1793.

In my family research I found that my Thompson Ancestors who came into Alabama in 1831 had to pass through some Indian Lands before reaching Butler County where they settled. They had to have Passports to cross the land. They also crossed the Chattahoochee River on a Ferry that was operated by an Indian. Without the treaties and Agreements that McGillivray helped negotiate, their traveling into Alabama would have not happened as early as it did.

In 1795 Thomas Pinckney, a Statesman helped negotiate a treaty with England that would allow that part of Alabama below the 31st Parallel to become a part of Alabama. It would take many years for the Treaty to become a reality. England gave the land to Spain but England would have to be the one to take it back and give it to Alabama. A war must be fought and won. The War of 1812 would decide the southernmost border of Alabama and also provide safety for settlers coming into the wilderness land of Alabama.

Mississippi Territory was created in 1798 and included all the land to the Mississippi River. Georgia was holding some land in the north and it would be 1802 before the northern border was Tennessee. With the creation of the Territory many settlers were moving into both the northern part as well as the southern part of Alabama. We have read of many men coming to the area of Big Springs in present day Madison County. John Hunt built a cabin in 1805 near Big Springs. In my family research my husband's maternal Revolutionary War Soldier, Henry Harless and his family were in Madison County, Mississippi Territory in 1809. Originally from Virginia, he had moved after the war to Tennessee and then into Alabama. Henry Harless died in 1815 and was buried on Harless land on present day Bell Factory Road in Madison County, Alabama. A memorial marker furnished by the Veteran's Administration marks his grave and is a lasting memorial to an early settler of a wilderness land.

My daughter married Delmar McCaig and we have researched his family and found that not only did his earliest ancestor come to America in 1620 with that little band of pilgrims who signed the Mayflower Compact but also his Byram Family came on one of the next ships to come to Massachusetts. His ancestor Alden Byram was in Madison County, Mississippi Territory in 1809. My research in the Courthouse in Huntsville found the marriage of his son, Silas Condict Byram to Martha Blythe in 1816. The Byram and Blythe families were early settlers of the wilderness land of Alabama.

William Thompson who was a brother of my Benjamin Thompson and also Revolutionary War Soldier left Georgia in 1798 and crossed over Indian Lands to settle in the newly created Mississippi Territory. His wife and children also came with him and he died about 1802 in Monroe County, Mississippi Territory. Early records prove that William Thompson was a Justice of Peace in Monroe County, Mississippi Territory. His family was in the wilderness land of Alabama and Mississippi. His descendant, Dale Thompson is my cousin and both of us are researchers of our Thompson Family.

Before Alabama and Jefferson County were created, the land along the creeks and streams of the Warrior River Basin was the Hunting Ground of the Creek Indians. The land was a beautiful wilderness with virgin forests, fertile rolling lands, scenic mountains and abundant waterways. As white men began to explore the land, the Indians felt they were being robbed of

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their land. Hostilities were inevitable. The Fort Mims Massacre on August 13, 1813 brought General Andrew Jackson and his troops to the land we call Alabama. Fort Jackson was built in 1814 on the ruins of old Fort Toulouse near Wetumpka, Alabama.

The War of 1812 was the United States of America against England and one of the first victories was fought to regain land south of the Ellicott-Dunbar Line. On April 15, 1813 the Stars and Stripes were raised and flying over Fort Charlotte on Massacre Island. The United States of America was the fourth country to fly a flag over the port City of Mobile, Alabama. Massacre Island and Fort Charlotte were now a part of the land that would become Alabama. Later the name of Massacre Island was changed to Dauphin Island and Fort Charlotte was renamed Fort Gaines. For over three hundred years a Fort has stood on the island first settled in 1702 as a reminder of the struggles of the early settlers of a wilderness land that became the State of Alabama.

When I was researching My Family I found that my ancestor, Thomas Lester who died in Macon County in 1863 served in the Carolina Militia during the War of 1812. His military record told me that he first came to Alabama during his service and that he and some more men in the South Carolina Militia built Fort Decatur in Alabama.

Fort Decatur was built on the southern shore of the Tallapoosa River near Old Talisi, a large Indian Village and not far from Cotton Valley where Thomas Lester later lived in Macon County. When I was doing research in the Courthouse in Tuskegee in Macon County, I found a deed for my ancestors Robert and Mary Mills. Their daughter, Sarah Mills married William Thomas Lester and is my great grandmother. The deed found recorded was when Robert and Mary Mills sold a lot that was in Fort Decatur in 1829. When they lived at Fort Decatur the land that would become Elmore and Macon Counties was still Indian lands. Robert and Mary Mills were living in Creek Indian Territory. My Family came to the wilderness land of Alabama and built Forts and lived inside the Forts and I had the proof. My Lester Family started out in Maryland and my Revolutionary War ancestor, William Lester lived in South Carolina for fifty years before moving to Alabama. Two of his sons, Joshua and David came to Alabama about 1825 and settled in Pike County very near the Creek Nation. In 1833 when Barbour County was created from Indian Lands and part of Pike County, David and Joshua Lester were living in Barbour County. My William Lester came to Barbour County and died there in 1848. A Memorial Stone was placed in the Cemetery of Louisville, Alabama in Barbour County to honor the memory of William Lester, Revolutionary War Soldier. Family Research is awesome; I am forever indebted to my ancestors for their courage, their sense of adventure, and their desire to find the best place to live; Alabama is God's Country to me.

The Battle at Horseshoe Bend almost annihilated the Upper Creek Nation.. Before the battle begun, Andrew Jackson allowed all the women and children to cross the river and seek safety from the fierce battle that ensued. After the battle the few surviving Red Sticks as the Indians were called were beaten and dejected. Their power was gone and it was just a matter of time and they would have no land in Alabama. The war ended in 1814. Two short years and a stalemate to the simmering differences between England and America. All the United States of America wanted was to have peaceful relations with England and the other countries. The Treaty of Paris signed in 1814 helped the countries achieve better relationships.

With peace restored white settlers came to this beautiful Wilderness Land. They came on horseback or on foot with all their worldly possessions. Others came by ox-cart or mule and wagon. Some came in wagon trains from Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia and Tennessee. They followed the well-marked Indian Trails and enlarged them to provide access for the loaded

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wagons. During this time of settling the wilderness land of Alabama, some important events occurred in the History of Alabama. Alabama Territory was created in 1817. Land Offices were set up and the land throughout Alabama was laid out in Township, Sections and Ranges. Men would be able to purchase land. There would be no more Squatters. Alabama became the 22nd State to enter the United States on December 14, 1819.

Another branch of My Family came to Alabama prior to Alabama becoming a State. My great, great grandmother was Mary A. Perdue. Her parents and grandparents came to Alabama Territory from Georgia and entered land in Monroe County. Monroe County was in one of the first Indian Cessions signed in 1798 and covered a large area that reached almost to present day Montgomery, Alabama. In 1830 James H. Perdue was recorded on the 1830 Census Record of the newly created Lowndes County. The family was living in Butler County when Mary A. Perdue married John Pinkston Thompson in 1850 and when James H. Perdue died in 1855.

About 1815 John Jones built Fort Jones near present day Jonesboro in Jefferson County and Alabama.. Some of the early settlers who sought refuge at the fort were William Brown, Samuel and Isaac Fields and others, including James Rutledge, Reverend James Tarrant, John Prude and William Rose Sadler. James Rutledge and his brothers found the place where they wanted to live near a creek that was named Opossum Creek. A free-flowing spring of water flowed from the hillside nearby. This spring became known as Rutledge Spring and the community that still is in this area is known as Rutledge Springs.

Bethlehem Methodist Church, organized in 1818, was built on land bought by James Rutledge and is one of the oldest active churches in Jefferson County. Some of the earliest members of this historical church were the men who sought refuge in Fort Jones. The old hand-hewn logs of the very first church building are a part of the ceiling of the Fellowship Hall of this church that stands by the side of Old Possum Valley Road now named Allison-Bonnet Memorial Drive. For almost two hundred years and before Alabama became a State, Bethlehem Methodist Church has served this area of the wilderness land that became Alabama. A sign just west of the church welcomes everyone to Hueytown, Alabama.

Being near water sources was necessary for the early settlers. The Waldrop brothers, Joseph, Robert, and Zachariah came from North Carolina and settled along Valley Creek that flows through present day Hueytown, Concord, Rock Creek, Toadvine, and Oak Grove. Joe Waldrop built a mill on Valley Creek in 1822. About the same time Joseph Huey moved his family from South Carolina. He had sons, James, Samuel T. and Jesse G. Huey, and daughters, Rachel and Philender "Linny" Huey. Linny married Albert G. Waldrop, son of Robert, in 1828 uniting these two early families of Hueytown.

Joseph Parsons moved his family from South Carolina and died in 1823. His sons were Samuel, Joseph Jr., William, Isaiah, James, John and Littleton Parsons. He also named William Owens, Mark Goodwin and William Nabers as heirs. The Parsons Family settled first in Mud Creek and migrated toward the land located on the pleasant ridge that became Hueytown. These early settlers in Alabama have many descendants living in Hueytown, Alabama.

About 1825 Abner McGehee bought a large tract of land in the area. He sold this land to Mortimer Jordan in 1828 who built his home near a place now known as Woodward and had extensive farming operations. In 1842 Mortimer Jordan sold a tract of his land located on both sides of present day Allison-Bonnett Memorial Drive in Hueytown to John Crooks. Margaret Crooks married Robert Floyd Waldrop and they built a home about 1875 on land that John Crooks deeded to them. Their daughter, Ethel Waldrop Huey, inherited their old home that was razed in 1996 to make room for a new Health Facility. Many years ago I made a photograph of

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this historic home of Hueytown and was very sad to see the landmark destroyed but progress is good. Sad but good and the new Medical Facility helps the people who now live in Hueytown.

Reuben Robertson bought a tract of land in 1845. When Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church was organized in 1875, the Robertson Family sold four acres of their land for the church and school in Hueytown. M. G. Robertson, a descendant of Reuben, sold land for the Woodmont Subdivision of Hueytown laid out in 1926. Where I now live in Hueytown is a part of the Woodmont Sector. Knowing that Reuben Robertson was one of those early settlers of the wilderness land of Alabama and knowing the descendants of his family today provide happy memories for an amateur genealogist.

When Mortimer Jordan died in 1866, his land was sold to the highest bidders. Jesse and Samuel Huey bought over eighteen hundred acres. Calvin Waldrop also bought a smaller tract. The land was along Old Possum Valley Road also known as the River Road from present day Brooklane Road to High School Road. The Huey Family was a large family with many becoming leading citizens of the area. Many became educators and long before Hueytown was a city, the Huey Family deeded land in 1920 to the Board of Education of Jefferson County for a High School. The old Hueytown High School was located on the corner of Warrior River Road and High School Road when I attended school there. The historic Gilmore-Vines Football Stadium still stands on this property and Stadium Park occupies the land where the first Hueytown High School was built in 1920. A new campus was built in 1960 about a mile from the old school and serves the students from Hueytown today.

Another historic site of Mortimer Jordan's Pioneer Plantation Land became the livelihood of most of the residents of Hueytown for a number of years. The Woodward Brothers bought the land where Jordan's home was built. We have read that Mr. Woodward built the Blast Furnace of his Woodward Iron Company on the site of Mrs. Jordan's Rose Garden. Again progress was good but the beautiful home of Mortimer Jordan and his family was a part of the past. Forgotten Places keep coming to mind as we write about the Wilderness Land that became Alabama and Hueytown. My husband's family was associated with Woodward Iron Company from the beginning of its operation. Thomas Cheatham Davidson was my husband's grandfather and soon after Woodward began to hire coal miners to work in the first Mine known as Dolomite Mine #1, he began to work at Dolomite Mine. The Davidson Family has been living in the area known as the City of Hueytown for over one hundred and ten years. Tom Davidson and his son, Frank Davidson and Frank's son, Russell Davidson and Bobby Davidson, Russell's son and my stepson all worked for Woodward. A sad but true story of our family is all four of these Davidson Men died because they worked in the coalmines. They all died from lung disease caused primarily by the coal dust. Another sad story is that Woodward Iron Company is no longer a part of the economy of Hueytown. A place where many men worked now stands idle and Woodward Iron Company is just a part of our history.

From the community known as Huey in 1900, the area became Hueytown about 1914. For many years Hueytown was one of the largest unincorporated areas of Jefferson County. The City of Hueytown was incorporated May 5, 1960 with Majors Norden elected the first Mayor. The city has grown; the population has tripled; and the city continues to grow. Located in the southwestern section of Jefferson County, Hueytown is my Hometown. For about seventy years my life has been spent in Hueytown or on the outskirts of Hueytown near Rutledge Springs. I attended Rutledge School before I attended Hueytown High School. And I am proud to tell everyone that I meet that I am from Hueytown, Alabama. In forty-six years the City has grown

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with most of its residents being descendants of the Early Settlers of the Wilderness Land of Hueytown in Jefferson County, Alabama.

Just a short note in the year 2009, Hueytown will celebrate its Golden Anniversary in 2010. The Hueytown Pride Organization holds SPRINGFEST every spring to celebrate the progress of our great City. We look forward to the next celebration, FIFTY YEARS, A COTY, HUEYTOWN, ALABAMA. Once a part of the Wilderness Land that became Alabama, we are the City of Hueytown in Jefferson County and the Great State of Alabama.

Sources: Census Records of Jefferson County, Alabama, 1830, 1850, 1870 and 1900. Jefferson County, Alabama Deed Records, Marriage Records, Probate Records, and Court Minutes from Courthouses in Birmingham and Bessemer. Jefferson County and Birmingham, Alabama, 1887, Early History by B. E. Grace. MAP OF BESSEMER, ALA AND CONTINGUOUS TERRITORY, BESSEMER WEEKLY, May 18, 1901. HISTORY OF ALABAMA. War of 1812 Internet. BARTRAM AMONG THE CREEKS Internet RootsWeb.com. Personal Files on Family Research.

Written by Ruth Brimmer Dawson Davidson in 2000 and Revised in 2006 and 2009.
111 Kenilworth Road, Hueytown, AL 35023, Phone 205-491-4785.