

History of Jefferson County, Georgia

1927 - By: Mrs. Z. V. Thomas

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Love though thy land far brought
From out the storied past, and used
Within the present, but transfused
Through future time by power of thought.

-----Jennyson
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foreward

In gathering the facts for this little history of Jefferson County, I am indebted to Dr. Lucian Knight State Historian's "Legends and Landmarks of Georgia", Evans' "History of Georgia", and to many friends for their courtesies in helping me to sources of information. The history is very imperfect and abbreviated, but it is written in the hope that some other pen will record a fuller more complete account of our grand old county, which as the birthplace of Georgia's legalized capital, and the times following this history-making epoch.

--Z. V. Thomas

Photo <Old Slave Market, Louisville, GA>

HISTORY OF JEFFERSON COUNTY

CHAPTER 1

Colonizing Georgia

Over in England there was a young officer by the name of Oglethorpe, who had distinguished himself in military service and was elected to parliament. He became interested in prison conditions, and decided that a new country and new surroundings would give many men, who were put in prison for debt, a new opportunity to make good.

He with some influential friends, petitioned the king for a grant of land in the new country, America, upon which a number of the indigent people around London could be settled. The scheme being approved, the charter of the Colony of Georgia was written and received the great seal of England June 9, 1732.

It has been idly charged that, in the beginning, Georgia's colonist were impecunious, depraved, lawless and abandoned; that the settlement at Savannah was a sort of Botany Bay and that Yamacraw Bluff was peopled by renegades from justice. This is utterly without foundation. The truth is, no applicant was admitted to the privileges of enrollment as an emigrant until he had been subjected to an examination and had furnished satisfactory proof that he was fairly entitled to the benefits. Other American colonies were founded by individuals coming at will, without question, and bringing no certificate of present or past conduct. Oglethorpe permitted no one to join his colonists who was not, by competent authority, judged worthy of citizenship.

Four months were devoted to the task of selecting the first settlers of Georgia. Only the best among the needy population of England were taken. No debtor was taken without the consent of his creditor; no criminals were accepted; and no man was received whose object was to desert those dependent upon him for support.

At high noon, on November 16, 1732, the goodship ANNE spread her wings and began to plow the Thames on her perilous voyage across the Atlantic. There were 35 families on board, numbering 120 emigrants, under the personal care of the illustrious Oglethorpe himself. Over two months time was consumed on the voyage, during which period prayers were offered each morning and evening for Divine guidance that no mishap might overtake the passengers on board. On Jan. 13, 1733, the vessel dipped anchor in the harbor of Charleston, and the colonists were given a hearty welcome. It does not detract from the genuineness of this greeting to state that Georgia afterwards became a buffer

between South Carolina and her enemies, the Spaniards and Indians. The next stop was Beaufort, where the immigrants were provided with shelter until Oglethorpe, accompanied by William Bull and Jonathan Bryan, of South Carolina, could visit the future settlement. They made the trip in an Indian canoe, and after winding in and out among the small islands at the mouth of the Savannah River, they saw, some distance up the river, a bluff crowned with pine trees, and at the western end a village, which they afterward learned was called Yamacraw. The chief of the tribe of Indians living in Yamacraw was named Tomo-chi-chi. A trading post had been established there by a man named John Musgrove, whose wife Mary, was a half-breed. The old chief at first refused to grant the request of the Europeans for land on which to settle, but, through the good offices of Mary Musgrove, he finally consented after which the land was surveyed and the party returned to Beaufort for the colonists.

February 12, 1733, the little band of emigrants reached the bluff on which the infant colony of Georgia was to be cradled. Four large tents were spread. By sunset the baggage was all ashore. Nightfall came, prayers of thanksgiving were offered, and under the silent stars was spent the first night on Georgia soil. The leaders among the early colonists at Savannah were - General Oglethorpe, Captain Horton, Henry Parker, John Fallowfield, Col. William Stephens, Patrick Tailfer, Thomas Jones, Thomas Christie, Richard Turner, Paul Amatis, James Burnside, Peter Morel, Hugh Anderson, Anthony Camuse, P. Delegal, Walter Fox, Peter Gordon, James Houston, Samuel Lacy, John Pye, Joseph Wardrope, Thomas Young, the Messrs. Sheftall and De Lyons, Noble Jones, James Habersham, John Milledge and Dr. Nunis.

In the next few months more ships bringing immigrants arrived at Yamacraw, and Savannah was laid out in squares and building lots, and the streets named. The name of the town was changed from Yamacraw to Savannah. The large grant of land by Oglethorpe by King George II. extended from the Savannah River southward along the coast to the Altamaha River, and from the headwaters of these rivers westward, to what is called the South Seas. The county was divided into 8 equal parts and was formed into the province of Georgia, named in honor of King George II. Religious liberty was given to the settlers except to those called Papists, but the church of England was the leading religion.

The county was divided into parishes:

Christ Church parish including Savannah;
St. Matthew's parish, including Abercorn and Ebenezer
St. George's parish, including Halifax
St. Paul's parish, including Augusta
St. Philip's parish including Great Ogeechee
St. John's, including Midway and Sunbury

St. Andrew's, including Darien
St. James', including Fredrica.

These parishes were established in 1758, in order to facilitate and better regulate the government of the colony. Public worship was ordered to be held at each settlement from the Ogeechee River on the west to the Savannah River on the east, and out of which, later, was formed Jefferson, Burke and Screven Counties.

There is no fairer land in Georgia than that which was included in St. George's parish. Great bodies of cane stretched along the crystal streams in which the bear found his home; on the rich grasses thousands of deer fed; the hills were covered with a magnificent growth; the forests were like a king's park; there were streams and springs. The cattle needed no pasturage except what the woodlands furnished.

It is no wonder that as soon as the land was offered to the settlers, they came in great numbers. The newcomer had only to select the place on which he wanted to settle, put down his stakes, and build his cabin. He filed an affidavit with the Governor's Council that he intended to settle in the colony, and an order was given to the surveyor to lay out two hundred acres of land for him, and an extra 50 acres for each additional negro he brought with him. The land was given away. Life with the early settlers was hard at first. There were no roads, and they came with their small supply of needful things on pack horses. The cabins were built of round logs and covered with split boards. At first the floor was of packed clay, the chimneys of sticks and clay. Oftentimes not a nail was used in the building. The furniture was scanty and made by hand. The long gray moss that hung like curtains on the trees in the swamps, furnished the couch for the sleepers. Augusta was the trading post, but very little money was in circulation. By carrying poultry to market, the pioneers secured powder, lead and salt. There was plenty game, and turkeys were so plentiful, they were caught in pens and their flesh dried. Immigration was large; as soon as the news of the rich land was told abroad, many Scotch-Irish people came directly from Ireland and settled in the part of St. George's parish that is now Jefferson County. Some brought over the spinning wheels they used in Ireland to spin flax, and a few tried to grow flax, but the soil did not suit, or perhaps the rough new land was not adapted to the culture of flax. Ten miles south-east of Louisville stood an old trading post that ante-dates the coming of Oglethorpe to Georgia. The traditions of the locality indicate that at an early period there were Indian traders from South Carolina in this neighborhood, and if not the first Europeans to establish themselves upon the soil of the future colony, then they, at least, penetrated further into the interior. George GALPHIN was one of this adventurous band. He lived at Silver Bluff, on the east-side of the Savannah-River, where he owned what was, at that time, an elegant mansion.

Galphin carried an extensive trade with the Indians, and was looked upon by them with awe and respect. They brought him their disagreements for settlement, and whatever he advised them to do, was the final word on the subject. The trading post which he established on the Ogeechee River was called Galphinton. It was also known as Ogeechee Town, and after Louisville was settled, some ten miles to the north-west, it was commonly called Old Town to distinguish it from New Town, which the residents of the locality gave to the future capital of Georgia. In the course of time there gathered about the old trading post quite a settlement due to the extensive barter with the Indians which here took place at certain seasons of the year; but time has spared only the barest remnants of the old fort. The following story is told of how George Galphin acquired the land on which the town of Louisville was afterwards built: Attracted by the red coat which he wore, an old Indian Chief, whose wits had been sharpened by the contact with the traders, approached Galphin in the hope of securing the coveted coat. Said he: "Me had dream last night." "You did?" said Galphin, "what did you dream about?" "Me dream you give me dat coat." "Then you shall have it," said Galphin, and immediately suited the action to the word by transferring to him the coat.

Quite a while passed before the old chief returned to the post, but when he appeared again in the settlement, Galphin said, "Chief, I dreamed about you last night." "Ugh", he grunted, "what did you dream?" "I dreamed you gave me all the land in the fork of this creek", pointing to the tributary streams of the Ogeechee. "Well," said the chief, "you take it, but we no more dream."

There is every reason to believe the old trading post at Galphinton was in existence when the state was first colonized. The settlement which gradually developed around it may have arisen later, historians are not in accord upon this point. There were sundry settlers scattered among the Indians, and it is probable Mr. Galphin had around his settlement at Galphinton some of his countrymen before Oglethorpe came. As early as the time of Governor Reynolds, in 1752, there were grants made to men in the part of St. George's parish that is now Jefferson County. Beyond question, Galphinton was the first locality established in Georgia by white men for commerce. At Galphinton, in 1758, a treaty was made between the state of Georgia and the Creek Indians, whereby the latter agreed to surrender to the state the famous "Tallehassee Strip", between the Altamaha River and the St. Mary's; but the compact was repudiated by the Creeks under McGillivray who was a leader in the long protracted Oconee War. By a treaty, in 1790, this strip was confirmed to the Indians, but in 1814, as a penalty for siding with the British in the war of 1812, the Indians were forced to cede it to the whites.

Some eight miles to the northwest of Galphinton, a trading post was established about the year 1769 by a band of Scotch-Irish settlers, who called the place Queensboro, in honor of Queen Anne. It was located in an angle made by the Ogeechee River with a large creek which enters the stream at this point. This creek is called Rock Comfort, which flows by Louisville. The

locality was somewhat elevated and seemed to meet two requirements; a strong hold that could be made secure from Indian assaults, and healthy. In the immediate vicinity there was estimated to be at one time 200 hundred families. It was sometimes called the Irish settlement, or Irish Reserve, because the majority of the settlers were Irish, and most of them came directly or indirectly from the North of Ireland. George Galphin and John Rae were instrumental in getting them a reservation of 50 thousand acres of land which bordered on the Ogeechee River. They were Presbyterians by faith. The town survived for a number of years, but when Louisville arose two miles off, it gradually declined in population until it finally ceased to exist. It was not until the Battle of Lexington that the Scotch Irish settlers of Queensboro, in the parish of St. George, renounced allegiance to the crown of England. The reasons for the strong sentiment which prevailed in this part of the province were numerous.

The settlers lived on the frontier, constantly exposed to Indian attacks. They needed protected of England.

Quite a few were wealthy planters, who possessed large estates; moreover, they resented a condition of affairs which were laid at the doors of the Puritans of Boston, and did not see why Georgia should become a party to New England's quarrel. So, following the famous meeting at Tondee's Tavern in Savannah, August 10, 1774, a protest meeting was held, in which the resolutions adopted at Savannah were condemned as reflecting improperly on the King of England and Parliament. This was signed by the free holders and earliest settlers of what is now Jefferson County.

Jefferson County was laid out from Burke and Warren counties in 1796, and was named for Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and President of the United States from 1801 to 1809. It lies in the eastern part of the state, and is bounded on the north and east by Richmond and McDuffie counties; on the west by Washington and on the northwest by Glascock and Warren; on the south by Johnson and Emanuel. The Ogeechee River flows through the county and before the Central Railroad was built, was the principal medium of communication with Savannah. The surface of the land is elevated, gently rolling, giving fine drainage, splendid for farming. Being an old county, the soil has been reduced in fertility by injudicious farming, but the introduction of scientific methods in the last few years has restored much of the land to its primitive productiveness. Crops can be produced everywhere. The main crops are cotton, corn, peanuts, peas, velvet peas, grain of every kind, potatoes, -- sweet and Irish, -- tobacco, berries, and fruits of many kinds. Indeed, it would be difficult to mention anything belonging to this latitude that cannot be successfully grown in Jefferson County. Since the appearance of the boll weevil, farmers have diversified their crops, and give much attention to many products which are putting money into the homes. Lumber manufacturing has assumed immense proportions, and there are several mills in

the county. Planting pecan groves is making a future bright with promise. Much hardwood timber is shipped in round logs to various manufacturing plants. There are several farms of dewberries, whose owners enjoy a nice profit from their sales. Nearly every kind of fruit, except tropical, can be grown, and the swamps furnish a variety of wild fruits and nuts. The principal minerals are shell marl, limestone, burrstone, agate, and chalcedony. There are several mineral springs. On the line of Burke and Jefferson in southeastern section there is a big spring that covers nearly a quarter of an acre, and boils up in several places, a clear stream of pure limestone water, with force enough to turn a mill. Near this spring there was a stone quarry operated by Mr. Burr, but it has long since fallen into disuse.

Several fine streams of water are scattered over the county. Ogeechee River runs entirely through the county, from west to east, and has many tributaries. Briar Creek marks part of boundary line between Jefferson, McDuffie, Richmond, and Burke; Rocky Comfort, Big Creek, Reedy Creek and Williamson Creek are the largest streams, while numerous small streams abound. The Ogeechee River is navigable to Louisville. Near Wrens on the farm of Mr. John Radford, a bed of clay has been discovered which contains flint and pebbles, useful in making roadbeds, streets, and for ballast. The stratum is about 12 feet deep and covers several acres. It yields about 900 cars per acre, and valued at six and seven hundred dollars for the acre.

The school system of the county is advancing rapidly to the most practical and far-reaching plans which have matured in the minds of the best thinkers of the state. Consolidated schools are the rule, and the county is divided into school districts which have completed, or have in construction, the most modern and best equipped school building it is possible to plan.

The last census gives the county a population of 22 thousand six hundred and two, with an area of six hundred forty-six square miles. It is near the central eastern part of Georgia, and is nearly twice as long as wide. The Central railroad runs through the southern part, the Georgia and Florida traverses the northern portion, the Savannah and Northwestern runs north and south from Savannah to Camack, while a short line operates between Louisville and Wadley. This short railroad has the distinction of a Sabbath observance, a train never having been run on Sunday since the road was built, and yet it is on the paying basis.

The old Indian trails leading from Louisville, Milledgeville and other points to Savannah and Augusta, are now splendid highways.

The county uses the prisoners to work the public roads, and provides a permanent home on the highway between Louisville and Wrens where good order, neat homes with sanitary conveniences, and electric lights, mitigate the

ignominy of their penalties. A home for the destitute and old is provided by the county, which is largely self-sustaining.

The Dixie Highway goes through the county, passing through Louisville onto Savannah, and the Jefferson Davis Highway is routed from Wrightsville through Bartow, to intersect the Dixie at Bostick's Mill, passing onto Louisville, Wrens and Augusta.

There are several historic churches in the county. Ways Church, one of the oldest, first called Darcy's meeting house, near Stellaville, was constituted May 15, 1817. The oldest church in the county, perhaps, is Old Bethel, constituted May 9, 1795. These churches were originally congregations belonging to the anti-Missionary Baptist Church, but education and a broader love for humanity made a split among the members. The antis withdrew and the Missionary Baptist church began her world-wide program. Ebenezer Church on the road from Louisville to Wrens, Presbyterian, is another old church. Mt. Moriah, Methodist, in extreme northern part of the county is noted for its camp meetings held every summer, including the third Sunday in August, where thousands assemble to hear the greatest pulpit orators in the Methodist Church. Here Bishop Pierce and his father used to preach, and here friends and old acquaintances met to renew friendships and memories of other days.

The leading denominations are Methodists and Baptists with Presbyterians in central part of county, Primitive Baptists in southern, and a few other denominations scattered over the county. Churches for these congregations are accessible, and every section is blessed with some church as a community center. The Scotch-Irish Presbyterians had congregations before the Revolution, but churches were not erected. The Rev. Mr. Ronadison was Pastor, but was a Royalist and was taken captive. After being released he left Georgia and never returned. After the war ended, the Presbyterians sent to Ireland and secured a pastor, Rev. David Bothwell, who came to Queensboro in 1790. His congregation was large and embraced a large scope of country. Here he labored for many years, and died at the residence of General Jared Irwin, in Washington County, and was buried there in the family burial ground in June, 1801, aged 45 years. He was a man of medium size-rather stout-and was a clear-forceful speaker.

The Methodists and Baptists came after the war of the Revolution and so remarkably have they increased, that their followers exceed all others in numbers.

In the southern part of the county, Gen. Solomon Wood lived. His home was built on a high knoll a mile east of Bartow, on the farm now owned by Mr. J. R. O. Smith. Here he built a block house for the protection of the people from Indian raids, and had a bell made; the shape of this bell is like those used for cow bells, and could be heard two miles. When signs of Indian trouble were

seen or heard the bell would peal out its warning, and the people would seek safety in the fort. General Wood was a Revolutionary soldier. He lived to a goodly old age, but fell from a wagon while making a trip to Augusta or Savannah to exchange produce for plantation supplies, and sustained a broken leg, which caused blood poisoning from which he died. He is buried on the high knoll near the old home site and his grave is marked by a simple stone. His sons continued to live there, until one of the overseers began to use guano, when they said if the land was too poor to make a crop without guano, they would move away. They sold the place to Mr. Spier, who in turn sold it to Mr. Samuel Tarver, father of the late Judge A. E. Tarver. It has seen many changes. When its career began, this part of Georgia was almost primeval forest. Indians were numerous, and made the life of the settlers days of agony and nights of dread, unless they were fortunate enough to make peace treaties with the chiefs; and even then some unruly warriors would slip at times to hold a war dance with himself, as he stealthily slipped upon some unprotected home and left a wife and child with bleeding scalps, to tell an awful story to the returning husband and father. Later, the bell was used on the farm of Judge Tarver to mark the beginning of the day's work and to call the hands in to dinner. It has been laid aside now for years, but is a living link which ties the present to a historic past.

South of General Wood's fort, across Williamson Creek, a party of Indians surprised a home and killed the father. They scalped and carried off his daughter, but were overtaken by a band of whites, hastily assembled, and a battle was fought not far from the J. J. Polhill place. The Indians were defeated and several killed. The girl was rescued and afterwards recovered and married a Mr. Eason. She lived to a goodly age, and was the grandmother of Mrs. Uriah Anderson, who home, near Old Bethel Church, is now owned by Mr. Ben Kitchens.

Few counties have sent forth a greater number of good citizens whose descendants have scattered into nearly every part of the world. Jefferson has been more famous for its large planters than for its public men, but it has produced not a few of distinction.

Ex-Governor Johnston was a citizen of Jefferson County. He was a native of Burke County, born Sept. 18, 1812; graduated from the University of Georgia; practiced law in Augusta a short time, then moved to Jefferson County, and was early mentioned as a youthful giant who fought with burnished steel. He was twice governor of Georgia, a senator of the U. S. Congress, Judge of Superior Court, nominated for Vice-President of the Confederate States, and was a member of the famous Georgia convention which met in Milledgeville Jan. 16, 1861, to decide whether or not Georgia should secede from the Union. After the war, he was again elected with Alexander Stephens to the United States Senate, but they were not allowed to take their seats because Georgia had not complied with all the requirements put on her by the Federal

Government, chief among which was ratifying the 14th amendment, conferring citizenship on the negroes, so lately slaves.

Ex-Governor Johnson doubted the wisdom of secession, and took no active part in affairs during the war. He returned to his plantation, near Bartow, and to his home, Sandy Grove, which was filled with many interesting things connected with his eventful life. He was serving as a judge of the superior court when he died. Judge Johnston was famous for his power as a platform speaker, for his deep devotion to his friends and intense hatred of his foes. He married a Miss Polk, a niece of Pres. James K. Polk. Governor Johnston is buried in what is called the New Cemetery in Louisville. A monument marks his grave, having on it the simple inscription; "ex-Governor Herschel V. Johnston, born in Burke County, GA., Sept. 18, 1812; died in Jefferson County, GA; August 16, 1880".

Hugh Lawson, whose father came into Georgia from North Carolina before the Revolution, a captain in the Revolution, one of the commissioners for the sale of confiscated property and for selecting the place for a State-house, and one of the trustees of the University, was brought up in this county.

Judge Roger Lawson Gamble, who was a member of Congress, long lived in Louisville.

Chesley and Littleberry Bostwick, both officers in the Revolution, lived in the county; also the Cobbs, Lamars, Rootes, and Flournoys. Capt. James Meriwether, a brave Revolutionary soldier from Virginia, died in this county October 25, 1817. Gen. George Stapleton, another Revolutionary hero, a Virginian by birth, settled in the county and reared a large family. He died May 30, 1832.

Maj. John Berrien, father of Hon. John M. Berrien, at the dawn of the Revolution visited Georgia, and at the age of 15 was appointed a lieutenant in the First Georgia Regiment, and was promoted to a captaincy in the same. When General McIntosh was appointed to a command in the Northern army, Major Berrien was selected by him as brigade major, and in that capacity he joined the grand army at Valley Forge. He was wounded at the battle of Monmouth and decorated by Washington with the order of Cincinnati, and later became president of the Georgia branch of this organization. The emblem of this order was an eagle. Major Berrien was born in the famous Berrien mansion, near Princeton, N.J., from which Washington issued his farewell orders to his army at the close of hostilities. He lived several years in Louisville, but died in Savannah.

Benjamin Whitaker, speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives for along time, lived and died in Jefferson County. United States Senator Gunn also lived in Louisville, and is buried in the old cemetery there.

Governor Howell Cobb and Gen. T. R. Cobb were natives of Jefferson, but were reared in Clark County. Howell Cobb, Sr. an uncle of the Governor, resided in Jefferson. He was a member of Congress 1807-1811.

One of the early settlers of Jefferson was Ambrose Wright. His son, Major General A. R. Wright, became an officer of high rank in the Confederate Army, and an officer of distinction. The present Comptroller-General of Georgia, William A. Wright, who has held this office for 36 years, is a grandson. A brother of Gen. A. R. Wright, Col. H. G. Wright, was a native of Jefferson and his several descendants living in Louisville.

Daniel Hook, an eminent pioneer minister of the Church of Disciples, resided for several years at Louisville, where his distinguished son, Judge James. S. Hook, Commissioner of Education, jurist and scholar, was born.

The celebrated Patrick Carr, who is said to have killed one hundred Tories with his own hand, lived and died in Jefferson. He said he would have made a good soldier, but the Lord made him too merciful.

Among the other soldiers of the War of Independence who came from this immediate vicinity were: Gen. Solomon Wood, a captain in the Revolution, afterwards of general of militia; Aaron Thomlinson, an officer under General Green; Chesly Bostwick and Littleberry Bostwick, both officers; Seth Pearce and William Lyon. Chief Justice James Jackson, a grandson of the old governor, was a native of Jefferson. Here also lived Brigadier-General Reuben W. Carswell, a distinguished Confederate soldier and a jurist of note. Dr. Tilman Dixon, of Louisville, was a student at Richmond Academy during General Washington's visit to Georgia, and being an honor boy, received an autographed book from the General.

Capt. James Meriwether and George L. Stapleton, Sr., were Revolutionary patriots, and served their country with honor and distinction. John Peel, and an old patriot by the name of King, whose grave in the old cemetery

{to be continued}