

Chapter Seventeen

THE ORIGINAL SETTLEMENTS

The Federal Census of 1840 was the first historical documentation of Creek families living near each other, who had moved inland from the river communities. Numerous Indian families had settled on the original Lynn McGhee land grant located at Red Hill. At the time of the census of 1840, Red Hill was a part of Conecuh County. During the 1850-1860 Federal Census, this area had become a part of Baldwin County. Then in 1868, Red Hill, later called Local, and known today as Huxford, became a part of a new county, Escambia County, Alabama, and remains so today. By the way, Escambia comes from the Creek word, "*shambia*," which means "*cold water*."

For the interested modern-day traveler, Red Hill was located east of Alabama Highway 21 past the present Huxford Middle School (old High School) on Escambia County, Alabama Highway 30. The school, which is on the left, serves as a beginning marker of the original land grant of Lynn McGhee. McGhee's property ran west to east parallel with Highway 30, on both sides of the road, extending east to the present day Sardis Church. Lynn, his wife, Hettie Semoice and four of their five children settled here.

If you go past the Sardis Church, which is on the left side of the road, take Burlington Road, the first road to the left. This road crosses the land once owned by Polly Moniac Coon-Rolin, who was the granddaughter of Sam Manac, and one of Steve's direct Creek ancestors.

Jack Coon-Rolin and his wife Polly with their children were at Red Hill when the Federal Census of 1840 was taken. In the 1860 Federal Census at Red Hill, their son Richard "Tobe" Rolin and his wife, Frances McGhee were counted in their own household; while sons John, Sam and Alex Rolin were all Coon.

Now in the 1870 Federal Census, the surname was changed to Rolin. The spelling of John's surname became Roland, and he and his wife, Rody Taylor, and their children were counted in the 1880 Escambia Census.

Polly Moniac's mother, Betsey Ehlert Moniac (our fourth g grandmother's whose husband Dixon died in 1835); Polly's sister, Matilda "Tildy" Moniac and husband Sidney Lomax (Lou's third g grandparents) and family, were also recorded in the 1840 census living in the Red Hill area. The Lomax homestead was northwest of the present day First Baptist Church of Huxford (west of Highway 21 on County Road 30).

Polly's brother, Sam Moniac II, was another Moniac descendant living in the area. Sam II, his wife Susan Marlow and their children, moved several times back and forth across the Monroe and Conecuh County lines between Huxford and Mount Pleasant, the old Sizemore Creek community. Susan Marlow had used her land reservations for properties in both counties. All of the younger Moniac family members were also included in the census of 1840.

Other future Poarch families settling in the Red Hill area, after the census of 1840, included William Colbert, his wife Celia Sizemore and their children, and William "Bart" Gibson and his wife Margaret (Peggy) Moniac and their children. These families established their homesteads near those of the McGhee's and Rolin's. All of these families settled in the Red Hill community between 1840 and 1860.

THE POARCH SETTLEMENT

The McGhee and Rolin (Coon) families were the first to move from Red Hill to present day Poarch, relocating to the late Lynn McGhee's land grant near the Hedapeda and Poarch Switch areas. The present site of Poarch is located in the northwest corner of what is now Escambia County, Alabama.

Earlier we mentioned that the frontier around Poarch had been basically an unsettled area, covered with heavy forest. Although a branch of the Federal Road from Montgomery to Stockton ran through it from northeast to southwest, the Poarch area was still isolated and thinly populated when the McGhee and Rolin families made their move. By this time, most of the Coons had chosen to use their non-Indian name of Rolin (Rollin or Roland).

Lynn McGhee died in 1848, prior to his heirs – Richard, Nancy, Peggy and Jack – deciding to move to the Hedapeda land grant, which they did in about 1860. The largest concentration of Indian families, settling in the Poarch area during the 19th century, occurred between that time and the end of the century. Locations and dates of establishment are: Hedapeda and Poarch Switch (1860), Bell Creek (1877), and Hog Fork (1886). The four hamlets were located within three miles of each other.

Another notable community with a sizable Indian population was the community of Jack Springs. It was located about four miles from Hedapeda. In its early history Jack Springs, which was located on the old Federal Road, was a commonly used campsite. Legend has it that General Andrew Jackson camped there on his way to Pensacola in 1814.

The 1870 Federal Census showed a sizable concentration of Indians living in the Jack Springs Community. There were 78 Creek surnames on the census return. The Mars Hill Baptist Church at Jack

Springs had been constructed in 1869 on land donated by a Creek Indian, John Steadham. Indians made up a part of the congregation and were involved in the administration of the church, certainly a rarity for those days.

In September of 1879, Jack Springs got its first U.S. Post Office, but it was discontinued after being opened for only three months. In 1880, Jack Springs first appeared on the Alabama State Map, but is not found on the map today.

Immediately following the McGhees and Rolins, and settling in the Poarch communities were the families of Alexander and Jefferson Hollinger, Bart Gibson, Alexander McGillivray Weatherford, William Adams, Clairborne Hosford, and Stewart and Simon Hadley. Boone, Bryars, Colbert, Durant, Ehlert (Elliott), Ellison, Freeman, Gibson, Hale, Hathcock, Hinson, Jackson, Peacock, Presley, Sizemore, Stiggers, Steadham, Taylor, and Walker were other Indian families who settled in areas surrounding Poarch in Escambia, Baldwin and Monroe Counties. Some of these families we will discuss in greater depth in the next chapter.

Outlining hamlets were Indian families lived included Poplar Springs (Indian name: Jeddo), Lottie, Nokomis, and Semriah Springs. Semirah Springs, got its name from William Marshall Dees, who was called "Billy Semire," after his grandfather, John Semoice.

Most of the original Poarch area families were tightly interwoven through intermarriage and because they lived close together in a small geographical region. These families provided the primary ancestral link that a century and a half later would help authenticate the heritage of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

The web of kinship relations in the Poarch area is too complex to describe completely. It is noteworthy that the Sizemores, Gibsons, Hollingers, Durants, and Marlows, all mixed-blood lines came to Southwest Alabama from South Carolina. Most were mixed-bloods from the Catawba or Lumbee Tribes. They soon began to intermarry with the Creek mixed-bloods and became fixtures in the Poarch community.

The Poarch families maintained close relationships early on with their kinsmen in the Alabama-Tensaw district. But with the passing of time the Poarch Creek Indians evolved into a separate group that became socially and economically distinguishable from the original river community.

An important factor in this separation was that the Poarch families were considerably more economically deprived than their relatives near the river. After the Civil War, many of the Poarch families became increasingly poorer. For the most part, they remained extremely poor throughout the rest of the 19th century and well into the 20th century.

CIVIL WAR YEARS

The United States Government's sworn promise to protect and provide aid to the Poarch settlement after the removal of the main Creek body to Oklahoma in 1836, waned with the passing of years. This led to a big informational gap about the processes of change and interethnic relations in the Poarch community that was evident up to the Civil War.

In the early 1860's, the Civil War between the North and the South began. At least eighteen men from Poarch served with the South's Confederate Army. Among those from Poarch families who served were: Richard McGhee (who was wounded in the war and received a pension the rest of his life), Richard "Tobe" Rolin (who lost his life in the war), Lynn McGhee (a grandson of the original Lynn), James L. McGhee, Carmen McGhee, David Moniac, J.R. Moniac, Mike Moniac, George Moniac, Martin and William Gibson, William W. Adams, William M. Dees, William Colbert, John Hinson, Charles Bryars, Adam, William and Alex Hollinger, and J.V. Steadham.

Charles Sizemore, who also had family ties to the Poarch community, was killed at Williamsburg on May 5, 1862, and George Washington Taylor, husband of Mary Matilda Colbert (daughter of William Colbert and Celia Sizemore), died in July of 1864 at the Battle of Chattanooga. Oral tradition has it that there were some troop movements through the Poarch area during the war, including a major Union movement along the rail line through nearby Williams Station, now Atmore.

FORGOTTEN YEARS

The decades immediately after the Civil War brought a number of important changes in the social organization of the Poarch Creek community. There are few descriptive accounts of any kind that might have described and identified the Poarch Band between 1850 and 1890, because of the remoteness and isolation of the area. But historical record for the remainder of the years leading up to the 20th Century did indicate some primary land acquisitions. During this period, homestead applications by members of the Poarch Creek community rose considerably.

Families in the Poarch settlements were consistently distinguished on the censuses, from 1860 onward, as Indian. The settlements continued to be very tightly clustered geographically, and became more strongly based on the network of close kinship, built up by the intermarriage between local family lines.

This negligence by the Federal Government also led to a significant disintegration of the Indians relationship with non-Indians. The degree of cultural isolation from the non-Indians grew more prevalent with

the passing of years as the chasm between the Indian and the non-Indian community widened even further. It would be well into the 20th Century before any appreciable change would take place in Indian and non-Indian relationships.