

THE JAMES DEWITT, SENIOR, FAMILY

On 26 December 1809, a passport was prepared and issued to James Dewitt, his wife, three children and two slaves to pass through the Creek Nation of Indians. Since about 1785, Governors of Georgia had been issuing passports for traveling to the various Territories and Provinces to the West of Georgia.

James Dewitt was living in Edgefield District of South Carolina at the time his third son, Lewis Lee Dewitt, was born in 1805. James brought with him two other sons, Joseph, born about 1795, and James F. Dewitt, Jr., born about 1796.

In the 1810 Census of Washington County, Mississippi Territory, James Dewitt's household was composed of: Two white males above 21 years; three white males less than 21 years; one white female above 21 years; one white female less than 21 years; no free people of color; and two slaves. Records are lacking for positively identifying who the other male above 21 years old and the female less than 21 years could have been. According to researchers who have worked extensively with the passports in the various archives of Georgia, it was not uncommon for travelers to get passports for a certain group but actually carry "mother, father, grandparents or cousins" along.

In the 1816 Census of Clarke County, Alabama, James Dewitt's household consisted of: One male, 21 years old or above; one female 21 years old or above; two males, less than 21 years old; and four slaves. James' son, Joseph Dewitt, 21 years old or above; a female, less than 21 years old; and one male less than 21 years old lived in a separate household. These two households account for the four males and one female who left South Carolina with the passport through Indian Lands. Apparently, the extra people in the household in 1810 were not immediate family members. At any rate, no proof of such has been found.

A logical question might be, "Why did these families come to such a dangerous and undeveloped place?" The Dewitt family was educated, comfortably well off enough to own two slaves, and they and their parents had already helped settle the State of South Carolina. There were probably several reasons: The offer of free land; the challenge of a new adventure; but the most likely one was the encouragement the settler got from the wealthy land owners who wanted to place settlers between themselves and the Indians. The new settlers were to serve as a buffer zone of Indian fighters.

If one notes that James Dewitt, Senior, apparently never got title to any land while in Clarke County, he most likely served in the militia since he had a rank of Corporal by 1812. These men wore their leather moccasins and leggings so as to pass silently through the forest habitats of the Indians, principally the Choctaw and Creek tribes in the Clarke County area. Their constant companion was their trusty gun used to secure food for

the table, protection for themselves and their families from the "savages", and to enforce equality and justice where no law prevailed otherwise.

Our Dewitts came to Clarke County, then known as the eastern side of the Mississippi Territory, just five years after the Creek Nation granted the use of a horse path through their country and the Choctaws ceded lands from the southern boundary of Clarke County to Choctaw Corner on the northern boundary of Clarke County.

By what route and conveyance the Dewitts came to the Mississippi Territory is not clear. The Federal Road was not constructed until 1811, a year or more after the Dewitts had migrated. However, this would seem to be the logical route which was a well traveled path before the road was built. They either came in a wagon or rolled a hogshead, a barrel on wheels, filled with the family possessions. They brought two slaves with them. The slaves would have been most helpful in providing transportation and personal care for the family.

During the Creek and Indian War or the War of 1812, a Corporal James Dewitt served in the First Regiment of the Mississippi Volunteers. It appears this person was James, Senior, the Indian fighter. It is certain this person was not James, Junior, as his War of 1812 Pension and Land Claim Records show he was a Private in the Fifteenth Regiment of Johnson's Mississippi Militia and was in service only six or less months. His War of 1812 record will be found in its proper place concerning his life. When stationed at Fort Claiborne, he stated he was thirty miles from home.

Most likely the Dewitt families took refuge in Fort Madison during the worst period of the Indian depredations in the area. At that time, the Dewitts lived east of Jackson and east of Bassett's Creek near Suggsville.

Apparently all the Dewitts survived the Creek War and suffered few personal losses. They made no claims to Judge Harry Toulmin for restitution for property destroyed or stolen during the conflict.

One may get some idea of where James Dewitt, Senior, lived by examining the assignments of the earliest Court Records of Clarke County, Alabama. In an 1813 entry in the minutes of the Commissioners' Court, it is noted, "By order of the Court that Joseph Dewitt be appointed overseer of the Road in place of James Dewitt." A later entry defined this "Road" to be from Reedy Creek to Rabbit Creek. A crew of men were assigned to Joseph to get the work done.

In the Commissioners' Court Minutes for May, 1816, a section of road from Jackson to James L. Phillipps and another section from James L. Phillipps to Coffeeville were ordered built. The court ordered that "James Dewitt be appointed overseer of the work."

overseer of said road from the town of Jackson to James L. Phillipse...".

In October 1817, James Dewitt, Senior, Joseph Dewitt and James (Duiett) Dewitt, Junior, signed a petition to prevent the annexation of part of the Alabama Territory to the newly formed State of Mississippi. The petition was referred on 30 December 1817 to the Select Committee, appointed on the 17th instant, to deal with a memorial of the Mississippi Convention, relating to an extension of the limits of the State (Territorial Papers of the Alabama Territory). As one result of this petition of residents in Clarke, Monroe, Washington, Mobile and Baldwin Counties, the Alabama Territory was established on 14 December 1819.

Rev. T. H. Ball, in his History of Clarke County, on pages 186-7, states that about 1824, the Dewitts were among settlers who migrated northward toward the Bashi and Marengo settlements. In 1830, the Dewitts were living in the western edge of Wilcox County. The 1830 Census reflects the compositions of the households.

Dewitt, Joseph (b. 1790-1800) age 30-40 years.
1 white male (1815-20) ages 10-15 years.
2 white males (1820-25) ages 5-10 years.
1 white male (1825-30) less than 5 years.
1 white female (1790-1800) ages 30-40 years.
2 white females (1825-30) less than 5 years.

His neighbors were Green B.; James and William White; and Abel Evans.

Dewitt, James (b. 1790-1800) age 30-40 years.
2 white males (1810-15) ages 15-20 years.
1 white male (1815-20) age 10-15 years.
1 white male (1825-30) less than 5 years.
1 white female (1790-1800) age 30-40 years.
1 white female (1815-20) age 10-15 years.
1 white female (1820-25) age 5-10 years.
1 white female (1825-30) less than 5 years.

Others living next in line were Joseph Morgan, Ennoch Manoss (Maness) and John A. Evans.

Dewitt, Lewis Lee (b. 1800-1810) age 20-30 years.
1 white male (1825-30) less than 5 years.
1 white female (1800-10) age 20-30 years.
2 white females (1825-30) less than 5 years.

Dewitt, William (b. 1780-1790) age 40-50 years.
1 white male (1815-20) age 10-15 years.
No white females in the home.

It is obvious by studying these Census Records of 1830, James Dewitt, Senior, is no longer in any of the households.

However, in the Wilcox County Marriage Records, James, Senior, was serving as Justice of the Peace and performing marriages. He performed one for James Morgan and Lucinda Caroline Wilkerson on 7 February 1828, and signed his name as a Sr. and a J. P.

Another marriage is recorded here to show his signature which was attached to the outside of a marriage he performed for James C. Irvin, Esquire and Mrs. Sarah Ann Strother. The same signature appears in the face of the instrument executed on 29 November 1827 except he placed Senr. in front of his name instead of the end.

*Solemnized by James Dewitt Sr. J.P.
The 29 of November 1827*

This could not be James, Junior, because he had not yet had his son, James A., who was born in 1832. Besides, Mr. Ball indicates he was known as James F. Dewitt, Jr.; and he never signed his name as a Senior on any documents.

One may draw the conclusion James Dewitt, Senior, died between 1828-1830; or, if he lived beyond that period, he was missed in the 1830 Census.

Efforts to trace our Duett-Dewitt ancestors back to Virginia have been stymied in South Carolina. Rev. Dr. Robert E. H. Peoples has been kind enough to share research of his own and some that has been shared with him. To date, none of the research has been able to work through the maze of records in South Carolina to unravel much past Charles Duett, who was first found on the Quit Rent Rolls of Virginia in 1704. He received English Land Grants and was taxed one shilling for each acre he owned in 1704.

John H. Dewitt, Jr., of Nashville, Tennessee, shared his father's work on the family of Harris Dewitt. His father had in his possession a record made by Major William Roadman Smith who claimed he had researched the line from the seventeenth century to October 1887. (He was certainly closer in memory to the older generations than those who are now about one hundred years further from the events.) John H. Dewitt, Sr., of Nashville had made some corrections.

The basic information is given here for further research because proof, if then available, did not accompany the records. This author believes, because of the Duett spelling that was and is still being used today, that the Dewitts of this blood did have roots in the Virginia line and through Charles of ... Dewitt who

A. Elizabeth
Dewitt
b 1825 Ala
Married
Ca 1845 Ala
Henry Autrey
b 1820

1. Catherine Autrey
b. 1845
2. Julia Ann Autrey
b 1847
3. Lydia I or J
Autrey
b 1849
4. Jane Y Autrey
b 1850

B. Catherine Dewitt
b 1825 or 27 Ala
Married
6 Jan. 1851
Nathan Morgan
b 1830 Ala

1. Mary A Morgan
b 1849
2. James C Morgan
b 1854

II

James F Dewitt, Jr.
b. Ca 1796 S.C.

Married #1
29 May 1819 Ala.
Lydia Williams
b. _____

C. James A Dewitt
b 1832 Ala
Married
19 Dec 1855 Ala
Rebecca Tompkins
b 1840 Ala

1. Mary Jane
Dewitt
b 1856
2. Martha Paralee
Dewitt
b 1858

Married #2
29 January 1823 Ala
Agnes Roper
b. 1790 - 1800

Married #3
3rd Sunday, September
1841 Ala
Rhoda K. Moore
b. 1817 S.C.

Married #4
8 October 1868 Ala
Emily Jane Guinn Koen
b. 1831 Ga.

D. Alexander Hamilton Dewitt
b 1833 Ala

Married #1
7 Nov 1856 Ala
Rebecca J Shepherd
b 1838

Married #2
8 Jun 1869 Ala
Elizabeth Woods
b 1839

Married #3
24 Jan 1874 Ala
Caroline Stringer
b _____

Married #4
2 Dec 1874 Ala
Catherine Gordon
Wiggins
b 1842

1. Rebecca Jane
Dewitt
b 1857
2. Phillip Alexander
Dewitt
b 1859
3. Robert M
Dewitt
b 1863.
4. John Dewitt
b 1866.
5. Lewis S
b 1869
6. Samuel Dewitt
b 1874
7. Mary Dewitt
b 1876
8. "General" Dewitt
b 1880

1870 Clarke County, Alabama

1090

James	w m	63?years	Farmer	S.C.
Jane A E	w f	33 years		Ga
Hazelwood, Ellen	domestic servant			
	b f	10 years		Ala

1880 Clarke County, Alabama
McLeod's Beat

born fa mo

1010

Jane Dewitt	w f	44 years	Farmer	Ga	Ga	Ga
Gracey Guinn	w f	81 years	Mother	Ga	Ga	Ga

1860 Clarke County, Alabama

353-1498

Lucien Koen	w m	34 years		Ala(Wash Co)
Jane E	w f	23 years		Ga

1910 Clarke County, Alabama
River Hill Beat, Precinct 8

135 J B (Joseph B) Atchison "2nd Marriage," married six

	w m	47 years	
Willie O.(Benson)	w f	44 years	wife
Mary I	w f	18 years	daughter
Neva E	w f	16 years	daughter
William F	w m	13 years	son
James T	w m	12 years	son
Eva T Finch	w f	14 years	niece
Nettie O Finch	w f	12 years	niece

*Jane E Dewitt w f 72 years aunt, widow

James F. Dewitt, Jr. was always referred to as "Captain".
History of Clarke County, Alabama, page 338, designates
as Captain, brother of L. L. Dewitt and father of R. J. W.
Dewitt. The title was given in recognition of his long years of
military and civil appointments beginning with the War
of 1812 or Creek Indian War in Alabama. A copy of some of the
appointments on file in the Alabama Department of
Archives and History follows:

A muster roll dated April 22, 1819 lists one Private James
Dewitt, Captain Jeter's Independent Rifle Company, Alabama State
Militia, 1819.

Election return dated August 31, 1821, Suggsville, Clarke
County, signed by G. W. Crugh, Lieutenant-Colonel shows Ensign
James Dewitt, 31st Regiment, Alabama Militia elected to fill
vacancy of Coleby Bell.

Military Register, State Militia, 1820-32 lists Ensign James Dewitt, 36th Regiment, Wilcox County Commissioned October 1824, resigned April 10, 1827. (In original document, Dewitt spelled Dewill.)

Military Register, State Militia, 1820-32 shows Captain James Dewett, 50th Regiment, Wilcox County commissioned June 1829. Vice Joseph Morgan.

Commissioner's Court Records for Wilcox County for 1825-1830 cast a rather confusing light on just when James Dewitt, Sr. died and just who the Dewitt parties were in each case. The selected entries also give some indication of the early road locations and neighbors.

On page 57, 13 December 1827, a James Dewitt was appointed overseer of the poor in Captain Sheffield's District.

On page 75, 25 August 1828, James Dewitt was appointed overseer of the road from Dickson's Creek to the Dumas Settlement.

On page 99, 25 August 1829, James Swain, J.C. Drew, and Martin Pruitt were appointed to work in Captain Dewitt's District.

On page 110, 19 August 1830, James Dewitt was appointed overseer of a road from Red Creek to Marengo County line.

On page 119, 11 December 1830, James Dewitt was appointed overseer of the poor for Captain Dewitt's Beat. He reported that Mathias and Mary Walker were paupers on 6 February 1832. It is recorded on page 146.

On page 188, 9 February 1833, George Morgan, later Sheffield, Sr. and John Wilkins were appointed to work the roads in Captain Dewitt's Beat.

On page 215, 12 February 1834, Obediah Dumas was appointed overseer of the roads for Captain Dewitt's Beat.

Certain conclusions may be drawn. There were two James Dewitt men, one being Captain James F. Dewitt, Jr. Rev. T.H. Ball has identified which was Captain Dewitt. Another James M. Dewitt, son of Joseph Dewitt was born in 1815. In an entry on page 119 of the Commissioners Court Records another James Dewitt was appointed overseer of the poor in Captain Dewitt's district. It seems most unlikely a fifteen year old James M. Dewitt would have been assigned such a task! He might have been assigned road work, however. So, from these deductions it appears that James Dewitt, Senior may have been missed in the 1830 Census and was still living as late as February, 1832.

James F. Dewitt, Jr. was a Veteran of the War of 1812, serving in the Creek Indian Wars of Alabama. His Muster Roll indicates he enrolled on 20 January 1815 for a term of six months.

twenty six years. (He only gave the years married to Catherine.) Catherine stated she was born in January 1842, was fifty-eight years old, the mother of three living children of six born to her. She was born in Alabama, her father in Georgia and her mother in North Carolina. Rev. Dr. Robert E. H. Peeples has contributed data on Catherine Gordon Wiggins. She was born in Dale County, Alabama, on 22 January 1844 and died in Franklin County, Arkansas, on 9 April 1910. She was the daughter of George Washington Wiggins, born about 1815 in Georgia and died about 1858 in Dale County. Catherine's mother was Jane McCall, born in North Carolina about 1821 and died in Alabama.

Three children of Alexander Dewitt were found in Franklin County, Arkansas in 1900. All three may be the children of Catherine if one can resolve the problem of Samuel's birthdate.

6. Samuel Dewitt, according to the 1900 Census of Franklin County, Arkansas lived two houses down from his father. He was recorded as having been born in December 1874. He was twenty-five years old, married for seven years. He was married to Addie H. _____, born in February 1874 in Arkansas. Addie's father was born in Kentucky and her mother in Alabama. All three of their children were born in Arkansas.

- a. Ethel M. Dewitt was born in September 1893.
- b. Hershah B. Dewitt was born in August 1896.
- c. Oba A. Dewitt was born in March 1899.

7. Mary Alena Dewitt was born on 13 February 1876. She died on 19 August 1959 at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Mary married James Obediah McKenzie on 17 August 1890 in Franklin County, Arkansas. James O. McKenzie was born on 12 March 1872 at Athens, Tennessee. He moved to Arkansas in 1881 with his parents, Francis Marion McKenzie and the former Nancy Abigail Shell. James Obediah McKenzie died on 20 November 1919 in Franklin County, Arkansas. Their seven children were:

- a. James Monroe McKenzie was born on 17 May 1892.
- b. Alexander Francis McKenzie was born on 5 July 1896 in Franklin County. On 20 October 1913, he married Ola Frances Shelby, born on 14 October 1895 in Franklin County. Both died in Bakersfield, California; Alexander F. died on 25 July 1957. The McKenzie family moved from Franklin County, Arkansas to Bakersfield, California in 1937. Until after the death of Ola Frances McKenzie, they resided at 2200 San Emidio. Alexander F. McKenzie married twice more after Ola's death. There were no children by the last two marriages. He and Ola Frances had eight children. All were born in Franklin County.

(1) Ethel Mattie McKenzie was born on 21 July 1914 and died, still single, in August 1929.

(1) Rachel Anna McKenzie was born on 3 April 1936, she married George Wayne Brock at the home of her mother, Mary Alena Dewitt McKenzie. Wayne Brock was born on 17 1914. They have twin daughters.

(a) Eleanor Ruth Brock, born on 24 July 1940 in Rosfield, California, married, on 16 September 1961, Warren Shantz. Their children are:

Norna Lynn Shantz was born on 8 August 1966.

Bradley Wayne Shantz was born on 6 August 1970.

(b) Eloise Joyce Brock, twin of Eleanor Ruth, married Ralph Phillips on 15 June 1963. They have three sons.

Andrew Owen Phillips was born on 10 July 1966.

Timothy Phillips was born in July 1960 in Camus Valley.

Stephen Phillips is the last child. No information as to birth is available.

(3) Fannie Nova McKenzie was born in February 1917 and died in 1920.

(4) Cora Zelma McKinzie was born on 6 December 1919 in Hart, Arkansas. On 18 December 1948, she was married to Rev. Robert E. H. Peeples in the Immanuel Chapel of Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia. "Miss Cora" as her husband calls her, has an ~~B.S.~~ ^{Ed.} degree from Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia. Dr. Peeples earned his Bachelor of Divinity from Virginia Theological Seminary in June 1949 and has since earned his Doctorate. Dr. Peeples is a retired Episcopal Priest, President of Hilton Head Island Historical Society, a member of the Board of Directors of the Society of West Families of South Carolina, life member of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina, the South Carolina Historical Society (from which the author secured his current address), Descendants of the Colonial Clergy, Sons of the Revolution, Society of Pioneers and Patriots of America and the Chatham Artillery and a Chaplain of the Georgia National Guard for ten years, retiring with the rank of Major.

Dr. Peeples is currently co-authoring a series of historical articles to be published. He has published many historical and genealogical articles in the various magazines published by the organizations to which he belongs. He has been researching the Dewitt family for a number of years. It is most heart warming to find another person besides this narrator who recognizes the Dewitts are very difficult to trace in South Carolina and elsewhere, for that matter. For after quite some effort of Dr. and Mrs. Peeples, they can testify that they stopped in 1977 when this project was begun. They have been most helpful and

encouraging as they have contributed their findings and the branch of their family history. Dr. Peeples and "Miss Cora" have no children except their large "family of God" acquired through long years of service in His name.

(5) Verda Pauline McKenzie, born on 2 March 1923, married Virgil A. Payne. Virgil was born on 25 July 1913 and died on 13 June 1968 in Santa Ana, California. They have a daughter.

(a) Denise Lorraine Payne was born in Bakersfield, California on 18 July 1961, *m. 15 JUN 1985 Kenneth Bates*

(6) Mary Ellen Lorraine McKenzie was born in 1925 and died in 1947, unmarried.

(7) Rev. William Obediah McKenzie was born on 3 June 1926 and married Ruth E. Vail on 30 June 1951, in Bellflower, California. They have two sons.

(a) Stephen Paul McKenzie, *married 27 March 1976 San Fernando* born on 7 April 1953 and wife, Jessie have three children:
Irene, daughter of Jesse I. & Dorothy Gillespie

Kelly Marie McKenzie was born on 6 October 1979.

Corinne Michelle McKenzie was born on 1 April 1981.

Christopher Stephen McKenzie was born on 21 June 1982 in Lancaster.

(b) Rev. Douglas Mark McKenzie was *married 6 July 1974 San Fernando* born on 25 October 1955. He and wife, Laura, have two children:
May, daughter of Arthur H. Bleich

Heather Dawn McKenzie was born on 5 August 1980.

Heidi Nicole McKenzie was born on 13 November 1982.

(8) Eula Frances McKenzie, born 2 January 1932, married William Mara in Bakersfield. They have two children:

(a) Michael Jerry Mara, was born 29 August 1951, married Margaret Jean MacGregor in Whittier, California on 27 August 1977. They have two children:

Patrick Michael Mara was born on 16 March 1980.

Brian Joseph Mara was born on 29 March 1982.

(b) Candice Alyce Mara was born on 5 July 1953.

This completes the family of Alexander Francis McKenzie, second son and child of Mary Alena Dewitt McKenzie. The other five children follow.

c. Charles Gordon McKenzie was born on 20 August 1900 and died on 29 August 1900.