

Written In Stone

By Sherry Johnston

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Burnett/Donald/Simpson Cemetery ~ Part I

Hampden Ridge was the first county seat of government for Conecuh County. According to the diary of Edwin Robinson, of CT, and later founder of Brooklyn, he wrote that his classmate companion and he “established themselves at Murder Creek at a place later named Hampden where Major Thomas now lives; he arrived at this place Dec. 26, 1818.” Some of our earliest settlers to Conecuh were early land owners of Hampden Ridge and its’ surrounding vicinity, such as Bellville. Those who settled here enjoyed many of the immense resources available in our county, raising their families, establishing early churches, some plantations and farms, and mercantile, blacksmith and wagon stores. Dr. B.F. Riley’s book, “History of Conecuh County” relates that a group of immigrants came to Conecuh from Chester District, SC in the year of 1817. Among them was Alexander Donald who came as a young man, married Catherine Simpson about 1821. Catherine was the daughter of Rachel Horger and Thomas Simpson. Her father originated from Orangeburg District, SC, was a grandson of William Simpson who was a personal friend of the poet, Robert Burns. Alexander and Catherine Simpson Donald had four children: Rachel, Nancy, Hezekiah (II), and Margaret Donald. Hezekiah was born in Conecuh in 1828 and died in 1861. He’d married Sarah Jane Crosby at the Crosby home called Hilldale, near Bellville. Sarah Jane’s parents also came from Chester District, SC the year that Sarah Jane was born, about 1832. She died in 1868.

Hezekiah Donald was a successful planter, and family man, loved by many and when he passed away in 1861, Dr. Riley says his death was ‘much lamented by all who knew him.’ Of Thomas W. Simpson, Dr. Riley stated that ‘he was one of the most useful, and yet one of the most modest, of Conecuh’s citizens. He delighted in dispensing hospitality and his roof was the refuge of many a way-worn traveler. He passed away in 1861 at his home, near Bellville. Another gentleman was J.H. Burnett, who married Margaret Donald the first time, and then to Rachel Donald.

Alexander Donald, the first one to arrive on Conecuh soil about 1817 served in the War of 1812 and he, his family and those who came after him were buried near their old home place on CR 23 between Bellville and Castleberry. This old burial ground was lost to many of the descendants until about 1960 or so, when Ed Leigh McMillan’s interest in locating, and fencing it off from surrounding property, helped to document its’ existence.

The Burnett Graveyard; or Burnett/Donald/Simpson Cemetery as it is also known as will have a dedication unlike it’s ever known when the descendants of these families gather March 8, 2008 to dedicate the War of 1812 headstone for Alexander Donald. What was lost has been found, and now we work with the future generations of these families to ensure that it will be remembered forever, treasured and preserved in the memory of these, our earliest inhabitants to our beloved Conecuh County.