

Written In Stone

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Gonzalez Methodist Church ~ Escambia Co., FL

Researching the Hawkins family and their connections to Evergreen last week led me to census records from England to Iowa; Mobile, AL; Escambia County and Pollard AL to Evergreen. In the *Escambia County Heritage Book*, a great granddaughter of Nancy B. Hilburn Hawkins tells the story of how her great grandparents married in GA, then moved into FL and AL. She carries forward the story of how Elizabeth Wisham Hilburn is found in the census records with her daughter, Nancy "Nannie" Hawkins following the death of Jay Hugh Hilburn, Sr. Sometimes we see this spelled as Jehue. According to the great granddaughter, Elizabeth Hilburn died in Conecuh County about 1911, and she is seen on the 1880 Conecuh Census with her daughter's family and they're living in Precinct 11 (Evergreen). The Hawkins emigrated from England around 1854, with William and Nancy marrying about 1867. Further research is needed on the Hawkins and Hilburn families of Escambia County, FL & AL, though it was also interesting to note in the 1875 church records for Pollard, Mrs. Elizabeth Hilburn was a member. Another interesting note regarding the Hawkins family was that a senior Hawkins member was a brick mason in Escambia County FL about the time of the brickyard being established in Bluff Springs, FL Many other familiar families were also found in Pollard, Brewton, Whiting (Flomaton), Canoe Station, AL & Bluff Springs, FL as well as near Gonzalez where you can visit an old cemetery behind the Gonzalez Methodist Church and find them interred.

According to the *Escambia County Heritage Book*, an article written by Paul Merritt establishes the original name of Gonzalez as the Powelton Church, so named for the circuit rider who served as pastor of 14 churches. The 14 churches in the Powelton Circuit in 1875 included Bluff Springs (Byrneville); Clear Springs; Canoe Station; Marvin (Muscogee); Harmony (merged with Pine Grove); Shepard (Powelton/Gonzalez); Walnut Hill; Ferry Pass and Crabtree (Pleasant Grove). Mr. Merritt states that the name of the circuit was changed from Pollard Circuit to Powelton Circuit at the Annual Conference held in Montgomery in 1877.

Descendants of the Hart family, of Covington and Conecuh Counties are found in Escambia County FL around the Gonzalez community in early 1860's, with the Methodist Church being established about 1876. We will continue next week with a look at the cemetery behind this historic church and community.