

Written In Stone

By: Sherry Johnston

Evergreen Courant ~ 19 November 2009

Jay City Cemetery ~ Santa Rosa Co., FL ~ Part I

The steady hum of a cotton gin accompanied me Sun. afternoon as I stopped in to ‘visit’ some folks interred in the Jay City Cemetery in Santa Rosa Co., Fla. Family surnames common to Butler, Conecuh, Covington, and Escambia counties can be found among the gravestones in this historic cemetery. Amos, Diamond, Dobbs, Forte, Grice, Henderson and Moore are just a sampling.

Jay has always impressed me with their farming community. My daddy used to say that some of the richest farmland could be found along this sandy stretch of Fla., and evidence of that was seen with miles of white fluffy cotton waving, being picked by the combines; peanuts already laid by in trailers; cattle and horses grazing in the fields; and smaller gardens beside every home, large or small. This community has always depended on itself, and raised almost everything they apparently need. A 1913 essay published in the Pensacola Journal documents the varied agricultural & natural resources that drew many of our folks to settle this new territory. This area of Santa Rosa County was first known as Pine Level as well as The Cobb Old Field long before it became known as an undiscovered oil field. It’s a given that our lives can be changed forever by certain events that happen anywhere, the location isn’t necessarily relevant to the change, and I am sure that many lives have been changed forever more by the discovery of oil in the middle of pastureland. However, this community has always seemed to be independent and make its’ mark, before and after the oil discoveries.

Jay City Cemetery is amidst most of that change, as it sits on a triangular corner of property, and looks like the City is preparing to expand it, as well as paving the drives and lanes of the cemetery. Recently, it’s been cleaned of debris, broken headstones stood back up, and old bouquets of flowers cleared. The folks buried here once walked the land where now their descendants till the land, mind the few businesses, and create a steadfast community much like their ancestors did when first they stood on the rich, sandy soil. It must be a little like the magic sand that gets into your shoes, and makes you yearn to return to home. Next week, I’ll ‘introduce you’ to some of those in these museums of stone in Santa Rosa County, Florida.