

History of Seminole County

The land which is now Seminole County was formerly roamed by Indians. On October 30, 1627, Charles I of England granted to Sir Robert Heath, his attorney-general, all of the territory of North America from Virginia to Florida and from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Sir Robert did not choose to settle this land.

Thirty-three years later, March 24, 1662, Charles II granted the same territory to eight lords who proceeded to develop the province which was named Carolina in honor of the donor.

The province of Georgia was created from Carolina by the British King George II in 1732. Prior to that time it included no white settlement and was Indian land, mainly Cherokee and Creek.

Shortly after the Revolutionary War, Georgia ceded to the federal government its unsettled territory westward which was organized into the territory of Mississippi in 1798. In 1802, when Georgia ceded eighty thousand acres of her western lands, the U.S. agreed to extinguish the Indian title to all lands within her borders if it could be peacefully done. But there was constant trouble with the Indians. The Seminole tribe, inhabitants of this area, plundered and marauded the houses and property of the settlers. Gov. Mitchell ordered Col Hawkins to demand restoration of stolen property.

The Creek War (which took place during the War of 1812) ensued, and the Indians ceded eight million acres. However, they remained restless.

In November of 1817, while at Fort Scott (old ruins now in-undated, were in lower Decatur County on the Flint River) Major General Gaines notified the Fowlton chief to meet him in conference. The chieftain had notified Major Twiggs that he was neither to cross nor to cut a stick from territory east of the Flint River, as it belonged to him. Hostilities ensued. On January 22, 1818, two more tracts of land were secured from the Indians for \$120,000, twenty-thousand paid down and ten thousand annually for ten years. The Three Notch road which passes by Hagan's Still, was used by Andrew Jackson's men to march to Fort Scott during the Indian campaign. This road passes through what is now Seminole County.

Early County was set up December 15, 1818 from lands ceded by the Indians. This county comprised what is now Dougherty, Clay, Baker, Calhoun, Miller, Decatur, Grady, Thomas and Seminole counties. Decatur was carved from Early in 1823.

Decatur County was named after the gallant Commodore Stephen Decatur and its county site was named Bainbridge in honor of Commodore Bainbridge. A great body of pineland through which the Flint River ran diagonally into the Chattahoochee comprised most of the county as was considered of little worth. The river bottom lands sold for \$500 to \$600 a lot while the piney woods land sold for \$20 to \$25 a lot in comparison.

The lands on the rivers were fertile and accessible and were soon taken up by the wealthy cotton planters who came from the eastern coast of Georgia and from North and South Carolina and Virginia. The larger planters lived near the Chattahoochee or Flint waters and had but little intercourse with the stock raisers scattered over the pine land of this county. They had many slaves and splendid mansions and no people in Georgia lived with greater elegance.

On the banks of the Chattahoochee, isolated and remote from all people of like kinds, there was, up to 1860, an elegance, a refinement and a style of living equal of in

the land. There were books, periodicals, newspapers, musical instruments-all of the comforts and many of the luxuries of life. There was a lavish hospitality.

An academy around the old Gibson place provided a higher education after that of the governesses and tutors who lived with families to instruct the young children.

Scores of miles east of the river there were only log cabins and poor, plain rustics. The main body of Decatur lived in the pine woods. In a county like Decatur, much inequality in social conditions, in schools and in religious privileges existed.

Some of the prominent families who lived on the Chattahoochee River were the Fairchilds, Dickensons, Harveys, Rambos, Coachmans, Peacocks, Crawfords, Cunninghams, Donalsons, Shewmakes, Gibsons, Shacklefords, Stedmans and others.

Riverboats plied the Chattahoochee and were the chief means of transportation at that time. They pushed large barges on which were loaded bales of cotton, at the various landings on the plantations along the banks of the river, destined for the cotton mills in Columbus. They also conveyed barrels of turpentine and resin to Appalachicola. Supplies ere brought up and down the river from the Sam Dickenson commissary at Steam Mill for the plantations and the sparsely inhabited piney woods area where early settlers had homesteaded. This land of virgin pine timber sold then for ten cents to one dollar and a quarter to two dollars and a half an acre.

The people in this section of Decatur County found it difficult to travel as far as Bainbridge to transact business and felt that progress would be more rapid if a county could be created having its county seat in Donalsonville. In 1906 the state legislators passed an act providing for several new counties. Grady was created that year. Seminole tried but lost the fight. Tow years later the fight was resumed under the name Evans County and it was lost again. Several efforts to create a new county during a period of 15 years failed, and then finally success came in 1920.

In 1918 a mass meeting was held in this interest. In 1919 a fight to create Seminole County, carved from portions of Decatur County and the Jakin area of Early County was introduced into state legislature. This was tabled after it had passed the committee and the people fighting for this new county realized that they would lose all if they insisted on the portion from Early County.

Some of the men who fought valiantly for the formation of the new county were: Messers, Clark Mosely, T. J. Shingler, Ed Spooner, J. E. Johnson, Charlie Reynolds, L. R. Robinson, A. R. Benton, Otho Benton, Dr. M.M. Minter, Dr. Thomas Chason, J. L. Dickenson, W. H. VanLandingham, P. S. Cummings, A. A. Subers and others.

These men won in 1920. Mr. Pat Griffin of Bainbridge in the state legislature cast the vote breaking the tie and making possible the creation of the new county. The Georgia state legislature appointed a Board of County Commissioners for the new county, to begin January 1, 1921. Appointed were: Messers. G. W. Hagan, J. L. Dickenson, W. W. Gibson, Pass Morris and L. R. Robinson, who served more than thirty years.

Following this an election was called in December of 1920. Mr. John Goree was the first county school superintendent. Members of the first county board of education were: T. A. Drake, who served more than thirty years, J. M. Hunter, g. W. J. Barber, C. N. Nichols, and Otho Benton. (Mr. Benton served as president of two boards of education on the same day: president of the Decatur County board and of the Seminole County board.)

In the election, the following officers were chosen: C. L. Reynolds, clerk of the court; J. M. Richardson, sheriff; Homer Goodwin, ordinary; R. T. Bolton, treasurer; L. W. Barber, tax collector; and Henry Reynolds, tax assessor.

The new county was named Seminole in honor of the tribe of Indians who had possessed the land. Legend says that their chief, Osceola, was born in this county in what is now the Peacock place where several Indian mounds exist. The name Seminole was suggested by Mr. A. A. Subers.

The first court was held in the upstairs rooms known as the old K. P. hall above what is now occupied by The Junior Shop and the old shoe shop. The jury rooms were above the present Holley Furniture Company. The lawyer's offices were above the present Dot & Nex. The bar was composed of R. L. Cox, W. L. Bryan, H. g. Rawls, J. T. Goree, -- House, and-- Abrams.

When the county was created, it had "nothing". No road machinery, no assets at all except 80 miles of graded roads.

The first thing the new county had to do was float bonds for \$100,000 to build a courthouse and buy road machinery. Of this amount \$85,000 went into a beautiful building and \$15,000 went for the roads. These bonds have been adequately satisfied.

Turpentine and lumber added greatly in the development of the county. Communities grew up and prospered in Steam Mill, Desser, Reynoldsville, Gophertown, Hammock Springs, Fairchilds, Thursbytown, Parkertown, Hagan's Still and other places where sawmills and turpentine stills were located. Commissaries, branch post offices, cotton gins and houses for the various colored and white employees sprang up and made up these thriving communities.

One of the first lumber mills in the county was Stewart Lumber Company located near Reynoldsville. This mill was later owned by P. S. Cummings, Sr, who moved it nearer Donalsonville to Lela, so named in honor of his wife. There developed quite an industry, a large lumber mill with four log trains leading all over this area and into the lower end of the county, a commissary equipped to meet the varying needs of the many employees, housing quarters for the colored and white people and homes for the overseers. Mr. Cummings bought up many acres of pineland to operate his mill and owned at one time about seventy-five thousand acres of land in Seminole and Decatur Counties.

Donalsonville, county seat of Seminole County, grew out of one of the earliest sawmills and turpentine stills in this area owned and operated by Col. John E. Donalson who built a commissary and houses for the employees. After destruction by fire, under a new corporation it became the Chattahoochee Lumber Company. Years later a large lumber company was owned and operated by A. J. Jones.

Donalsonville was chartered in 1897.

In the very beginning of the development of this area the early settlers had livestock-cattle, sheep and swine, which grazed in open range on the natural lush green grass where there were no fences to obstruct their wanderings. Each owner had his

individual brand which marked his livestock. Once a year neighbors would collect to corral the sheep for shearing and the other livestock for sale or slaughter. Cattle and especially swine made up a large part of the diet of that day.

John J. Cummings, Sr. pioneered in the development of purebred Hereford cattle in Georgia here in Seminole County and established registered strains which have sired many of Georgia's fine cattle of today. In 1945 this county transferred more registered livestock than any other county in the United States. Seminole Farms was the home of the largest herd of registered cattle east of the Mississippi River.

Seminole Stockyards, established by L. R. Robinson in Donalsonville became one of the largest buyers of livestock in Georgia.

Seminole County has taken its place as one of the leading producers of peanuts per acre in our nation. Here was established by Mr. T. J. Shingler, Sr., the first peanut processing plant in the world, Planters Products Company, still in operation.

In addition to the old academy on the river there was another school of higher learning, the Nazarene College in Donalsonville built by Mr. T. J. Shingler, Sr., later merged with Trevecca College. This three story brick building was later purchased by Dr. Thomas Chason and later became the Donalsonville Hospital.