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Colvin Family Records and Century Old Tomb Markers Throw Light On North Louisiana And Lincoln Parish Early History

By M. L. Kelley, Ruston, La.

Ruston, La., May 25. – One hundred and forty-five years ago, the will of one John Colvin was filed for probate in Chester County (then Cravens County) court, South Carolina. Mr. Colvin, in drawing his will certainly knew little of the country west of the Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountains, and nothing at all of Louisiana. The truth of the matter is that for most of his time in Virginia and the Carolinas, Mr. Colvin had bee to busy helping a guy by the name of Washington create the independence of the United States to have paid much attention to matters of exploration.

However, so far as the territory now know as North Louisiana is concerned, John Colvin through his will more or less directly “fixed things up.” Incidentally, one of the executors of his will was this same George Washington along with William, eldest son of John Colvin.

In his will, John bequeathed to William, one half of his 300 acre estate. The other half went to John, second son. For Daniel, third son, there was “one black mare,” and for Talto, youngest son of the brood there was no mention.

The will was filed in Craven County court in 1793. Daniel and Talton probably saw little ahead for them in that part of the country. Subsequently, Daniel took unto himself a wife, Susan Huey, of the Craven County Hueys, and accompanied by his bride, some of her relatives and Talton, set out to make a home for himself. Exactly when this expedition began, or when Daniel and Susan were wed, is not clear from family records, however, in something like 1807 they wound up in this neck of the woods which is a long time ago, at any rate. Talton quit the party along the Mississippi River and joined the United States Army, later died while a member of the Marines at New Orleans, in 1814.

Daniel blazed a trail from the Ouachita River to what is now known as Colvin’s Creek, in Lincoln Parish. Here he stopped, homesteaded himself some land, and began the task of providing for what eventually became quite a family. The trail he blazed across the upper end of Ouachita and Lincoln parishes was for many years, the established highway between Monroe and the west. Along this road, the Western Union Telegraph Company strung its first wires through the region, resulting in the road being called “the old wire road,” a name which sticks to this day – long after most of the road has become impassable, over-grown or obliterated.

Daniel Colvin was born somewhere around 1777, since the inscription on the tombstone over his grave, located in a very secluded, woodland spot about three miles eat of the present village of Vienna, says that “Daniel, consort of Susan Colvin, died 1850, aged about 73 years.”

These Colvins were a pretty prolific brood. Families of 10 to 17 children were the rule, instead of the exception. Which explains why from this early beginning of Colvins, as the settlement was known for quite a number of years, has come probably the largest family in North Louisiana, as well as the first post office in that territory. So numerous are the clan members now, that a recent conservative estimate of the number of Colvins in this parish alone was placed at 3,500, including those by name and relation. (Not to Politicians – W. A. Colvin Sr., V.W. Colvin and S.P. Colvin are now the clan heads, just in case). Each year, usually in August, the tribe holds a re-union at Unionville Church, between Vienna and Dubach, and never fails to attract one of the largest groups to assemble in the parish during the year.

Daniel may or may not have been aroused over the facts that all he got out of his father's estate was "one black mare", however, if he was, he may have been the originator of the term "I'll go far (missing) it will take ten dollars to send me a post card." What Daniel really did was to go where he couldn't get a postal card for \$50, or fifty shillings or fifty bottle tops or whatever is was they used for money in those days.

So we come to the second part of the story.

Jeptha Colvin was the second son of Daniel, apparently older than the daughter, Sarah, consort of John Johnson, died 1826, aged 24 years. Which would lead one to the conclusion that Jeptha was born sometime during the trek westward. To him is traced much of the Colvin ancestry in North Louisiana, and it was he who fixed things so Daniel could get a postcard, by starting a postoffice. Known as "Colvin" in 1838. This office in service continuously since that time, although the name has been changed, passed its 100th milestone on March 24, 1938

"Jep", as he was known to those of his time, began his government service during what Mr. Hoover would probably term a "slight recession." Postoffice records show that his compensation for the year, June 1st, 1838 to June 1st, 1839 was \$1.64. Such a volume of business apparently left Jep with plenty of time for carrying on of his personal affairs, since family records state that he "prospered greatly and it was his delight to have his neighbors and kinsmen near him." Sometime prior to 1832 Jeptha took for his wife, Narcissa Rainey, a member of one of the families who made the trek westward with Daniel Colvin. The first two children, Mary Ann and Sarah Ann, died within a few months of each other, since grave markings read "Sarah Ann, daughter of Jeptha and Narcissa Colvin, died May, 1836, aged 2 yrs." Immediately following his marriage to Narcissa, Jeptha began the construction of his home, still standing about one half mile east of Vienna. Of two-story construction, it first served as a post office and residence, later served as a hospital during the Civil War, after the Union Army had taken possession of North Louisiana. Today it stands, with boarded exterior and rock foundations, the only changes from the original structure when Jeptha carried Narcissa across the portals. The interior is still the logged timbers, the architecture is still that Jeptha's, with its wide hallway going through the center of the house, and its four columns supporting the porch in conventional Georgian fashion.

Jeptha and Narcissa brought eleven children to add to the Colvin clan, the first two passing away at early ages, and many of whom hold no place in the family archives at present. Jeptha's father, Daniel died in 1850, after his wife, Susan, had died in 1840, and Daniel had taken a second wife, Katy May. Several months after the death of Daniel, the Tims, Mayfields, and others of the Carolina families moved into the new settlement, Among them were Miss Eda Tims, now 97 years of age, still very active, and her sister, Miss Minnie Tims, who later married an O'Neal.

Miss Eda Tims, or "Miss Edie," as she is lovingly known to virtually every inhabitant of Lincoln Parish, tells the following story of the Colvins, as she found them upon her arrival:

"Jep and Miss Nicy were living in their home when Daniel died," She began. "Shortly after we got here, the 'black measles' broke out and took nearly every baby in the settlement. One of them was Andrew Jackson Colvin, 10 year old son of Jep and Miss Nicy. (The grave markers reads "Andrew Jack Colvin, aged 10, died 1851.") After Miss Nicy died, and the Civil War broke out, in 1861, Jep took his slaves and refuged to Texas where he again married and later died in 1868. Just before we came over, William Colvin, (again he pops up), oldest brother of Daniel, came to this country and settled in what is now Ward 2 of Lincoln Parish, west of Vienna. William died some time before Daniel."

“Daniel Colvin had been here more than forty years when we arrived.” Is the best that Miss Edie can give on the records.

(Note – A grave marker which so far has not been cleared up, has been unearthed in the old cemetery where Daniel and Susan are buried, and reads “W.D. and Amanda Colvin,”. With the dates in the 1800’s but the remainder of the inscription obliterated with age.)

Colvins, as the first post office was known, was first located in Ouachita Parish, the boundaries of which then extended westward to Arcadia. Later Union Parish was formed and Colvins taken in. Then it became a part of Jackson Parish. In 1850, for some reason not yet accounted for in either the family or post office records, the name was changed to Vienna. In 1873, Lincoln Parish was created by taking portions of Union, Claiborne, Jackson and Bienville parishes, and Vienna made the parish seat, of the new political subdivision.

In 1883 the V.S. & P.R.R. built its line from Monroe to Shreveport and missed Vienna by about four and one half miles to the South, thereby creating the town of Ruston, to which the parish seat was moved in 1884, and where it is not located.

The Colvins apparently have been great hunters for centuries. Their dogs meant nearly as much to them as did their families. Their family crest, dating back more than four centuries into old England carries the head and shoulders of a hunting dog at its top.

Illustrating their love for their dogs, is a story of William Colvin while making his trip from the Carolinas to Colvins, some thirty years after Daniel had come over. The party had camped for the night somewhere between the Mississippi and Ouachita Rivers. William missed his favorite hound gyp, which he knew was just about ready to bear a litter of puppies. Knowing the canine instinct of going home to bring their young, William stopped his caravan, placed a slave on the fastest horse he had and stayed there more than a week waiting for the slave to find his dog. The records fail to reveal whether or not the search as successful.

Several years ago, members of the family began compiling the family record, and when finished they started to place the crest on the front cover. Some of the prominent younger members were set on eliminating the head and shoulders of the dog.

A group of the older Colvins set their minds to the task and kept it in there. “We’ve been hunting over 400 years, and it’s too damn late to change us now,” is the way the minutes read.

William Colvin, eldest of the Colvin clan after John, is described as a “swash-buckling, broad shouldered, two-fisted man who could whip any five slaves on his place.” Yet the simplicity of these Colvins in living, is best described in the following story attributed to him by a great-grandson.

In addition to his plantation, William operated a store. One day a young girl came in.

“Mama said to send her a dime’s worth of asafetida,” she told William.

William got the package. “Mama said for you to charge it,” the young girl said.

“I can’t charge it, but you just take in on with you,” William told her.

“But mama said for you to charge it,” the girl said, evidently somewhat abashed that William wouldn’t charge the article, yet wanted her to take it.

“Dammit, I can’t spell Higginbotham and I can’t spell asafetida,” William roared. “You take it to mama and tell her to forget it.”

Of such is the history of North Louisiana carved. Long may it continue.