



Chapman Family Ancestor settled near Leon in 1850s

By Curtis Thomasson
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The Chapman name was an early one in Covington County and its bearers left some indelible marks on the area. Chapman Street and the Chapman house that is located on the East corner of East Three Notch Street and Second Avenue are but two accounts. (The current resident, Scott Wright, restored this historic home in recent years.) While there are only three current listings in the telephone book for Covington County, there have been many families who resided in the area.

As early as 1822, John M. Chapman emerged as one of the first leaders in Covington County. He was appointed to serve as one of the new set of commissioners to organize the county and conduct elections to fill the county offices. During that year, he was recommended by J. R. Mobley to replace Mobley as Judge of the County Court. He was then appointed and served until December at which time he resigned and moved from the county. The location of his new residence and his relationship to the other Chapmans to arrive later are not known.

John D. Chapman had arrived in Covington County by 1856 because he purchased several parcels of land during that year. He acquired 120 acres in the northern part of the county that would fall in Crenshaw in 1866. He bought three parcels, 121, 81, and 40 acres, in the edge of Butler County that would later fall in Chrenshaw.

John D. was the oldest son of Benjamin and Sarah E. Chapman who were born in 1796 and 1802 respectively. The children in this family included the following: John D., b. 1827, d. 1884, m. Mary H. Anderson; Abner, b. 1830; William C., b. 1832; Martha A., b. 1834; Sarah E., b. 1836; Seaborn H., b. 1839; Caroline H., (or F.), b. 1841; and Solomon D., b. 1845.

Benjamin was apparently the ancestor to move the family to Alabama. It appears that he settled his family in Coosa County near Wetumpka. Census data indicates his first child was born in Georgia, so the family most likely moved from that state. Family records indicate Benjamin left the area and moved to Arkansas before his death in 1855. Most of his family moved with him as his sons, Abner, Seaborn, and Dudley, died there.

The oldest son, John D., stayed behind because he had married there in Coosa County in 1847. His wife, Mary H. (Anderson), was the daughter of Suprey and Elizabeth (White) Anderson. John D. and Mary reared the following children: John Henry, b. 1847, d. 1932, m. 1882 Mollie Campbell; Sarah E., b. 1849, m. 1969 Dr. Edmund H. Johnson; William Hickman "Hick", b. 1852, d. 1902, m. (1) 1877 Belle Reynolds (2) Martha Bellvidear; Robert Bunyan, b. 1855, m. 1877 Leonora "Nonie" Johnson; Anna White, b. 1858, d. 1944, m. 1880 Judge Alzie Malachi Riley; Mary Boone, b. 1861, d. 1917, m. 1885 Pinckney Newell Hickman; and Dr. Abner Richard "Buddie", b. 1864 d. 1920, m. 1884 Susie Hammonds.

Circa 1850, John D. decided to move his young family to "The Valley" community in Pike County. The location was near Luverne, which is in Crenshaw County today. After some six years at this residence, the family moved a little further south to Covington County.

In the new location, about six miles north of the town of Dozier, he acquired a large plot of land along the Conch River. He prospered and "Opened up" a large, five-horse, farm. He eventually owned 600 or 700 acres, and had eight slaves to help operate it in 1860.

The family lived comfortably on this "plantation" for about nine years. Following the end of the war and facing the trying period, he moved his family to Leon where he continued to farm and sell goods. He also operated a horse-drawn cotton gin that reportedly had a good day when two bales of cotton could be turned out.

During the war John D. served as a private in Co. F., 33rd Ala. Inf. Reg't (Covington and Coffee Grays). During the same year, 1862, there was a Jon. D. Chapman listed as a private in Co. I, 40th. Ala Inf. Reg't. The relationship of these two nor that of the J. E. Chapman, 41 years of age who was discharged from Co. C., Co. Reserves by the medical board, is not known.

John D.'s young son, John Henry at 16 years of age, joined the Confederate Service in 1864 as a private in the Company of Covington County Militia (Second Class). He survived and lived to an advanced age at which time he wrote an informative record of his family and experiences titled "Memories of J. H. Chapman." His personal life will be discussed in next week's column.

By 1859, John D. had become a leader in his community. During that year, he was commissioned as a Justice of the Peace for Beat No. 5, and he was one of three men who represented the Zion Missionary Baptist Church at the Zion Association Meeting.

Following the war, John D. returned to public service upon being elected to serve a two-year term representing Covington County in the Alabama Legislature. He was recognized as a notable gentleman in the Leon community and was regarded as a "moderate" in his political views. He is credited with having submitted the bill to form Crenshaw County on 1866.

At the end of his term, John D. returned to Leon and continued his normal livelihood. In the 1870 census, his family is listed as Number 64: John E. Chapman, 42 years, and Mary, 43 years, with children: John, 22; Hickman, 17; Robert, 14; Anna, 11, Mary, 10; and Albert, 6.

John D.'s descendants were numerous and influential in the development of Andalusia. They will be presented and discussed in the next week's column.

Appreciation is expressed to Marilyn (Henderson) O'Neal for lending her family records for this writing. She is the daughter of the beloved Abbie (Chapman) Henderson. Of course, sources such as Wyley Ward's books, Gus and Ruby Bryan's book, and Sidney Waits's book were consulted.

Anyone who might have corrections or additions to the above is requested to contact Curtis Thomasson at Route 9, Box 97, Andalusia, AL 36420 or Email: chthom@alaweb.com. Any further information on this family would be greatly appreciated to be included in next week's writing.

Reunion:

The Henley Reunion, descendant of Mike and Mary Ann Henley, will be held on Sunday, May 27, at the Red Oak Baptist Church on Alabama 55 South
ACTIVITIES will begin with lunch in the fellowship hall. All relatives and friends are invited to attend.