



WALTON RELATIONS

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Walton County Genealogy Society

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Genealogy in an App World

Unless you have an iPhone, Blackberry, or Android smartphone, you may wonder what all the fuss is concerning “apps.” The word *apps* is short for applications, mini-programs that allow you to look up and store information on your phone. Apps are usually very reasonably priced, and there are also many good, free ones. In fact, the five most popular genealogy apps are free. They include:

- **My Heritage** – allows you to display and manage your family group sheets and trees.
- **Find Grave** – gives access to the findagrave.com database from your phone.
- **GedStar Pro Genealogy Viewer** – synchronizes with PC software, including GEDCOM files, to display your data.

Each application has some limitations but, if you use genealogy apps, you may never again find yourself wishing you had your genealogy notes with you. Looking up a detail will be as close as your cell phone.

WCGS Meeting

The Walton County Genealogy Society will not meet in July or August, but we hope to see you at the quarterly meeting of the Walton County Heritage Association on Thursday, July 21, at 6:00 PM. Our speaker will be **Robert Daniel** who will present “A Journey Through the Florida Chautauqua.”

Upcoming Reunions

Slay Family Reunion, Saturday, July 23, at the DeFuniak Springs Community Center on Hwy. 83. Contact Ron Slay at 352-793-7320 or ronslay@sum.net.

Weimorts Family Reunion, Saturday, September 11. Contact Suedelle Wilkerson at suedelle@fairpoint.net.

Walton County Heritage Museum

Now Open Seven Days a Week! 1:00- 4:00 PM

1140 Circle Drive, DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435

850-951-2127

www.WaltonCountyHeritage.org

WaltonCountyHeritage@cox.net

A Road Map Back

by **Nanette Sconiers Pupalaiakis**

An ancient Creek legend teaches, “When you forget, your clans will die as people.”



Chief Bobby Johns Bearheart

At our first meeting, I immediately felt that Bobby Johns Bearheart, leader of the Perdido Bay Tribe, was the most modest of men. During our session, he demonstrated, but never flaunted, a fund of knowledge about natural history. We became fast friends and, after this initial discussion, I walked away a happier person knowing that this man was charged with a mission to learn, educate others, and help preserve the Muscogee Creek’s ancient culture.

Although our Native American predecessors are long gone, their spirits still have a buoyant pulse. It can be heard in the rumbling waters of the Choctawhatchee, Apalachicola, Wetumpka, and other such rivers that bear the language of an all but forgotten race. The heartbeat of these indigenous people can be felt in the rhythm of the ceremonial drums and their lives readily envisioned during the sacred dance or while listening to the soothing peaceful voice of the river cane flute.

The colorful legacy left by the Creek Indians is depicted on the Perdido Bay Tribe’s impressive website (<http://www.perdidobaytribe.org/>). The site highlights work being done by the tribe to preserve this fascinating culture. There is a diverse group of interesting and talented members who strive to serve this purpose. Last year, Vice Chief Stan Cartwright and Edna Dixon published a children’s book



reminiscent of oral tradition stories told to Creek Indian children long ago. ***Strong Fox: How Fox Came to Help a Village Grow Stronger*** serves to entertain while inspiring children to face difficulties in their lives by focusing on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. The primary mission of the Perdido Bay Tribe is to “honor their shared heritage by learning and teaching others about Southeastern Creek Indian history and life ways through art, education, and community service.” Thus, each generation adds their special gift to the tradition and the process is continued as a vital and cherished part of a living cultural heritage.

In leading his people, Chief Bearheart’s principal purpose is to keep the Muscogee Creek heritage alive and teach others the way of his ancestors. He consented to an interview for a college student project last year, and this dialogue gives insight to his experiences growing up in rural Georgia in the 1930s and 1940s.

Where did your family live when you were growing up?

We lived primarily in remote areas, mostly in an old log house provided by my father's employer. We raised a garden and enjoyed the freedom to hunt and fish very much as our ancestors had. Mother canned and preserved fruits, vegetables, meat, and fish. She also made traditional sofkee in a big iron pot in the yard, so we always had something to eat. To me this was an ideal way to live. Every day was a new adventure, and I was happy in my freedom.

How did the laws against Indians living in Georgia affect your family?

It seems amazing now, but the laws against Indians living in Georgia were not repealed until the mid-twentieth century. When I was born in 1936, just 100 years after the Creek Removal, the elders of my family still feared the possibility of being sent to Oklahoma. My people lived in isolation and were somewhat protected by the landowners who valued their knowledge and skills. As young children, we were taught early on to keep a low profile on the rare occasions we came in contact with the outside world.

What did your family do to make a living?

My father, older brother, and other men of my family worked for very little pay in the turpentine and logging industries in the forests and swamps of southern Georgia. My father, a quiet, responsible man, was highly valued for his skills and became head turpentine distiller.

What native skills and traditions did you/your family use/follow?

Because of the challenges of hiding to avoid removal, my ancestors lost that all-important closeness of a larger Creek community with its continuity of language, ceremony, and other traditions. They did retain their survival skills and continued gardening, hunting, and fishing in the traditional ways. In addition, my maternal grandfather was a highly skilled wood carver and craftsman who created traditional carved ceremonial masks, furniture, tools, weapons, and kitchen implements using techniques passed down from his ancestors. He in turn passed these skills on to my clan uncle and brother and, through them, to me.

Who was the most important influence in your life?

My Clan Uncle, Alton Evans. Uncle Tone, as he was called, was a generous man and friend to everyone. He was a wise and patient mentor to me.

What important lessons did you learn from Uncle Tone that helped form who you became?

I was very curious as a child, and Uncle Tone always responded to my questions with kindness and respect. I still remember every word he spoke. He taught me about my Indian heritage and respect for my elders and ancestors. He taught me how to hunt, fish, and make the tools and weapons I would need with my own hands. But most of all, he taught me about the importance of the brotherhood of man and how to treat other people – all other people. Uncle said, "The most important lesson you will ever learn is how to live like a real human being."

What about your formal education? Did you go to school?

Yes, I did go to school but not until I was nearly 9 years old. It was a whole new experience, and I was already behind my classmates. I was not very well received because my background was different than the other kids. I quickly learned there is such a thing as prejudice.

What happened to you at school and how did you deal with it?

Most of the kids were pleasant enough but, even in those days, there were bullies in school. I was confused when almost every day a few boys pushed me around calling me derogatory names. I didn't want to fight, but there seemed I had no other choice. I wasted a lot of time defending myself and often got the worst end of the fights. For that I spent a lot more time in the principal's office being punished again.

How did this experience in school affect your life?

I was unhappy yet hesitant to tell Uncle what was happening to me, but he knew. Often he was complicit in my skipping school to go off on some peaceful errand with him. In his own kind and understanding way, Uncle convinced me that I should not hold bitterness because of it. I suppose this was my first real experience

in applying Uncle's lessons about the importance of the brotherhood of man and living like a real human being.

What would you like for others to learn from your school experience?

Those days are not among my happy memories, and I choose not to dwell upon them. But, from the things I see going on today, it seems that prejudice and bullying are just as bad as they ever were. There are many who still have not learned the meaning of Uncle's lesson, so I hope that by telling my story I can pass on to others the wise and loving counsel he gave to me. I would like for all people to be able to see through their own negative actions and reactions and learn to become better human beings.

What has most inspired you to dedicate so much of your life to honoring your culture/heritage?

My heritage was slipping away before my eyes in so many ways. Our ancestors' mounds of burial and ceremony were being used to build highways or to make room for agriculture. We were desecrated by Hollywood and their demeaning of a whole race of people. History recorded that just a few existed and they were savages. If you see a wrong, try to fix it. Let your voice be heard and your actions show meaning. I cared enough.

What would you most want people to come away with when reading your history?

That I was just a regular person who loved life, family, and friends over wealth and honors.

If there was anything you could have done to make things different or to change anything for Creeks, not only in your area but across the nation, what would it have been?

Encourage all Native Peoples, full or mixed blood, to unite for the betterment of all. For those with wealth to help the ones suffering. Educate, educate, educate!

What would you tell young people today?

Take pride in your culture and self. Surround yourself with like friends. Refuse to be coerced into joining habits and events that would harm your mind, body, and welfare. You, and only you, can make life good.

Extend love and friendship to all.
The brotherhood of man transcends the
sovereignty of nations.
Follow the Red Road and learn, then teach.
– Bobby Johns Bearheart

It has been my good fortune to meet this man of spiritual quality. Chief Bearheart exhibits a generous nature and genuine desire to share the values of the rich Southeastern Creek cultural heritage and to provide support to his community. By his guidance, the Perdido Bay Tribe has created a forum where Indians and non-Indians can join to preserve a noble past and celebrate a rich heritage.

The winds still blow across the few burial mounds that are left undisturbed by these ancient people. And, the same sun and moon they cherished silently watches from the great sky above our beloved earth. It is right to remember and protect the life ways of those who lived here long ago.



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