

THE NEXT GENERATION OF THE GHOSTS OF CHERRY HILL

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'Writer's Corner'

A few weeks ago our son, Chris, and grandson, Ethan, visited us and we stayed at the cabins at Edgar Evins Park. Christ stated that while we were together, he would like for us to take Ethan, now 11 years old, to see where the brown-eyed girl's family had lived since his mom's family had been from the Silver Point/Cherry Hill/Wolf Creek area.



So on a beautiful day, we drove out of the park, up the Wolf Creek Road up to what remains of the once busy community of Silver Point on Highway 56 just where it crosses I-40. After a great lunch at the Rose Garden Café, we drove around to the point near which Putnam County and DeKalb County come together on Highway 56 and looked for what remains of the Cherry Hill Community.

When I was writing "Ridin' the Blinds," I had done a considerable amount of research on the old community and was lucky enough to find a paper "worked out by the students in the seventh and eighth grade," taught by Mr. G. B. Parsley in 1941. The paper's stated objective was, "To preserve the history of the local region" and to "Make a comparison of the facilities and conditions of the early school with the present school."

Though like many "lost" communities of this region, little remains of Cherry Hill now but the name. However, the scholars' paper revealed that the community once had three stores, all of which were owned and operated by the brown-eyed girl's ancestors. One belonged to Joe Lafever, her great grandfather, one by Talmadge Lafever, her first cousin once removed, and one by James Maynard, her father's uncle. No wonder she always wanted to have a gift shop; store keeping is in her blood.

It was interesting to me that all three stores run by these family members were within about 300 years of one another. One has to wonder how such business competition played into their relationship as a family. The students dutifully reported that the land was "poor, ridge (land), stony" land and that tobacco, wheat, and lespedeza were produced on it. They also noted that many of the residents were "Union Soldiers," not surprising in this upland ridge country whose residents had little association with the big farmers and slave holders of the river bottom country.

Not surprising also that the area remained primarily Republican, even during the era of the Democratic "Solid South," although the paper noted that the area had been primarily Democratic prior to the Civil War. The students also recorded that school had begun to be held there as early as 1891, using Webster's Blue Back Speller, McGuffey's Reader, and Ray's Arithmetic. The first building had been constructed at a cost to the school board of \$17.50 for lumber.

The first school was contrasted with their present (1941) school which had been built in 1934 and boasted "of two large classrooms, a community room, and two cloak rooms. The two classrooms are equipped with chairs and desks for each child. The school is also equipped with maps, charts, globe, library, etc." One of the handicaps to delivering a good education was the fact that school terms only lasted two to three months, children being needed for farm and housework much of the rest of the year. The children were allowed to study their spelling lessons aloud and "sing their geography." At one time, Cherry Hill had maintained its own high school. The scholars noted that the first church in the community was a church of Christ and that Jeff Boles, H. Leo Boles, and G. C. Brewer were some of the people who had preached in the building.

As to "amusement" the children reported, "The men would have what they called 'log rollings,' when one would invite his neighbors to help him clear land and in constructing a house or barn. He would have a

house or barn 'raising' when his neighbors would help him build his house with logs. Sometimes the women would have a 'quilting' and invite her neighbor women in to help her.

These 'workings and 'quiltings' were usually followed at night by a party or 'frolic,' as they sometimes called it. Many times the games would be played and dancing carried on most of the night. "The Old Virginia Reel" was a favorite to play. Music was furnished for the plays by the use of the fiddle and banjo. Some of the old favorites were 'Billie in the Low Ground,' 'Arkansas Traveler,' 'Old Joe Clark,' and 'Soldier Boy,' etc. The people showed each other great hospitality."

As we drove through the area looking at the houses where ancestors had lived, perusing the writing on the stones in the graveyard and noting the family names on the road signs in the area, were accompanied by the ghosts of Cherry Hill, at least in our minds. Men and women who had chosen this piece of ground to make a living and provide for their families, who had to make choices about which side of the great conflict of the Civil War they would cast their fate, and determining whether they would be farmers, pottery makers, or store keepers. Most of them chose some combination of all of the above and subsisted on a piece of ground they could call their own. That was the goal, to subsist, to break even, for none of them could even fathom getting rich or getting ahead.

It was an altogether satisfying day, thanks to those students in the seventh and eighth grade 70 years earlier. I wonder if they thought you and I would be interested in what they wrote about a relatively obscure community three quarters of a century later. It was interesting to note that these students were not too far removed from today's scholars since the teacher made these terse, grumbling notes to the report: "Howard Herald, a pupil in the 6th grade and grandson of James Maynard, was asked to find out some information about his grandfather, Mr. Maynard, and report but he failed to do so. Ruby Jack Brown was asked to report on her grandfather, Joe M. Lafever, but she failed to make any reports."

I suppose the more things change, the more they stay the same.

*Read the report called: Cherry Hill-A Local History: <http://www.ajlambert.com>

*Read more about Robert Rogers Chaffin in the Chaffin files and read more Writer's corner stories at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>