

Recognizing the Raulersons' roots

Founding family honored as Olustee Pioneer Family.

By Christopher M. Esing (Special to the Reporter)

Few families have shaped and touched so many parts of Florida to the extent of that of the Raulersons. Over several generations, the Raulerson family spread far and wide pushing back the frontier and paving the trail for thousands of other Americans that would follow them into the Sunshine State. Along the way, they pioneered many communities across Florida planting their roots wherever they built their cabins and homesteads.

Prolific in their numbers, Raulerson descendants crisscrossed the land becoming one of the most common family names and lineages in every corner of the state. Many of the Raulersons that live in Florida today trace their descent to one of five pioneering siblings including Jacob, William, Noel, Nimrod and Fannie Raulerson. Their families and offspring have shaped the history of Florida as well as the communities in which they settled for the last 200 years. The forays of this branch of the Raulerson family into Florida begins in Columbia County, and this story hopes to offer a glimpse into the sacrifices that each sibling made as they pioneered their way through the pine and palmetto of Florida's tropical frontier.

Jacob, William, Noel, Nimrod and Fannie's story and roots begin with their father, John (Rollinson). John was born to Benjamin (Rawlinson) Sr. in 1749 in Richland County, South Carolina. He died in 1816 in Glynn County, Georgia. In 1771, the King of England granted John 100 acres at the fork of the Wateree and Congaree rivers in Old Craven County, South Carolina in March 1771.

During the Revolutionary War, John along with brothers Benjamin, Richard, William and George Rollinson fought against the British. John served in the South Carolina Militia, Richland District. He was a private under Colonel Benton of General Francis Marion's Brigade.

Following the war, he moved to Effingham County, Georgia. In the 1780s where he was granted 200 acres on June 13, 1789, for his military service during the Revolution. He would receive two more grants of land increasing his property to

300 acres. Within 20 years, John had moved again to Glynn County, now Wayne County, Georgia on Jan. 2, 1801. He lived there until he passed in 1816. John's life mirrors that of many early pioneers who made their way into the Georgia wiregrass. During his migration from South Carolina to Georgia, John cleared three farms from the wilderness and raised five children on the frontier.

Among John's progeny are Jacob Raulerson (b. 1778 South Carolina, d. Oct. 22, 1857 Wayne County, Georgia), William Raulerson (b. 1780 South Carolina, d. 1858 Baker County, Florida), Noel Raulerson (b. 1793 South Carolina, d. 1830 Wayne County, Georgia), Nimrod Raulerson (b. 1795 South Carolina, d. August 20, 1858, Baker County, Florida), and Fannie Raulerson (b. 1796 Effingham County, Georgia, Georgia, d. 1840 Columbia County, Florida).

These five siblings would be the first to adopt the Raulerson spelling of the family name, which was first recorded on July 20, 1813, when the governor of Georgia issued a military commission to Jacob Raulerson as Lieutenant of the 335th District of militia in Wayne County. Each of the siblings used the spelling in their legal documents following the war of 1812. Jacob, William, Noel, and Nimrod each served in the Creek Wars (1813-1815) as part of the larger war of 1812. During the conflict, they acted as Mounted Spies for the Georgia Militia due to their dark complexion. In all the American conflicts from the Revolution through the American Civil War, Raulersons served as Indian spies with the American Army because of their ability to pass among the Native American tribes against whom they fought.

In a number of Georgia Census records, many Raulersons are listed as being Mulatto or of mixed race. In 1810, there were 10 Rawlinson/ Rollinson families listed as "Other Free" or non white. In 1814, Captain William Cone made an affidavit to obtain the right to vote for William Rollinson because of questions over his race. The Wayne County document states that William Cone had known the mother of William, Noel and Fannie Rollinson since she had nursed William and that she was a fair, white-skinned woman and that he knew John Rollinson and that he was said to be their father. The Raulersons were considered "free persons of color" or "other free."

They are believed to be descendants of the Saponi and other Eastern Siouan tribes. They often moved with biracial communities as they made their way across

the southern frontier from South Carolina into Georgia and North Florida. Many of these families pioneered the backcountry together. Because of miscegenation laws, living amongst those who were defined as of a similar ethnic or racial background was the only means by which their children could legally marry. These communal networks of familial clans often defined migratory patterns as families moved onto the frontier together. In these mixed communities of native/ white settlers, multiple families often crossed the wire-grass of Georgia in groups pushing the boundaries and borders of the United States eventually moving onto the Florida frontier.

As each of John Raulerson's five children and their descendants made their way into Florida, all of the siblings first spent time in Columbia County. Some would remain, a few would return, and others would continue to journey as they spread deeper into the state. Jacob Raulerson was the first to venture into Florida. Jacob arrived in Georgia as a young man having been born in South Carolina. He settled in Appling County in 1819. During the War of 1812, Jacob served in the Georgia State Militia. He was commissioned on July 20, 1813, as a Lieutenant of the 33rd District Company of the Militia. From 1814-1815, he served as a mounted spy in the Wayne County Militia serving under Captain Richard Walker at Fort Wayne. During this campaign, he and his brothers saw action across the North Florida theater including in Columbia County. Although he did not settle in Florida, four of his children migrated to the Sunshine State with sons, Nichabod and Herod, eventually making their homes in Columbia County.

Jacob's brother William would be the second to make his way into Florida. William was born in 1780 in South Carolina. He also moved to Appling County. At an early age, he married Elizabeth Moore, daughter of Caleb Moore in McIntosh Co., Ga. The nature of the Raulerson racial identity seems to be confirmed by his marriage to "Battie Moore" which family records described as being "half Indian." William Raulerson served in the War of 1812 as a mounted spy in the Wayne County Militia. He served under Captain Richard Walker and was stationed at Fort Wayne. His service would also take him through North Florida as part of the larger Creek campaign. During the war, William Raulerson was one of 105 men who signed the petition to Congress on Jan. 25, 1814, to cede the District of Elotchanay in the Republic of East Florida to the United States. It is believed that he and his brothers were a part of the larger Patriot War to capture Florida for the

U.S. Following the failure of the campaign, he returned home and moved to Ware County. William and Elizabeth Raulerson were members of High Bluff Primitive Church in what was then Ware County, but now Brantley County. Because of conflict over the family's behavior involving William's sister, Fannie, the couple were dismissed by letter on Feb. 12, 1825. They moved soon after to Columbia County.

William and Elizabeth settled on the St. Mary's River near Fort Moniac in the North Prong Church area near the edge of the Okefenokee. On Feb. 2, 1843, William Raulerson received suthorization to operate a ferry across the North Prong of the St. Mary's River for a term of five years. The ferry was established one mile from Fort zmoniac. William Raulerson remained there untilhis death in Columbia County (now Baker Co.) in 1858. Four of William's children remained in Florida. Three lived out their lives in Baker County, including Westberry, Jacob and Isabel. Daughter Emily Raulerson Hull moved to the vicinity of what is now Columbia County and settled on the "Little Suwannee."

Soon after she was married, Emily recorded that hostile Indians roamed the country, and at one point,14 children including those of the Ivey and Moore families lived at her home for a period of 11 days subsisting upon peck and seed corn while the community lay under siege. Because of those experiences, she later encouraged her son, Stephen Hull, to fight in the Third Seminole War against his father's wishes. He ran away from home on a horse furnished to him by his mother to go join the army. A number of descendants of both, Emily and father William, continue to live in Columbia County to this day.

Noel Raulerson, the third eldest of John's sons, also followedhis brothers onto the Florida frontier. Noel married Eleanor Baggs (b. May 6,1785 in South Carolina, d. June 1866 in Hillsborough Co., Fl.) on August 3, 1815 in Camden Co., GA. He served in the 745th Battalion of Georgia Militia under Captain William Walker in the winter of 1813. From 1814-1815, he also served in Captain Richard Walker's Wayne County Mounted Volunteers at Fort Wayne defending against Indian attack. Following the war, Noel returned to Georgia, though he moved back and forth across the Florida border to hunt and trade furs. He eventually moved to the Province of East Florida sometime before 1821. He built a cabin on Lake DeSoto at the location of what would later be the site of the Columbia County Courthouse.

Noel was the first white settler in the community of Alligator. Noel Raulerson did not remain but returned to Wayne County in March 1822. Noel died about 1830 and was buried on the farm of his brother, Jacob Raulerson. His widow Eleanor Raulerson, then moved to North Florida to be near Noel's brother, William, in present day Baker County. She is listed on the 1830 census with William and Fannie Raulerson, her brother-in-law and sister-in-law.

Eleanor and her family did not remain long in North Florida and eventually moved to Hillsborough County in 1844. Sons Noel Rabun and John Baggs Raulerson, would be among the first settlers of the Green Swamp of Lake and Hernando counties, moving with William Wiggins and John Thomas who had both married into the Raulerson clan. By the time they moved, both sons were already seasoned pioneers.

Noel Rabun Raulerson had fought under Capt. Robert Brown in 1837 then under Capt. Sanderling in 1838 as part of the Okeefenokee Swamp campaign of the Second Seminole War where he was wounded in the right shoulder. During the same period, John Baggs Raulerson enlisted as a Private in Capt. Sanderling's Company, 1st Brigade Florida Militia, commanded by Col. Robert Brown in 1838. Following his service, he lived in Alligator before deciding to move South with his mother and brother. As the Raulerson Caravan arrived in their wagons near the Green Swamp, each member drove to their selected parcel of land, unloaded all their belongings, and camped in the open until homes could be built in what became known as the Ichepucksassa settlement. They worked together to grub out the land and build fences to protect their cattle at night. Noel Rabun latter settled on the southeast edge of Lake Hancock. He would become one of the leading cattlemen of South Florida, owning more than 2,515 head in 1862. His herd would eventually reach more than 4,000 cattle.

Six of Noel and Eleanor's children eventually migrated to Florida and son, Jacob Raulerson, settled in Columbia County. Noel Rabun Raulerson Sr. would go on to pioneer the Kissimmee River Valley settling in the community of Basinger in 1874. He and his sons remained leading cattlemen in the area with Noel Rabun Jr.'s herd reaching 8,000 head of cattle. Noel Rabun Sr.'s son Peter eventually settled Tantie, becoming the first American to build a home in what is now Okeechobee in 1896.. Noel Rabun Sr. returned to Polk County, but many of his children

remained in Basinger. During his life, he had 13 children. When he died in 1899, he had more than 100 grandchildren and great children spread across south Florida.

Of the five Raulerson siblings to settle the state, the two youngest, Nimrod and Fannie, experienced the greatest trials and tribulations after moving with their families. Nimrod was born in South Carolina in 1795. He married Sarah Dukes on April 22, 1820 in Wayne Co., Georgia. Following Sarah's death, he remarried Nancy Roberson in 1846 in Wayne Co., GA. Nimrod served in the 74th Battalion in the 33rd Militia District in Georgia in 1813. In 1814 and 1815, he served as a mounted spy in the Wayne County Militia under Captain Richard Walker. He was living in the 451st Militia District of Wayne County and was a 1st Lieutenant from March 23, 1834, to Oct. 3, 1836. Nimrod also served in Florida in the Second Seminole Wars having enlisted on July 19, 1837, at Deep Creek in Jacksonville under Captain William Haddock. He was mustered out on Dec. 19, 1837, and eventually moved near his brother at Fort Moniac.

While living along the St. Mary's River, his wife, Sarah Raulerson, was killed by Indians on the evening of Aug. 19, 1839. Newspapers noted that between sunset and dark, the homes of settlers living near Fort Moniac were attacked by 65 Indians. Several homes were burned to the ground and several of the occupants killed. At sundown, the first gunshots of the ambush hit Eliza Patrick, shooting her through the root of her tongue.

During the attack, Sarah Duke Raulerson also found herself in the midst of the siege. She had long predicted to Nimrod that "one of these days, he would come home, and find her dead at the hands of the Indians." Sarah could hear the Indians whistling around the fort every night when she went to tend to the cows. Nimrod told her that it was rabbits whistling to calm her.

When the attack began, he had been playing cards with soldiers at Fort Moniac. As soon as Nimrod heard the guns from the soldiers' stations, he rushed with a group of soldiers' to their homes over a mile away. There was a branch to cross and when they got to the stream, he met his two little girls who had escaped after their mother had been attacked. When Nimrod arrived home, he found Sarah dead holding their baby. The child was lying in his mother's arms in a pool of blood nursing its dead mother. After the fighting stopped, Nimrod placed her body inside what remained of the cabin and burned it to the ground. All of the

houses in the settlement had been burned in the attack. As they fled, Indians put salt in all the pots and poured them in the wells to prevent the settlers from remaining. Nimrod returned to Georgia and remarried Nancy Roberson. He was shown in Wayne Co. in 1840 and in Baker Co., Fl. In 1850. He died in Baker Co. in August 20, 1858 and is buried in the Crews Cemetery which is located at the edge of the Okefenokee Swamp. His widow was pregnant when he died and the youngest child was born six months after and his death. At least six of Nimrod's 14 children settled in Florida. Three of them built homes and died in what would become Baker County.

Fannie was the youngest of the Raulerson siblings to move with her family onto Florida frontier. She was born in 1796 in Effingham County along the Black Creek part of the Savannah River. Fannie's mother died early in her childhood, and her absence meant that she was raised in a home full of men. This seems to have had a profound impact upon the woman that she would become. Fannie was described as having a stubborn and independent streak that kept the family in trouble with their local church authority. The Raulersons were expelled and dismissed on multiple occasions from their congregations because of Fannie's behavior.

Between 1810-1829, Fannie had 11 children out of wedlock. None of the children were told their father's names, and she raised each of her children on her own. All of the children would live with the stigma of being fatherless and often called wood's colts. Looking to start anew, Fannie followed her brother William to the Florida frontier in the 1820s. She moved to Columbia County with William and his wife, Elizabeth, around 1826. They settled on the St. Mary's River near Fort Moniac. Fannie was said to have supported her self by operating what would become Raulerson's Ferry on the North prong of the St. Mary's River a mile north of the fort. Her brother William would later apply for the authorization to operate the ferry himself.

In the 1830s, Fannie and Tempy and George Gillett who had children of the same age as her own They invited her to move near them to raise their families together. In March of 1883, George Gillit and Fannie Raulerson relocated on the north side of Ocean Pond, in Columbia County (now Baker County) with their

families. They had been there seven weeks when they were attacked by a band of Seminoles.

On the evening of the ambush, Fannie had gone with son, William to spend the night with the Gillett's, while their daughter, Lydia Gillet, went to spend the night with the Raulerson children. They lived a half mile away from each other. At dusk, Indians unexpectedly raided the Gillett house, by killing George Gillett by shooting two bullets into his back, each passing through his body. He was dead in two minutes. According to accounts, Mrs. Raulerson screamed to Mrs. Gillett, "Come, Tempy lets go." Mrs. Gillett replied, "No I would not desert my husband in my life and I won't forsake him in death."

Fannie became so excited that she forgot her 14- year-old son in the house as she fled into the woods. The Indians commenced to killing the Gillett family. They shot Mrs. Gillett and her three-year-old daughter. Five-year-old William Raulerson was found sitting in a rocking chair shot in the chest with his face split open from a tomahawk. He was killed instantly never falling out of the chair. Fannie rushed home and gathered her remaining children, including Independence, Polester, Franklin, Adaline, David and Lydia Gillett, along with four African American slave women. They tracked 15 miles through the woods walking all night and the next day. They were repeatedly scratched and most of their clothes shredded, but they survived.

Fannie moved with her surviving children to the community of Corinth north Alligator. Fannie's brother William built a cabin on the site of what would become Corinth Church. Fannie later moved back to Moniac to assist her brother, Nimrod, and his children after his wife Sarah was massacred in August 1839. She is believed to have died a year later in 1840. And again under Captain A. Stewart in Alligator in 1841. David Raulerson served under Captain Giles Elli's Company of the Florida Volunteers during

Many of Fannie's surviving sons would fight directly in the Seminole Wars with daughter Polester marrying a soldier. Independence, Liberty, and David all fought in the second and third Seminole Wars. Independence and David served under Captain Asa A. Stewart's Company of the Brigade of the Florida Mounted Militia in 1840 and again under Captain A. A. Stewart in Alligator in 1841. David Raulerson served under Giles Ellis's Company of Florida Volunteers during the

Third Seminole War. He was killed in the line of duty at Port Tampa near Fort Brooke. Many of Fannies children remained in North Florida and Columbia County. Raulerson Ferry which she operated on the St. Mary's River would later grow into the community of Baxter. Today, it and many other settlements serve as a testament of the Raulersons early pioneering efforts in the region.

The legacy of the Raulersons in Columbia County and Florida remains large. The Raulersons were the founding family of what would later become Lake City and Columbia County more than 200 years ago in 1821. The Raulersons were also among the first citizens who cast their ballots in Florida's first state-wide election in 1845 including two Raulerson men from Alligator and seven from the rest of Columbia County. Herod Raulerson, Jacob Raulerson's son served as a Representative for Columbia County in the Florida Congress in 1852. Charles Raulerson, a descendant of Nimrod and Sarah Dukes, owned one of the largest liverys in down-town Lake City from 1880 until his death in 1914.

The impact of the Raulerson family stretches across the span of Florida's history as an American territory and state. The Raulersons pushed back the frontier of Florida from the Okefenokee down to Okeechobee and would be the first settlers in many communities across Florida's wilderness. Over the last two centuries, Raulersons have served as military, political, religious, and economic leaders throughout Florida, and a number of institutions and buildings are named in their honor. It is estimated that more than 1,000 Raulersons—who trace their roots to either Jacob, William, Noel, Nimrod or Fannie—continue to call Florida home.

With a heritage that expands and touches every corner of the sunshine state, it is a great honor to be able to recognize the Raulerson family and honor their descendants as the 2022 Lake City and Columbia County Olustee Pioneer Family.