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Monte Verdi Plantation Historical Marker Recognizes Slave Names



Picture by Maxine Session

Much to the surprise of many Rusk and Cherokee County African American residents, a very important piece of their local ancestry history sits in their midst and has been there since 1856. Thanks to Dorothy Franks, Project Manager, Deborah Loftis Foster, President of the Laneville Allen School Alumni Association, the alumni and the Texas Slave History and Inventory Preservation Board, the unknown history has been made known. Located about one mile off Highway 84, approximately eight miles East of Reklaw, Texas on County Road 4233, the plantation is easily found.

On Saturday, September 1, 2018 descendants gathered at the plantation to "Speak Their names", 200 plus Monte Verdi slaves.

Story page 3.

Monte Verdi Plantation African American Slave Family Decendents Return to Roots

Cover Story By Maxine Session



Slave house which still stands behind the big house.



Current plantation owners Joe and Cecelia Koch



Decendants from as far away as Maryland and South Carolina.

On Saturday, September 1, 2018 more than 150 decendants and others gathered under a large tent and shade trees at the beautiful old Monte Verdi Plantation to "Speak the names" of their ancestors. Located in Rusk County near the Glenfawn community, they gathered to commemorate the names of the slaves who once lived and worked on the 10, 700 acre plantation by calling out their names and unveiling the historical marker containg their names and their history. Joe and Cecilia Coke, the current plantation owners were there to greet them and join in the ceremony. Slave decendant, Tarrant County Judge Lewis Sturns, 213th District,

had this to say,"I have mixed emotions. Our ancestors were brought here against their will. A people without knowledge of their history is like a tree without roots. Let us be glad that the South did not win (the Civil War). We would still be working the cotton fields." Dr. Scott Sosebee, Stephen F. Austin History Professor said history is like a fabric. If you loose a string you loose the fabric. Everybody's story has to be told.

Furlich July Arrington of Jacksonville is a 12th generation decendent of Jesse July(1870 U. S. Census) family. She and daughter Janea were there.

Shirley Freeney Jones, decendent, from Dallas had this to say." My Daddy, Rev. Earnest Freeney was born and raised in Freenytown near Fairview Community. He told me much of our family history was lost when he was a small boy. The Klan burned a cross in their front yard. The family ran, settling in Rusk, Texas with nothing more than what they could carry. The land was lost."

Walter Session of the Sessions family decendants said he was shocked when the family name "Sessions" was included in the slave family list. "I had no idea my family roots were here."

Dorothy Franks, founder, told of her visit to the Rusk County Courthouse to take care of business when a man she met carried her to the basement vault and showed her documents from the 1856 Will of Julien Sidney Devereux, Monte Verdi Plantation owner. From that began the researc which led to the recognition ceremony and marker dedication..

Continued page 9

Speak Their Names

from page 3

Dorothy went to her Laneville Allen School Alumni Association, board members of the Texas History and Inventory Preservation and partnered with them in coordinating the special Ancestor Recognition Ceremony after she did research, wrote letters to the plantaion owners and others, submitted application to the State Historical Commission for placement of the marker and got it approved.

Documented Family Slave First Names

Occording to a book written by Dorman H. Winfrey, *"Julien Sidney Devereux and His Monte Verdi Plantation"* Waco Press 1962, the Devereux Family Papers survived the plundering of the Civil War because the plantation was not destroyed. After the death of Sarah Devereux-Garrison, the family deposited them in the University of Texas Archives (Dolph Brisco Library). fortunately, for Texas History, Julien Sidney Devereux and his decendants have preserved the writings and names of slaves as they are recorded in the diary kept by the father John William Devereux, and those written by himself in the records of the Devereux Family Papers.

Scott and Tabby

The 10,700-Acre AnteBellum Plantation of Julien Sidney Devereux and Sarah (Landrum) Devereux Garrison, was one of the most economicalily and historically significant plantations in the state. Devereux Family papers at the regional and state archives preserve a record of names of "the enslaved people who labored here. Their written family history begins with Scott and Tabby, born 1792 and 1787 respectively, the eldest in John William Devereux's group of slaves who were taken with their children and grandchildren from Georgia to Alabama to Texas. Documented African American families at MonteVerdi in 1846 included Scott and Tabby, their son Anderson, and his wife(unnamed). Other couples included Judy and Jim, Sam from the Loftus Plantation and (Eliza Henry) Mariah, Jinny and Peter, Joanna and Joe, (El) Mina and Walton, Maria and Lewis, and Green and Phoebe, who

founded the Anadarco (Anadarko) Christian Church and School in 1868. Julien Devereux's 1856 probate records name 80 slaves on the estate. After obtaining their freedom in 1865, these resilient men and women paved the way for better lives for themselves and their future generations.

Slave Decendants of the 80 Surnames

Some families stayed in the area continuing to work and live in villages and communities which comprise the former lands of Monte Verdi, as documented in the 1870-1900 U. S. Census and other records. Decendants of the 80 Monte Verdi slaves rarely adopted the surname Devereux, but instead names including Anderson, Bagley, Blanton, Booker, Bowens, Bradley (Julien's first wife's family)Brantley, Caddell, Cary, Cooper, Freeny, Henry Lewis, Loftis, McDaniel, Owens, Spencer, Sturns, Tipps, Williams and others. Today these family names are recognized for their humanitarian contributions. Others whose Surnames were called were Austin, Ball, Cain, Coss, Fly, Freeman, Garrison, Harris, Hightower, Johnson, July, Johnson, Jordon, Landrum, Lithicum Minter, Norman, Pendleton, Polk, Pruitt, Punch, Richards, Robertson, Robinson, Sessions, Smith, Tilley, Toler, VanZandt, and Wyatt.

Villages formed by Monte Verdi freed slaves

While some of the freedmen of the Monte Verdi Plantation continued to live and work in the area, others branched out within the 16 miles that comprised the 10,700-acre plantation and formed other villages. These include Anadarco, Concord, Cushing, Douglass, Fairview, Glenfawn, Laneville/Freeneytown Lawsonville, Minden, Mount Enterprise, Mount Zion, New Salem, Pine Grove, Reklaw, Sacul ,Shady Grove, Sulfur Springs, Vallley Grove, West Holly Springs and some locations in Cherokee and Nacogdoches counties..



These 80 names of (200 plus) former slaves of Monte Verdi Plantation Rusk, County, Texas are recognized for their contributions to the past, present and future of the region, state, and the nation.

Ceremony Participants

Debra Loftis Foster, was the Emcee for the Ceremony. Others who were a part of the program were Bobby Williams, Laneville Allen High Alumni Association, Rev. Bobby Carter, Pastor of Anadarko Christian Church, Joe and Cecelia Koch Monte Verdi Plantation owners and hosts, Alpheus Moss, concord High Schol Alumni Association, Dorothy Franks, Founder Texas Slave History Preservation, The honorable Travis Clardy, State Representative, The Honorable Louis Sturns, 213th District Judge, Tarrant County, The Honorable Joel Hale, County Judge Rusk County, The Honorable Harold Howell, Rusk County Co. commissioner Precint 4, Dr. Jolene Snider, retired History Professor/ Authorthebook *"ClaimingSunday"*,

Dr. Scott Sosebee, Associate History Professor Stephen F. AustinState University and President Robert Loftis Laneville ISD Board of Trustees.

Elder Carlvera Maurice Dunn and Barbara Spencer Dunn presented Ancestor Recognition "Rainbow of Love" written by Mico Spencer Scott. Jeri Caddell Mills, TexasSHIP Board of Directors gave acknowledgments, Presentation were made by Marilyn Williams, Laneville Allen High Alumni Association, the marker dedication was done by Jean Smith, Marker Chair, Rusk County Historical Commission and the prayer of didication was given by Rev. Jesse McLendon , pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

African American families across the state of Texas and this nation thank you Dorothy Franks for not laying aside information given to you, but for taking on the task of the many hours of research, time and task dedication it took to bring attention to this historic site and the placement of this historic marker which brings knowledge to us about our family roots.

Donations toward the marker can still be made by sending to: LAHAA, P. O. Box 235, Laneville Tx. 75667.