

OPELOUSAS STEPHEN

Introduction

Although, I have entitled this member of the Jett family “Opelousas Stephen,” his life touched upon activity in four states—Kentucky, The Mississippi Territory and later Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. In addition, Opelousas Stephen is a direct descendant of mine and is an ancestor. As such, there are many things which we know about him and many things which we do not know.

This Stephen almost magically appears in the Coles Creek area of the Mississippi Territory. Like Adam appeared in the Garden of Eden created by God, we have Opelousas Stephen showing up in a remote part of Mississippi and find that he is closely linked to the Cole and Curtis families there.

These families will move as a group to Louisiana at the very beginning of the 19th Century and from there will migrate to the Spanish Province of Texas after spending roughly twenty years in Louisiana.

We know that Opelousas Stephen saw himself as being a Kentuckian. When Stephen made an Application for Land he had to present a character Certificate. Stephen’s Character Certificate No. 1040 is found in the General Land Records of Texas dated December 20, 1834 and identifies him as being a native of Kentucky.

Opelousas Stephen-Who he is and who he is not.

The identity of this particular Stephen has perplexed my particular line for a number of years. Why does he appear in the Coles Creek area of Mississippi and how did he get there? However before we turn to that question, it might be helpful to define Opelousas Stephen by who he is not.

NOT STEPHEN BORN 1735

He is not the Stephen born in 1735 who lived in North Carolina and who we believe may have been the lover of Phoebe Crawford. The Stephen born in 1735 is too old. Further we can identify later activities of the Stephen born 1735 when he moves to Kentucky and later dies in Kentucky.

NOT STEPHEN BORN 1775

Stephen born 1735 had a son, Stephen Jr. born 1775. This particular Stephen who I call Stephen Jr. migrated with his father and the Searcey’s to Kentucky. Stephen Jr. was evidently at the early battle of St. Clair as a teenager but he is not the Opelousas Stephen. He had a long life which was spent in Kentucky and died there.

NOT ONE OF THE TWO SONS OF PHOEBE CRAWFORD/CALVIT.

At first our line of Jetts thought that Opelousas Stephen might have been one of the two sons of Phoebe whose father was Stephen. However, we later identified the two sons of Phoebe as being Hamilton Jett and John Martin Jett and therefore do not believe that Phoebe was the mother of Stephen. We have not become aware of any other children of Phoebe fathered by Stephen Jett (Stephen b. 1735 we believe).

NOT THE CHILD OF ISAAC ISRAEL JETT

We have dealt with Isaac Israel Jett in another chapter. He was from Madison County Kentucky and was married. He died in 1793 just outside of Ft. St. Clair. Although he had several children, there is no evidence that any of them was named Stephen. The only male that I have been able to identify is Isaac Israel Jett Jr. who lived in Madison County Kentucky until his death in 1865.

STEPHEN ACCORDING TO JETT TRAILS WEST

Jett Trails West is a book published on Jett Genealogy and written by my aunt, Lois M. Jett and my father Ernest C. Jett. The authors of this book believe that Opelousas Stephen was the child of John Jett (one of the sons of Stephen Jett b. 735) and his first wife Ann Burns. Below is a quotation from page 31 of that book:

“Stephen Jett. After many of years of research, we believe our ancestor, Stephen Jett, b. ca 1780-82 was also a child of Ann and John Jett, Sr. but that he raised by his grandfather and other relatives in Kentucky. It is quite possible that John, Sr. and Ann were in Kentucky when she died. Speculation is that Ann may have died in childbirth. We know that there were three Stephen Jett shown in the household of Stephen Jett, Sr. and his son Stephen Jett, Jr. in the Madison County Tax Lists of 1799. We believe that this third Stephen was one and the same Stephen Jett, B. 1780-1782, d. 1837 who was in the Natchez District in 1800, listed in the 1810 census of the Opelousas District in Louisiana, and was in Jefferson (now Orange) County, Texas by 1830. We are not sure that if he was present in 1790 census in Greenville, SC where John lived with his second wife Naomi.”

STEPHEN'S SUDDEN APPEARANCE IN COLE'S CREEK

We find that sometime a few years before 1800, Opelousas Steve appears in Cole's Creek and becomes associated with the Cole and Curtis Families and ultimately marries Sarah Cole the daughter of James Cole Jr. (born 1762). Various genealogies add a measure of confusion by identifying this individual under various titles including James Cole Jr., James Cole II and even James Cole III. The Spanish records generally identify two Coles being James Cole the Elder (the father of James Cole Jr.) and James Cole the Younger who is the James Cole born 1762 and the father of Sarah Cole who will marry Stephen Jett. The Cole family like the Searcy family discussed earlier is closely associated with the Jett family. The Coles will be part of a group of families who lived in close proximity in the Cole's Creek Area in the Mississippi Territory, then moved to the Opelousas area in Louisiana where they will live for close to 25-30 years and finally migrated again as a group to the Spanish Province of Texas.

We will be discussing the Cole and Curtis families at more length and their migration to the Cole's Creek Area in Mississippi in the future. The Cole Family appears in the Cole's Creek area significantly before Stephen Jett appears there.

As I began my study of Opelousas Steve, one of the questions which intrigued me was how it happened that Stephen came into the Cole's Creek area which was located about two days North of Natchez. Further, why did people locate in the Cole's Creek area to begin with.

Ultimately, the answer which I came to was that Opelousas Steve, came to the Cole's Creek area with Jett relatives who settled and farmed this area. I believe that Opelousas Steve came with the Asa Searcy family who settled in the area near Greenville, Ms. which is not far from Cole's Creek.

Opelousas Steve was in that particular area doing work on Asa's farm and had the opportunity to meet the Cole family and Sarah Cole in particular Both Asa and his father, Reuben, had married daughters of Stephen Jett of Granville, N.C. (b. 1735). Reuben had married Elizabeth and Asa had married Elizabeth's sister Frances. Asa was both a warrior and farmer. He had served as a soldier in the American Revolution. He and Frances had accompanied the Jett family and migrated with them from Granville, N.C. and then later to the north Holston River Area. After spending some years in that area the Jett family had migrated to Madison County, Kentucky. Asa and a young brother of Frances, Stephen Jr. (b. 1775 and a son of Stephen Sr. b. 1735) had participated in the Battle of St. Clair in late 1791 which had turned into a disaster and where the majority of the soldiers and Indian fighters from Kentucky were wiped out. Later Asa would serve as an Indian Scout under General "Mad" Anthony Wayne and would participate in the defeat of the Indians in 1794 at the Battle of Fallen Timbers.

In 1794 and 1795 two events had a profound effect perhaps causing Asa and his family to move to Mississippi. First, in 1794 the cotton gin was invented making the production of cotton much more economically effective in the South. Secondly, in 1795, Spain entered into the Treaty of San Lorenzo. This treaty gave up the claims of Spain to Natchez and allowed the United States to use the Mississippi River and Port of New Orleans without payment of taxes. We think that Asa and his family moved to the Mississippi about 1795. We know that Opelousas Steve was in the Coles Creek area prior to 1800. We also know that Asa and his family continued to live in Mississippi until Asa's death in 1815. At the time of his death, Frances Jett Searcy was visiting with their daughter, who was the wife of Joshua Smith in Sumner County Tennessee.

Cole's Creek, the Natchez Trace and Old Greenville, Ms.

Although Asa Searcy probably came to the area in 1795, the area was previously settled by numerous families who had received at various times both British and Spanish Land Grants for acreage in the Cole's Creek area. The Cole's Creek Area during the time of Asa Searcy and the Cole and Curtis families was a much more populated area than it is today. Located on Cole's Creek was a town which later would become known as Old Greenville, Ms. Old Greenville was settled sometime prior to 1798. It was located on Cole's Creek and was about 28 miles North of Natchez. We know that in 1808 (shortly after the Coles and Opelousas Steve had left the area), Old Greenville had about 40 houses, a church, courthouse, prison and pillory for offenders, two taverns, a drug store and a church. The City of Greenville was one of the stops on the Natchez Trace and probably also provided a rest stop for travelers on the Old Natchez Trace.

The Old Natchez Trace was one of the few ways that one could travel from the Eastern United States into Natchez and The Mississippi Territory. The Old Natchez Trace was about 440 Miles long and ran from Nashville, Tennessee to Natchez, Mississippi. The Natchez Trace was primarily a group of interconnected Indian trails. Some of the trails went through Choctaw and Cherokee lands. By 1801, the U.S. Army had signed treaties with these Indian nations and was in the process of improving the trail. The trace was difficult to navigate and it was not able to be fully used by wagons until 1809. Not only was the Old Natchez Trace difficult to navigate but it was also dangerous because of robbers. For

these reasons, it is likely that most people came to the area in the early years around the turn of the nineteenth century, came by way of boats down the Mississippi River.

As mentioned earlier, the cotton gin was patented in 1794. A number of large land holdings and plantations were established around Greenville. One of the richer men in America, Abijah Hunt moved to the Natchez District of Mississippi in 1798. Interestingly Hunt had made his fortune by supplying provisions for soldiers in the area near Cincinnati, Ohio. Coincidentally, Asa had served in this area during his time in Kentucky. Abijah Hunt moved to Mississippi and set up public cotton gins in Natchez, Greenville and several other towns in Mississippi. Not only did Abijah Hunt have a plantation near Old Greenville but he established a public cotton gin there. Abijah Hunt and his partner Elijah Smith not only ginned cotton but had a business where he brokered and transported both cotton bales and lumber to Northern markets. Abijah in 1799 was appointed Deputy Postmaster for the Mississippi Territory and as such he also promoted the improvement of the Old Natchez Trail so that mail could be sent from Natchez to Nashville. Abijah died in 1811 after being shot in a duel by George Poindexter, a lawyer and politician in Natchez. He left about 25 plantations to his son David Hunt.

David Hunt would be an extremely rich man. Interestingly, David Hunt's first wife was Margaret Stampley from the Stampley family near Cole's Creek.

In the Cole's Creek Area were a number of large southern plantations used for raising cotton. Included in these plantations were Gayoso, Pecan Grave, Logonia, Oak Grove, Cedars, Woodland and Springfield plantations. These plantations today are privately owned and not open to the public.

Also, Old Greenville, Mississippi no longer exists and only the old cemetery for the city remains.

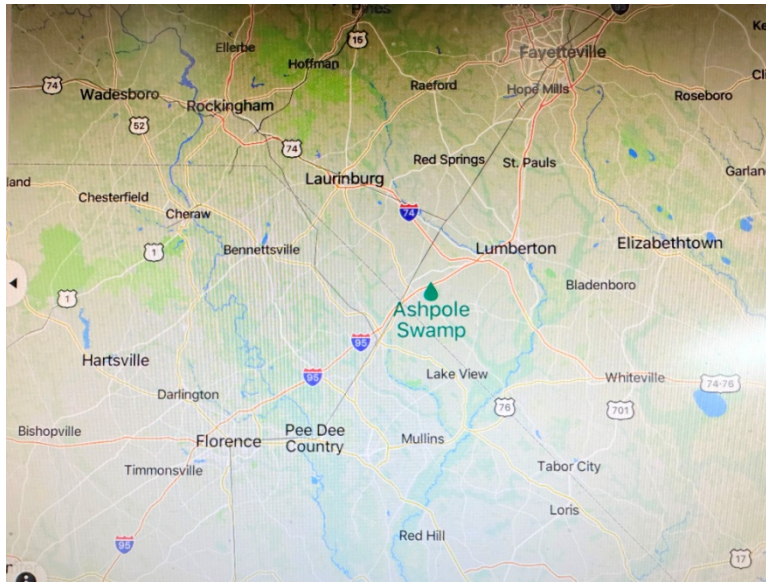
There were a number of families in the Cole's Creek area which would have a great impact upon Opelousas Steve and many generations of his family. Two of the family groups which would play a major role in his life were the Curtis Family and the Cole Family.

The Curtis Family

Richard Curtis, Sr.

For our purposes, a study of the Curtis family and their migration to the Mississippi Territory begins with Richard Curtis, Sr. who was born in Fort Henry, Virginia in 1725. In 1749, Richard Curtis would marry Phoebe Courtney (maiden name) Jones. Phoebe had previously been married to William Jones and had a son John Jones. Both Phoebe and her first husband had been of Welsh ancestry. The children of Richard Curtis, Sr. and Phoebe are listed in the Notes.

Richard Curtis and his family migrated first to Ashpole Swamp which is in Bladen County (now Robeson County) North Carolina which is located near the Southern border of North Carolina.



Ashpole Swamp, North Carolina

In 1760, Solomon Cole is born in that county to Richard and Phoebe Curtis. In 1762, the Curtis family migrated to Craven County South Carolina and in 1764, Jemima Curtis was born at the Pee Dee River Valley in Craven County, South Carolina.



Pee Dee River, South Carolina

Welsh Neck Baptist Church

A number of Welsh had migrated to South Carolina in 1736 and again in 1746 and were located in the vicinity of Society Hill which was called James Neck. The Welsh were mainly from the Welsh District in Pennsylvania. (That area is now in the State of Delaware). About thirty families migrated together from Delaware and these had been members of Pecander Hundred Baptist Church in Delaware. The first Welsh settlers were granted in Northeast South Carolina and this area was known as The Welsh Tract. The name "Society Hill" came from St. David's Society which was a previous name of the Society Hill Library Society. This society both educated people and acted as a lending library.

In 1738, eight families of the Welsh residing in this area of South Carolina formed the Peedee or Welsh Neck Baptist Church. Included in this church were some of the Jones family. In 1744, the Welsh Neck Baptist Church began the construction of their first church building. At this time, many of the members were bilingual speaking both Welsh and English. By 1759, the Welsh Neck Baptist Church had about sixty-six members and therefore was not at that time a large church. At this point in time about only four of the members not of Welsh descent. By 1772, Welsh Neck had over half of the eighty families in its location baptized and regularly attending the church. By 1777, the church had grown to 197 members. By 1779, Welsh Neck had 250 members but this number would drop to only 48 in 1793 due to the Revolutionary War and other issues. The Church was described by some as being Anabaptist. They were fairly tolerant and had many of the doctrines of the "primitive" Baptist church meaning that, among other things, they believed predestination of the saints as opposed to Arminianism which placed a stronger emphasis on free will as opposed to being "called from all eternity." In 1798, Richard Curtis, Jr. was licensed to preach by the Welsh Neck Baptist Church. It is interesting to note that by 1790 people of Welsh descent made up 11.6% of the North Carolina population and 8.8% of the population of South Carolina.

In 1779, Richard Curtis, Sr. was shown on the jury list for the Cheraw District in Craven County, St. Carolina. In 1779, the Curtis and Jones families were members of Welsh Neck Baptist Church.

Revolutionary War in South Carolina

In South Carolina and in particularly the area where the Curtis's lived, there was great conflict between families who were loyalists and those who were patriots. South Carolina was about equally divided at the beginning of the Revolutionary War with about 50% supporting the Patriot cause and the remaining 50% were Tories or Loyalists supporting the British.

The Curtis family was strong supporters of the Patriots. Many sources state that Richard Curtis, Sr. fought as one of the guerilla fighters reporting to Francis Marion who was known as 'The Swamp Fox.'" In 1776, Marion was a Lieutenant Colonel and had participated in besieging Atlanta which ultimately failed. When the British took Charleston on May 12, 1780, Marion who was part of the garrison there avoided capture due to being out of the city because of a broken ankle. Although it is possible that Richard Curtis had fought alongside Francis Marion, I have been unable to substantiate this. Many of those fighting alongside Marion were partisans who did not receive pay from the U.S. and supplied their own weapons and horses in fighting both the British soldiers and the Tories who were supporting them.

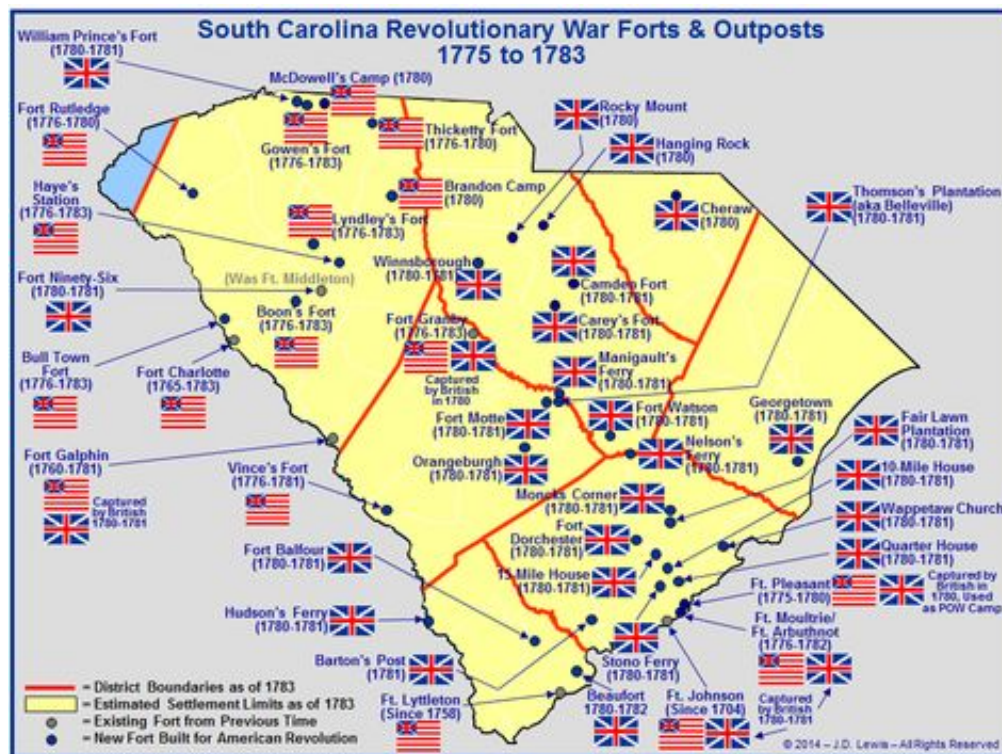
The time in which the Curtis Group left South Carolina is not random. The area in which the Curtis Group lived had fallen under control of the British and the Tories. The war in South Carolina at this point

in time, had gone disastrously for the Revolutionaries. The British had occupied a number of South Carolina cities and were in the process of building forts to strengthen their soldiers and the Tory population. Congress had appointed Benjamin Lincoln as the Southern Commander of the Continental Forces. Savannah, Georgia had fallen to the British on December 29, 1778, and in September 1779, Benjamin Lincoln and a joint American-French expedition had failed to retake Savannah.

In February 1780, the British had landed about 1400 British and Hessian Troops in South Carolina. General Lincoln was unable to protect the City of Charleston and on May 11 the city surrendered along with about 7000 Continental Troops. General Benjamin Lincoln had been captured by the British at Charleston.

As part of their attempt to control South Carolina, the British occupied and built forts in a number of South Carolina Cities including such towns as Camden, 96 (a City), Rocky Mountain and many others.

Below is a map showing some of the British Forts.



The Curtis Family lived in Society Hill South Carolina which was in walking distance of the Welsh Neck Baptist Church. The Curtis Family was about 14 or so miles south of Cheraw, South Carolina which is marked in red on the map below.



The British occupied Cheraw with the British Seventy-first Highlanders.



In short, Cheraw had become part of the British line of defense. South Carolina had become a battlefield and the area was devastated. Slaves had been promised freedom by the British and many of them had flocked to the British side.

Further, the British had obtained the alliance of much of the Cherokee nation. This resulted in numerous attacks in the western part of South Carolina. Although the Cherokees had been ordered to attack only Patriots, they attacks quickly devolved into attacks on any white whether they were Patriots or Tories. (It is not surprising that the Indians could not always distinguish who was who due to the fact that both Tories and Patriots lived in close proximity).

Moreover, on May 29, 1780, the British Dragoons under Tarleton had massacred about 350 Patriots after they had surrendered at Waxhaws. This war crime gave birth to the cry of the Continental soldier "Tarleton's Quarter" meaning that you could not trust the British to keep their promises if you surrendered to them.

It was in this abysmal environment in which the Curtis family and their friends fled from South Carolina.

Heading for the Mississippi Territory.

The Mississippi Territory was considered to be attractive and land was cheap especially if one had the advantage of having a large family. Although the British had controlled the Natchez Territory as part of the West Florida District, it lost control of the area in 1778 to Spain. Spain was not a friend of Great Britain and generally acted as a neutral in the Revolutionary War ; although it was happy to do damage to England if it could. In 1779, Bernard Galvez, Governor of Spanish Louisiana captured Natchez.

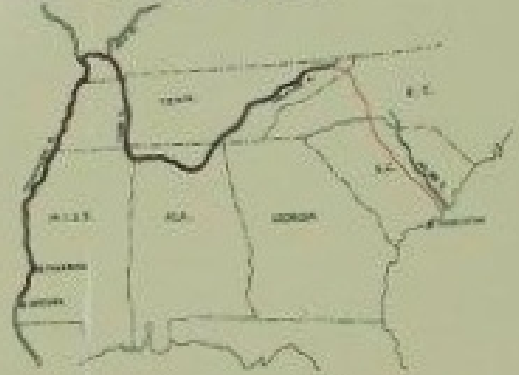
In Spring of 1780, the Curtis Group departed from South Carolina and headed for the Holstein River Area. The trip to Natchez was a long and arduous one involving traveling up to the Hostein River Area by way of the Pee Dee River Valley and then after some time in the Hostein River Area it would involve travel on the Holstein , Tennessee, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Although we cannot be absolutely certain, I suspect that the trip to the Holstein River may have been primarily on foot and packhorses because the Pee Dee River was flowing to the sea and therefore their trip would have been upsteam if it had been by boat. Below is a map on a marker showing the location of the Pee Dee River area.



The entire trip taken by the Curtis Group is shown on the marker below:

BEGINNING OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN MISSISSIPPI

In the Spring of 1780, several families of the Great Pee Dee River area near Charleston, S.C., loaded their possessions on pack-horses and set out for the far off "Natchez Country". Richard Curtis, Sr., was their leader.



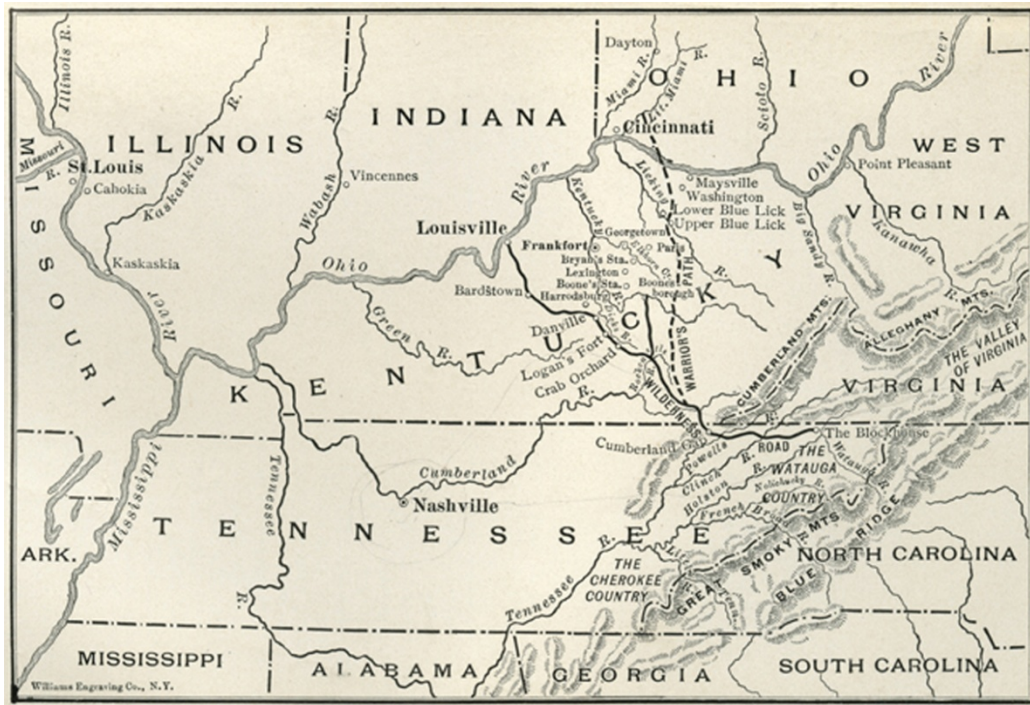
The Curtis Group

It is difficult to identify all of the members of the Curtis Group. We believe that it included Richard Curtis, Sr. and his wife Martha Pattie Jones Curtis. Also it included John Jones and John's wife. As you will recall, John was Richard's stepson and his wife's son from her first marriage. Accompanying the Jones family would have been their children including John Jr. who was 12. Also accompanying were Richard Sr. children, along with their wives and children. There was William Curtis (son of Richard, Sr.) along with his family. Also there was Benjamin Curtis (son of Richard Sr.) along with his family. There was also Richard Curtis, Jr. along with his family. Richard Jr. was a licensed Baptist minister by now and about twenty five years of age. Also in the Curtis Group would have been Richard Sr.'s daughters and their families. His daughter had married John Courtney. Also there was Martha Phoebe Curtis Stampley and her family including her husband, John Stampley Sr. Another daughter of Richard, Sr. was Jemima "Mamie Cotter" Curtis who was about 16 at the time. She would later in Natchez marry into the Cole family and be the mother of Susannah Cole who would marry Opelousas Steve.

There were evidently some others who also made the trip as part of the Curtis Group including Daniel Ogden and his son Daniel Ogden Jr.

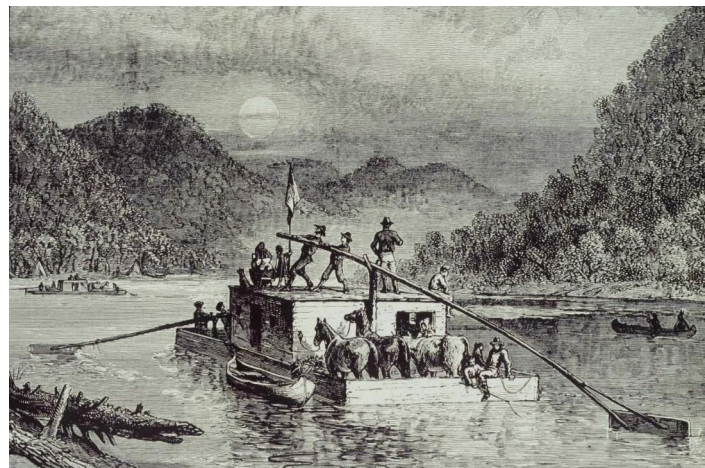
Holstein River Area

Once, the Curtis Group got to the Holstein (or Holston) River Area, they evidently began to construct river boats and planted a crop of corn. Evidently the Holston could not be navigated at that time year around and it was necessary to wait upon rains and probably the melting of snow to provide sufficient depth to make the trip without running the flatboats to ground. Below is a map showing the Holston River Area



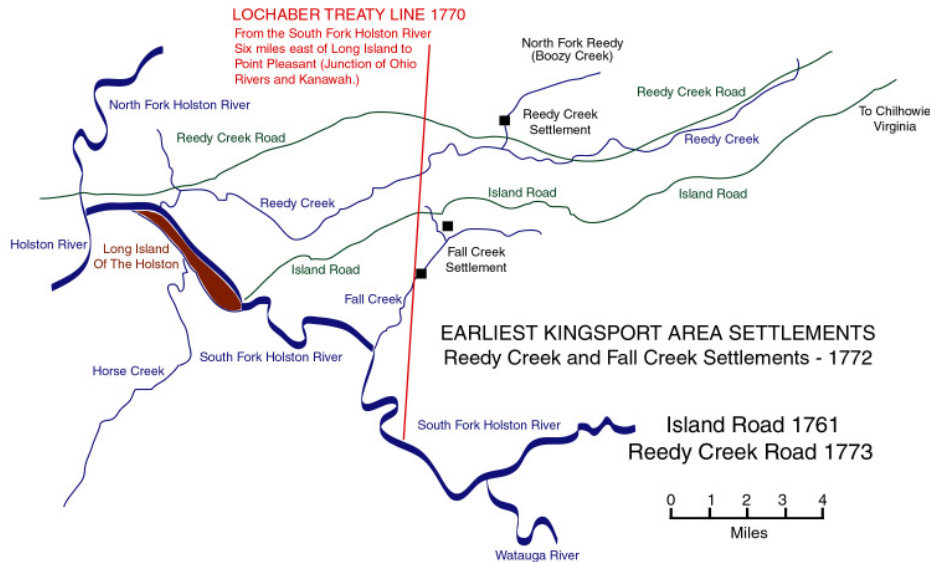
The Curtis Group utilized flat boats which they built which could be used as flat or tub shaped hull with an area built above for protection. It was generally used to float down stream and had oars, poles and the rudders to guide it. They were sturdy boats. They had to be large enough to transport things like a family, or families, horses, cows, chickens, farming implements and the like.

The route went from the Holston River, to the Tennessee River which was entered around Knoxville. After the Tennessee River, the route went to the Ohio River near Paducah Kentucky. From there, the boats would travel down the Ohio River and enter the Mississippi near what today is known as Cairo, Illinois. Below is a picture of what a flat boat may have looked like:



Although we cannot be certain, I suspect the flat bottom boats were launched from Long Island in the Holston River. We know that during this period there were many boats which were built and launched from this area. It was also considered the beginning of the Wilderness Trail. In fact there was a small area on Long Island known as the boat yard. In July 1777, the Cherokees (who were allies to the British) formally had given up this land, but many Cherokees still inhabited this particularly area of the country and were still hostile to whites.

Below is a map showing the location of the Long Island of the Holston River.



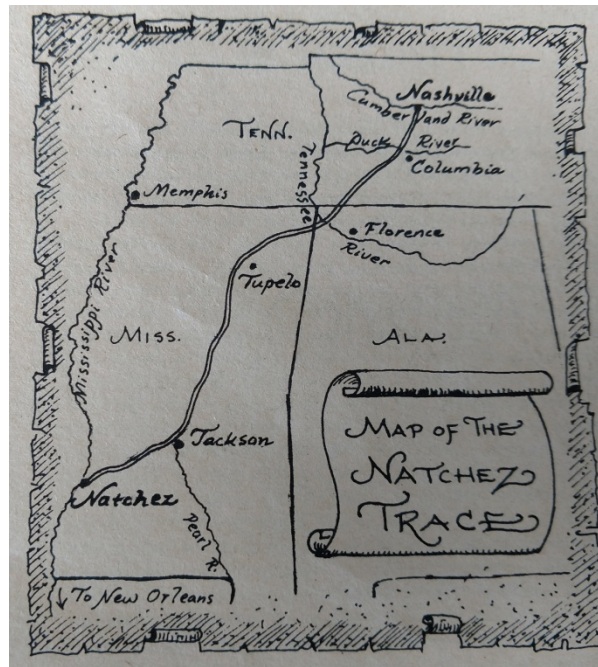
Apparently there were three flat bottom boats. We believe the first two had the Curtis Group and the third flat bottom boat was allowed to accompany the first two because it was thought safer to travel in numbers. Due to the fact that some individuals had small pox on the third boat, it floated somewhat further back in the group of boats and at camps during the evening, the third boat had to make its camp away from the first two boats due to the smallpox.

In the first boat was Richard Curtis, Sr. and his family including the Jones family. In the second boat were other Baptists including Daniel Ogden and his son, William. Also we know that the Perkins family was in the second boat.

Although our sources are silent regarding whether there was a pilot on board, I think it very highly unlikely that the Curtis Group would have tried to navigate numerous rivers leading to Natchez without a guide or pilot on the lead boat. There were many people in the area who made their living by guiding flatboats from Kentucky and Tennessee to Natchez. They were called "Kaintucks" (which is a variation of Kentucks). They guided the flat boats of settlers and supplies to Natchez. Flat boats would be built and then floated on the current down to Natchez. At Natchez, the boats would be dissembled and the lumber sold. The Kaintucks were a tough and hardy bunch of pioneers. After selling the lumber in Natchez, they would make their way back to Tennessee and Kentucky via the Natchez Trace which was a

very dangerous trail of about 440 miles to Nashville, It is said that in 1810 about 10,000 Kaintucks travelled the Natchez Trail.

Below is a map of the Natchez Trace:



On a bend of the Tennessee River somewhere near the mouth of the Clinch River the three boats were attached by a group of Cherokee Indians. Below is a map showing the Tennessee River and where the Clinch River enters it.



The Indians vigorously attacked the first flat boat. William Jones who was twelve, took one of the oars as the men returned fire. His stalwart mother used a hickory stool to protect him and evidently one of the Indian bullets hit the chair but did not pierce it. Also one of the women took an oar so her husband could return fire. Evidently one of the musket balls grazed the head of Hannah Courtney. Another musket ball damaged the wrist of Jonathan Curtis.

As the battle raged, the second boat containing the Ogden and Perkins family made it past the Indians without incident.

The third flat boat were not so fortunate. It was captured and its occupants were massacred. It is said that one of the women was captured and enslaved for several years before being ransomed. I have not been able to identify any of the occupants of the third boat. The Indians had somewhat of a pyrrhic victory because their evidently caught small pox from the occupants or the items in the third boat which ravaged the Cherokee attackers and their particular tribe.

The Curtis Group continued their trip.

Here is part of a post describing the trip by Aubrey Smith in the Genealogy.com forum entitled "Pee Dee River to Natchez Country Migration and dated July 11, 2004:

" Following the Tennessee River they reached the Ohio River near Paducah, KY. (On this leg they traveled near present day towns of Dayton, TN; Chattanooga, TN; Scottsboro, AL; Guntersville, AL; Decatur, AL; Florence, AL; Savannah, TN; Perryville, TN; Sycamore Landing, TN; Eva, TN; Aurora, KY; and Lake City, KY) From Paducah the flat boats floated down the Ohio River where they entered the Mississippi near Cairo, IL. (This is near present day Metropolis, IL; and about 30 miles south of Cape Girardeau, MO).

At Cairo, IL the flat boats embarked on the "mercy" of the mighty Mississippi River for the rest of the journey to the "Natchez Country." (They traveled near present day towns like Hayti, MO; Cathursville, MO; Heloise, TN; Osceola, AR; Memphis, TN; Helena, AR; Rosedale, MS; Greenville, MS; Lake Providence, LA; and Vicksburg, MS) South of Rodney one group of pioneers steered the flat boats into Boyd's Creek

(now Cole's Creek) for the 15 mile trip to Curtis Landing on the South Fork of Cole's Creek. Other pioneers continued on to Natchez or Wilkinson County steering their flat boats up St. Catherine's Creek, the Homochitto River or Buffalo River.

These pioneers had made a trip of approximately 1400 miles by flat boat on water. The total miles traveled by horse-pack and flat boat would be about 1650-1700 miles.

Upon arrival it was necessary to fell trees and build log houses quickly. Fields needed to be cleared and cultivated. The survival for the first year was dependent on the family's ability to fish and hunt. Squirrel, deer, ducks, and wild turkey were the family's fresh meat."

The Curtis Group landed at Cole's Creek which was a settlement North of Natchez about 17 miles and near an area which was already settled by others. We do not know much of what transpired in this area after their settlement. We suspect that land was cleared and during the first year, the settlers survived mainly from game which they shot. Land was cleared and crops were planted. Natchez was under Spanish Control. Richard Curtis, Jr. was about 25 when he came to Cole's Creek.

Below is the location of Cole's Creek.



On November 10, 1784, Richard Curtis, Sr. died in the Mississippi Territory. His wife, Phoebe Curtis would pass away sometime during the period 1790-1791.

In 1789, Manuel Gayoso de Lomas became the Spanish Governor of the Natchez District. The Mississippi Territory was Catholic and there was no freedom of religion and the citizens were expected to be and to support Catholicism. This was not only the position of many Spanish citizens, the Catholic priests in the area and many of the Irish born Kentucks who worked the rivers who were Catholic by birth. Many settlers into the area from the colonies brought their own faiths and beliefs. Manuel Gayoso will play a future role in our story of Richard Curtis, Jr. due to Gayoso seeking to enforce Catholicism upon non-Catholics. Below is a painting showing Gayoso.



During the period 1790-1795, Cotton had not yet become “King” ; however by 1794 Eli Whitney would have patented the cotton gin and by 1795, John Barclay had built the first cotton gin in the Natchez District.. We also know that there was a public cotton gin built in Old Greenville which was close to the Cole’s Creek area.

By 1790, the Curtis and Cole families were shown as producing tobacco in a Mississippi List of Tobacco Growers. The Searcy’s and Jetts and were not shown on the list probably because they had not yet arrived in the Cole’s Creek area.

In October, 1781, a church was meeting at the home of Margaret Baird Stampley, who was the wife of Henry Stampley. It was there that the first Baptist Church in the Mississippi Territory was organized. Richard Curtis, Jr. did the preaching because he was a licensed (but not yet ordained) minister. Other members included Benjamin Curtis, William Curtis, John Jones, Ealiff Lanier, William Thompson, Richard Curtis, Jr. and Margaret Stampley. Later in 1798, a separate log building was built for the church and the church as named Salem Church meaning “Peace.” The Church was a primitive Baptist Church. As such it was most likely Calvinistic in its theology as opposed to being Armenian with its emphasis on free-will. The primitive Baptist Church would have had singing but no instruments. There was an emphasis on Preaching, Prayer and Keeping the Sabbath holy. As a primitive Baptist Church it would have not subscribed to items such as missionary societies, Sunday Schools or the like. There would have been a strong emphasis on family devotions in the home and children would have attended the services as opposed to things like Sunday Schools. In addition, they would have subscribed to baptism by

immersion, the Lord's Supper, transferring letters to evidence membership, holiness and perhaps even foot washing.

The members of Salem Church would certainly include those who had come to the Mississippi Territory with the migration of the Curtis and Jones families along with others who subscribed to the beliefs of the church which beliefs would have been similar to those held by the members of the Welsh Neck Baptist Church back in South Carolina where the Curtis and Jones family had been members.

Richard Curtis, Jr. and the young Salem Church began to attract the attention of the Catholic Church and the Spanish Authorities. A prominent citizen, William Hamberling was converted and sought to join Salem Church. In addition a Spaniard, Stephen De Alvo (Estavan Alva on the Natchez District 1792 Census) married an American woman and sought to join the church. In addition other settlements with Americans desired that Richard Curtis, Jr. come and preach to them. On April 6, 1795, Richard Curtis, Jr. was arrested by Governor Gayoso while he was performing a marriage of Curtis's niece Phoebe Jones to Daniel Greenleaf. Gayoso warned Curtis to cease his activities or he would be sent away for life to the silver mines in Mexico. Richard Curtis, Jr. began to be more careful of his activities. After discussion with the members of Salem Church, the church began to post people to warn the members of the church if the Spanish authorities came to raid the church for its activities.

On August 6, 1795, Governor Gayoso sent five Spanish officers to arrest Richard Curtis, Jr and the two converts, Bill Hemberlin and Steve De Alto. The three hid and eventually had to leave the Mississippi Territory and their families and fled to South Carolina where the three were helped by Baptists at Welsh Neck Baptist Church. They were assisted in their flight by a courageous midwife named Cloe Holt who took supplies and money to the men for their flight.

We believe that it was about 1795 when Asa Searcy and his family (including Stephen Jett) made their way to the Cole's Creek area.

Richard Curtis, Jr. and the two converts were absent from the Mississippi Territory until 1798. During this period, Richard Curtis, Jr. was ordained as a Baptist Minister by the Bethel Black River Church, Williamsburg District of South Carolina which gave him more authority and power than just a licensed Baptist Preacher. By March 31, 1798 the Spanish had left Natchez and John Adams appointed Winthrop Sargent as the first territorial governor of Natchez as a U.S. territory. In 1798, Richard Curtis, Jr. and the two converts returned to Cole's Creek and their families from South Carolina.

Richard Curtis, Jr. would go on to organize or help to organize other Baptist churches in the Mississippi Territory. In 1798, Richard Curtis Jr. would go on to organize Bayou Pierre Baptist Church near Port Gibson which was a major port on the Mississippi River north of Cole's Creek. In 1800, he helped to organize Bethel Church in Wilkinson County and New Hope Baptist Church in Adams County. In 1806, Richard Curtis, Jr and Thomas Mercer helped to organize Ebenezer Baptist Church in Amite County. He also made trips over to the Louisiana Territory. Richard Curtis, Jr. would die of cancer on October 28, 1811.

The Coles

Stephen Jett married Sarah Cole. Although we do not know the exact date, some documents believe the date of marriage was around 1802. Sarah Cole was born in 1786 making her about 16 when she married. Her father was James Cole (b. 1762) and her mother was Jemima Cole (b. 1764). Jemima's

father was James Cole Sr. (ab. 1732) and her mother was Mary Rentfroe (b. 1736). Mary evidently married James Cole Sr. (b. 1732) about 1756 in Blackwater River, Bedford County, Virginia in 1756. Jemima's brother was Rev. Richard Curtis, Jr. making him an uncle to Sarah Cole.

The Coles came to the Mississippi Territory much earlier than the Curtis family. James Cole was born in Delaware. He and his family migrated to Virginia and then to Ashpole Swamp in Baden, North Carolina around 1761. Later they moved to the Pee Dee River area in Craven, North Carolina around 1764. Like the Curtis family much later, the Cole Family left the PeeDee River area and went overland to the Holstein River Area. Again like the Curtis Family they went by flatboat to the Mississippi Territory but again much earlier in time. Some sources which I have read apparently confuse the two stories mistakenly believing that the Coles lost one boat to the Indians. That however, was the Curtis family who came much later. Both the Cole and Curtis families are discussed in [Early Migration Trails](#). But the writer makes clear that James Cole arrived in the Mississippi Territory in 1772 and the Curtis family in 1780.

From the records of the West Florida, James Cole (b. 1732) arrived in the Mississippi Territory in 1772 and with nine children. James Cole had the paperwork finalized on his grant of 550 acres on November 6, 1776. The nine children of James Cole (b. 1732) are listed in the Notes. In 1794, James Cole passed away and an inventory was made of his estate. His surviving wife was Mary (Rentfroe) Cole and his eldest son was listed as John Cole. Mary Rentfroe Cole would die about 1810 at Cole's Creek.

In the 1792 Natchez Census we find many members of the Cole Family living in the District of Villa Gayoso which would have included the Cole's Creek Area. Those listed in the 1792 Census include:

Estavan Cole (Stephen)
Gullermo Cole (William)
Jaime Cole-el joven (James the Younger)
Jaime Cole-el vieho (James the Senior)
Juan Cole (John Cole)
Solomon Cole

Also included in the census are various members of the Jones and Stampley families all living in the Villa Gayoso (Cole's Creek) area.

As a result of his marriage to Sarah Cole, Stephen Jett was closely linked to the Cole and Curtis families. We do not have a record of the marriage but it is likely that the marriage was performed by her uncle Richard Curtis, Jr. although this cannot be proven.

Opelousas Bound

Around 1804 some of the members of the James Cole family decided to obtain land and relocate to the Opelousas area. In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase had been completed and a number of people came into the area. Opelousas prior to that time had been under mainly Spanish rule. At the time that the Coles and Stephen Jett migrated to the Opelousas area, Opelousas was the third largest town in Louisiana.

Some of the children of James Cole (b. 1732) and Mary Rentfroe Cole elected to remain in the Mississippi Territory and not migrate including John Cole (b. 1766) and Mark Cole (b. 1764) and James Cole (b. 1732).

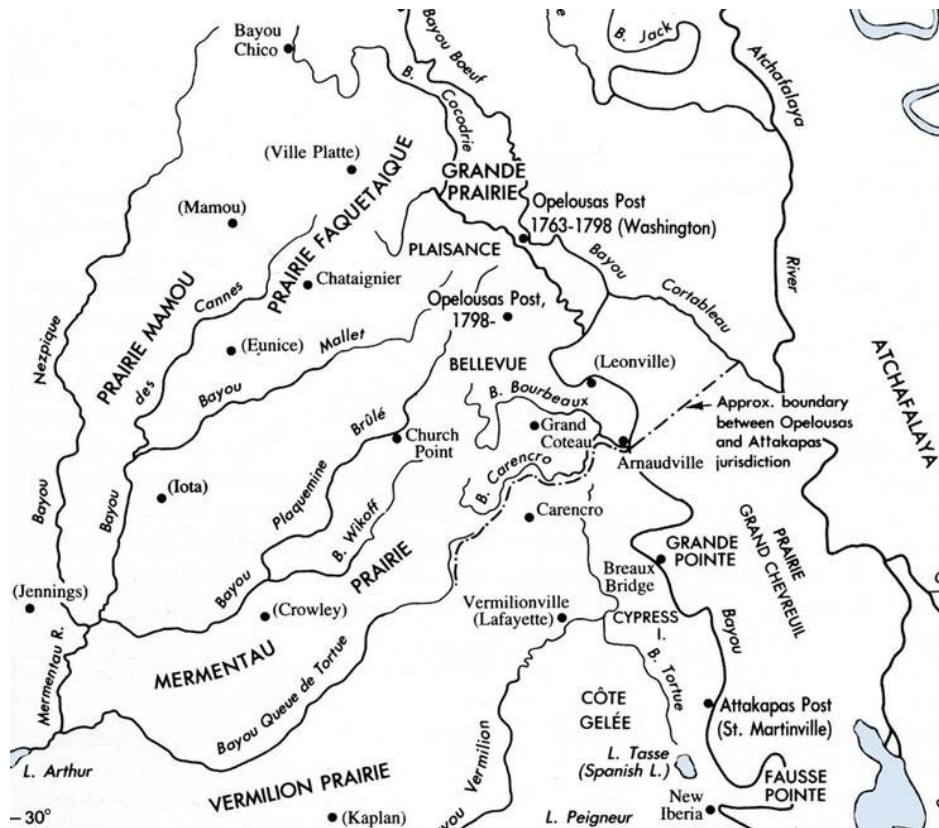
Many of the other children of James Cole (b. 1732) elected to move to the Opelousas area which was already well settled including by some other neighbors of the Coles who had gone there earlier from the Mississippi Territory. Some of the other children of James Cole (b. 1732) included James Cole (b. 1762) and his wife Jemima Curtis Cole. In addition some of their children also migrated including the following:

- Sarah Cole and her husband Stephen Jett
- Absalom Benjamin Cole (b. 1787)
- Susannah Cole (b. 1789)
- Mary Ann Cole Simmons (b. 1792)
- Richard Cole (b. 1795)
- James Rentfroe Cole (b. 1797)
- Phoebe Hayes
- And other members of the James Cole family (b. 1762)

Moreover, some of the other brothers of James Cole (b. 1762) also migrated to Louisiana including Solomon Cole (b. 1763) and William S. Cole (b. 1766). The children of Solomon Cole are listed in the Notes to this section. Solomon and Elizabeth Cole sold their property in the Mississippi Territory and moved to the Opelousas area on February 7, 1804. In the same year, Stephen Jett and Sarah Cole Jett also moved to the same area known as Plaquemines Brule not far from Opelousas. That area was then in the Parish of Opelousas but in 1805 it became known as St. Landry Parish.

Plaquemines Brule basically means “burnt persimmons.” Along Bayou Plaquemines Brule were a number of persimmon trees which were burnt as the area was cleared. The fruits of the persimmons were also known as “plaquemines.”

Below is a map showing Bayou Plaquemines Brule along with two locations where the Opelousas Post was established.



The Opelousas Post was in essence a fort near where families settled and trade took place. The post was run by the French until 1762 when Louisiana became part of Spain. In 1769, about 100 families, who were primarily French, lived near the Opelousas Post. In 1782, the Spanish allowed land grants and there was a very diverse mixture of people who settled in the area including people of Spanish, French and Canadian (“Acadians”) birth. The area around the Opelousas Post became the City of Opelousas.

There was influx of new settlers after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Among these new settlers were the Coles and the Jetts. The trip from the Cole’s Creek to the Opelousas area is roughly about 150 miles. One source describes the trip made by the Solomon Cole family as being by raft and travelling “down Cole’s Creek, down the Mississippi, and up the bayou to Plaquemines Brule area near Opelousas.” Solomon Cole, his brother James Cole and Stephen Jett all settled in the Plaquemines Brule area; however Solomon Cole would later move to Prairie Soileau. Solomon Cole served as a Justice of the Police (Police Juror) in St. Landry Parish from 1811 to 1818. Solomon Cole passed away in 1825.

The area around the Plaquemine’s Brule was fairly level and good for both farming and cattle.

Stephen Jett and Sarah Cole Jett would raise their family in St. Landry Parish. Their children are listed below:

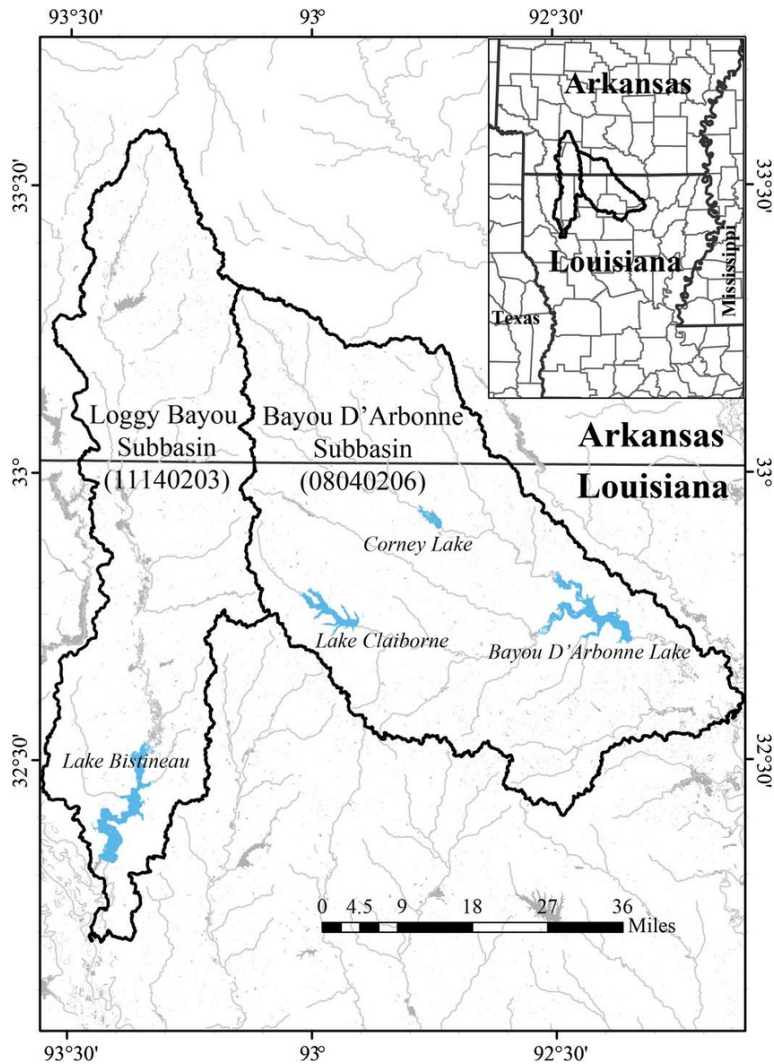
- James (b. 1804)
- Elizabeth (b. 1806)
- Jemima (b. 1808)
- John (b. November 2, 1811)

- Absalom (b. circa 1813)
- Susannah (b. circa 1815)

We know very little about the Jetts during the period when they lived in St. Landry Parish. Below is a passage of interest showing that the Jetts and Coles continued to follow their Baptist roots which they had developed in the Mississippi Territory. This passage is from Jett Trails West at page 139:

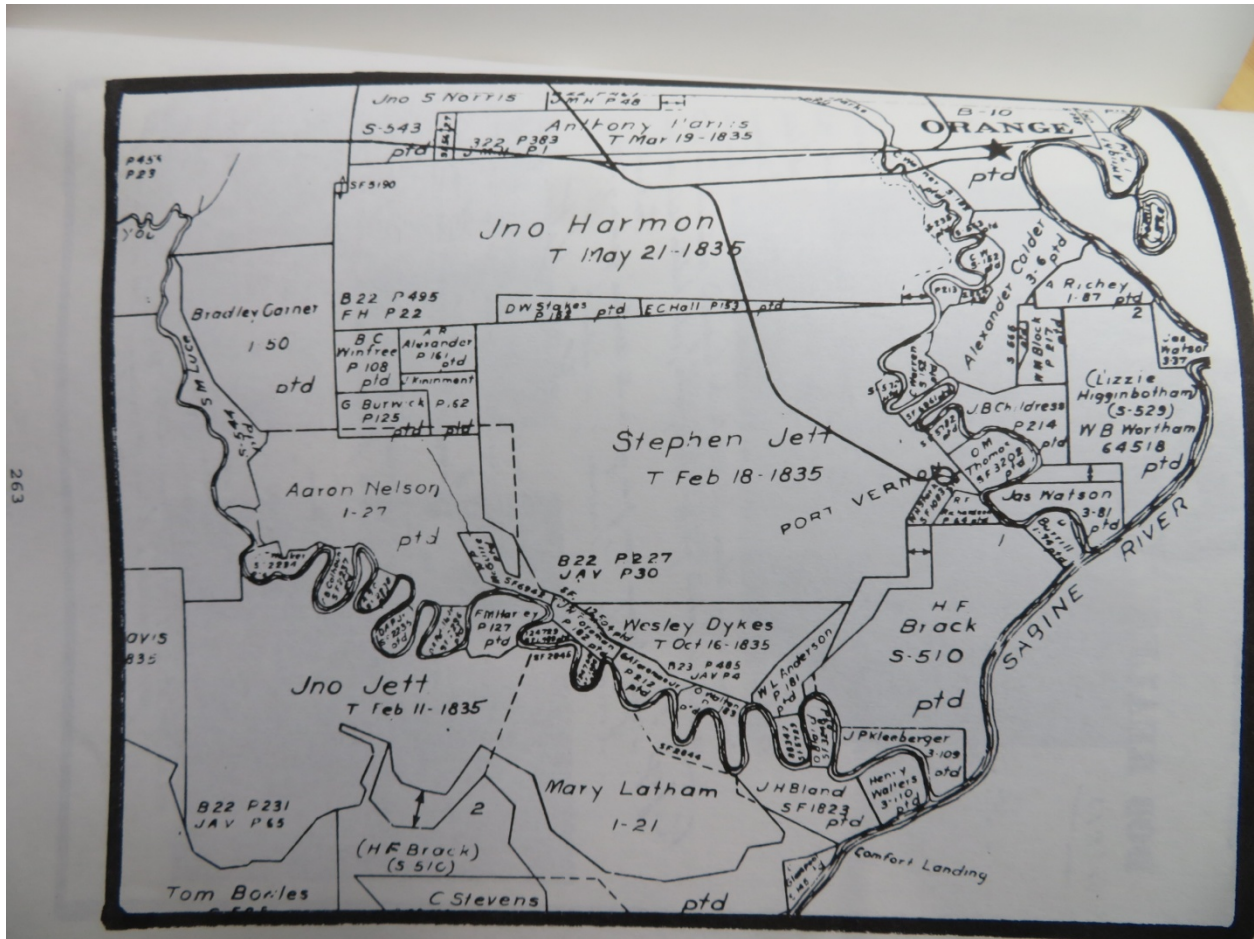
“We do not know much of the Cole and Jett families during their stay in Louisiana. We do know that they were “Anglos” living in a “Cajun” community and were staunch Baptists when most of their neighbors were Catholic. Penrose St. Amant, in his “ A Short History of Louisiana Baptists” reports: “On October 31, 1818 the Louisiana Association, the firsts in the state, was organized and held its first session in this church (Beulah Church at Cheneyville). The five churches constituting the association at its inception—were Calvary, Beulah, Debourn, Vermillion and Plaquemine, with a combined membership of eighty-six. Absolom Cole, a messenger from the Debourn Church, was a grandson of Richard Curtis.” Stephen Jett represented the Debourn Church at the 1820 meeting of this association.”

Stephen and his family show up in the 1810 and 1820 Census Records of St. Landry Parish. Their oldest son James (b. 1804) appears in the 1830 Census Records of Bayou D’Arbonne, Louisiana along with the families of James Cole, Sr., James Cole Jr., Stephen Cole and Solomon Cole. Interestingly, the area of Bayou D’Arbonne is located in the Northern Part of Louisiana.



Migration to Texas

According to Orange County records, James, Absalom and John Jett came to Texas about 1824. Apparently they were joined in about 1830 by Stephen Jett and Sarah Cole Jett. Also various members of the Cole family came to Texas in the same period including David and John Cole. Apparently formal land grants were held up but in 1834, the Mexican Government permitted land grants in Zavala's Colony and recognized Zavala's agents and in 1834 sent a land commissioner to issue land titles. Stephen Jett got his grant on February 18, 1835 and John Jett received his grant about a week earlier on February 11, 1835. These grants were in Jefferson County which is now known as Orange County. The grants are alongside Cow Bayou. Cow Bayou is an early name for the City of Beaumont. Below is a map showing the grants.



The three sons of Stephen married and began their families while living in Louisiana. James married Susannah Noland on May 10, 1827 in St. Landry Parish. John Jett had married Jane Swann on January 14, 1833 in St. Landry Parish. Absalom had had married Mary Ann "Poly" Arthur on April 15, 1838.



St. Landry Parish on 1845 Map

One of the three sons of Stephen, John, would die in a cattle drive on May 18, 1849. The exact place of death is not known nor is there any grave of which we are aware. Although we know very little about the particulars of John's death we do know that the area where John and the other members of the family were living was known for being a cross road for cattle drives especially along the Opelousas trail to New Orleans.

The Opelousas Trail began in San Antonio and ended up in New Orleans. Jeff Campbell in an article entitled The Opelousas Trail wrote this regarding the perils of the Opelousas Trail: "So many cattle drowned on the Opelousas Trail that the town of Beaumont, Texas, where the Neches River wanders along the county line, enacted the "Ordinance to Prevent Nuisances by Swimming Cattle" in August of 1840. The provision levied a dollar fine per drowned cow and a \$50 bond before a crossing. Drowning wasn't the only peril along this drive; there were also the thick humidity, heat, monsoons, robbers and loneliness."

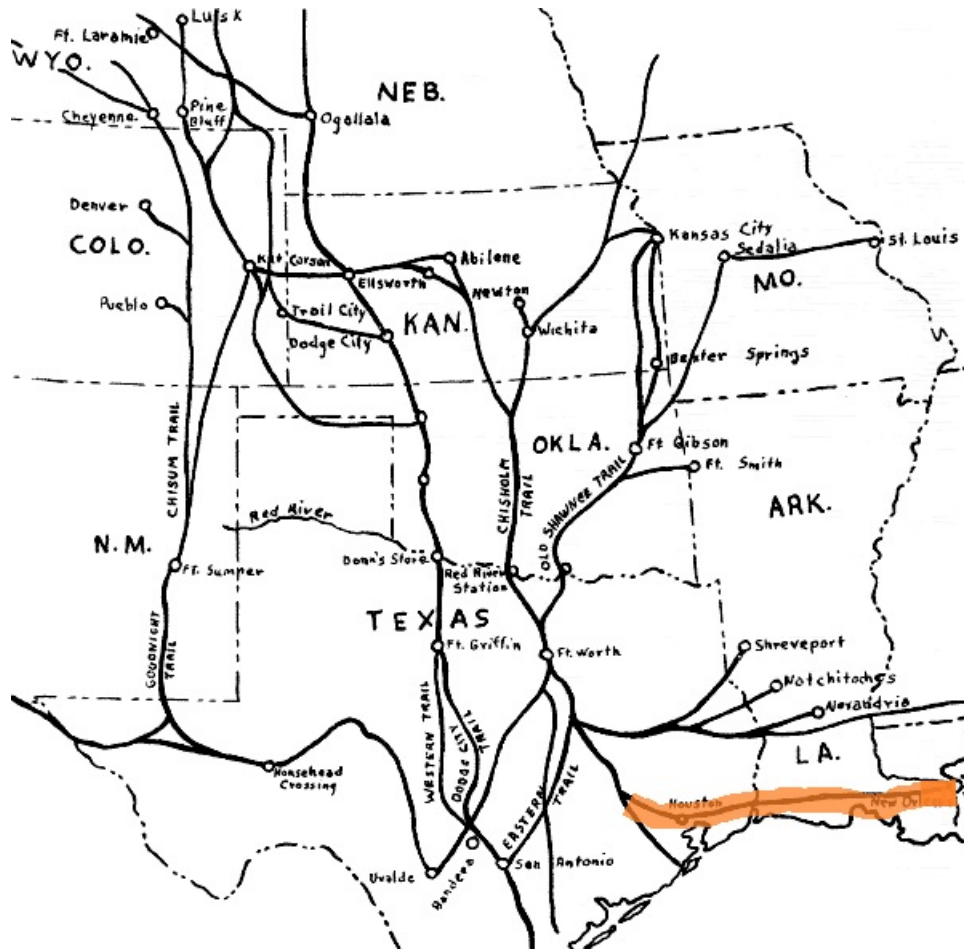
Getting across the Sabine and other rivers at Beaumont were a challenge. Some of the ferries and fording places were the Travis Ferry at Beaumont, Ashworth's ferry at Santa Ana (3 miles to the south) and Pine Bluff Ferry (5 miles to the North). There was also Ballew's Ferry on the Sabine River. At Ballew's, the owners were required to provide pens for the stock, accommodations for drovers and meals. In return the owners of the ferry could charge 2 cents for each cow which passed.

Drovers would wrestle a cow making it swim across a river and the other cattle would follow. By 1855 about 50,000 head per annum were taken on the Opelousas trail.

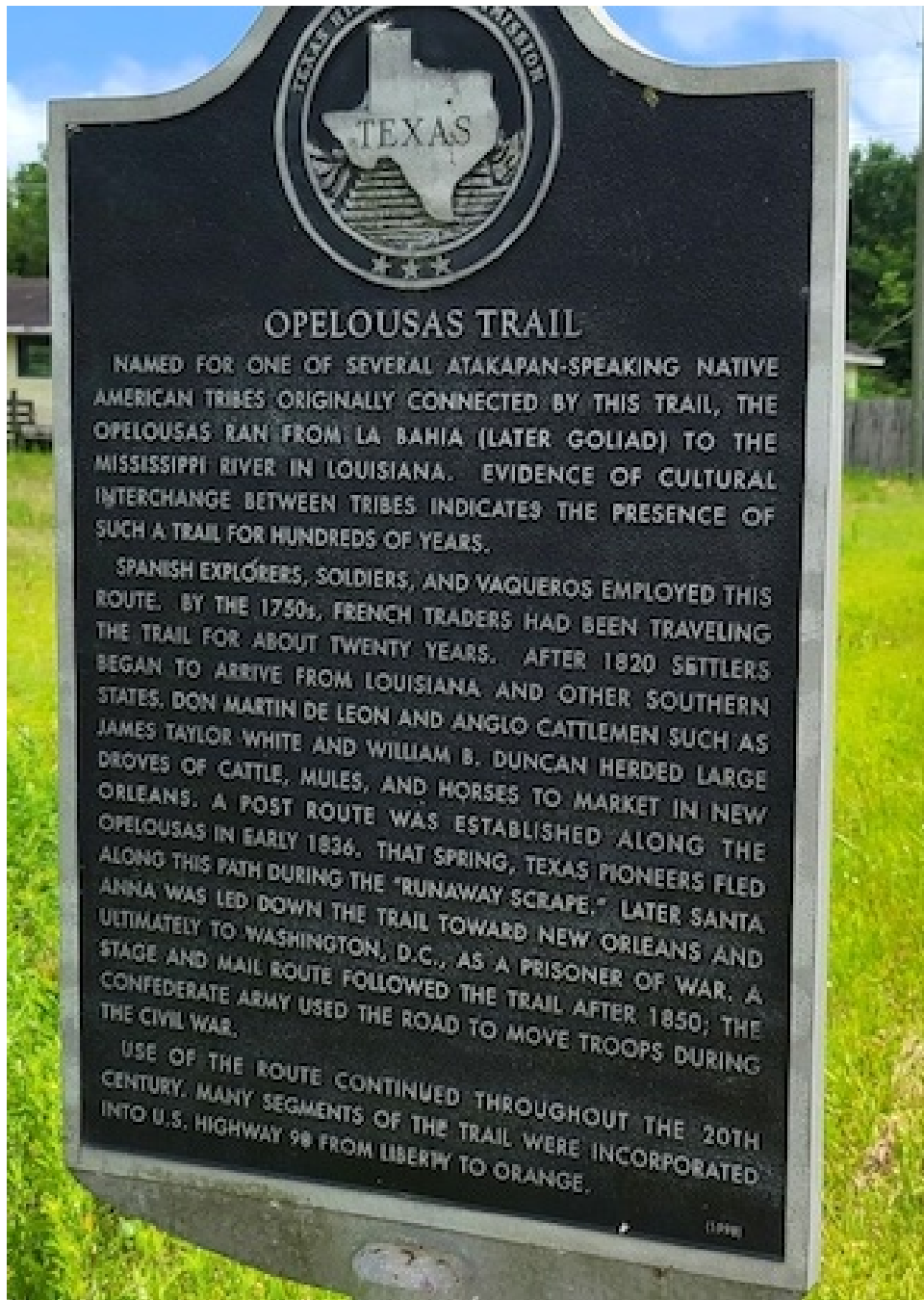
Cow Bayou was a place where cows had to cross a stream. Just down from the Jetts was Winfree's Crossing. Drovers and cowboys would often stay at Winfree's Crossing overnight and Abraham Winfree maintained a 20 acre pen for the cattle. The Winfree Family believe that General Santa Anna spent the

night with Republic of Texas soldiers after he was captured at San Jacinto in 1836 on his journey after capture at San Jacinto to New Orleans.

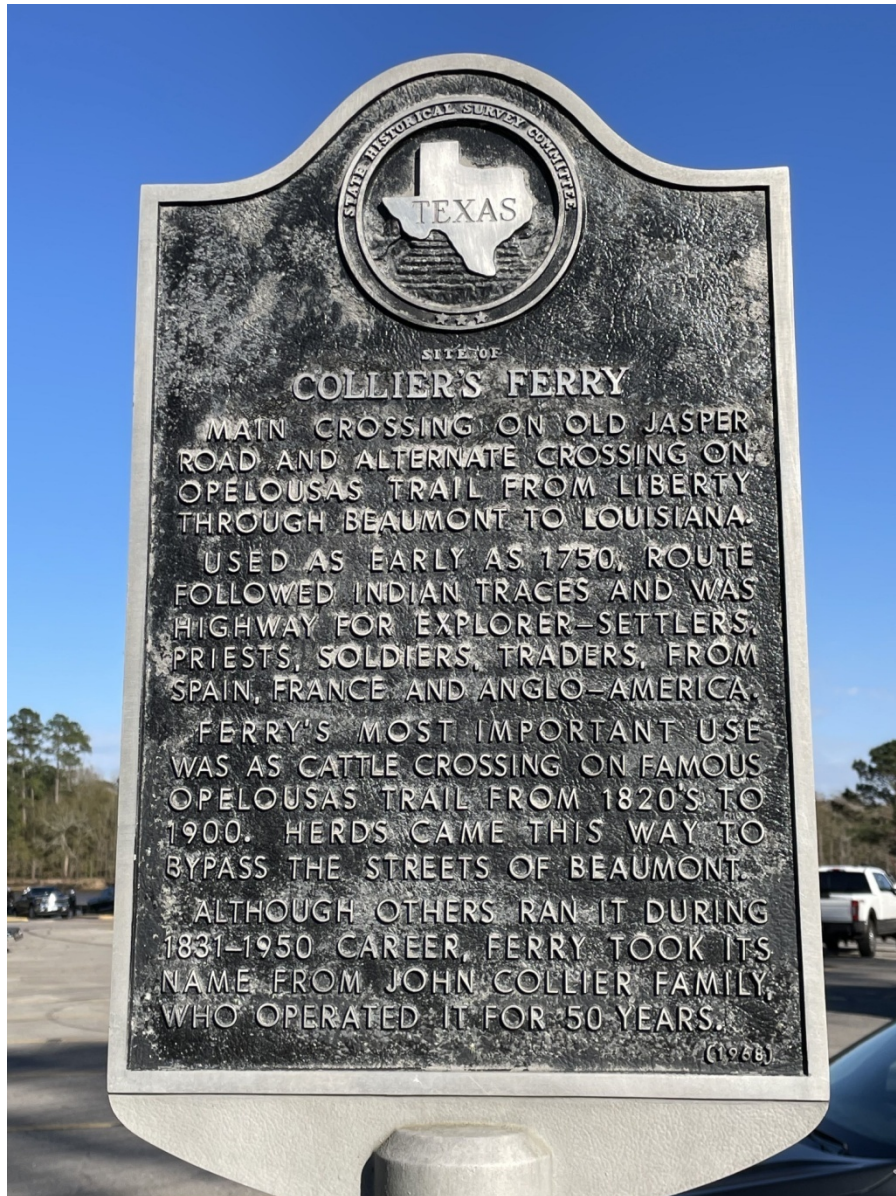
In short, although we know little about the death of John Jett do know that his property was very close to the Opelousas Trail including being close to one of the crossings of Cow Bayou in Beaumont.



Opelousas Trail in Orange running Through Beaumont and Jefferson County To New Orleans.



Marker for Opelousas Trail



Marker for Collier's Ferry in
Beaumont Texas Area

The death of John Jett in 1849 at 37 years old was tragic leaving a widow, Jane Swan with three children at the time, Ranson Ferguson (Age 5), John Jett (age 4) and Anson (Age 2). Of the three children only one survived to have children and that was Ranson who was my great grandfather.

Stephen Jett died on May 17, 1837. He was too old to have participated in the Texas Revolution being about 54. However, according to Jett Trails West, "his sons all saw limited action." Absalom Jett served in Captain Benjamin Harper's Company. We know that Absalom Jett and Clark Beach (husband

of Elizabeth Jett) reenlisted at the Battle of San Jacinto and were involved in taking the Mexican soldiers who surrendered at San Jacinto back to the Mexican border.

Below is a marker commemorating the military service of Absalom Jett.



We also know that our ancestor John and his brother Absolum served as Texas militia in Captain Davis' Company D. from September 10-November 27, 1839. This was part of a larger group which were part of John Neill's First Regiment of Mounted Gunmen. Texas President Mirabeau Lamar had authorized this militia to conduct a military campaign against Indians who had been attacking settlers in the Austin, Texas area. Some of the events of these skirmishes were covered by one of the privates, William B. Hamblen. There were several skirmishes with the Indians including one on November 5, 1839.

When Stephen died, his wife Sarah Cole Jett became the administrator of his estate. Cash of \$730 was distributed among his children according to a settlement agreement signed by Clark Beach (husband of Elizabeth), James Jett, Duncan St. Clair (husband of Jemima), John Jett, Absalom Jett and Susannah Jett (unmarried).

Sarah Cole lived with her son Absalom Jett and his family and died in December 28, 1851 leaving a meager estate.