

Ruston Daily Leader date unknown "Out of Our Past" Series
by Marjorie Leigh

"EARLY SETTLERS: Jephtha Colvin (1794-1868)

"To the early immigrants, especially those from the Piedmont regions of Virginia and the Carolina, the sand hills of North La. must have seemed like a breath from home. Heavily wooded and well watered, game and fish abounded and the hills rolled gently toward the western horizon, rising higher and higher. In contrast to the heavy alluvial lands of the delta, the soil was reasonably rich, and light enough to be easily worked. Is it any wonder that these homesick and weary souls settled down with almost an audible sigh of relief and gratitude to the good God above that He had brought them to such a happy landing? They settled down, worked hard, founded their churches, their schools, and their cemeteries, and lived sober and unromantic lives.

"When I first came to Ruston in September 1927, I could not understand, my eyes and mind being conditioned to the flat river lowlands, why the first pioneers passed up such good land for the privilege, the questionable privilege, it seemed to me - of living in a hill country. What if an occasional flood did do great damage? In the long run the waters amply repaid the planter for their rampage. But 40 years of living is a very sobering and enlightening experience, and now I share with the 'native hillbillies' their love for these lovely hills.

"With that little digression behind us, let us get on to the life story of Jephtha Colvin, 'Jeb'. Not only was he his father's mainstay and constant companion, but he had a keen nose for business. He was born in South Carolina in 1794, and died in Texas in 1868, aged 74. He was described as being a big good natured man, and gentle and kind. He moved to Texas after the outbreak of the Civil War, in 1862, but before his departure he purchased tombstones for all of the unmarked graves in the family cemetery (now known as the Katy Cemetery). Another of his kind and thoughtful acts was to pay, after emancipation, the transportation back to Louisiana of all his former slaves who wanted to return.

"During the heyday of the immigration to Texas, from about 1838 to about 1850, he maintained a relay-station on the old stage-coach line between Monroe and Shreveport. His home was sturdy and well-built, and later during the Civil War was used by the Confederates as an army hospital. Jeb married Narcissa Rainey in 1817. There were nine children from this marriage, all of whom lived to be grown and married, with children of their own. You can begin to get some idea of what a prolific and vigorous family this Colvin Clan really is, and why, at the family reunion held each August, they are numbered by the thousands, not the hundreds.

"Narcissa (Rainey) Colvin was a daughter of one of the original settlers who, according to one tradition, accompanied Daniel Colvin on his long trek from South Carolina. She was born in 1807, in South Carolina, and died in Louisiana about 1860. She was buried in the Katy Cemetery, but ironically enough, her

grave is one of those that are unmarked. What happened to the tombstone is anybody's guess, but it seems reasonable to suggest that it was knocked over and broken up by wandering animals. This frequently happened in old cemeteries, and if it were more or less deserted and unused indeed almost forgotten, a very heavy stone could have been crushed to bits over the course of a few years,

"I have been told by present day descendants of Narcissa Colvin that she was a very sweet and lovable woman. In her later years, a little room was built for her at the back of the main house, and here she would sit and smoke her pipe. There was always a little girl Nearby to fetch her a coal, or a flaming splinter, whenever she needed to relight it. It was after her death that Jeb moved to Texas, where he married a second time, to a Miss Amanda Smith. He was buried in Texas. The family may know the location of his grave, but the nearest I have been able to place it is 'somewhere in East Texas, not too far from Tyler', which is a bit vague to say the least.

"Of course, neither Daniel nor Jeb lived in Lincoln Parish - there was so such thing in their lifetime. At first, they lived in Ouachita (or Ouachitta, as the old records spell it) Parish, and later after 1839 when Union Parish was organized, they lived in Ward 2 of Union Parish. Daniel was 62 by 1839, an old man in those days, and probably too worn and tired by his strenuous life to be active in the establishment of the new parish. Not so with Jeb .

"In a torn and yellowed record book in the Union Parish Court House, the record is spelled out in spidery letters and fading ink:

"Records of the Police Jury of the Parish of Union

"First meeting, call session, May 16, A.D.1839, State of Louisiana, Parish of Union,

"Pursuant to an order of the Honorable John Taylor, Judge in and of the Parish of Union, State of Louisiana,

"The following members (elect) of the Police Jury for the Parish of Union, met at the house of Wm. Wilkerson (near the Ferry at the mouth of Bayou Corney) and presented their certificates of election (viz):

"Jeptha Colvin presented the following certificate:

"By order of the Honorable John Taylor, Parish Judge of the Parish of Union.

I have this day held an election for a member of the Police Jury of said Parish at the house of John Stowe for Ward No. 2 in the said Parish, and the Polls being opened and an election held as the law directs, I Jeptha Colvin received Ten of the votes, that being the whole number of votes cast. The said election of Jeptha Colvin is therefore declared (and elected) a member of the Police Jury for Ward No. 2 in the Parish of Union (State of Louisiana) May 16th, 1839. Signed: Jeptha Colvin, J. P.

"The questioned words in brackets are illegible. Jeptha was succeeded by James Roan, and later, by David Colvin. His son? The records fail to say.

"This first Police Jury was primarily concerned with regulating law and order in the newly formed parish. After attending to that little matter, they appointed various commissioners to oversee the construction and maintenance of roads, ferries, and

bridges, among the last being a bridge across 'Bayou Shutre' (Choudrant Creek?), Next, they turned their attention to 'estrays animals', which judging from the number of ordinances passed, must have been a serious problem. Third in importance was the establishment of a public school system. Or maybe I should say, of public schools, for I'm sure, there was no system about it.

"Then, and only then, after the major problems had been disposed of, in July 1839, was provision made for the establishment of Farmerville. A plat was drawn up, a Public Square measuring 300 feet on a side was dedicated, streets named (Main St., Washington St., and Lafayette St., then running East and West Bayou Street Water Street, Charter Street) lots laid out, numbered, and offered for sale, And if you think the interest is high now, take a look at the terms ordered by the Police Jury: one-third of the price to be paid by January 1, 1840, the remaining two-thirds by the 1st of January 1, 1841, with the unpaid balance bearing interest at the rate of 10 per cent per annum for the 1st of January 1840: Daniel Colvin bought two lots, numbers 40 and 41, across from the Public Square, but facing Bayou Street, for \$106.90 and \$25.00 respectively.

"And so, Jeb Colvin played his role in the history of Lincoln Parish, although he never lived there. A small part? Maybe Unglamorous certainly. But as I said above, these early settlers worked hard and lived sober and unromantic lives."