# CHILDREN'S STORIES

## The Mathews Family of Clarke County, Alabama, 1800–1948

*The original Mathews home of Josiah Allen and Lucy Martin Mathews*

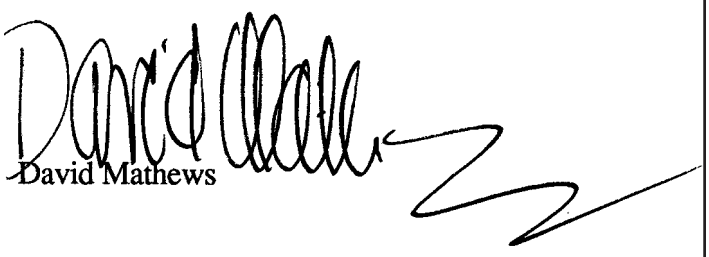
# Table of Contents

*I remembered the stories my grandfather told us when I was growing up and wanted our children to hear them. We were living in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and Washington, D.C., in the mid 1970s, so we bought a tape recorder and asked my father, Forrest Lee Mathews, to take my grandfather, David Chapman Mathews, to his favorite sites and make recordings for his great-grandchildren, Lee Ann and Lucy. He warmed to the request and, stimulated by familiar surroundings, produced a rich history of both our family and Clarke County. His stories are also his own autobiography.*

*D.C. Mathews or "Mr. Dave," as he was called, was born in 1886 and died in 1980. While teaching a summer school in the Union community, he married the daughter of the family he was staying with, Emma Lee Bumpers. She was one of eight children of Rile Stephen and Mima Morgan Bumpers, who had organized their neighbors to build the school just across the road from their home. Mr. Dave went on to teach at the Pine Level School, now Leroy High, from 1911 to 1914. For nine years he was at the Tompkins School and taught briefly at Morrison and Arlington. He was principal of Jackson High from 1943 to 1944.*

*In 1919, David Mathews ran on the Prohibitionist ticket and won a seat in the legislature, a seat his father, James Waldrum Mathews, had held earlier. He was to serve two more terms in the legislature; in 1939 and in 1954. His great love was education and, in January of 1923, he took office as County Superintendent of Education for Clarke County, an office he held for 18 years: 1923-1936 and 1944-1948. He also said, "I farmed a little"; which he did to supplement a teacher's salary, typically $60 to $70 a month.*

*The tapes were unclear in some places or there were repetitions so I have done some light editing, which has not, I hope, interfered with my grandfather's distinctive way of telling a story. I have also added some details from the articles he wrote called "Early Sketches." For reference, a genealogy and Clarke County map are included.*



David Mathews

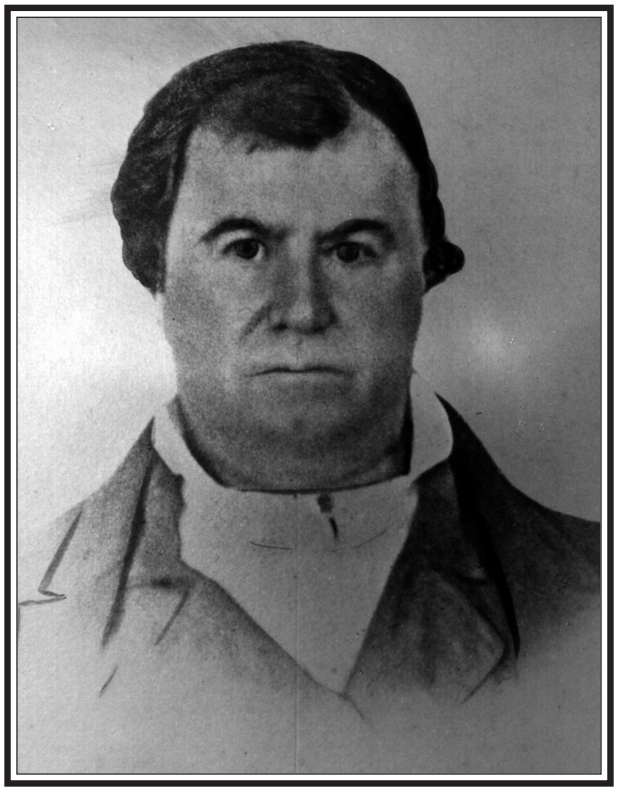
February 1999

## THE WALDRUMS AND WALKERS

*Great-Grandchildren (Lee Ann): Papa Dave, tell us about the way you lived, about the way times were when you were growing up.*

The earliest memories of my family, on both my mother's and father's side, tell me that they came from South Carolina. On my father's side, my grandfather, James William Waldrum, came to South Carolina about 1818. My family has been connected with the history of Clarke County since the early nineteenth century. James Waldrum came over the old federal road which crossed Bassetts Creek near the present Walker Springs. He was one of hundreds who came after the Indians, who were allies of the English in the War of 1812, had been subdued.

There was an old frontier inn or tavern on the south side of the creek run by William Walker, my great-grandfather. It was from his tavern that Walker Springs received its name. Walker was one of the earliest settlers in the county, arriving around 1800. He built a mill in 1816.



*James William Waldrum*

Waldrum stayed around the tavern of William Walker and fell in love with his daughter, Polly. They were married, I think, about 1820. I found the notice of their marriage by a Justice of the Peace named Whelmy. He specified that they were married at night. Why he was so specific, I don't know.

Waldrum was a young man, some 21 years old, and his trade was overseer; he understood slaves. He was busy farming yet took time to help all the early immigrants to the county. In those days, sites for water mills were of special value because they had no steam or other source of power. He built his first home, a cabin, near the old federal road, some two miles east of it and near a spring still known as the Waldrum Spring.

*Great-Grandchildren: I wonder if the Waldrums had a real, real big wedding?*

Of course they did.

I have been to the spring that James Waldrum used to get his water from. His house was only recently destroyed and I'm sorry I didn't get to see it. Polly lies in an unmarked grave near the home. I have made every effort to locate the grave, but all I can find is a sunken place in the woods.

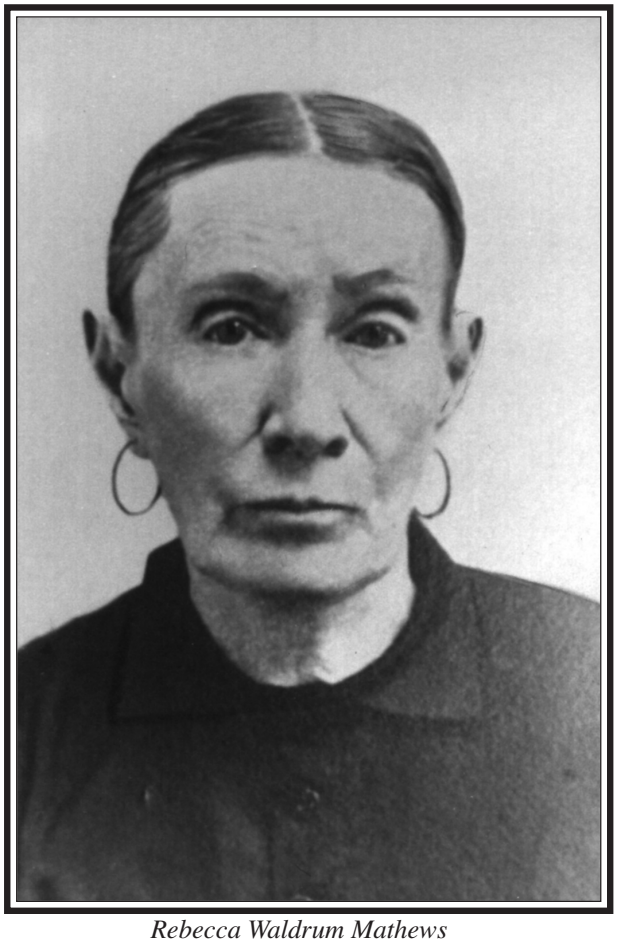
From the union of James Waldrum and Polly Walker, three children were born: one boy, William, and two girls, Rebecca, my grandmother, and her sister Julia who first married Charles Bradley and then John Daffin. William Waldrum married a Miss Lee from Gainestown in his first marriage.

I don't know how long after her death that my great-grandfather Waldrum remained a widower, but his next marriage was to Rebecca Marks. The Marks lived near Gainestown and were steamboat people. My father told me that Rebecca was a stunning beauty, but I looked at the old court records and she signed her name with an "X," an indication that she couldn't read or write, which was not uncommon in those days. We didn't have anything like public schools.

By Rebecca Marks, three children were born. The boy was Henry, and my grandmother Waldrum was very fond of her stepbrother. He married a Miss Neal near Clarkesville. They also had two girls, Mary, who never married, and Carolina. I'm sure that was for the state of Carolina. She married Major Josiah Jones from a good family in Walker Springs.

In the meantime, my grandfather had moved south into the forks of the river and became the overseer of two plantations owned by a Carl Matheson. His home was on the ridge between the two rivers at Rockville. My grandmother was living there when she was 12. That was 1833, the year when the stars fell on Alabama.

My grandmother was a remarkable woman. I can remember her very well. I wish I could remember my mother that well but she died when I was very young; I have no clear picture of her. My grandmother had a retentive memory; she knew all the stories and romances of the county. She met all the prominent people. For example, she was a great friend of James Jackson, who was a proper man of Gainestown, and she knew the Creaghs at Suggsville.



*Rebecca Waldrum Mathews*

### *The Story of the Face in the Well*

"Do coming events often cast their shadows before?" Let's see what my aged grandmother told her little awestruck grandson, who was named after her husband and whom she called "Davy," as he sat at her knees on the old long porch of my father's home one day some 70 years ago.

At my grandfather's house (William Walker), it was nothing unusual for dozens of guests to stop there for meals and feed for their teams. It was also a great gathering place for young people of the settlement. One day when several of the Walker girls were there, I think it was February, someone proposed that they look into the dug well in the yard and see the faces of their future husbands. When the girls eagerly leaned over the curb and peered down at the water, one of them, Elizabeth, screamed and almost fainted. She vowed that she saw a man's face clearly outlined in the water below. Of course, her companions laughed at her but failed to change her mind.

Several days later, a well-dressed stranger on a fine horse rode up to the tavern and as soon as Elizabeth Walker saw him, she ran to the kitchen where her mother was busy getting dinner and told her that the man whose face she had seen in the well was on the porch.

The stranger introduced himself as "James Cummins," claiming that he was prospecting for new lands, mill sites, etc., which was common in those days, and he stayed at the tavern for a time. He seemed to have ample means, was intelligent, and had pleasing manners. To make a long story short, he and the girl who saw his face in the well, Elizabeth Walker, married.

He claimed his home was up in the northwestern part of the state, near the Natchez Trace, and there he carried his bride and placed her in a new but comfortable cabin, and time passed

rapidly for the happy couple. In a year, twin boys were born.

His wife noticed that her husband was away from home a great deal of the time but he explained that his prospecting work made this necessary. She also noticed that he did not seem to welcome visitors and that the few neighbors they had gradually fell away and left them severely alone.

One day she was seated on the porch nursing her babies and the first thing she knew the house was surrounded by mounted and armed men. The leader of the group raised his hat and courteously asked if Mr. Copeland was at home.

Mrs. Cummins, as she thought she was, explained that they were at the wrong place; that her husband was named "Cummins" and that he was away at the time. With his hat still in his hand, but with a tinge of sarcasm in his voice, he asked Mrs. Cummins where her "Mr. Cummins" was and when she expected him back home.

To both inquiries she was forced to give negative replies. The leader impatiently replaced his hat on his head, looked her straight in the face and said, "Lady, you don't seem to know anything about your husband. You don't know where he is, you don't know when he will be back, and you don't even know his name. Come on, men, let's ride," and the party rode away. But just before they got out of sight of the cabin, one of the men wheeled his horse and rode back to the edge of the woods.

The man had a frank, manly bearing and Mrs. Cummins instinctively realized that he was trustworthy. He reined his horse, shifted his rifle so that the muzzle would not bear on the wife and children and said, "Lady, you impress me as having been well reared, and I believe that you made truthful answers to the questions Captain Slade asked you. It is my honest opinion that you have been shamefully imposed on and that you believe that you are Mrs. Cummins, but such is not true. Your husband's name is Copeland and he is a member of the Murrell Gang."

The Murrell Gang was a bunch of cutthroats and robbers preying on the roads leading to Mobile and New Orleans on which the early settlers shipped their crops. After disposing of their rafts or timber or barges of corn, wheat, or livestock, they would walk back to their distant homes up the rivers rather than laboriously work their barges back against the force of the current.

The gang's headquarters was at Natchez, and many was the traveler who failed to reach his home after disposing the fruits of his labor at Mobile or New Orleans. Many were never heard of afterwards. The gang operated on the theory that "dead men tell no tales."

The man continued his talk by saying that he lived only a few miles away, and would have enjoyed being neighborly with Mr. Copeland but that one of his slaves disappeared at the same time he knew that Mr. Copeland was away from home, and that his neighbor lost a valuable horse at the same time. He wound up his conversation by saying, "Mrs. Copeland, it is my opinion that you will not see your husband anymore. You have my complete sympathy and I will be glad to help you return to that home where you said you were reared in South Alabama."

Through her tears, the miserable young wife thanked him and asked him to return with a team the next morning. She said that she would think things over and if her husband did not return that night, she would act on his advice the next morning. With a respectful bow, the man raised his hat and rode away.

Never did a wife spend a more miserable night than did Mrs. Cummins, or Mrs. Copeland, as she really was. A thousand little incidents which, at the time they happened, were dismissed from her mind, now assumed great significance in the face of the charges made by her neighbor.

For instance, more than once her husband returned from one of his trips, prospecting trips as he claimed, and showed her expensive watches and other jewelry, including a nice necklace that he fastened about her neck and she was still wearing. He airily explained that he had acquired such articles from their owners in a trade or poker game and that he would sell them on his next trip to New Orleans or Tuscaloosa. They did disappear, but she knew no details connected with

their disappearance. Her husband seemed to resent questions she asked about such matters, so she let them pass without further comment.

Then there was the Negro boy that he brought back with him from one of his trips. (When this was told, the terms for African American or black Alabamians were either "Negro" or "colored.") She really liked the boy, for he seemed happiest when helping her about the house, and she could not help but notice how he seemed to dread seeing her husband come around. Early one morning, her husband left on one of his trips, taking the boy with him, and she never saw him again.

Thinking over such occurrences over the past year, she was forced to conclude that her neighbor was correct, that she had been deceived and that the only course open to her was to return to that safe old home on Bassetts Creek. Long before daylight, she packed up what actual necessities that she could not do without — mostly clothing for herself and babies. When daylight brought her neighbor back driving a pair of good horses hitched to a light wagon and accompanied by two other men all heavily armed, she eagerly climbed to the seat by the driver and the light wagon rolled rapidly away. The two armed guards rode in the rear.

Pausing briefly by a good spring by the roadside to rest the horses and eat a lunch, they reached Tuscaloosa and the stage station in time for supper. A stage left for South Alabama early the next morning and, after seeing her aboard and leaving very implicit orders to the stage driver not to allow any stranger to approach the stage, her kindly neighbors wished her a safe and happy journey back home. Elizabeth Walker never forgot their kindness and protection.

One may imagine what excitement prevailed in the vicinity of Walker's Tavern when the disillusioned bride and her twin babies got off the stage. Every neighbor for miles around came to see Elizabeth and listen to her heartbroken story. As is usual in such cases, a few of the more observant sadly shook their heads as they recalled something "that fellow" said or did which, in light of what they knew when they heard Elizabeth tell her story, confirmed their suspicions that he was not what he pretended to be.

Mr. Walker and his sons grimly renewed the priming of their rifles, which were always kept handy, and said nothing. In a few days, the household resumed its accustomed activities and Elizabeth again assumed her duties as a productive member of the group. In those days, every member of a household had his or her specific duties to perform and performed them. The wagons and settlers continued to pass the tavern with their needs fulfilled. They were bound, usually, farther west in pursuit of the bountiful lands "over the hills."

Time passed rapidly for the Walker household. To Elizabeth, the memory of her experiences in her home on the Trace gradually faded, but an unfamiliar footstep on the gallery floor would cause her heart to beat faster in fear of the return of James Copeland, for she firmly believed that he would return someday, if he lived, to see his twin boys. She knew, too, that a meeting with her father and brothers would be a tragedy, for she had not forgotten their looks as they primed their rifles the day she returned home.

Early one winter morning, the men of the household left for Pensacola with their well-loaded wagons on a trading expedition, leaving the slaves to look after the duties of the farm and ferry as they had been trained to do so. Late that afternoon, it became necessary for Elizabeth to sit up with a sick neighbor about two miles away. Night came early. The slow rain that was falling when the sun went down changed to sleet and then snow as the night advanced, and the old Negro nurse tucked the twins into their trundle beds, placed several large sticks of wood on the fire, and resigned herself to catnaps and listening to the howling tempest outside.

Suddenly she was aroused from her nodding by a knock on the door. As she had heard no footsteps on the gallery, she knew that the person had approached by stealth. The knock was impatiently repeated and the old nurse carefully cracked the door sufficiently for her to see a tall, heavily-wrapped stranger outside. He placed his foot in the small opening of the door and pushed himself into the room, and James Copeland stood before the frightened nurse.

Where is Miss Elizabeth?" he said. With the freedom of an aged and trusted slave the old woman replied, "Miz Beth is not here. She knows you is a bad man and she don't want to see you anymore." "Where are the babies?" was the next question hissed at the old nurse. Reluctantly, she showed him the chubby infants sleeping in their warm bed, the bearded outlaw gazed intently at the sleeping infants and tears slowly coursed down his cheeks.

Turning to the old nurse he said, "Tell Miss Elizabeth that I have treated her shamefully. I am everything that she has heard I am. I am a member of the Murrell Clan, but I have been unable to sleep for several nights and I am sure that I am nearing the end of my career. Every time I close my eyes in sleep, I see a man following me on a gray horse and I have to continue my flight. Tell her that I hope she will raise our boys to be honorable, truthful men. She will never see me again." With a last, long look at the babies, as if to impress their looks on his mind forever, he strode swiftly out the door, swung up to the saddle and disappeared in the stormy darkness.

The old nurse's story lost nothing of its dramatic interest as she related it to her mistress when she returned the next morning.

About one week later, several wagoners stopped by the tavern for their noonday meal. They were seated at the table when another wagoner going back east came in and took his seat. With the freedom of the open road, one of the first arrivals asked the newcomer, "Well stranger, what is the news in the west? I see you are going back east."

"Well," replied the man, "about the only news I know is that the Murrell Clan had a bad time in Old Mississippi the day before yesterday. Several of the Copeland Gang were killed, but their leader, Old Jim Copeland, would have got away if the Sheriff had not been mounted on a splendid gray thoroughbred horse he had just bought a week before. He outran Copeland's horse and captured him. He is now in jail and will be hanged next week."

Murmurs of approval went round the table. The meal was completed and the wagoners went on their several ways, leaving Elizabeth with her thoughts.

So ended my grandmother's story. She placed her hand on my head and summarized it thusly: "Davy, Elizabeth Walker was my mother's sister. She and both her twins died soon afterward.

"Her brother went to Mississippi and found Copeland in jail, just as the wagoner said he was. He gave them the story of his outlaw career, asking that they have it published and the proceeds used to help raise his boys. They promptly burned it.

"But, Davy, Elizabeth said that she saw Copeland's face in the well. Did she? Copeland said that there was someone following him, and that he could not sleep. He also said that this pursuer was mounted on a fine gray horse. Well, he was.

"I am constrained to believe that coming events oft cast their shadows before."

## THE MATHEWS

The Mathews family came from the Edgefield District, South Carolina. I'm not exactly sure when they arrived in Clarke County, but I think it was sometime between the 1830s and 1840s. They settled south of Grove Hill some four or five miles. Josiah Allen Mathews and his wife, Lucy Martin, raised a large family of 15 children. There seemed to have been no wealth in the family. They opened up a farm near what is now the Mathews' cemetery. The home Josiah built has been moved some half mile or so from its first location, but it is still sound and in good condition. It was made out of massive timbers, one sill is 42 feet long.

My grandfather, David Mathews, was reared at that home. Just how he met my grandmother, Rebecca Waldrum, I never have learned since it was very unusual for children who lived 15 or 20 miles apart to see each other, even much less associate. It is my general understanding that my grandmother was, as a young lady, employed as a governess by some family, maybe the

Chapmans or the Pughs out in the hill county (west of Grove Hill). Perhaps she was doing that when she met my grandfather. They were married and reared a family of eight children.

### *David Mathews Returns from the Civil War*

The Civil War came on in 1860, and the Mathews family contributed five soldiers to the Confederate army. The oldest was my grandfather, David Mathews, next was one of his brothers, Lige (Elijah), next was John, then Joe (Josiah), and Marion. I have heard my father often describe what a fine looking man Marion was physically. They were in the Western Army. At first, Uncle Lige was in that unit too, but later he joined the Confederate Cavalry with Wirt Adams. Adams was shrewd enough not to be hemmed up in Vicksburg, and he got his command out of there and therefore was not captured when Grant captured Vicksburg.

Under any reasonable standards, my grandfather could not have entered any army. My grandmother often stated that "Davy" was almost blind. He could not tell who a person was more than a few yards away. Once he was on the point of picking up what he thought was a large sand rock and carrying it out of the plow's way, when one of his children shouted, "Look out, Pa, that is a rattlesnake!" Anyway, he volunteered, was accepted, and was placed in the Western Army (David Mathews was in the 32nd Alabama Regiment).

Why they took him, I don't know, but the Confederacy was starved for manpower and they took anybody who could walk. He was captured in the defense of Lookout Mountain, Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1863 and carried to Davenport, Iowa, where he was put in the Rock Island Prison. He was not used to the terrible northern winters and was seized with rheumatism and arthritis, diseases they didn't know much about then. Being a Mason and the commander of the prison being a Mason, they had some ties and this commander often begged my grandfather to take the oath of allegiance and get out of the prison. "Mathews," he said, "it will be impossible for you to stand the winters out here, they are too severe."

My grandfather refused. So the commander of the prison said, "Well then, if you won't sign the oath of allegiance, on the basis of your Masonry, ask for better provisions, better treatment. We have a place where we can take the members of our order and give them better treatment." My grandfather refused that, saying he was no better than anybody else; he could stand anything that his comrades could. He refused to profit by his Masonry. But late in 1864, he realized that the advice of the prison commander was good. The commander assured him the South was crumbling and the war was likely to end by the end of the winter of 1864-1865, which it did in April of 1865.

So, late in 1864, he decided he would take the friendly advice and get out. He went out across the old iron bridge leading to Davenport, Iowa, from Rock Island, about the lonesomest man in the world, my grandmother told me. He was 2,000 miles from home, didn't know a soul, and didn't have a cent in his pocket. He walked up to an old German farmer, a "Dutchman" who had just immigrated into that western country and opened up the prairie. He told him who he was, told him how he was crippled with rheumatism, and how he hoped to get some clean clothes, clean food, a clean place to sleep, and try to recover his health. He was willing to work anywhere around the farm at anything that he could do. The old German said, "Why yes, Mathews, you can work around the barn, possibly milk the cows after you get better from your rheumatism and feed the swine." My grandfather said, "Feed what?" "Feed swine," the German repeated. "I don't know as I know how to do that," my grandfather said. "You call them hogs," the German told him. My grandfather didn't even know that hogs were called swine. He stayed with the old farmer and was never better treated. At the end of the month, the farmer handed him a $20 gold piece and told him that his neighbor right up the road would keep him the next month.

So he farmed with the German immigrants. They took care of him every month until, sure enough, spring did come and with it the Confederate surrender at the end of April. But my grandfather didn't know it. My grandmother often said that "Davy" did not learn of the surrender for

several weeks, and then it was only a rumor. Anyway, with warm weather, his renewed strength, and several gold pieces in his pocket, he finally took deck passage on a Mississippi steamer to New Orleans.

Although the mosquitoes feasted on him for some two weeks and several thousand miles, he finally worked his way around the coast to Mobile, and from there on up the Tombigbee River to Jackson Landing.

He had beaten the drum for several companies of Clarke County soldiers as they left for the war some four years before, but there was nobody beating a drum when he got off the boat the day he landed back at Jackson. His family had given him up for dead, as the other soldiers had long since returned home.

Crops were "layed-by," and the neighbors had gathered to recover in my grandmother's kitchen when they saw my grandfather coming up the road from the south. He had walked from Jackson Landing that morning, only some 15 miles. He got home in time for dinner.

As the family seated themselves around the table, Uncle Joe (Josiah), my grandfather's brother, who had also been in the army and been captured, looked down the road, and as soon as his little, beady eyes sighted Davy down the road 200 yards, at least, he screamed out, "Bless God! Yonder is David." Well, you can imagine that the dinner was neglected.

My father, who was 13 years old when his father got back home, has often said that his father always spoke kindly of his treatment in the north. He also said that his mother was a better farmer than his father was, and that he found plenty of corn, plenty of meat, plenty of everything when he returned home. It was July, I think.

David Mathews had two or three bales of cotton stored away in a cotton house near the present Jess Summers' home. It was, of course, very valuable; he sold it and received a dollar a pound. After that, my grandfather wanted to get to some more land where he could raise more cotton. He was living on piney wooded land which wasn't very good for cotton and they knew nothing about fertilizer, so he bought some land up in the hills, the lime hills, due west of Grove Hill, about three miles. Though broken in health and impaired in his activity, he was still anxious to get out and make money. At the time, his family was living in a log house, which my father said, he wouldn't put corn in. On December 24, 1866, the family moved to the lime hills and went to clearing fields like farmers had to do on any frontier settlement. (They were assisted by a former slave, Pink Chapman, who also moved to this area.)

Sadly, David Mathews soon died. My father said he died working harder than any man ever did.

## THE MCLEODS

It is very appropriate that I tell the girls stories of the McLeods. Neil McLeod, Jr. and his wife, Nancy Calhoun, were the parents of my McLeod grandfather, John. John married Christian Calhoun, his cousin, and their oldest child, Frances Isabella, married my father, James Waldrum Mathews. Christian and John's common grandparents were Malcolm Calhoun and Christian McCorquodale, who were natives of Scotland. Another aunt, Christian Ann Calhoun, married Robert Nathaniel Bumpers, who was the great-grandfather of Emma Bumpers, to be mentioned later.

My mother's people, the McLeods, like all the Scots of Clarke County, were, according to the latest research, originally Vikings, a bunch of bold sea robbers from Norway. They gradually migrated to the Isle of Sky and merged with the Scots.

The McLeods were unfortunate in their guesses about the wars for several hundred years. They allied with the Jacobites, followers of bonnie Prince Charlie who claimed that he was the rightful heir to the English throne. They fought in the battle of Culloden Moor (1746) where Prince Charlie's flags went down and he became a fugitive. He was befriended by Flora MacDonald and the highland clans. Flora was regarded as the leader of the McLeods, MacDonalds, and other clans. After losing the

war, these Scots had a hard time, but finally survived and decided to come to America.

The McLeods arrived in North Carolina about two years before the Revolution. They guessed wrong again and sided with the English crown. This, due entirely, I think, to the treaty that they had made with the English king, in which they had agreed not to rebel anymore against the throne. Flora MacDonald reminded them of their treaty, and almost to a man, they abided by it. They were either neutral in the Revolution or joined a loyal army made of Scottish clans. The Scots marched out under the English flag and were given a glorious whipping at Moore's Creek in Carolina by the patriots.

Early in 1820, I think, one branch of the McLeods immigrated to Clarke County, Alabama. From that branch, my mother, Frances Isabella McLeod, sprang. She and my father lived within a few miles of each other, and were married along in the 1870s. My father was born in 1852 and my mother was a bit older than he was. They settled in what was known as McLeod's Beat, an area given its name by the family of the McLeods who lived there with about every Mac in the world — there were McLeods, McVays, McLeans, and MacDonalds. They were all Scottish and that part of the county was called Little Scotland because there were so many people of Scottish descent there.

Neil McLeod had three boys in the Confederate Army: John, Daniel, and Malcolm, called "Make." John was my mother's father. Daniel was the Confederate captain who was in charge of the Dixon Guards during the Civil War. Malcolm was killed, as was my grandfather, John McLeod, in the fighting in Tennessee. (John McLeod died in the battle of Franklin, Tennessee, in 1864.)

Until recently, we have been unable to locate the grave of Neil McLeod and his wife. Recently, after diligent inquiry and stirring around, I have located two unmarked graves that I am sure are the last resting places of Neil and his wife. I have recently placed resting markers there, and the graves are now presentable to the passersby.

## PUGHS AND CHAPMANS

My grandfather also told stories of other families closely related to ours in his articles for *The South Alabamian*. This one is especially relevant because it is the story of his great-grandmother's sister, Elizabeth Martin, who married Elijah Chapman. I married their great-great-great-great-granddaughter Mary Chapman. The Chapmans were also related to another old Clarke County family, the Pughs.

Miss Minnie May Pugh, a descendant of the old original settler, Isaac, has prepared a very interesting history of that family. Suffice it to say here that Isaac Pugh first came alone into these wilds about 1809 or 1810.

He is supposed to have lived with the Indians (Choctaws) and to have been a friend of their old chieftain, Pushmataha. I am sure he was not a "squaw man," however, and his cabin sat on the ridge in about the middle of the present highway to Coffeeville opposite the well which he later dug when his son, Pickens, built just north of the first cabin. That later home is still in a good state of preservation and is a beautiful home site.

The descendants of that old settler are too numerous to name in these sketches, but among them can be found farmers, carpenters, merchants, teachers, and doctors.

The Chapman and Pugh families were intermarried about like the McLeods and Calhouns were. This family, too, settled in those lime hills and became substantial citizens of the county.

One old Chapman home site is located on the old Coffeeville Road some three miles from town. In that home, three generations of Chapmans grew up and passed on. The last owner of the home that I can recall was James Chapman, commonly called Jim. (James Stephen Chapman was the great-great-great-great nephew of Elijah Chapman.)

His son lives west of the old home, some hundreds of yards. A noted rifle, the handiwork of "Uncle Steve Pugh," who was an apprenticed gunsmith, is still owned by a member of that family. I have seen many guns of various ages and

sorts, but I pronounce Uncle Steve Pugh's gun, which he called "Old Sunday," the best example of the frontier type (flintlock) I ever saw.

My grandmother often has told me the story of how one of those old Pugh or Chapman families, when they arrived at the site of their proposed cabins, cut down a large white oak, against the butt of which his wife began to build her cook fire. She continued to do this until every limb, body, and sprig of the tree was consumed.

### *Going Back to South Carolina*

I also have heard the following story about Elizabeth Martin Chapman, who was a sister of my great-grandmother Lucy Martin Mathews.

When her youngest son was some 12 years old, Elizabeth decided to revisit her people in old Edgefield District, South Carolina. They went horseback, of course, and when they reached the Saluda River and rode their horses on the flat, Mrs. Chapman said to her son, "Put the nosebags on the horses and let them be eating as we cross the river."

The bearded ferryman managed to move close to her son and, in a low voice, asked his name and from whence he came. When he was given that information, he abruptly threw his arms about Mrs. Chapman, who gave him a smart slap for his manners. "Why, I am your brother, John," he responded.

The story illustrates a trait of the pioneers of this country which I have never understood. Of course, they had no mail service as we today understand it. They did have service of a sort, but they did not seem to avail themselves of such service as was furnished. When they left a place they often seemed to shut the door to their old homes and strictly begin life anew.

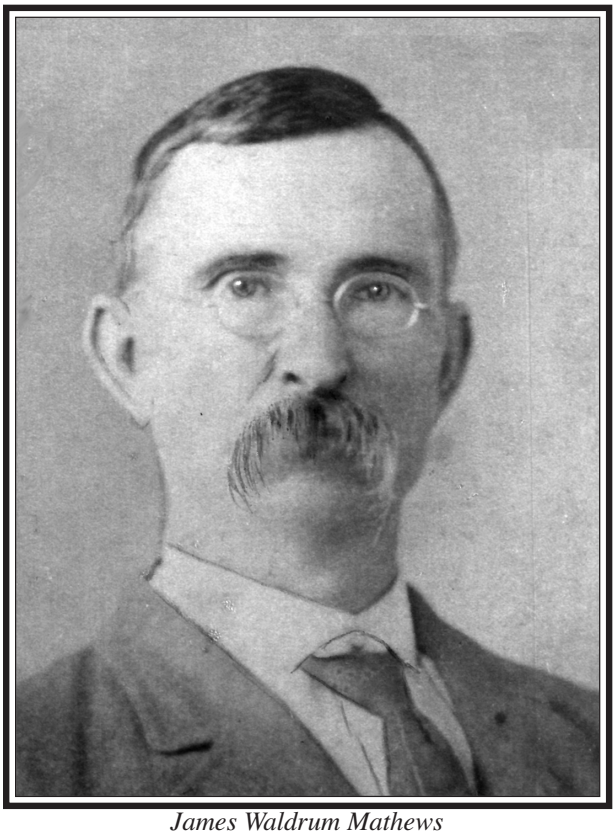
My great-grandfather Waldrum's father also did not recognize him when he appeared at his old home, so it must have been many years since he first left. When he started to return to Clarke County, his father presented him with a fine horse, bade him "farewell, forever" and so it turned out. He never went back to "old Carolina."

## GROWING UP

My father and mother built a home within a half mile of where she was reared in McLeod's Beat.

They had just finished the house, a good, comfortable farm dwelling, and moved in when, two weeks later, misfortune struck. The house was destroyed by fire. (One of the children is said to have put a bucket of ashes under the porch.) My parents had just enough time to wake the children, get their mattresses, and leave before the house fell in on them. I never have forgotten the pitiful picture of that family, as they sat on logs and watched the only home they had burn.

I grew up in another home in McLeod's Beat that replaced the one lost in the fire. And I wish I could explain to you children how we lived. Just how we lived I'll never know. When the first house was burned, the sawmills gave my father green lumber to use. Green lumber! He made the flooring with it and it shrank so much that I could



*James Waldrum Mathews*

count the chickens running under the house. Just think of that.

I was born in June of the year, 1886, following the fire. It's a barrel of wonders to me that the shock that my mother experienced didn't destroy my mind. All it did was mark me permanently with a fear of fire. When I was a child, just a tot, I can remember walking around the yard where the old house was and seeing the pine wood east of the homes burning all the way to Walker Springs. Every spring, the woods would be burned off either from lightning strikes on dead trees or someone set fires to get early grass for his choice milk cow. I would walk around and watch the smoke and cry. My people didn't seem to think that there was anything wrong with me. Today, I would have been put in an institution somewhere where I would have been taken care of.

Our family was unique in the patterns of births. The first child born was Forrest. He was followed by Nonie (Wynona Alethea), a girl. Nonie was followed by Bill (William Erastus), a boy. Bill was followed by Charlsea, a girl. It was boy, girl, boy, girl, boy, girl right on down to ten children. I was down near nine, born in 1886, and my sister, Mamie (Mary Alice), was born in 1884. She was two years older than I was. Mit (Mitford McLeod), who was four years younger than I was, was the last boy. (Between me and Mit was Mittie who was born in 1888.) The last child was Fannie, a girl, who died of typhoid fever (when she was about 10 years old).

*Great Grandchildren (Lee Ann): We have met some of them – we met Uncle Mit and Aunt Georgia*

By the time we were settled in a new home, the measles set in. My oldest brother, Forrest Lee, died of that illness when he was 18 years old. He was teaching in a little summer school down in New Albany; it was near Old Mount Zion. He went down there and taught school after he had lay-by crop at home. About that time, measles hit the community and I never saw such ravaging. They had a type that you couldn't do anything with; the doctors knew very little about what to do, and my little sister Mittie was taken with measles when she was only about two or three years old. Forrest wanted to come and see her, and although Momma wanted him to come, she didn't want him to come into the house. So Forrest came to the porch and looked through the window. He never went in the sick room, he just looked through the window. Still, he contracted the disease and was dead in less than ten days. He and Mittie were buried side by side in the old Union Cemetery, in what became a line of Mathews' graves: Forrest, Mittie, followed by my mother. (Frances Isabella McLeod Mathews died in 1895.)

I clean off those graves because they represent the best people I know in the world. I remember when I came to this cemetery for the funeral of my mother. The preacher was named Frasier; I recall that he, my mother's friends, and relatives sang a slow droll song, I think it was "O Sinner, Come Home" or something like that. As the neighbors placed my mother in the vault and covered it up, I stood there and looked at that grave but as a child I couldn't appreciate its real significance. I was confident that I would see my mother again when we got home. Needless to say, I was wrong.

## LEFT AT THE OLD UNION CHURCH

I missed my mother greatly. I remember family outings without her and the trouble I got into. One time we went to a big gathering at the old site of the Union Church. There was a reunion of Confederate soldiers there. I recall seeing the first colored lemonade I had ever seen at a stand. An old fellow was mixing his lemonade with cold water and ice and shouting in soaring tones, "Ice-cold lemonade for the ladies and red-streaked candy for the babies. Step up, step up, Yippee-all, Yippee-all." He colored that lemonade until it looked just like iced tea. It never occurred to me that one day people could drink as much of it as they wanted.

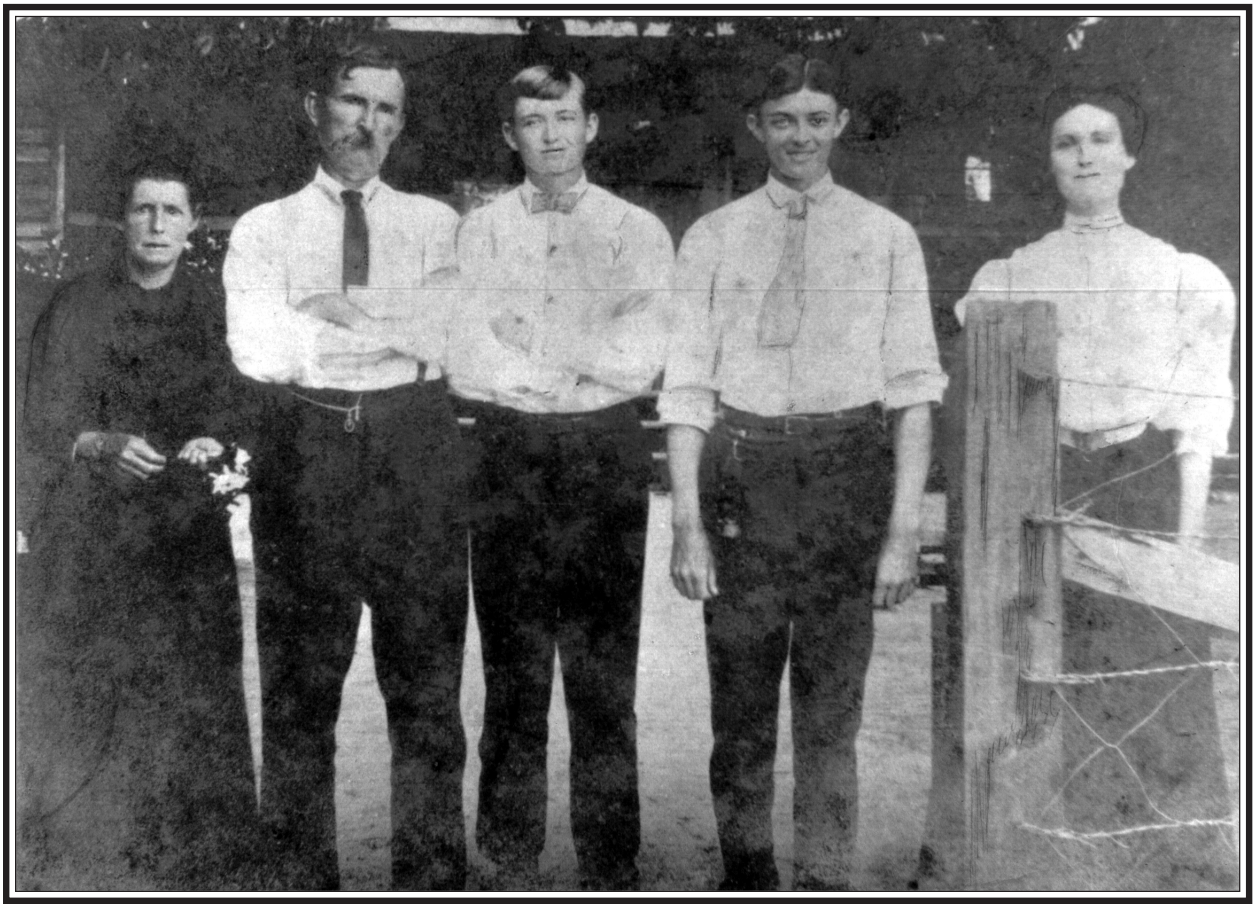
When my father was ready to leave, I was not at the wagon, and he drove off and left me — a poor, little orphan boy. When I got back up to the place where we had parked, there wasn't a soul left there, and it was up to me to get home

the best I could. So I went to crying and trotting home for about three or four miles. Cousin Kish (Christian McLeod), my mother's cousin, raised hell with pa because he left me, but he says that, "It'll teach him some sense if we just let him come home." Well, I trotted into the front yard at home and when papa went out to see me in, he said, "Well, I reckon you've learned to stay around the wagon and not to go anywhere else." Well, I had. I learned that and a good many more lessons by and by.

### *Cousin Kish*

After my mother died, my father married Cousin Kish. I remember that she liked to tease pa about the McLeods in their family who had become preachers. Because my mother's youngest brother, Archie McLeod, was called "Raz," my father referred to his two sons who made preachers as the "Razzes."

One day when Cousin Kish was looking over *The South Alabamian*, she threw it down in disgust and said that she was going to quit reading it. I asked her why and she said it didn't have any obituaries in it. That amused me very much. I asked her if she rejoiced in reading all the death notices of the people. My father also slung his paper aside and said, "Well, there's nothing in this darn sheet but something about those Razzes." Cousin Kish said, "Now Jim, you hush. Those boys are studying to be preachers." "Yes," my father said sarcastically, "and wonderful preachers they'll be." "Well, they may save your soul sometime," Kish responded. "No," my father said, "I guess not. I won't let them." I remember those things very well. My father just refused to be saved.



*Kish McLeod Mathews, James Waldrum Mathews, Mitford McLeod Mathews, David Chapman Mathews, and Mary Alice (Mamie) Mathews*

### *Albert Sidney Mathews*

I also remember my father teasing my brother Albert who was gigantic; he was six feet four inches tall, I think, and very squarely built. His arms were as long as Abraham Lincoln's and pa often remarked, saying, "Albert, you can pick a tick off the calf of your leg and never bend." He was not a fat man.

Albert did love the girls. He was very much in love with one girl in Jackson and thought she was going to marry him, but she didn't and it almost killed him. He went moping around the house, and it took several jabs from me and Mit to get him to loosen up and be able to eat again. I recall he was sitting at the table one day at dinner, and he'd been moping around the place like he had typhoid fever. Cousin Kish, as good-natured a soul as ever lived, said, "Albert, I thought you was going to marry and I made you two quilts. I had them ready for you." He looked over at Cousin Kish, sadly shook his head, and said, "Well, Cousin Kish, I appreciate that just as much as if I lived and needed those quilts." Needless to say, my brother and I had to be let out of the room because we were making unseemly noises and raucous laughter.

### *Farming*

Some of my other memories of growing up are memories of learning to farm. Seventy-five years ago, agriculture differed very little from what it was in the days of Abraham, though farmers had become acquainted with the use of commercial fertilizer, mainly phosphate and, to a limited extent, the use of certain crops as soil builders, such as peas.

Winter cover crops were unknown. As a boy, I can well remember how I wondered what caused the small nodules on the roots of peanut vines and pea vines. Though I noticed that corn and cotton planted after such crops produced much better than they did otherwise, just why this was true was not explained to me for the reason that nobody knew.

Nitrogen and potash were practically unknown; so was the importance of preparing a good seedbed. My first recollection of deep breaking of the ground before planting and the liberal use of commercial fertilizer for increased corn production was when the yearly farm paper that my father took, *The Home and Farm*, told of how a boy in North Carolina grew 150 bushels of corn on one acre. I think this boy's name was Jerry Moore.

The usual method of preparing land in those days, even by the best farmers, was to bed out the land in four-foot rows, with plows known as "twisters" and about four trips to the row, leaving a small ridge in the middle called a "balk."

Early in March, this balk was broken out with a shovel, and corn was dropped by hand in the furrow. This corn dropping furnished employment for a boy who might otherwise have been in some one-room school within two or three miles of the farm.

On my father's farm, I became the corn-dropping boy. After I graduated from the corn-dropping class into the plow class, my place was taken by my younger brother, Mitford. The ex-corn dropper had to take another plow with a smaller shovel and cover the corn with two furrows to the row.

It was not actually required that the covering plowboy keep up with the opening plow and corn dropper, still he was given to understand by sly looks and sarcastic remarks (which he could overhear as he passed those ahead of him) that if he failed to keep up and came out an acre or two behind at the close of the day, he could come back after supper and catch up. Such was corn planting on my father's farm.

Just before the corn came up, it was "boarded off," which means that a one-inch board some 8 inches wide and some 16 inches long was fastened to the foot of the "Georgia stock" and run over the ridge, with the two covering furrows left on the corn. This was considered light work, just the ticket for a boy who was a little light (or small) for heavy plowing and a little heavy (or too big) for corn dropping.

I came in handy again on my father's farm when cotton planting began. The cotton ground was prepared by first bedding the land in three-foot rows on the hard ground of the previous

year's corn land. The corn stalks were cut down with a hoe and piled up and burned. This made it easier to cultivate the new cotton crop, and it was classed as "light work," just the thing to keep a boy busy. On my father's farm you should have no trouble in guessing who that boy was. Yes, you were right the first guess. I was the boy.

Now it was time to rebed this cotton land, fertilize it, and prepare for planting. There had to be so many acres of cotton planted to make a certain number of bales in order to pay for the "advancing" by the merchant who stood between the farmer and the big commission merchant in Mobile. Cotton was the only crop that this merchant would consider advancing supplies for. So let's fix the cotton land which we have already bedded out once with four trips to the row.

Again that boy comes in handy, that youngster who has just graduated from the corn-dropping class. I don't see how the farm could have operated without him. Neither could my father figure it out, if he ever tried, which I doubt. He had to feed the boy, didn't he?

Anyway, a sack holding about half a bushel of bought fertilizer was hung on the boy's shoulders and, being further armed with a tin horn about three feet long with a funnel-shaped muzzle at the top, the whole instrument of torture being designed to pass the fertilizer through — without the March wind, which always began to blow about that time of year — from landing the phosphate in the Gulf of Mexico. However, some of it landed in the boy's eyes.

After a fatherly lecture about the cost of the fertilizer and the necessity of making it go as far as possible, the boy was told to "strike a trot" and stay out of the way of two plows that were to follow, covering with the two furrows what little, if any, of the fertilizer the boys left in the old water-furrows. This procedure would leave a middle to be "busted out" later with two more furrows and completing the preparation for planting — a total of nine trips to the row.

I hope the reader won't jump to the conclusion that the boy, when he finished neck and neck in getting out the fertilizer before the plows, could rest. Such was not the case on my father's farm. He was a careful, thoughtful man and had already made plans for removing the temptation of idleness from his son's path.

This boy meanwhile had got from under his fertilizer sack, but not from under the scent. One must realize that this phosphate was mined on some island out in the Pacific Ocean somewhere. I never tried to learn the exact location, as I had no intention of ever stopping there in my travels. It was excrement of every kind of bird which the ingenuity of old Beelzebub himself could not think up. Several days' accumulation of this stuff, with all its assorted odors, caused the boy to smell

*Front Row: Emma Bumpers Mathews,David Chapman Mathews, John A. Bolen, Wynona A. Mathews Bolen, Georgia Garett Mathews, Mitford McLeod Mathews*
*Back Row: Mary Alice (Mamie) Mathews Payne, Arvin Levert Payne, Albert Sidney Mathews, unidentified, unidentified*

*Georgia Garett Mathews, Mitford McLeod Mathews, Louthel Wilson Mathews, David Chapman Mathews, Mary Alice (Mamie) Mathews Payne, Albert Sidney Mathews, Charlsea Mathews Walker*

like a glue factory after a convention of billy goats had just left the hall.

Anyway, the boy's suggestion that he be allowed to adjourn to a nearby creek where he might, by the liberal use of lye soap and sand, get rid of at least a portion of his accumulation, was promptly vetoed by his father. "What! That will all wear off. This wind will take care of that, and besides, the gnats and flies will not bother you as long as you smell like you do. Don't forget that in counting your blessings. In addition to all that, history does not record a single instance where a fellow was even bitten by a rattlesnake or turned out of the Methodist Church for practicing close communion after he had finished putting out phosphate."

My father wasn't able to send any of his children to college because he did well to feed us. So Uncle Raz, who became a lawyer, told my brother Bill that if he would let him, he would send him through the university. In the meantime, my mother's oldest brother, Allen, had become a teacher; at least they called him a teacher. Eager for an education, Bill took the offer, finished at The University of Alabama and became a civil engineer.

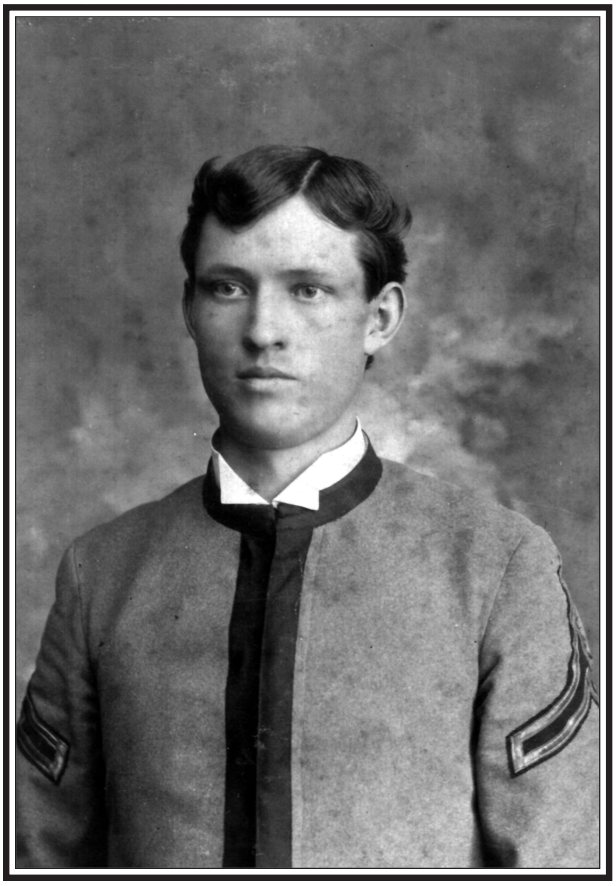
### *The McLeod Curse?*

I often inquired of my father about the histories of our families — the Waldrums and McLeods. In speaking of the McLeods, he told me about what he referred to as "their curse." I asked him what he meant. He said, "Nearly every generation was afflicted by 'hysterics.'" He didn't know of any other word for the problem, these seeds of some peculiar malady. My brother Bill had this malady. He was as fine a mathematician as you ever saw; he had a fine mind. But the first thing we knew, he quit his job. In his work in the coal mines maybe a thousand men depended on him. But he had to leave and return home here in Grove Hill. Something had come over him. Doctors called it melancholia. Papa referred to it as the curse of the McLeods. Uncle Allen's boy, Will, who was as fine a boy as you ever saw, with as fine a mind, had it. So did my grandfather (John McLeod) 's brother, Malcolm. I can't explain it. I guess modern scientists could name it, and maybe they can find out what was wrong.

There were other diseases we had to face. They killed several members of my family. The practice wasn't to call your doctor or to give you water when you had a high fever. I'll never forget the doctor that let my mother die from typhoid fever, asking for water. I asked him how in the world would water hurt anybody. Later, I said to Dr. Chapman, "Doctor, you saved my life." "When was that David?" he asked. I said, "They sent for you when I had measles and you didn't get there." He was a poor unfortunate doctor; he let four of us die. My father believed everything he said, but I didn't believe anything.

## SCHOOLING

I had no educational advantages except those provided by the little neighborhood schools. In those days, children were reared to raise cotton. They were expected to contribute to making a



*William Erastus Mathews*

living for the family. Every child, by the time he was five or six years old had a task. Children worked and there's where I learned the value of labor, the value of money, and a lot of other values that stayed with me all of my life. You can't get away from those early impressions. While it is important for children to have advantages, sometimes I think people are overdoing it now and giving them too much. It reminds me of the old days. Many of the large slave-holding families knew nothing at all about physical labor. They didn't know how to hitch up a mule to the plow. Many of the wives of such families could not sew a stitch or make up a pone of corn bread dough.

The average farmer in the community was poor and there was hardly anyone in the community that had any money. Well I take that back, there were two men who had, I expect, three or four hundred dollars. The rest of them didn't see that much. They planted crops because you couldn't get any credit at the store if you didn't raise cotton. You had to raise cotton. If you went to a store you would hear a conversation like this: "Mr. Jones, I would like to get a hundred dollars worth of supplies during the summer." "How much cotton can you raise?" "Well, I think I can raise four bales." "Alright, I'll let you have a hundred dollars." Another farmer might say, "I think I can raise ten bales." "OK," would be the response, "I think I can let you have two hundred dollars." That's the way it would go. Of course, many poor devils didn't have any credit. As I said, if you didn't raise any cotton, then you couldn't get fertilizer. Because of these conditions, children, even at an early age, were hired out to work for their neighbors. But we never did, we worked at home. Children were hired all around the county to pick cotton, chop cotton, and thin corn. That's the way they lived.

For our education, we went to a little one-room school — a plain, unsealed house — with a teacher teaching six or eight grades. The teacher had six or eight classes every morning. Now they say you can't do it. Well, I don't know about that because I did. I've taught school many a day, 65 pupils and 10 grades. My pupils bore down on fundamentals; in those days, there were three things that we stressed: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Taught to the tune of a hickory stick (Papa Dave said, laughing with his great-grandchildren).

Children in those days worked on spelling. Just before my time, the Blue Back Speller had its day. I taught the Blue Back Speller just as I studied this book by Webster. People thought there was no other. But the best speller in the public schools, in my day, was Reed's *Word Lessons* which was strong on this: "'cents,' 'scent,' and 'sent,' three ways; you had to give all three of them and define them." "C-E-N-T-S, money, S-C-E-N-T, odor, and S-E-N-T, past tense of send." We got those homonyms better than you children could possibly get today. You have no opportunity to use Reed's *Word Lessons*. If you ever find one of those books, keep it because it's the best.

I never went to school for over five months at a time. I had to pick cotton, gather corn, and all that. I didn't like to do those things and yet I didn't fully realize the importance of education. But I couldn't have gotten more if I had realized it. Oh, I guess I could have, if I had let my family starve, but I wasn't willing to do that. And I didn't want to be under obligation to anyone.

After I finished going to school myself, I became a teacher. In those days, to teach you had to stand for a state examination. Those examinations were very thorough in the fundamentals: not only reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also English, history, and geography. When I learned geography, I had to find the capital city of every state in the Union. Did you study geography like that? Well, I did. We broke the country into about five sections. We had the New England states, Mid-Atlantic states, Southern states, Middle Western states, and Rocky Mountain and Pacific states. In that way, if you break the country up into five blocks, I can teach you right along — each state, their capitals, the leading cities, and the products. That was all in my day.

In those days, it was considered a disgrace to send a child to school who didn't know the alphabet. You were to learn that at home and not waste the teacher's time teaching you.

Our teachers taught us to read by the phonics method. I remember it just as well as if it were today. My first teacher was a red-cheeked Scottish girl named Prim. My father carried me to school and introduced me to Ms. Annie Prim. The first thing we did when she rang the bell, we all took our places at our seats. She read a few lines in the Scriptures and we repeated the Lord's Prayer. That was every morning. I was called up after she rang the bell. She told me, "Dave, come here." She had made out her schedule and I knew when my time had come. She took me at her knees nine times that first day. Just think of that, and she had 40 pupils.

I got up there and she said, "Dave, do you know the alphabet?" I said, "Yes'um." And she said, "Are you sure you know?" I said, "Yes'um." And she said, "Well when you look at the alphabet, 'p,' 'd,' and 'b' are letters you can get confused." Those were things that could trick a child. She took a pencil and pointed to a letter. I told her what it was. She did it again and I gave the correct answer. Then she said, "I believe you do know your alphabet." She turned the page of the book she was holding. On the next page, it started B-A, C-A, D-A, F-A, G-A. She said, "Listen Dave, B-A, ba, C-A, ca." She was teaching the sounds. I took to that just like a chicken eating corn. I went to school with the lady for five months, and I quit in the fourth reader. I could read just as well then as I can now.

It was just as natural for me to read and, not only that, I was taught a better way of spelling. I had to spell by syllables, pronounce my syllables: "incomprehensibility, in, in-com, in-com-pre. . . ." I'm sure you were taught just to spell, weren't you? By the sound of letters: "F-A-T-E, fate, G-A-T-E, gate, H-A-T-E, hate." Long "a," long "a," long "a." Then you have the short "a." "Hat, H-A-T, not hate, hat," that's a different sound. The vowels, you know, have different sounds. That's why the English language is so difficult and why there are words that sound alike but have different meanings. I told you about that before. "C-E-N-T, cent, and S-C-E-N-T, scent, and S-E-N-T, sent," all have the same pronunciations, but are spelled differently and have different meanings. That's why it's so difficult to learn the English language.

## TEACHER AND SUPERINTENDENT

***Great Grandchildren (Lee Ann): Tell us about being in the legislature and some of the laws you made.***

I grew up on the old farm and stayed with my father until I was 24 years old. I began teaching neighborhood schools and met my first wife, Emma Bumpers, at Union. I taught a summer school there and met her. She was a beautiful girl but didn't have as much education as I had, which was practically none. We were married in about two years. We had our first born, which was your grandfather, Forrest Lee, then Louise, and Louis. I lived and taught south of Grove Hill for about nine years at a school called Tompkins. My school had a reputation all over the county. My pupils were drilled on the fundamentals and

*Emma Bumpers and David Chapman Mathews wedding in 1910*

I was strong on discipline. I never had any foolishness; we worked. And I turned out pupils who can do better than today's high school graduates. We turned out children who could tell you all about geography, tell you about the seasons, tell you about numbers in arithmetic, fractions, all that I knew about the fundamentals.

Not only did we have good readers, but the books of those old days, it seems to me now, were of superior merit as compared with those of today. For instance, I can still recall how the student was introduced to the parts of speech in Smith's *Grammar.* The lesson started off with this question: What is your name? Underneath was the answer: Noun. What is the name of the town in which you live? Underneath was the answer: Noun. The next question was the clincher. What are all the names? The answer was Nouns.

I had never delved very deeply in such abstract questions as transitive and intransitive verbs and had never been introduced even to prepositions, as is indicated by such literary gems as "Between you and I." "If I had ah knowed a could ah rode I would ah went." "Wall I guess I'd better be ah wentin; Gainst I git thar it'll be time I wuz ah came-in."

Not so long ago, a young lady rushed up to me (she was waiting on an old lady who had brought some eggs in the store where she was working) and said, "Mr. Dave, you are such a good adder-upper, how much does a dozen and nine eggs come to at $0.30 a dozen?

Knowing that this young lady had spent 12 years in school without learning that much, I threw up my hands in a hopeless gesture and said, "Young lady, I have been up both sides of the street trying to find somebody who had studied Adder-Upping to where he could answer such a profound question, but without success. If I were you, which thank God I am not and can't be, I'd just fry the eggs and eat them and charge the account off to both profit and loss, and get me a position that did not require so much brain power. You are too pretty a girl to have to do such heavy work."

The last I heard of her, I am sure, she took my advice. She had married a patent medicine agent and left the country in a model T Ford loaded with "Lydia Pinkham's Pink Pills for Pale People."

I stayed teaching until 1922, when I became superintendent of the Clarke County Public Schools. The school board wanted me to reach out and help the country or rural schools. They wanted that for several reasons. In my day, there were 16 five-month schools and about 6 were nine-month schools. They were all part of the public school system and supported with public funds. Well, as you can see, somebody was getting shortchanged. One child was getting to go to school for five months; another child for nine.

I've always worked by objectives. As a boy in the field, I would task myself — I was going to get a certain stump or place in the field. My first two objectives as superintendent of education were to equalize educational opportunities

*David Chapman Mathews*

in Clarke County, and to make the schools free for pupils.

And I swore a mighty oath that I was going to change the system. I was going to give that country child the same length of school that the law promised. Today, it might surprise you to know that many of the merchants, whose children went to school for nine months, thought that they were superior to the farmers out there picking cotton. Even the children thought they were superior; certainly they had on nicer clothes than the rural students. You have no idea of the distinction that existed then between the town child and the country child. Yet in many cases, the children belonged to the same family. For example, one brother might live in Grove Hill and own a store. His children would get to go to school for nine months. His brother might live across the creek on a farm, and his children would get only five months of schooling. Can you explain that? You know that's not right. Coming from the country or rural area, naturally, my sympathies were with the country child. I despised the disparity; it was unAmerican, undemocratic, and not Christian to have such a distinction.

The first time I met with the board, I said, "Gentlemen, here's what I find: in the first place, none of you is qualified to serve on the board."

I told the chairman that he had not been reading the minutes of board meetings, and I asked the board to create equal school terms. The board cooperated with me in every way possible; I sold them on my ideas. I also had to educate the public to the idea of longer school terms.

School children were paying fees, ranging from $5 to $10, to supplement public funds. That was my second objective; to make the schools free. To do that, we had to have the three-mill tax made uniform throughout the county.

That brought me into contact with corporations and many prominent people. It was a fight and the fighting aroused some hatred. Large corporations had their land valued at $0.40 per acre; that wasn't tax, it was land valuations by the tax assessor. They had no regard for the rural children.

Thank God, I had taken a mighty oath that I was determined to make the changes. I was going to give every child in Clarke County an opportunity to go to high school and stay home every night, that is, to have a school close to their home. And I did it. During the term that I was in office, I built 67 schools for Negro children and 10 for whites. I built Jackson High School, Grove Hill High School, Thomasville High School and Coffeeville High School. I arranged for a system of trucks to take the children to them. I didn't try to tear down a single country school, I wouldn't do it today. I also wanted the mothers to help their children. That is not emphasized now and I think it is terrible. Your mother can take you at her knee and teach you more in five minutes than I can as a teacher. That is especially true for the fundamentals.

Tom Dewey played the very devil when he got us on that word method. My brother, Mit, wrote about that. If I were teaching you children, the first thing you would do is to learn your letters and phonics or the sound of letters. You would learn the vowels: A-E-I-O-U, sometimes W and Y. When I was a child we did that and I can tell you that it will never leave you. Learning to read is as simple as dirt, but we make it too complicated now.

My father was one of the best readers I ever heard, and yet, he never went to school for more than five or nine months. You learn to read by reading. And if you like to read, you can get an education; I don't care where you live. And if you decide to teach, teach with this in mind. I did; it was my way. If I knew something I loved to tell so that you would know it too. That is, you would know if you were interested. Teachers are like people who have a sack of apples and students want some apples. Teaching is a kind of exchange; it's just that simple. Teaching methods will take care of themselves. We sent people to normal schools and they learned how to teach, but they didn't have anything to teach. They had methods but no content. In other words, if you had a sack for apples, and you knew what to do with them, but you didn't have any apples, you would be in trouble. The first thing a teacher has to do is to know something. Then the next thing

they have to have is an avid desire to transmit what they know.

We call that Socratic teaching. Do your children know about Socrates? Have you read any books about old Socrates? The Greeks didn't understand him; he was so miserably ugly and they worshipped beauty. They couldn't understand how Socrates could be so wise, and yet be so miserably ugly. Of course, you know his fate. He taught the youth about immortality and was charged with corrupting the youth of Athens. They condemned him for that. Do you know what happened?

*Great-Grandchildren: He drank poison, didn't he?*

Yes, a fatal drink of hemlock. Did you ever see in your libraries any pictures of Socrates' school? No, you wouldn't see anything like a school. He didn't have one and he didn't have any students. His students were people who sat around him in the groves or on the seats by the seashore. Socrates moved around all over Athens and people asked him questions. That's now called the Socratic method of teaching. And you'll never improve on it. If you want to know something enough to ask your teacher, and if your teacher is wise enough to answer your question, you will teach yourself. But if you don't have the curiosity, a teacher can't teach you anything to save your life. The pupil should ask the teacher instead of the teacher asking the pupil. For instance, imagine that you are trying to solve a problem and that you don't understand it. Ask me, your teacher. Ask me to explain. Do you see? That is what I am talking about. It's the same principle exactly.

Socrates brought in that method and Jesus Christ brought in another method very useful to teachers — it was the method of telling stories, parables. "He that heareth these things, and doeth them, shall be likened to. . . ."

I wish it were possible to impress on you just how public schools operated for some 20 years after we first gained a uniform system of school books, and the county was divided into districts.

The great objective in those early days was to have our pupils complete seven grades of work. That was the ideal of the county boards.

Too, the state began to aid districts in building better school buildings. The plans for those buildings were atrocious, and it was impossible to warm them in cold weather, but they did have good blackboards.

With the seventh grade ideal to spur them on, pupils were given county-wide examinations in that grade, and I would like to see our children in that grade today wrestle with the examination some of their parents took in those one-room schools.

Gradually our ideals rose to high school levels, and the need for a high school at Coffeeville became acute, and the community rose to the challenge and Coffeeville became a standard high school.

Strange to say, that with the growth of high school advantages for all children and the concentration of all the children in the county into about five schools, the rural population of Clarke County was decreasing. I am speaking now of the white population.

The first Negro high school in the county was established at Coffeeville. That was about 1920. Today there are high schools for the Negroes at Jackson, Grove Hill, and Thomasville. The ideal for every child to finish high school and stay at home every night holds for both races, and this is as it should be.

When I was a schoolboy, a walk of three or four miles to school was nothing unusual. Today, I see children getting on school buses almost in sight of the school building.

In my day, children carried their lunches to school. These lunches consisted of such things as eggs, bacon, biscuits and syrup, not overlooking potatoes or yams. Today, the children have warm lunches in the cafeterias, but if the parents are not careful, many of them will get a soft drink and a box of cookies.

One of the favorite memories of my grandfather comes from a letter he wrote to a bureaucrat in the state superintendent's office while he was county superintendent during the Depression. He takes particular aim at Governor Miller, who was in office at the time.

GROVE HILL, ALA.

*February 16, 1933*

*Mr. Wm. F. Feagin*
*Montgomery, Ala.*

*Dear Mr. Feagin:*

*I am in receipt of your letter of even date stating that you expected to have a representative of your department make an inspection and appraisal of the state-owned buildings in this county at an early date, and asking if I would co-operate with you in having this work done to the extent of furnishing my car, without expense to your department.*

*In the first place, I see no necessity of making the appraisal mentioned. During the previous administration, a representative of your department visited this county and appraised the school property. In the main, his valuations were about the same as those already placed on the property by this office. In the second place, the roads are in such a condition now, and will so remain until the early summer, that it is almost impossible to visit many of the buildings. In the third place, unless some plan can be devised whereby the schools will receive, at least, their constitutional funds, there will be no further excuse for the buildings and we may dispense with them entirely and move to New York.*

*I am perfectly willing to co-operate with you in this appraisal to the extent of furnishing my car but it is only fair to you to advise you that my car was re-possessed by the finance company about last July when I failed to draw my salary for the previous February and I am now walking – mostly at night to avoid my creditors – wherever I am compelled to go and wearing a pair of shoes my grandfather wore home from Appomattox and a coat given me by a distant cousin on his return from "making the world safe for Democracy." As I have to keep this coat tightly buttoned for reasons that I am not ashamed of at all but do not care to make too obvious, my naturally long, swinging stride is restricted and your representative will have no trouble in keeping pace with me, if he is an active man. A colored friend, an old preacher, had helped me out with a hat. It is a stovepipe derby which he wears to the Associations but which he has graciously loaned to me until that time. I take special pride in this lid as its tall, graceful dome affords me room to display in all its fragrant beauty a slogan that has grown dear to the entire educational force of this county – "Save millions with Miller." It is really affecting to see the response of the people to this slogan wherever I go and I predict that it will go down in history alongside that of Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death," or Nathan Hale's "My only regret is that I have but one life to give to my country." My teachers prefer the one from Hale.*

*In the event your representative, Mr. Amerine, cannot see his way clear to appraise the buildings under the plan outlined above, and you will give me notice a week in advance of his visit, as promised in your letter, I believe that I can rig up a yoke of yearlings and a truck wagon and transport him around in the style and dignity one in his position would naturally expect, and should have. I have a neighbor who is breaking a pair of two-year-olds and he has kindly offered to loan me his team whenever I have any notables to entertain, so I feel that I can do the occasion proud if you will give me advance notice of the visit.*

*Very truly yours,*

*D.C. Mathews*
*Superintendent*

## TALES FROM THE UNION CHURCH CAMPGROUND

I will close these accounts with stories from the Union Church which I have mentioned before. Beside the church at its original site was an immense arbor where various meetings were held beside those of worship. The arbor was 75 feet or more square and would easily seat 500 people. It obtained its name "campground" for the simple reason that it was used as an annual encampment for the old Civil War veterans. Some of my happiest moments were spent around the campfires of those old men who would camp for a day or night and relive scenes of the Civil War. There I met the veterans of Lee's army in Virginia, Johnson's army in Mississippi, and Wheeler's cavalrymen, along with those of Forrest. With them, I lived the hardships and sufferings of the veterans of the Confederacy.

One of the first companies raised in the county for the war was raised by Stephen B. Cleveland of Suggsville. However, at Fort Morgan he resigned from that company (infantry) and returned to raise a company of cavalry of which he was captain, "The Suggsville Greys." It was to this company that Miss Emma Portis presented the flag in an eloquent address.

One of my uncles, Lige Mathews (Elijah Mathews), secured a transfer from the Dickinson Guards and joined Captain Cleveland's Company. Uncle Lige idolized Major Cleveland, who meanwhile had won battlefield promotion to the rank of major. His captain position was taken by Mr. Kilpatrick.

The Suggsville Greys were merged with the command of General Wirt Adams in the western army. They participated in the Battle of Shiloh.

I have often heard Uncle Lige tell of the tragic death of General Albert Sydney Johnston, which occurred near him. Also, he loved to tell of an incident that took place near the Tennessee line.

One morning, Major Cleveland's men awoke to find that several inches of snow had fallen during the night. As the camp came to life, snowballs began to fly in every direction. A man named Hall hit Uncle Lige with a ball in which he had rolled up a good-sized rock. Immediately fists began to fly. Soon Major Cleveland went between the two, shoved them apart and said, "Are you two fellows soldiers or just children?"

Uncle Lige explained what had happened, and showed him the weighted snowball. Major Cleveland pulled up Mr. Hall's shirt and made him hold the rock-laden ball against his naked stomach until it melted. He then gave the poor fellow a scathing lecture and let him go. Uncle Lige said that after this, Mr. Hall "always played fair."

I could fill a book with stories of Major Cleveland's command during the ups and downs of the Mississippi campaigns centering on Vicksburg.

Adams continued to operate more or less independently until the end of the war. When the war was over, General Grant allowed the Confederates to keep their mounts, saying that they would need them to plant their crops.

Uncle Lige said that he never saw such a change as that which took place overnight. Every wagoner or infantryman who could do so immediately stole anything in the shape of a mule or horse, and passed himself off as a cavalryman, explaining the lack of a saddle by accusing the deserters of stealing it the night before. The Yankees saw through the trick, but waved them on down the roads with a laugh.

As the area around the campground became more thickly settled, Old Union Church became less accessible. But like an old stump, sprouts from it sprang up; other churches grew from the stump. On the eastern edge of McLeod's Beat was Antioch, a Baptist church. Across the creek and to the north was Hebron, a Methodist church, and on the northwest, Wesley's Chapel sprang up. With these churches drawing congregations from their respective communities, Old Union went down. And today, there's nothing that marks its place but the old cemetery, the fallen tomb, and memories. I often visit the site because my people are all buried there.

When I visit, I find myself repeating the words of the boys of the Confederacy when they

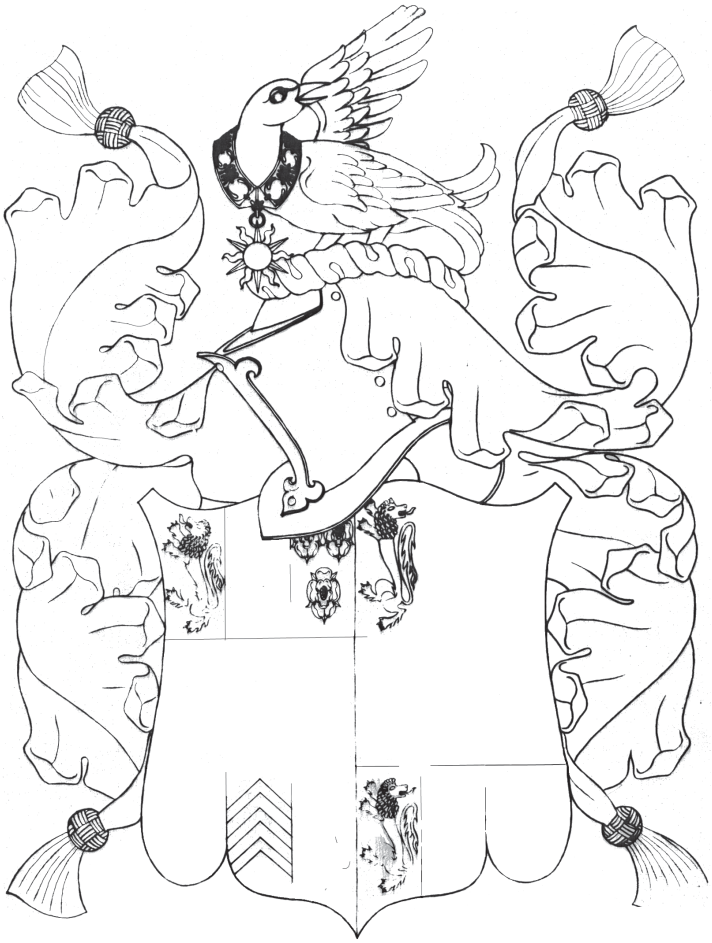
said, "There's a grandeur in graves, there's a glory in gloom. Out of the gloom, future brightness is born, as after the night comes the sunrise is morn. Each single brick in war's path of might will yet come a rock in the temple of right."

## THE FIRST MATHEWS

The Mathews, like many other Clarke County families, originated in Wales. The earliest dates in the stories we tell about ourselves (which is all that a family "history" is) go back to the fourth century to a Roman Christian named Tacitus, who was stationed in what is now Ayr, Scotland. His great-grandson, Cunedda, drove south into Wales with an army at the end of the Roman occupation of Britain. Cunedda's son, Keredig, was a founder of Keredigion or Cardiganshire on the western coast. Another son, Teilion, who succeeded his brother as ruler of Cardigan, produced a line of children that led, in 1047, to Gwaethfoed, known as the Great Prince of Cardigan. Roughly 14 generations later, Gwaethfoed's offspring, Sir Mathew ap Ievan, was living in Llandaff near Cardif in South Wales. His son, Sir David, was the first to adopt the surname, Mathew. He was standard bearer for the army of Edward IV at the battle of Towton in 1461. One of his descendants who came to America was Isaac Mathews, Sr. (1769), who married Mary Mathews, a distant cousin. She descended from Samuel Mathews (1592-1659 or 1660) who was colonial governor of Virginia. Josiah Mathews was their great-grandson.

Another branch of Sir David's family was exiled to Ireland. This may have been the branch of Thomas Mathews, a general in the Revolutionary War and Speaker of the House of the Virginia legislature (1788-1794). Mathews County in Virginia was named for him. That same branch of the family could have produced George Mathews, the general who commanded the 9th Virginia Regiment in the Revolutionary War and was later governor of Georgia (1795). His grandson, George Mathews, was president of the group that settled Selma. The same family gave its name to Mathews, Alabama, in Montgomery County. The Bill Mathews family of Clarke County, who came from Dallas County, is likely to be of that line.

For more information on the Josiah Mathews family, see *James Waldrum Mathews and His Descendants* by Albert Sidney (Sut) Mathews.



**Quarterings in Arms of William John Mathew:**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Mathew | 2. Beli Mawr | 3. Cunedda Wledig | 4. Gwaethfoed | 5. Cadwallon | 6. Cadwaladr |
| 7. Ynyr of Gwent | 8. Russell | 9. Hywel of Caerleon | 10. Coel Godebog | 11. Vortigern | 12. Rhodri Mawr |
| 13. Hywel Dda | 14. Iestyn ap Gwrgant | 15. Tudor Trefor | 16. Elystan Glodrydd | 17. Grono Goch | 18. Skerne |