

**REMEMBERING
FORT POLK'S HERITAGE:
A TRIBUTE TO THE
DISPLACED FAMILIES OF
CAMP POLK AND PEASON RIDGE**

NOVEMBER 3, 2007



Remembering
Fort Polk's Heritage:
A Tribute to the
Displaced Families of
Camp Polk and Peason Ridge

*"WE WILL NOT FORGET OUR HERITAGE FAMILIES FOR THEY ARE
UNSUNG HEROES WHO SURRENDERED THEIR HOMES AND WAY OF LIFE
FOR THE SAKE OF THIS NATION."*

PREFACE

By MG Daniel P. Bolger, Installation Commander, JRTC & Fort Polk

As we serve and train on the land we call Fort Polk, we walk in the steps of heroes. Starting in 1941, 50 of the 89 divisions raised for World War II passed this way. In 1950-51, the 45th Infantry Division prepared here for the grim hills of Korea. During the Vietnam War, over one million Soldiers received basic and advanced training at Fort Polk's famous "Tigerland." And now in the current Global War on Terrorism, we have trained more than half of the fighting brigades bound for Afghanistan and Iraq. Fort Polk has long been the favorite practice field when America's Army is preparing to go in harm's way.

But we should never forget that this land has not always been an Army installation. With America's entry into WWII imminent, the War Department was scouring the country in search of training grounds. More than 200 families were displaced from their homesteads when the War Department exerted emergency powers under eminent domain to take land and create Camp Polk.

We won WWII, of course, and history confirms that the sacrifices were well worth it. Yet memories linger to this day. Fort Polk's Heritage Project honors, memorializes, and recognizes the local citizens whose sacrifices made this modern military installation possible. These families gave us what we have today. It is our honor to serve them as Soldiers.

<MG Bolger's signature>



FOREWORD

By COL David Sage, Garrison Commander, Fort Polk

Most accounts of the forming of Camp Polk begin in 1941 when the installation first opened for business, as if the post sprang fully fledged from nothingness. In reality, a heavy price was paid to form this military installation and enable the world-class training of America's troops. Prior to becoming an Army post, the land was occupied by subsistence farmers and their families. Today, their names echo through time as place names for military training exercises.

Beyond documenting the inception and success of Fort Polk's Heritage Project, I hope this effort will provide a template for preserving family heritage at other military installations, and serve as a primer for promoting community partnerships in the future.

<COL Sage's signature>



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BACKGROUND

The eve of World War II found America’s military in neglect after years of public apathy. As hostilities intensified in Europe, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Congress initiated a program to prepare the nation’s military for possible entry into the conflict. Procedures for a draft were developed, existing military bases expanded, and new military installations were created. The Army, in particular, needed room to train. As General George C. Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff during WWII, stated, “The only way to learn how to do things properly is to get out on the ground and actually do them.”



And so the hunt was on for land suitable to host the war games that would be vital to the triumph of America’s Greatest Generation. Army reconnaissance teams scouted across the Southern United States, searching for the ideal location. General Marshall wanted varied terrain to test the soldiers and equipment, thinly populated country that was “conveniently and economically accessible,” and a willing population who would not demand huge reimbursements for any damage that might be caused by the military maneuvers. After months of searching, officers finally chose huge tracts of land in west central Louisiana, and the famed Louisiana Maneuvers began in 1940. During these maneuvers, Omar Bradley, Mark Clark, and George Patton coached and trained their young troops.

Today, Fort Polk covers 198,759 acres, part of which is situated on U.S. Forest Service Lands in the Kisatchie National Forest. The installation was officially established in 1941 as Camp Polk, named in honor of the Right Reverend Leonidas Polk, the first Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Louisiana and a Confederate general. Construction of Camp Polk began in January 1941, and the post’s first commander, Colonel Otto Wagner, arrived with a few soldiers in March 1941. Camp Polk was officially completed 1 August 1941.

Wooden barracks sprang up seemingly overnight to support an Army preparing to battle Axis forces on the North African, European, and Pacific fronts. During the Louisiana Maneuvers, thousands of

Fort Polk At A Glance

Total Acreage:	198,759	Supported Population	96,761
Army Owned	100,634	Military	9,221
USFS Owned	98,125	Military Family Members	14,022
Intensive Use	40,506	Army Civilian Employees	2,014
Special Use	12,820	Contractors	3,384
Limited Use	44,799	Retired Military Personnel	36,940
		Reserve Component, ROTC	29,299
		Rotational Training Troops	1,881



American Soldiers learned the basics of combat at Camp Polk before shipping out to fight during WWII. The post was essentially inactive from 1946 until 1950, with some National Guard use during the summers. The post re-opened for the Korean Conflict and then closed again in 1954. The installation reopened in 1955 as Fort Polk, and was permanently activated in 1961 during the Berlin crisis, with the installation becoming an infantry training center in 1962. Subsequently, Fort Polk was selected to conduct advanced training for Soldiers headed to Vietnam.



The Soldiers of Fort Polk have been called to serve around the world. From the service of the “Greatest Generation” during WWII, to the Korean Conflict, Vietnam, Operation Just Cause in Panama, Operation Desert Storm, and now the Global War on Terrorism, training at Fort Polk has helped American troops fight

Fort Polk became home to the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) in 1993. Today, the JRTC and Fort Polk supports America’s fight in the Global War on Terrorism by providing intensive training for the Army's light infantry and special operations forces. By integrating the U.S. Air Force, Navy, and Marines, along with military units from America’s allies overseas, the JRTC provides uniquely realistic training for our troops. The joint service training emphasized at Fort Polk is crucial to the survival of our armed forces and critical for maintaining national security.

The combined-arms nature of most military missions has drawn heavy armored units into JRTC training. Contingency and special operations soldiers (including paratroopers, air assault soldiers, Special Forces, and Rangers) are among the first to be called in a military crisis. They must deploy on short notice and be prepared to fight immediately upon arrival. During JRTC training, heavy and light units team up for a true-to-life training experience. The JRTC’s training strategy provides the key to victory on any battlefield: leaders with warrior skills and mental agility combined with forces trained and ready to win.

Fort Polk is also home to the 1st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, which contains several combat support units. Medical, dental, and military police commands also support the installation. The 4th Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, one of the Army’s new modular brigades, officially activated 19 January 2005 at Fort Polk.

Peason Ridge

Located in Sabine, Natchitoches, and Vernon Parishes, Peason Ridge is a non-contiguous training area north of the Fort Polk main post consisting of 33,488 acres. The first known occupants of Peason Ridge were tribes of the Caddo, Ais, Adais, Hasinai, Natchitoches, and Peticaddo. In the early 1900s, the immense stands of virgin timber in the area drew the attention of lumbermen A.J. Peavy and R.J. Wilson. The surnames of these men were combined to give the land its present-day name of Peason. The terminus for the Christie and Eastern Railroad, the lumber mill at Peason

employed 450 people and operated from 1917 until all the timber was harvested in 1935.

From Timbering to Soldiering

As Vernon Parish began to change from a frontier community into a modern farming community, land speculators and timber barons were amassing vast tracts of its virgin pine landscape. Just when settlers could finally claim legitimate government-sanctioned landownership, the unclaimed land was bought by outside corporate interests. The land changed hands quickly, again and again. Almost overnight, mills sprang up and the timber cutting began. For a brief period, Vernon Parish was the center of one of the largest industries in the United States. Then, just as quickly as they had arrived, the timber barons left, and the pine trees were gone. The U.S government arrived to reforest the barren landscape, and a new era began.

As the United States prepared for global war in 1940, the U.S. Army sought land to practice maneuvering large numbers of men and materials. Despite the hard work of the Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), large tracts in Vernon Parish were still relatively open, rolling, “submarginal,” cutover land with little occupation — precisely what the army required. The army chose a location just seven miles southeast of Leesville. These lands were owned primarily by the Forest Service, some 27,615 acres in all. In sum, the coming of Camp Polk, and then Fort Polk in 1941 was a tremendous economic boost to the area. Construction workers at the camp flooded the area for housing, food, and other services.

Through the spring and summer of 1940, military vehicles and green-clad soldiers were seen more and more frequently marching and conveying up and down western Louisiana’s formerly quiet dusty roads. The first of the Louisiana Maneuvers began in April and May 1940, pitting tanks against tanks in a mock battle. Leesville and the area east to Leander became the battleground. At one point, Leesville was actually the scene of a tank battle. As citizens watched from rooftops, tanks raced through town firing blanks at each other in mock combat.

At the beginning of the Louisiana Maneuvers, one Army observer described Camp Polk as an area, “...where I don’t think any human beings have been for fifty years.” He could not have been more wrong, for the land was indeed inhabited and the War Department was diligently working through the Federal Court system to obtain the land needed to permanently establish Camp Polk.

No one is certain how many households were present on the land that was acquired to form Camp Polk. However, the Fort Polk Heritage Project has verified a total of 255 different surnames, and there are many documented instances of numerous households having the same surname (i.e., extended families occupied multiple home sites).

DISPLACEMENT: CREATION OF CAMP POLK

While some willingly sold land to the War Department, other landowners dug in and vowed to stay. To obtain the land needed to train American troops in preparation for WWII, the War Department worked with the Federal District courts in Lake Charles (over 70 miles to the south) and in



Shreveport (over 100 miles to the north). The Peason Ridge land was also included when the War Department began proceedings to acquire the land that was to become Camp Polk. In 1941, the occupants of the 29 homesteads present at Peason Ridge were displaced from their land.

The distance from west-central Louisiana to the court buildings in Lake Charles and Shreveport was an enormous obstacle for landowners who attempted to fight the taking of their homes. Most of the affected landowners had no means of traveling such great distances. Through the Federal court system, the land was condemned and a judgment was rendered declaring eminent domain. After this, the local Parish Clerk's Office carried out the eviction of the residents from the property.

Recollections about how the condemnation of the land was carried out differ. Some oral histories recount instantaneous eviction with no prior notice, where government officials descended on a home site, tacked a notice of condemnation to the door, and told the occupants of the house to leave. Through memories shared decades later, the occupants of the house fled with what belongings they could gather as bulldozers moved in and demolished everything to ensure that there was no place to return to.

According to Vernon Parish records from the 1930s and 1940s, it appears that many families displaced from the land were not the landowners of record. Many people living on the land were tenants or homesteaders, which may help explain the prevalence of memories about sudden and irrevocable eviction that are shared by many Heritage Family members.

During the course of the Heritage Project, records have been found listing the same person as legal owner of multiple homesteads. Matching these records with recollections of Heritage Family members indicates that land speculators were purchasing the land ahead of time, in hopes of turning a tidy profit at the expense of the War Department. However, in at least one instance, surviving records show that a land speculator paid \$500 to the farmer and received only \$400 from the government.

Both records and memories of amounts paid for the condemned property vary as widely as the recollections of how the taking of the land was carried out. Some landowners were paid as much as \$25 per acre, while others were paid as little as \$2 per acre. The reason behind this disparity in compensation is not known.

However, other accounts of the land acquisition reveal weeks of prior knowledge. One account details how a landowner dismantled his entire homestead, moved it, and rebuilt it only to have his land taken to move again. In the end, this landowner is said to have dismantled and moved his homestead four times before successfully getting out of the footprint of Camp Polk.

The immense burden born by the subsistence farmers who were displaced to create Camp Polk is hard to fathom. In addition to losing their homes and their land, they also lost their only source of food because their land was taken before crops were ready for harvest. The global shift from

“They lost everything – home, ancestors, land, even their ‘grocery store.’”
Skip Cryer
Heritage Family Member

an agrarian lifestyle to a more urbanized, industrial lifestyle was played out in the microcosm of west-central Louisiana: The very people who lost their farms were the ones employed to build Camp Polk.

The sudden and complete diaspora of entire family units from their ancestral lands also separated people from loved ones who were buried in family plots on what was becoming Camp Polk. This resulted in a severance of connections with the past and a loss of personal history.



MG Bolger, Commanding General of the JRTC and Fort Polk, speaks about the historical perspectives of the Heritage Project.

THE HERITAGE PROJECT

For decades, the history of the Heritage Families laid dormant. Most published accounts of Fort Polk begin with 1941, when the installation officially opened. Even today, an internet search on the history of Fort Polk will reveal mention of the post being constructed on "...cut over pine forests with a few dilapidated shacks" (www.globalsecurity.org).

COL David Sage, Garrison Commander, had previously overseen a similar heritage project, though on a much smaller scale, while serving as Deputy Chief of Staff at Fort Hood, Texas. Reflecting on the magnitude of the sacrifices ordinary American families made to create Camp Polk, and on the enduring ties that exist between family history and the land, COL Sage vowed to restore the connections that had been severed when the installation was formed. COL Sage saw this not only as an opportunity to thank the families whose land was taken to create the installation on which he now served, but also as a way to strengthen the Army's ties with the local community. And thus the Fort Polk Heritage Project began with a seemingly

"By strengthening our relationship with the local community, we are able to improve the quality of life – and life experiences – that our Soldiers and their families have while stationed at Fort Polk."

*COL David Sage
Garrison Commander
Fort Polk*

"There's a deep connection to the land mass we now call Fort Polk. We're working to document that connection and make it sustainable for future generations."

*Jim Grafton
Cultural Resources
Program Manager
Fort Polk*

simple goal: to recognize, honor, and memorialize the families who were displaced when Camp Polk was created.

The basis of the Fort Polk Heritage Project is the connection between families, their land, their history, and their identity. This connectivity resonates with both military personnel and civilians. In addition to capturing and recording history that was at the point of vanishing from living memory, the Heritage Project has restored

good will and reconnected the relationship between the Army and local residents of west-central Louisiana.

THE HERITAGE WORKSHOP

At the inaugural meeting of the Fort Polk Heritage Project team, excitement buzzed at this unique opportunity to cement the family unit in west-central Louisiana. However, team members quickly realized that they really didn't know much about the families they wanted to honor. Determined to get it right, the Heritage Project team decided to ask known members of Heritage Families for their assistance and their guidance on the best way to honor the families who were displaced.

On 19 April 2007, Fort Polk hosted the Heritage Workshop. Attending the workshop were:

- ◆ Heritage Family representatives (from the Bass, Chaney, Cryer, Haymon, James, Jeter, LaCaze, Nolde, and Sweat families)
- ◆ Area museums (Museums of West Louisiana, Peason Ridge, Beauregard Parish, and DeRidder War Memorial)
- ◆ Vernon and Beauregard Parish Chambers of Commerce
- ◆ Vernon and Sabine Parish Tourism Commissions
- ◆ Academic historians
- ◆ Cultural resource professionals
- ◆ A broad cross-section of Fort Polk personnel
- ◆ U.S. Forest Service personnel

The overarching purpose of the workshop was to obtain ideas and input from each of the groups in attendance on how to best recognize, honor, and memorialize the sacrifices made by the Heritage Families whose homes and land were taken to create Fort Polk. Breakout sessions were conducted during the workshop to focus on three broad topics: (1) memorialization, (2) creating and planning a day to honor Heritage Families, and (3) recording the cultural histories of Heritage Families. The goal of each breakout session was to identify issues, rank priorities, and develop recommendations for going forward.

Memorialization

The Memorialization Group was tasked with identifying strategies for (1) developing a memorial on Fort Polk dedicated to the Heritage Families, (2) identification and possible memorializing for the sites of historic homesteads and communities that once existed on Fort Polk, and (3) preserving the historic cemeteries and gravesites on post.

The group decided that two permanent memorials were needed because land was taken from families in two locations, Fort Polk and Peason Ridge. Members of the Memorialization Group decided that the best way to honor both sets of Heritage families was to erect two obelisks in Warrior Memorial Park on Fort Polk: One obelisk honoring the families displaced to form Camp



Polk, and one obelisk to honor the families displaced from Peason Ridge. Obelisks were chosen because the shape was seen as a very formal representation of the respect and honor due to the Heritage Families. To ensure no one ever again overlooked their contributions to this nation, it was decided to engrave each obelisk with the names of the Heritage Families displaced when their land was taken. Future plans call for a memorial to be installed at Peason Ridge to commemorate that area's Heritage Families as well.

The Memorialization Group also decided to identify and mark the location of each homestead and community. Furthermore, the group recommended that new roads and trails on Fort Polk be named for the historic homestead/community located nearby.

Heritage Tree Registry

One of the hurdles to memorializing the homesteads of the displaced families is the fact that there are no remaining historic structures on Fort Polk. Many homesteads were deconstructed by the tenants when they moved and rebuilt at a new site. However, many trees planted by the families to provide shade to their homes remain, standing sentinel to the events of history.

Personnel from Fort Polk have worked diligently to locate homestead trees by combining the use of GPS, GIS land mapping, current aerial photographs, and historic aerial photographs. By overlaying images from aerial photographs taken in 1939 and landowner maps from 1941 onto current aerial photographs and GIS mapping data for Fort Polk, possible locations of homes, barns, and communities are derived. Document searches for past cultural resource site investigations are being used to provide possible site data for wells or other remaining structures at the home places. One by one, these possible locations are now being painstakingly ground-truthed.

When a Heritage Tree is definitively identified, information is collected and added to the Heritage Tree Registry database, including:

- ◆ Species
- ◆ Height of the tree
- ◆ GPS coordinates of the tree
- ◆ Crown-spread of the tree
- ◆ Estimated age of the tree.

This database will be used to ensure that these living memorials are protected to the best degree



Signs have been placed throughout Fort Polk, identifying various homeplaces and settlements. These signs serve as reminders to the Soldiers currently maneuvering and training at Fort Polk of the monumental sacrifice made by the Heritage Families for the sake of our nation.



possible. However, the search for Heritage Trees has turned up more than shade trees. Many ornamental trees and flowers have been found at old homesites, standing as mute testimony to the love the Heritage Families had for their land. Two antique roses have been recovered from old homesites on Fort Polk: the ‘Seven Sisters’ rose from the former Self homeplace and the ‘Old Blush’ rose from the former George Cryer homeplace.



The shade trees shown in this photograph are all that remain of the Clint White homestead. These trees are now part of the Heritage Tree Registry at Fort Polk.

Other markers of homesites, including square, blacksmith-made nails, were found adjacent to one old homesite, dating it to the pre-Civil War era. And in one especially moving moment, an elderly Heritage Family member was helping Fort Polk personnel try to locate her family’s homesite when they literally stumbled upon a door from an old wood-burning stove. Ms. Marie Cryer White exclaimed, “Why that’s from my Grandmama’s stove! The last time I saw this door, I was tending Grandmama’s fire while she cooked!”

Cemeteries

A total of 18 historic cemeteries are located on Fort Polk training lands. Most of these cemeteries are quite small because the early settlements themselves were small and widely scattered.

Family members taught family histories and lore by recounting who was buried where, and the details of that person’s life. However, when the connection to the land was severed by the construction of Camp Polk, many people lost access to their family cemeteries. This resulted in some gravesites being lost altogether and the occupants of many more gravesites becoming unknown.

Easier Cemetery Access

Cultural Resources staff members have worked with Fort Polk Range Control to establish procedures for easy and safe visits by Heritage Family members to their familial home sites and cemeteries that are now located on military training lands. The Cultural Resources staff members developed a Cemetery Access Guide brochure containing easy-to-understand directions for gaining access to these lands. In return, surviving Heritage Family members who have accessed their familial lands have provided the Cultural Resources staff members with invaluable information, history, and memories about the significance and location of various landmarks, such as trees and gravesites.

Over the years, some area genealogists have conducted research at these cemeteries. They quickly learned that achieving complete accuracy in the recording of grave data is almost impossible. In many cases, the identity, grave location, and history of the deceased were passed down in stories over the generations and was not documented with a formal grave marker. However, the oral histories were not failsafe. Events, dates, relationships, and even names mutated with retelling over time. Some intriguing

remnants of the histories of the deceased remain, such as the marker labeled “Harriet Gill and son.” Members of the Gill family relate that, according to their family history, the child buried with Ms. Gill was not her son. However, further details about this have been lost to time.

The earliest grave identified in association with Fort Polk lands is for Philemon Bryan, who died in 1849. Mr. Bryan’s grave is an exception, however, for most of the early graves were either unmarked or marked with perishable markers. This may have been due to a general lack of money for permanent gravestones. Or, perhaps since the gravesites and cemeteries were originated and maintained by family members of the deceased, tangible signs indicating a final resting place may have been deemed unnecessary.

At the time of the April 2007 Heritage Workshop, the final resting places of some Heritage Family members were in danger of being lost forever. The Heritage Project Team learned the magnitude of the problem when a Heritage Family member exclaimed to them during a cemetery visit, “Where are all the graves?!”

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) used ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to ground-truth known and suspected historic burials, thus helping to locate lost civilian gravesites – a first for a military installation. In partnership with the USFS, personnel from throughout Fort Polk worked to provide recognition, dignity, and sanctity for Heritage Family gravesites. The graves of Heritage Family members whose identities have been lost are now marked, in keeping with the recommendation generated at the Heritage Workshop.

Through the Heritage Project, the boundaries of all historic cemeteries have been found and marked. This prevents inadvertent damage to the cemeteries during training (12 of the 18 historic cemeteries are located on active training ranges; 2 are not fenced). It also gives the troops a sense of their place in history and an appreciation for the sacrifices of these families.

The 18 historic cemeteries located on Army and USFS lands are now listed as state archaeological sites, in coordination with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). As listed archaeological sites, these cemeteries are protected under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), bringing civil and criminal penalties for those who would damage them. Fort Polk’s submittal of historic



The final resting places of some Heritage Family members were in danger of being lost to the ages. In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, personnel from throughout Fort Polk worked to provide recognition, dignity, and sanctity for Heritage Family gravesites. The graves of Heritage Family members whose identities are unknown now have simple wooden head and foot markers.



civilian cemeteries as ARPA sites was a first for an Army installation.

Heritage Family Collection

The true centerpiece of Fort Polk's Heritage Project is the compilation and archiving of the Heritage Family collection. Developing the Heritage Family collection stands as true testimony to Fort Polk's sincerity in wishing to develop and maintain favorable relationships with the Heritage Families.

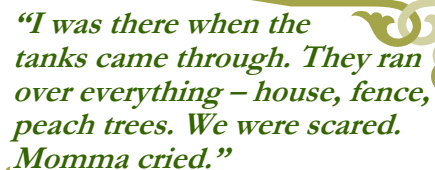
Contained in the Heritage Family Collection are historic photographs, some of which were generously donated by Heritage Family members; oral histories gathered from Heritage Family members who resided on the land when it was taken by the War Department; cultural artifacts recovered from Heritage Family homesites; birth and death records; and land records.

Workshop attendees agreed that the purpose of the Heritage Family collection is to preserve and make available the histories of the Fort Polk Heritage Families. To ensure the security of the collection, the Heritage team decided to house dual copies of the collection at the Fort Polk Curation Facility, widely regarded as the best curation facility in Louisiana, and at the Northwestern State University (NSU) Curation Facility. All tangible items and original artifacts will be permanently held at Fort Polk, as per regulation. Digital copies of historical documents or photographs will be housed at NSU.

To make the collection easily accessible to as many people as possible, the collection will be digitized and made available on the internet. Wishing to do more than simply make these files available on the internet, the Heritage Project Team has plans to create a virtual tour environment, where Heritage Family members (or anyone else) can click on their family name and be taken to aerial photographs of their familial lands and historic photographs of their homesteads. Another click of the mouse will bring up voice recordings of oral histories and digital photographs of historic birth, death, and land records.

Recording the Cultural Histories

Participants in the April 2007 Heritage Workshop agreed that the effort to capture and record cultural histories should be focused on the period from 1820 through 1941. Through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the staff from the NSU Folklife Center are to be the subject matter experts involved with collecting the oral histories. Workshop participants decided that oral histories would only be collected from Heritage Family members who actually lived on the land that was taken to create Camp Polk; oral histories will not be collected from descendents of former residents of the land. However, the cultural history capture goes further than just oral histories and extends to family records, school records, historic maps, land ownership records, and



"I was there when the tanks came through. They ran over everything – house, fence, peach trees. We were scared. Momma cried."

*Norma Lee Jeane Meaux
Heritage Family Member*

abstracts. The capture of these types of cultural history records will be accomplished by Fort Polk and USFS personnel.

Heritage Day Planning

As word of the Fort Polk Heritage Project spread, team members hoped for a positive reaction. In the months following the Workshop, an astonishing number of people with connections to Heritage Families came forward from around the nation. From a contractor paid to mow the grass on Fort Polk to family members in Wyoming and Florida, and everywhere in between, excitement was building about the first Heritage Day in November 2007.

A true team effort allowed Fort Polk to host Heritage Day. Personnel from throughout Fort Polk, both government employees and contractors, along with USFS staff, Heritage Family members, and NSU personnel worked tirelessly for seven months to ensure the success of the first Heritage Day celebration. Command support from both MG Bolger, the Commanding General, and COL Sage, the Garrison Commander, was critical to the successful planning of the day. Everyone selflessly put in many long hours to ensure that every detail of every activity was planned to perfection for Heritage Day.

AT LONG LAST: HERITAGE DAY 2007

A crisply perfect Louisiana fall morning heralded the first Heritage Day at Fort Polk. Hundreds of Heritage Family members congregated at the Main Post Chapel to visit with long-lost friends and family, share memories, tell stories, and accept Fort Polk's honor and gratitude for their sacrifices. Among descendents present were employees of the USFS and Fort Polk, bringing full circle the connection between the land and the Heritage Families. Refrains of, "Why, I haven't seen you since we left the land!" echoed again and again throughout the halls of the Chapel as Heritage Family members renewed connections severed by the taking of their land over 60 years ago.

The day began with family members sharing artifacts from their time on the land that became Fort Polk. Fourteen families proudly shared their family treasures in booths set up in the fellowship hall of the chapel. Each booth was jam-packed with cherished mementos, historic photographs, and family records.

In addition to the family booths, six stations were sponsored by Fort Polk, the USFS, NSU, NPS, and local genealogical societies:

- ◆ **Oral Histories:** NSU cultural historians played videotapes of the oral histories collected to date and were on hand to capitalize on opportunities to collect more oral histories from Heritage Family members in attendance at the day's festivities.
- ◆ **GIS Mapping:** USFS and Fort Polk personnel were on hand to demonstrate how historic homesites



Fourteen heritage families had booths full of items from their time on the land that was taken to create Camp Polk.



have been located using GIS mapping overlain with historic aerial photographs. Heritage family members could see their homestead marked on Fort Polk GIS maps and provide confirmation that the location was correct (or help fix incorrect placement) on the maps.

- ◆ Headstone Cleaning and Ground Penetrating Radar: National Park Service (NPS) personnel explained proper techniques for cleaning headstones without damaging the fragile old stone. USFS personnel explained how they used radar technology to locate lost graves.
- ◆ Historic Photo Scanning: USFS and Fort Polk personnel staffed a scanning station where Heritage Family members could add their historic family photographs to



Historic photographs spurred many recollections by Heritage Family members.

the Heritage Family Collection. The USFS archival specialist also provided advice on proper handling and storage of the original photographs.

- ◆ Book sales: Copies of three books pertaining to Fort Polk history were available for purchase:
 - *Whiskey Chitto Woman*, by Marguerite Hudson
 - *A Good Home for a Poor Man*, by Steve Smith
 - *Fort Polk Cemetery Guide*, by Cultural Resources staff
- ◆ Heritage Rose Sale: The ‘Seven Sisters’ rose, discovered at the location of one of the historic homesites on Fort Polk, was propagated and sold by the Vernon Parish Genealogy and Historical Society. Offered for sale during the 2007 Heritage Day, this rose was a living connection between past and present.

And of course no family reunion, for that was truly the atmosphere of the day, would be complete without food. Loads of homemade goodies abounded at the inaugural Heritage Day celebration. Jim “Gator” Grafton, Fort Polk’s Cultural Resources Manager, personally cooked for 10 hours to ensure enough old-fashioned syrup tea cakes were on hand to feed the hungry crowd.

Convocation

Following the mingling, Heritage Day officially began with a convocation in the Main Post Chapel sanctuary. The Heritage choir, comprised of personnel from Fort Polk, opened the



Heritage family members gathered at the GIS mapping station to locate their homesites and reminisce.



Roses From the Past

The ‘Seven Sisters’ rose was discovered at the location of one of the historic homesites on Fort Polk. The Vernon Parish Genealogy and Historical Society propagated cuttings from the rose, and offered “descendants” of this rose for sale during the 2007 Heritage Day.



convocation by singing “I’ll Fly Away” followed by the national anthem. COL Sage’s opening remarks began with, “Welcome home.” He stressed the importance of collecting and curating the history of the Heritage Families so that their stories will be alive and available to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. COL Sage concluded his remarks by reminding the Heritage Families that their sacrifice gives young Soldiers one last opportunity for realistic training prior to deploying to the world’s hot spots. This training is key to both their victory on the battlefield and their safe return home.

Next, Greta Boley, USFS Supervisor for the Kisatchie National Forest, spoke eloquently about the dedication of the USFS in caring for the land and serving the Heritage Families. Ms. Boley reminded those in attendance that the sacrifices of the Heritage Families have helped all Americans enjoy enduring freedom.

MG Bolger’s keynote address truly inspired the crowd and perfectly captured the intent and meaning of the Heritage Project. Said MG Bolger:

“Coming face to face with the people who made Fort Polk possible is truly the greatest day I’ve had during my tenure at Fort Polk. Today is a day long overdue. The Federal Government exercised their authority under the constitution in taking the land during a time of war. The constitution states, however, that just compensation must be given when land is taken ... Today, just compensation has finally been given to you through the Heritage Project. Sixty years ago, your land was cleared, but your history was not uprooted. Your roots will always be here. Your land will never be made into a parking lot or a shopping mall. Your heritage will always be here. We honor your families. You gave up your homes, way of life, and happiness. Heritage Day reminds us of this. Your roots are now the roots of our great Army. Wherever our Army goes, we bring the red mud of west central Louisiana with us on our boots. America’s freedom is indeed just compensation for your sacrifices. On behalf of all of America’s Soldiers, I thank you.”

MOU Signing

Upon the conclusion of MG Bolger’s keynote speech, COL Sage, representing Fort Polk, Ms. Boley, representing the USFS, and Dr. Larry Monk, representing NSU, gathered in front of the Chapel altar to sign the Heritage Project Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). As set forth in the MOU,

“The purpose of the MOU is to establish a closer and more cooperative working relationship between the JRTC and Fort Polk, NSU, and the Forest Service in order to collect, preserve, protect, and make known to the public the



Dr. Larry Monk of NSU, Ms. Boley of the USFS, and COL David Sage, Fort Polk Garrison Commander, signed the Heritage Project Memorandum of Agreement during the convocation in the Main Post Chapel.



invaluable cultural resources associated with those Department of Agriculture lands and Department of Defense lands used for military training by the JRTC and Fort Polk. Army and Forest Service lands used for military training contain significant cultural materials located beneath the soil surface, standing upon the landscape, and held within disparate collections of memorabilia in private and public hands. Of special value are the cultural resources held within the living memories of citizens who were displaced from their homes in order to establish the military training post in the period 1941 - 1943. It is appropriate for the Forest Service to cooperate with NSU and the JRTC and Fort Polk in order to capture and curate these cultural treasures for future generations.”

Specifically, the MOU will help ensure the preservation of the Heritage Family histories at Fort Polk and on USFS land by: 1) providing official approval for NSU to gather oral histories from surviving members of Fort Polk Heritage Families; and (2) developing a Heritage Family collection, with copies housed at both Fort Polk and NSU.

Under the terms of the MOU:

- ◆ The USFS will continue to provide use of GPR to ground-truth known and suspected historic cemeteries, thus helping to locate lost civilian gravesites.
- ◆ NSU will continue gathering oral histories from members of the Heritage Families; will house a copy of the Heritage Family collection, comprised of historic data on Heritage families; will provide on-site demonstrations of gravestone preservation and cleaning; and will spatially capture (via GPS), photograph, survey, and document all 18 historic cemeteries.

Dedication of the Heritage Memorial

Following the signing of the MOU, attendees of Heritage Day went across the street to Warrior Memorial Park for the official dedication of the Fort Polk Heritage Memorial. MG Bolger and COL Sage presided over the dedication, which was officially concluded by the Fort Polk Heritage Choir singing “America the Beautiful.” The reunion atmosphere was felt at the memorial dedication, too, as families posed in front of their names inscribed on the granite obelisks. Pulled into family photographs time and time again, MG Bolger and COL Sage were recipients of more hugs than could be counted. To say that the Heritage Families were pleased with the memorial would be a vast understatement.

The remainder of the first Heritage Day was rounded out by four different bus tours of family homesites and cemeteries, self-guided cemetery tours, and the placement of signs along the Heritage Trail by Heritage Family members Ms. Marie Cryer White, Dollie Haymon Mayo Wilcox, and Mr. James Jeter.



The two obelisks in Warrior Memorial Park honor the displaced families from Fort Polk and from Peason Ridge. Each obelisk is engraved with the surnames of the families displaced and is placed next to a representation of the landmass taken to create Camp Polk.



The granite obelisks placed in Warrior Memorial Park formally symbolize the deep respect and honor America owes to the Heritage Families. However, they are not the full extent of the Heritage Family Memorial. A series of iron silhouettes and a split rail fence between the granite obelisks and the woods surrounding Warrior Memorial Park further symbolize the way of life that the Heritage Families sacrificed for the sake of our nation.

THE FUTURE

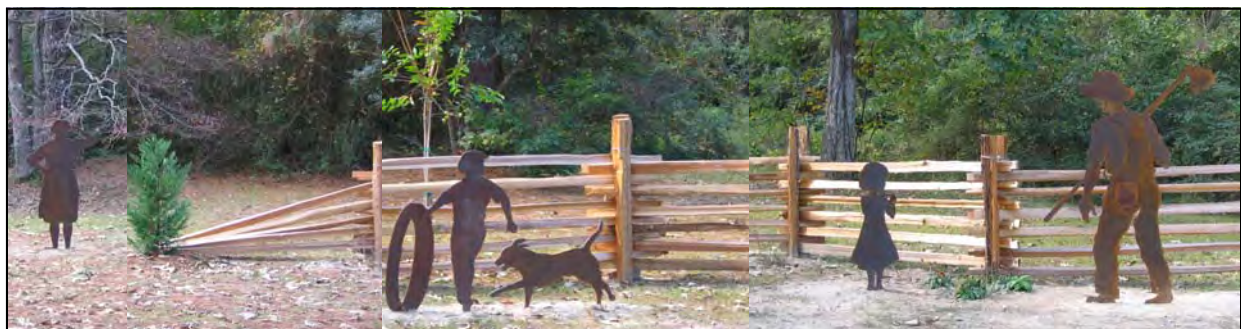
Fort Polk’s Heritage Project has restored connections between area residents and their historic lands. However, the benefits of this project extend beyond community relations. Soldiers training on Fort Polk share a connection with the Heritage Families as never before. Both the Soldiers and Heritage Families understand what it means to make deep personal sacrifices to ensure the safety of America. Through this common bond with the Heritage Families, Soldiers training on Fort Polk have a surrogate family sharing true kinship and an appreciation for the hardships endured for a common cause: the sanctity and security of America.

America’s Soldiers truly understand what it means to sacrifice personal needs for the greater good of our nation and thus have a deep empathy for the sacrifices the Heritage Families made. The Heritage Project benefits the military mission of Fort Polk because troops training on the Heritage Family lands are motivated and inspired by what ordinary Americans sacrificed for the sake of their country.

Plans for the future include honoring and capturing the oral histories of the troops who have trained at Fort Polk in preparation for combat in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. Perhaps future reunions of these veterans will be held in conjunction with Heritage Day, bringing together the families whose land was used to train our soldiers and the families who protected this nation, bringing full circle the history of this land we call Fort Polk.

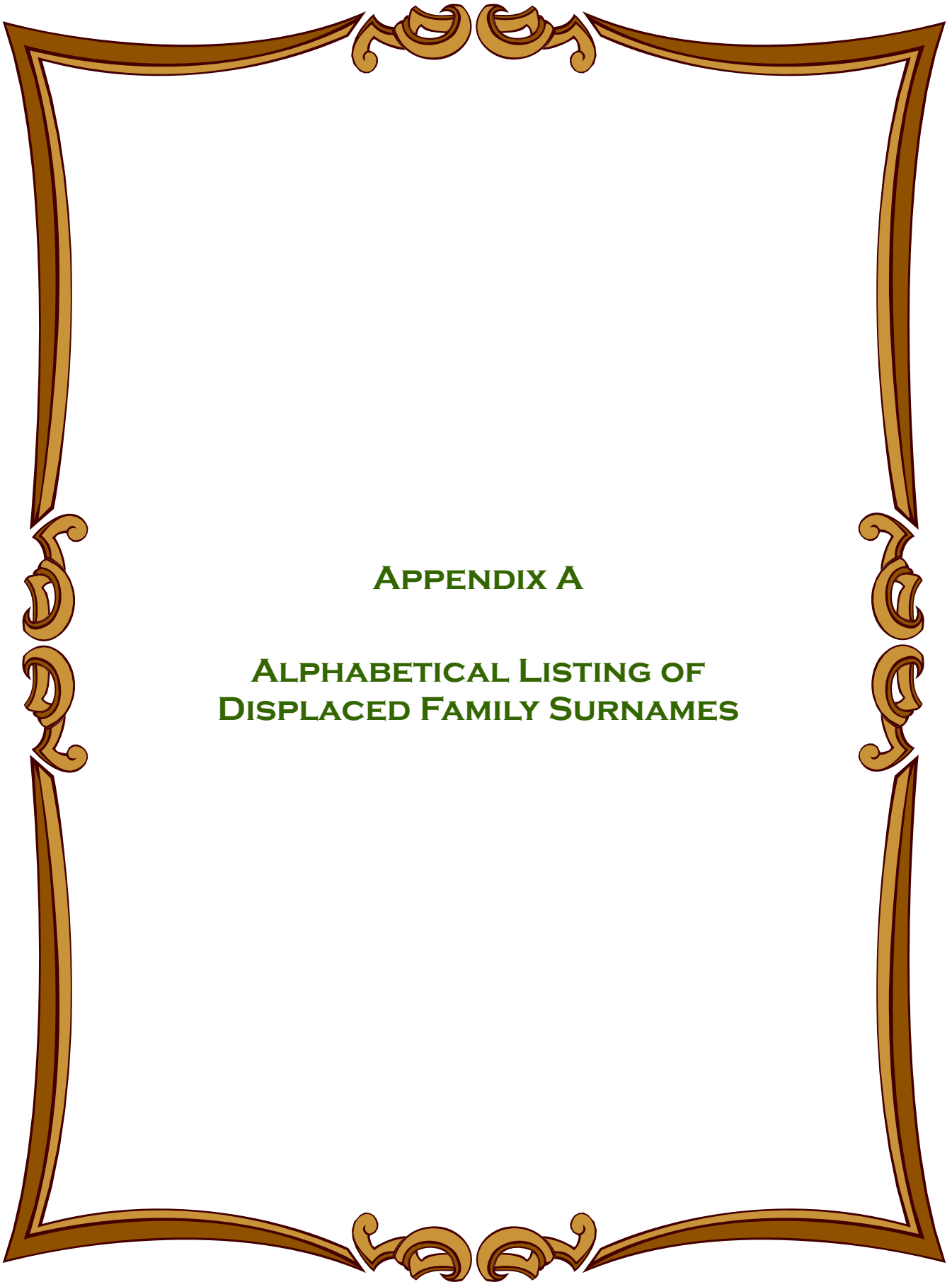


MG Bolger shakes hands with James Jeter, Heritage Family member.



Fort Polk Cultural Resources personnel harvested the wood, hand split it, and constructed the split rail fence. They then designed the silhouettes, drawing inspiration from an historic photograph of the H.E. Self homeplace. After the entire Heritage Project Team voted unanimously in favor of the silhouette design, a local Fort Polk employee and iron worker constructed the final silhouettes.





APPENDIX A

**ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF
DISPLACED FAMILY SURNAMES**

Camp Polk Families

Adams	Brown	Dowden	Grandmougin
Allied	Burke	Duckworth	Grandy
Anding	Burnett	Echols	Grass
Armstrong	Burns	Eddleman	Green
Arnold	Burton	Elliott	Gunter
Ashmore	Cakes	Ferguson	Haight
Austin	Calcote	Fletcher	Hall
Bailey	Calhoun	Floyd	Hancock
Banks	Carlock	Ford	Hardin
Bankston	Carr	Fowler	Haymon
Bass	Carrol	Funderburk	Haynes
Behan	Carter	Gerguson	Hicks
Bethune	Cavanaugh	Gill	Hinson
Blackman	Cooper	Gish	Hoffpauir
Blatock	Craft	Glass	Honeycut
Bloodsworth	Cryer	Glasscock	Howard
Blue	Cudd	Goetzmon	Hudgens
Boone	Davis	Goines	Huggins
Boyd	Dear	Goings	Hunt
Brack	Deason	Goodwin	Hyde
Bridges	Deckeize	Gourney	Jackson
Brister	Dixon	Graham	James



Camp Polk Families (continued)

Jeane	McInnis	Page	Scarborough
Jeter	McKee	Palmer	Schaeffer
Johnson	McKu	Pate	Scobee
Jones	McLean	Pelt	Self
Jordan	McMullen	People	Sellers
Keller	McNully	Perkins	Shankle
King	Mitchell	Petre	Sharp
Knox	Monk	Phillips	Shaver
LaCaze	Morris	Pitre	Shell
LeBleu	Morrison	Poe	Singletary
Leblue	Munso	Polson	Sliman
Lee	Musgrove	Powell	Smith
Legg	Nalde	Prewitt	Snell
Lewis	Nash	Ranzes	Spears
Looke	Nessmith	Reagan	Spiller
Lyons	Netherland	Reed	Sporn
Maddox	Nolan	Roberts	Stephens
Martin	Nolde	Rowzee	Stevens
McCoullough	Oakes	Sandel	Stewart
McDaniel	Odom	Sanders	Strocher
McDonald	Owen	Sarver	Swain
McElveen	Owers	Scarber	Thompson



Camp Polk Families (continued)

Thorton Woodworth

Tinsley Woosley

Tolbert Word

Turner Young

Varnell

Vernell

Wadsworth

Walker

Ward

Watson

Watts

Weeks

Weldon

Welsh

West

White

Whitley

Willis

Wilson

Wingate

Wisby

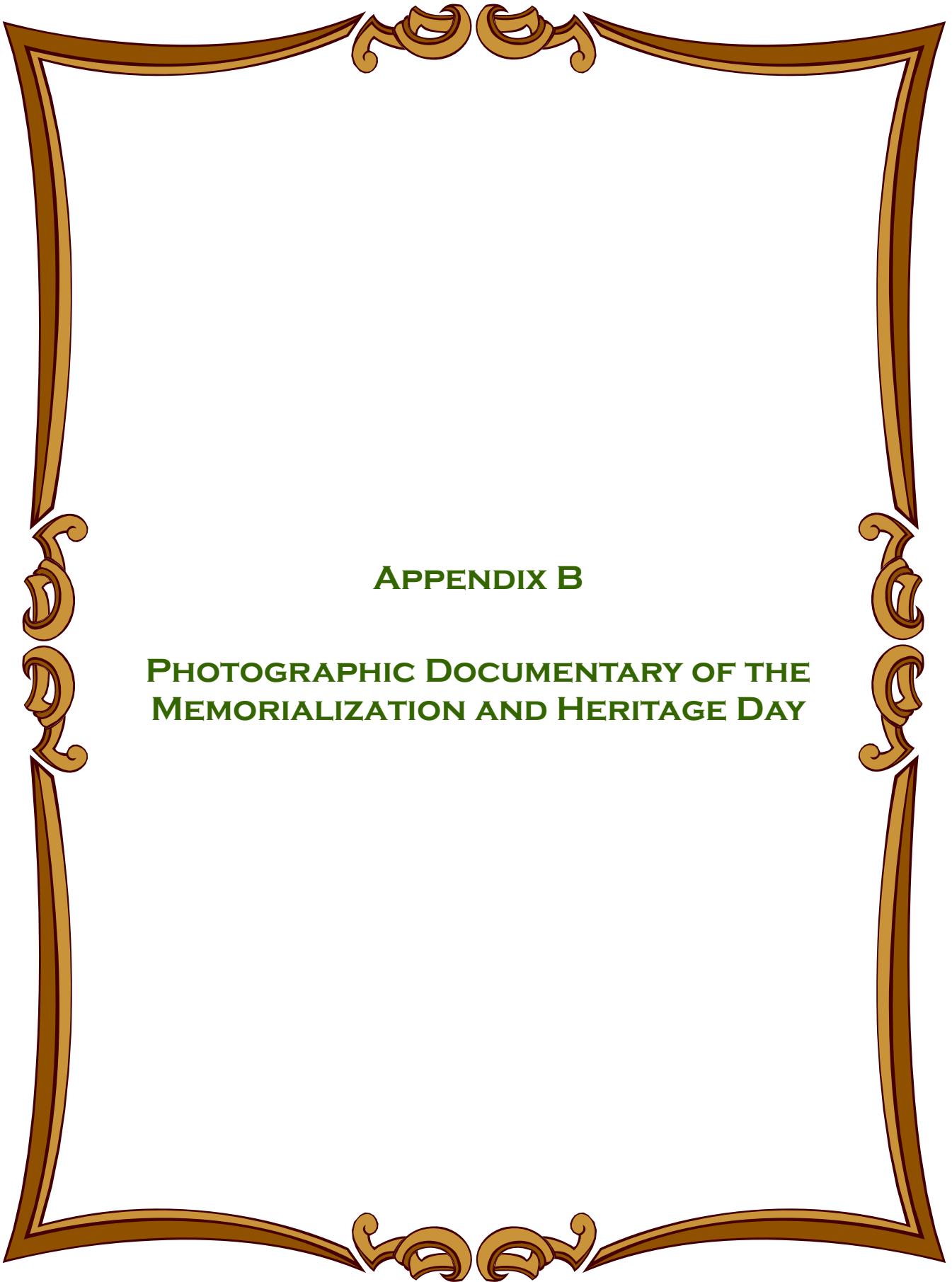
Woods



Peason Ridge Families

Behan	McDaniel	Snell
Bennett	McInnis	Spears
Bridges	Merryman	Spies
Brown	Mitchell	Stephenson
Browning	Moore	Stewart
Cain	Norger	Thompson
Carter	O'Meara	Walker
Carver	Owers	West
Chambers	Owners	White
Curtis	Page	
Dowden	Pate	
Jones	Pruitt	
Frazier	Reagan	
Grant	Reeves	
Hamilton	Rukas	
Haynes	Sandel	
Henderson	Sandell	
Hodges	Sanders	
Hughes	Scott	
Lanier	Shell	
Mason	Simmons	
McCollough	Smith	





APPENDIX B

**PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY OF THE
MEMORIALIZATION AND HERITAGE DAY**



Registering for Heritage Day tours



Hall/Brack/Chaney Family Exhibit



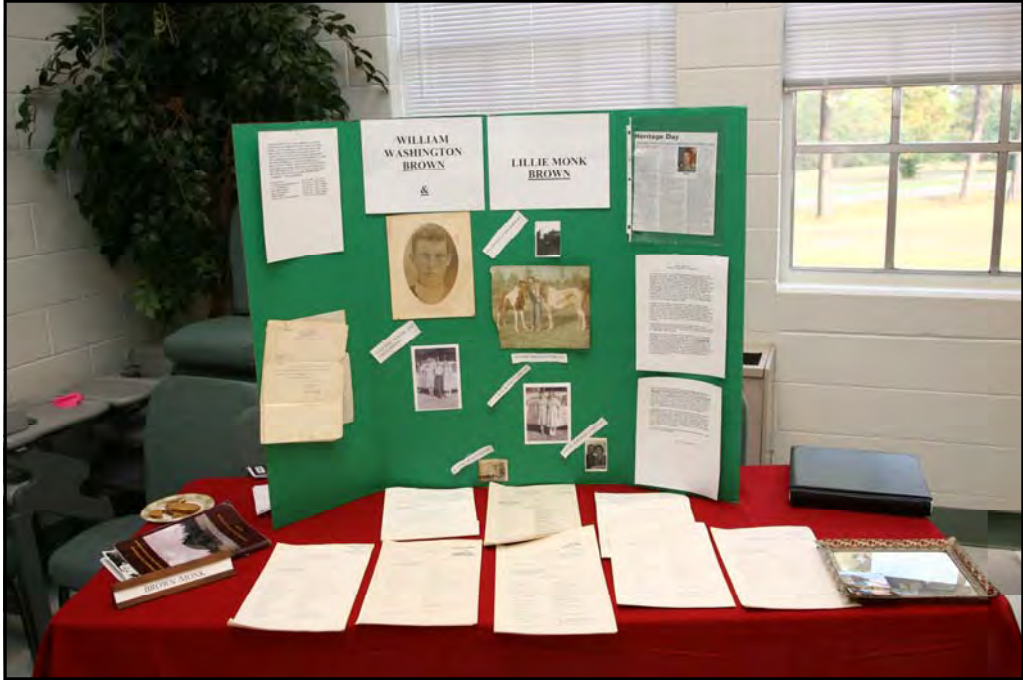


Peason Ridge memorabilia



Peason Ridge memorabilia





Brown Family Exhibit



Reconnecting with old friends





Cryer/Whitley Family Exhibit



Louisiana Maneuvers Exhibit





Convocation



COL Sage addresses the convocation





Ms. Boley, USFS, addresses the convocation



MG Bolger addresses the convocation





Dr. Larry Monk, NSU, COL David Sage, Fort Polk Garrison Commander, and Ms. Boley, USFS, after signing the MOU



Historic photos are scanned to become part of the Fort Polk collection





Perusing historic photographs



MG Bolger and Heritage Family members walk to Warrior Memorial Park





Aerial view of the Heritage Family monument



Obelisk honoring Peason Ridge families





Iron silhouettes and split rail fence at Warrior Memorial Park





Jeane family



Haymon family





Fred Cryer





Crowds gather prior to dedication of the Heritage Family Memorial



COL Sage addresses the attendees





MG Bolger and COL Sage dedicate the Heritage Family Memorial



Fort Polk Heritage Choir sings "America the Beautiful"





MG Bolger poses with stonemasons Steve Lora & Willie Self



COL Sage poses with Heritage Family members





Cemetery tour



Cemetery tour



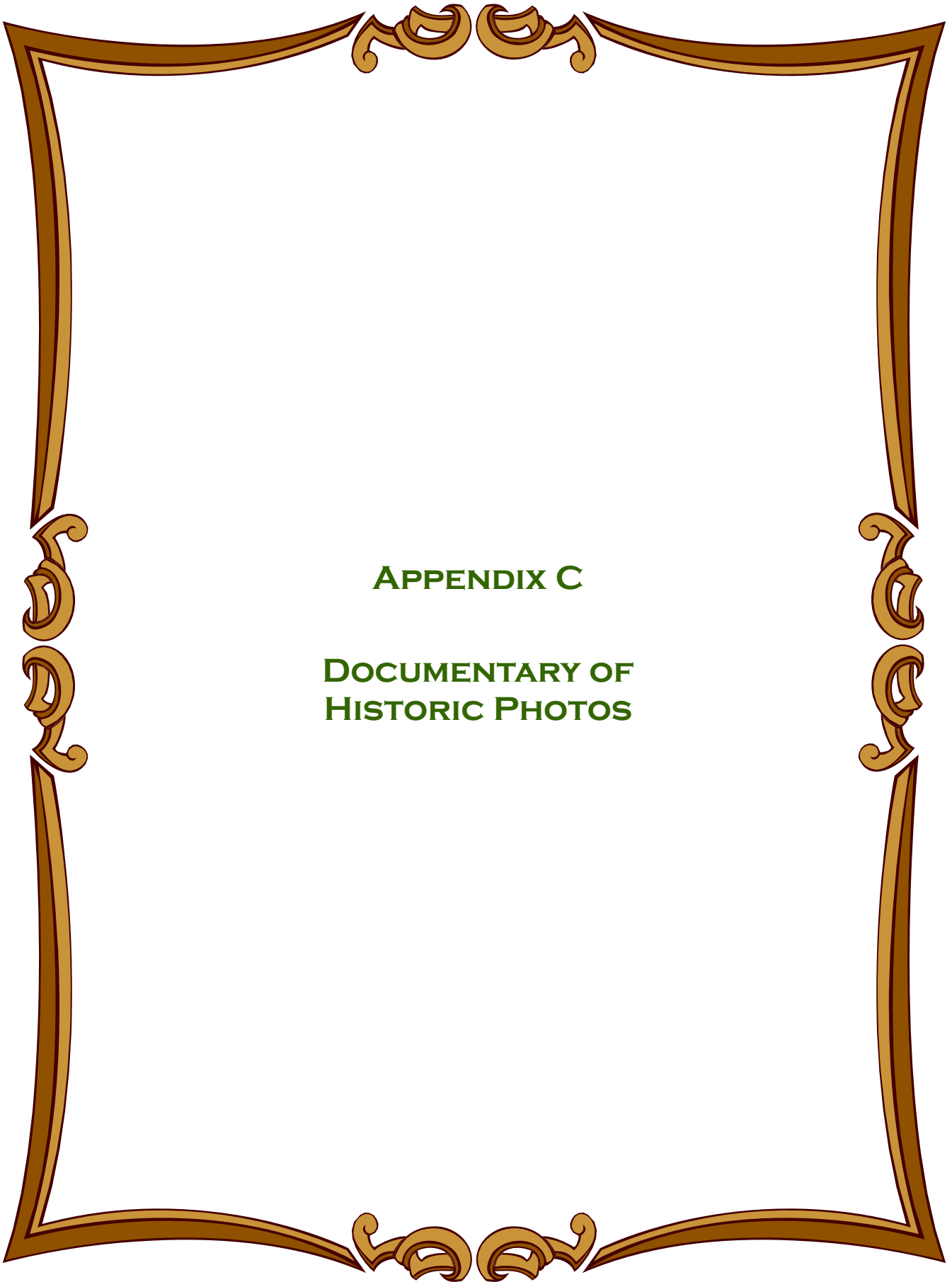


Capturing oral histories



Placing a sign along the Fort Polk Heritage Trail





APPENDIX C

**DOCUMENTARY OF
HISTORIC PHOTOS**

Homestead Photographs



Clint White Homestead



James Bass Homestead





Ollie Kile Homestead



H.E. Self Homestead





Unknown Homestead



Albert Jefferson Cryer Homestead





Oscar Calcote Homestead



W.C. Johnson Homestead





Azzie Haymon Homestead



Martha Legg Homestead





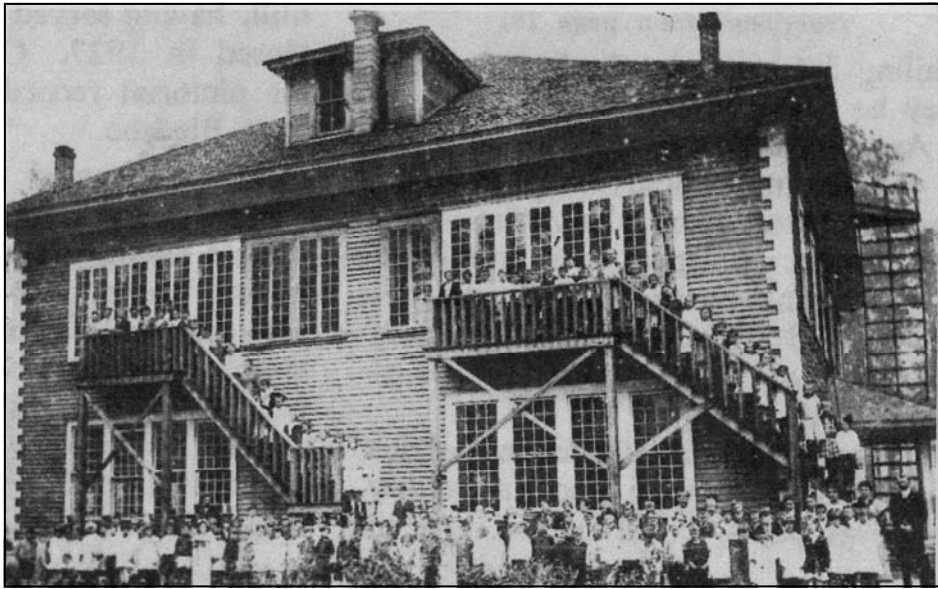
Haymon-Hester Homestead



Davis Missionary Baptist Church



Church & School Photographs



Fullerton School



Hope Church





Whiskachitta School



SLAGLE FIFTH GRADE, 1928-29:
 The teacher in the rear is Miss Estes Leach (Mrs. Tommy Warford).
 First row: 1, Austin Johnson, 2 Frank Simmons, 3 Winston Johnson, 5 Pauline Smith.
 Second row: 1 Marie Pollard, 2 Marquite Stegall, 3 _____ McMahon, 4 Gussie Gill, 5 Hazel Bass, 6 Mildred Peavy.
 Third row: 1 Woodrow McDaniel, 2 Mildred Pollard, 3 George Gordy, 5 Leslie Spurgeon, 6 Carl Morrison, 7 Willie Stephens, 8 Everette Stephens.
 Fourth row: 1 Bob Peavy, 3 Roy Cooley, 4 Barney Ball, 7 Juanita Clark, 8 Lorene Hall.

Slagle School





Zion Hill Church



Red Hill Church





Carpenter Crew



Turpentine Still



Heritage Family Photographs

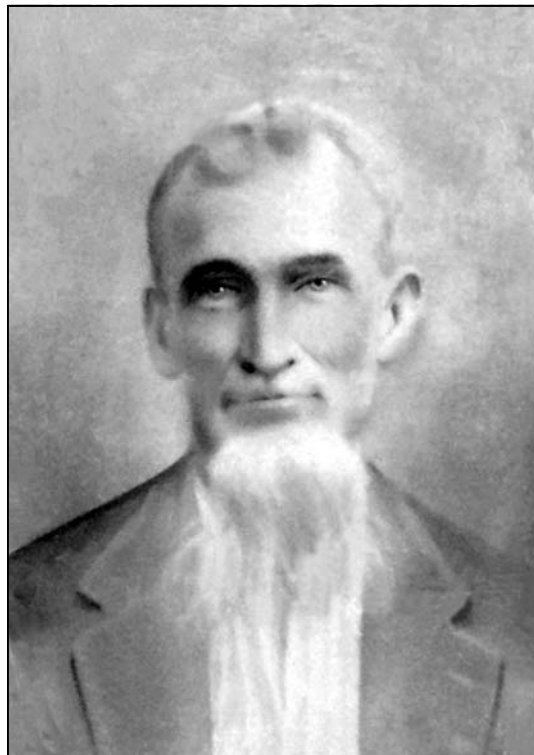


Mr. & Mrs. Allison Phillips



Allison Phillips & red wolf





Christopher Columbus Whitley



Marrion Monroe Whitley





Polly Ann Wisby Bass & Alice Bass



Ed Jeter





Mary & Archie Singletary,
Martha Watson Perkins,
baby Rose Jeter,



The Jeter Family





Homer Craft holding
Linda Sue Gregory



Dennis Lee Jeter holding
Rosie Jeter





George Cryer



Laura Ann Cryer & Virgie





Elijah Calhoun & Stella Bass



Lynn & Vernon Bass





Polly Ann Wisby Bass & Frank Bass

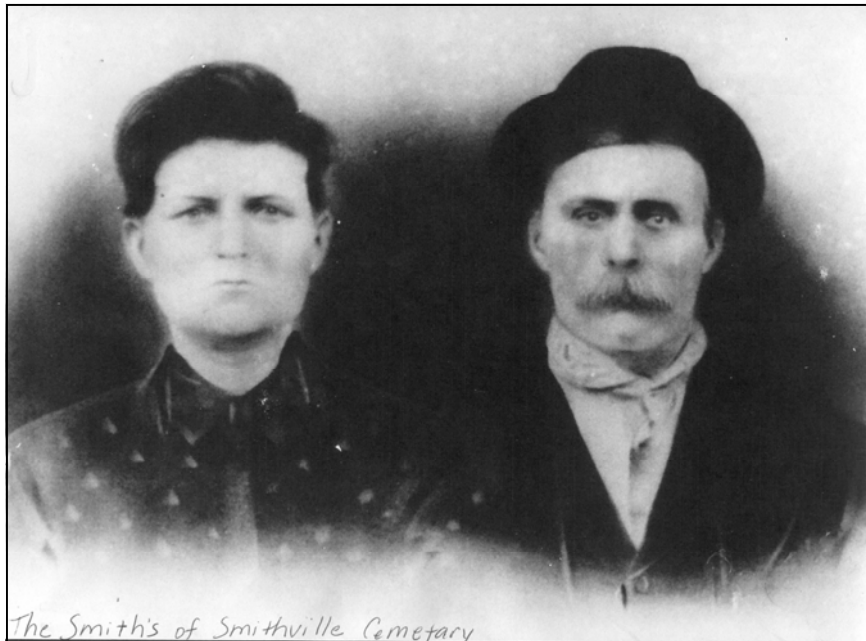


Maydella, Versie & Vernon Bass



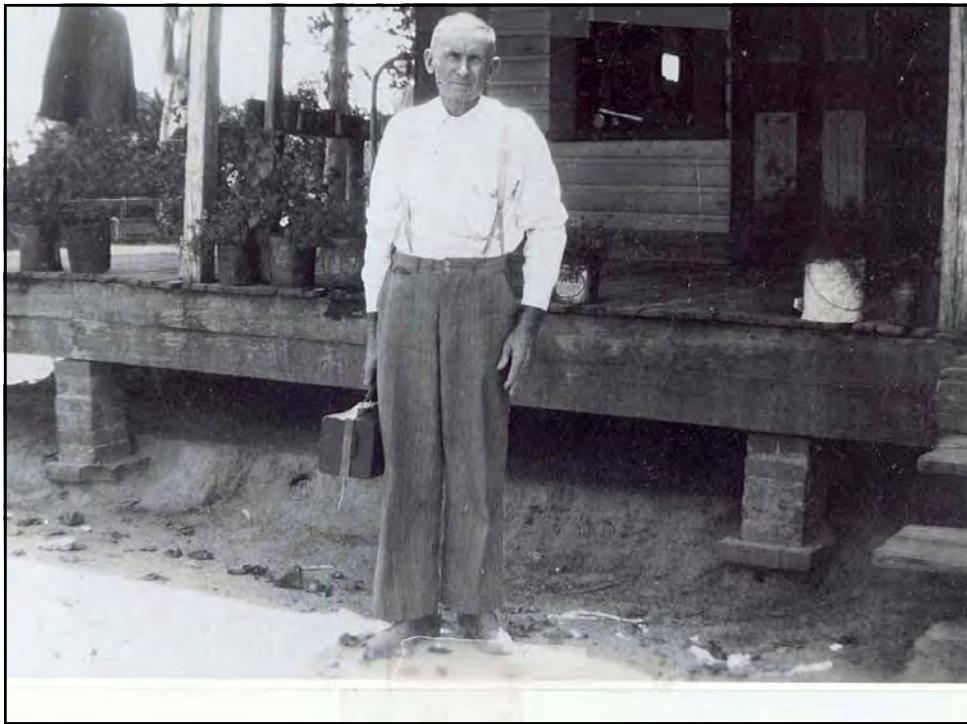


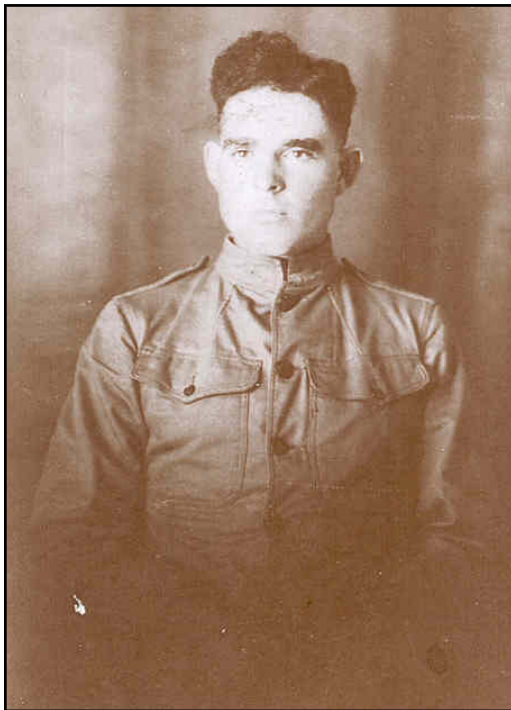
Missouri Elizabeth Whitley Cryer & William Riley Cryer



George Washington & Martha Smith













Identification Pass
CAMP POLK
LOUISIANA

AGE **17**
HEIGHT **60** INS.
WEIGHT **106**
EYES **GREY**
HAIR **BROWN**



No. **16748**

NAME **ORINE M SWEAT**
ADDRESS **FULLERTON, LA.**
EMPLOYED BY **QUARTERMASTER LAUNDRY**

EDWIN S. BURT
Lt. Col. INFANTRY,
PROVOST MARSHAL



