

Written In Stone

By Sherry Johnston

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Coon Hill

Chumuckla, Coon Hill, Florida town and Pace—what do these communities in NW Florida have to do with Conecuh County? Many of our settlers from Conecuh, Covington, Escambia and Monroe Counties left either before the WBTS or immediately afterward to settle near the springs in Santa Rosa County. Chumuckla is an Indian word meaning “healing waters” and it was the mineral springs in the area that gave Chumuckla and Chumuckla Springs their names and most possibly, their early fortunes. The town was once centered at Coon Hill near the springs, but is now east of the school at CR 197. A farming community, Coon Hill was settled circa 1820, the center for early timber developments in the Santa Rosa area of NW FL. As settlers from Conecuh began to migrate into the area, they found family members already established working in the timber companies springing up in the area, as well as the off-shoot businesses such as turpentine camps; stave and lumber mills. The earliest timber settlement of the area was at Coon Hill, not far from the original Chumuckla Indian village. Creek beds were channeled into flumes to float logs down to the Escambia River. Over time, land became available for other crops such as cotton. The main cotton mill established at Coon Hill still stands today, though it is unrecognizable with additions of sheet metal covering and protecting the old structure.

This past Sunday, October 28, 2007, in the Historic Coon Hill Cemetery, folks gathered round the tombstones for an Open House/Fish Fry Dinner to celebrate the completion of the Coon Hill Cemetery Restoration. The cemetery had suffered several hits of vandalism over the past few years, and the cemetery committee had undertaken a vast effort to restore the cemetery, preserving it for the future generations of descendants of these early settlers. Hundreds of cars led into the cemetery with shuttle service provided to bring folks to the gate, where they stood in line for delicious catfish and mullet and all the trimmings. This cemetery is known to be the final resting places of 2 senators, 2 circuit riding preachers, 15 war veterans, 2 tax assessors, 3 postmasters and many others. Names found here that are also found in Conecuh include Campbell, Davis, Diamond, Ezell, Hart, Howell, Lee, Mayo, McCaskill, McDavid, McMillan, Pyburn, Reynolds, and Williams.

For contributing to the restoration of Coon Hill Cemetery, send your donations to Coon Hill Burial Assn. Trustees, c/o Alvin H. Enfinger, 9487 Chumuckla Springs Road, Jay, FL 32565.