

Destruction To Rebirth : How The Civil War Affected The Chrisawn Family

By Paul G. Chrisawn II, February 2012

David Chrisawn was born around 1796 in North Carolina. He was one of eight children of Andrew Chrisawn, a revolutionary war veteran who fought at Kings Mountain, Camden, Eutaw Springs, Charleston and Guilford. His mother was Lucy Sims Chrisawn. His parents were married in Orange County North Carolina. Andrew lived in Surry County North Carolina before the war, but was awarded land for his war service in Burke County. (presently McDowell). Andrew died in 1824, followed by his mother on November 1, 1843.

By 1820, he and his wife, Mary, were in Buncombe County North Carolina and soon he would make his way to Washington County, Tennessee (presently Unicoi). David and Mary had two children, Burton and Rebecca, both of whom were born around 1820.

By 1850, David and Mary were well settled in what is now the Coffee Ridge area of Unicoi County, Tennessee. Another family, the Foster's, lived there and whom become very close to the Chrisawn's. The patriarch of the Foster family, Thomas, owned large amounts of land in the area and had several children. Two of his children, Kennedy Kan and Mary "Polly" became spouses of Burton and Rebecca Chrisawn respectively. An 1850 census record showed David and Mary Chrisawn living near the home of Burton, his wife Mary Foster Chrisawn and their three children, Rebecca, David, and Mary. Also next door was Kennedy Foster and his wife Rebecca Chrisawn Foster and several of their children.

David died sometime soon after 1850 and talk of war was in the land. The mountain counties in the area were divided as to which side to support. Burton and Mary supported the Confederates.. And were soon to move to Yancey County North Carolina where there seemed to be more support for the Southern cause. Kennedy and Rebecca would remain in Tennessee in support of the Union as would Burton and Rebecca's mother Mary.

By 1860, Burton and Mary relocated to the South Toe area of Yancey County, North Carolina with their 7 children. Burton was over 40 years old but he enlisted in the Confederate army in 1863. At least two of Kennedy and Rebecca's children, Thomas and Kennedy Jr. enlisted in the Union army. It must have been awful for Mary Chrisawn, now a widow, to fathom her son Burton fighting for the gray, and two grandsons, fighting for the blue. The conflict destroyed this family. No record exists that Burton or Mary ever returned to Unicoi County. All soldiers involved from the family at least survived the war.

Rebecca Chrisawn died around 1874 and Kennedy remarried. Burton Chrisawn died in 1881. Mary Foster Chrisawn survived at least until 1900. In a census record for that year in Yancey County, She is alive, in her 70's and is a mother of eleven, eight of which were still living.

Sadly, Mary Chrisawn, widow to David and mother to Burton and Rebecca, probably had to endure the pain of outliving her husband and children. She was alive at age eighty five in 1880 still living in Coffee Ridge ironically with her grandson Thomas who fought for the Union army and could have met her son Burton face to face on the battlefield.

The children of Kennedy and Rebecca Foster endured and more members of the Foster family were born. The Foster family has continued to grow and descendants of Kennedy and Rebecca exist today. I am Paul Chrisawn and a 4G grandson of David and Mary Chrisawn. I am descended from a son of Burton and Mary Foster Chrisawn, Leander Columbus Chrisawn. From Burton and Mary's eleven children, At least fifty more Chrisawn family members were born. The family remains alive today because of them. Burton, Mary, and many of their children are buried at Chrisawn cemetery in Yancey county.

Kennedy and Rebecca lie in rest in Kennedy Kan Foster cemetery in Coffee Ridge more than likely with David and Mary Chrisawn. Death records for them cannot be found. I have taken the time to locate and attempt to maintain these burial grounds of my family. I would like to encourage other descendants of these families to do the same. Of course without them, none of us would be here. I have recorded this story for my children so that they can pass on the history of our families, lest it be forgotten. Family.. past, present and future.. Will continue to mean the world to me.

