

THE EXAMPLE OF DR. NEHEMIAH BEARDEN

Dr. Nehemiah Bearden set an example to be followed. He was one of the great frontier doctors of the 19th century. His concern for others was not only reflected in his work as a doctor, but also as he compassionately took people into his home. Many historical records in the Dawson County Courthouse point to his concern for others. In addition, there are many property transactions in Lumpkin and Dawson County, Georgia that indicate that he was a prosperous man.

In 1818, Ansel Bearden and wife Georgia Leumel, became parents to two twin sons, Nehemiah Bearden and Jeremiah Leonard Bearden in north Georgia. The census records show that Ansel and wife Georgia were from South Carolina and had several other children. When Nehemiah was about 5 years old, his mother died. His father Ansel soon remarried to Jane Jordan. On June 1, 1836, Nehemiah married Cynthia Smith (born in South Carolina) in Lumpkin County, Georgia. Brother Jeremiah Leonard Bearden married Juliet Smith (sister to Cynthia). Grandparents Richard and Sarah Bearden moved to Dawson County Georgia in 1843. They joined the New Hope Baptist Church on September 2, 1843. In that year Nehemiah may have met his grandparents for the first time. Richard Bearden had fought in the Revolutionary War. After that he lived in Kentucky and then in several communities in Tennessee most of which bordered the Tennessee river.

Miss Emma Gober, granddaughter of Nehemiah Bearden, relates the following family tradition: Dr. Nehemiah Bearden was known to help others get well. He used many herbal remedies in his medical practice. He had a doctor book that he used as a reference, "Shelton's American Medicine". He also used an iron mortar and pestle to grind up the herbs that he administered to his patients. Both the book and the mortar and pestle were passed on to his son-in-law, Hockenhull M. Gober, and today they still remain in the possession of family members. In the 1890's, it was thought that Nehemiah Bearden along with family members moved to Cleburne County, Alabama. Family members who went to Alabama (and children of the following) included: Hockenhull McPherson Gober and wife Marcina Bearden (daughter of Nehemiah), William Milton Bearden (son of Nehemiah) and wife Martha Blackburn, David Washington Pelfrey and wife Rebecca Alma Bearden (daughter of William Milton Bearden), and David Wehunt and his wife, Melinda. Two of the children of David and Melinda Wehunt, William and Mary Ann Wehunt, married two children of William Milton Bearden, Sarah Cathern Bearden and William Leonard Bearden. Hockenhull M. Gober, in his writings wrote that he resigned as being pastor of the Congregational Church in Dawson County on November 12, 1895 and moved to Cleburne County, Alabama. Family tradition relates that Nehemiah got sick and died while in Cleburne County.

The following legal documents have been found to verify the family traditional story:

1. Marriage license, December 23, 1895 in Cleburne County to J. N. Bearden to Lenora B. Fields. Marriage held on 25 Dec at the residence of W.T. Fields. This is obviously, Jessie Nathaniel Bearden (son of Milton) and wife Norah Fields. There are many references to the Fields family in the minutes of the New Hope Baptist Church. One wonders if William Thomas Fields and family came with the group from Dawson County to Cleburne County, or had moved there earlier.
2. The Dawson County Courthouse records the deed of Milton Bearden of Cleburne County, Alabama selling 80 acres of land on September 26, 1896 for \$100 to J.J. Hearben.
3. In the 1900 census records of Winston County, the records provides the names of all of the children of Milton and Martha Bearden. The record shows place of birth for all of their children to be Georgia, except for Rose I. Bearden, born in Jun 1893 in Alabama, and Wilt F Bearden, born in Mar 1895 in Alabama.
4. No property records were found in Cleburne County Court House that showed any purchase of land of the families.

Hocknelhull M. Gober in his notebook wrote of the places that he lived. They are:

1. First move, to the Crossroads Mines, nine miles north of Dawsonville, Ga. Dec 28, 1875.
 2. Second move, to the fork of Amicolla Creek Junior R.O, Nov 1883.
 3. Third move, to Arbosochee (Cleburne County, Ala) Nov, 1895.
 4. Fourth move, to Haleyville, Alabama, Nov 1896.
 5. Fifth move, to (Mitchel Place) Amos P.O. (Winston County).
 6. Sixth move, to Amos P.O., Dec 4, 1898.
 7. Seventh move, to Double Springs, county seat of Winston County, Dec 3, 1911.
 8. Eight move, to Fall City (Hilton Place) Aug 18, 1921.
 9. Ninth move, to Black Pond (Fall City P.O.) Dec 4, 1924
- Lattie Esther married Nov 28, 1925, broke up home, and went to Victor's Nov 29, 1925. Christine Ivey was born Feb 20, 1927. Lattie Ivey died Feb 24, 1927.

Records of cemeteries of Dawson County and Cleburne County were checked to determine the location of the graves of Nehemiah and Cynthia Bearden. The compiled records of both counties did not produce their names, which leads one to believe that they were buried in unmarked graves. Nehemiah Bearden would have been 77 in 1895. In the family graveyard where Richard Bearden is buried, his son William also has a marker there. There are about five more graves that are marked with stones, but no name. This family graveyard is said to be on the old homeplace of William Bearden that is

on an old dirt road, located just off of Wehunt road. William Bearden died before the prime of his life and the census records of 1850 show that Richard and Sarah Bearden lived in the same house with William's widow, Fanny Bearden. Richards' grave was not marked until the Veterans Administration placed a tombstone there in 1982. Perhaps Richard's wife, Sarah, and Nehemiah's wife, Cynthia, are in graves in the family cemetery that are marked with stone rocks.

Mr. Plessy Bearden tells that when he was a boy before World War I, he used to hoe corn in fields near the Bearden family cemetery. On the opposite side of Wehunt road from the Bearden family cemetery, is the home of William Leroy (Pete) Bearden. Pete tells how he recently bought the home and farm from Max Wehunt. Pete further explains that the farm was owned by the Wehunt family for several generations back. Pete also tells that there is a big waterfall in nearby Gilmer County that is commonly called, "Bearden Falls". Gilmer County is where David W. Pelfrey originates. About a half-mile from the Bearden family cemetery is the New Hope Baptist Church. In the church property is a large cemetery with more Bearden tombstones than in other place than I have ever seen. Across the road from the New Hope Baptist Church is another road that goes south. About two and half miles down that road leads to Bearden Road and several Bearden home's. It is assumed that all of these Beardens are descendant's of Richard Bearden.

Ansel Bearden, father of Nehemiah, was a founding member (1834) and Clerk of the Goshen Baptist Church. The early minutes and history of the church are recorded in the handwriting of Ansel Bearden. When nearby New Hope Baptist Church was founded in 1842, Ansel Bearden and wife, Jane Jordan, were founding members. Ansel also served as Clerk of the New Hope Baptist Church. No doubt son Nehemiah also actively attended and participated in church. In the 1900's another descendant of Richard Bearden, Boyd Bearden served as Clerk of the New Hope Baptist Church. His grandson, Ted Bearden, is the current operator of the Bearden Funeral Home in the biggest town of Dawson County, Dawsonville. Other descendants of Richard Bearden, still remain in Dawson County and neighboring Lumpkin County.

The character qualities of a frontier doctor, no doubt included caring and compassion. Perhaps these qualities are also reflected when on May 15, 1866, Nehemiah Bearden signed a document at the Dawson County Courthouse to become the guardian of John B. Chumly. The document said in part "The within Bound Nehemiah Bearden promised to take the Guardianship of the said John B. Chumly, and feed clothe and care for him during his minority, and to give said John B. Chumly, a common English Education, and when said minor

arrives at his majority, to give him a horse, saddle and bridle, and two good suits of clothes."

In the book, "Five Early Settlers of Palo Pinto & Parker Counties Texas", Deedie McIntire, points out that in the census of 1870, 8 year old John Sheriff was living in the home of Nehemiah Bearden. In 1880, a 24 year old "nephew", Ansel Sheriff, was living with him. The courthouse records of Parker County, Texas, show that the heirs of the estate of Ansel Bearden, included Nehemiah Bearden of Dawson County, and Jinsey Sheriff of Lumpkin County. This suggests that a sister of Nehemiah Bearden married a man named Sheriff. Again the qualities of care and compassion are reflected as Nehemiah takes others in to live in his home. Malissa Bearden (sister to Nehemiah) and her husband, Rev William Brashears were said to have opened their home to, and care for young girls who were from distressed families in Texas. Malissa Bearden, Rev William Brashears, along with her parents, Ansel and Jane Bearden, as well as 12 other of their children, left Dawson County moved to Texas in 1859. The Rev William Brashears served as the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Santo, Texas.

The following land transactions were recorded in the Dawson County Courthouse:

Feb 25, 1875, Nehemiah and Cynthia Bearden sell land for \$150 to Wm M. Turner, 30 acres of lot 966, 30 acres of 1009, 30 acres of 1008, 30 acres of 1007, 1/11 of lot 939, and 940 and 965.

July 29, 1880, Nehemiah Bearden purchased 40 acres of land, lot number 1148 of the 5th district. \$25.

July 26, 1884, Nehemiah Bearden sells 40 acres of land for \$100 to H.M. Gober (son-in-law), lot number 1216 of the 5th district.

November 24, 1885, Nehemiah Bearden swaps to H.M. Gober 5 acres of land of lot 1148.

September 26, 1896, Milton Bearden from the State of Alabama, Cleburne County sells 80 acres for \$100. Land of the 5th district, lot 1149, 35 acres of lot 1148, 5 acres of lot 1165. Note: Nehemiah Bearden bought the lot 1148 on July 29, 1880, but there is no recorded transaction of transferring the land to Milton Bearden.

Other transactions of land of Nehemiah Bearden are recorded in the Lumpkin County Courthouse prior to 1860 before Dawson County was formed out of Lumpkin.

Nehemiah Bearden did not make it to Wintson County as his descendants did in the late 1890's. The Bearden's, Pelfrey's, Wehunt's, Gober's, and Field's families made it

to Winston County to establish new farms and a new life. Today, there only remains a few alive today of the older generation who are the grandchildren of Nehemiah. They recount stories that they heard about their families coming from Georgia and that they heard their parents talk about a man named Dr. Nehemiah Bearden. The courthouse records of Dawson and Lumpkin County record some of the history of this great man. Dr. Nehemiah Bearden leaves a few hundred descendants a common heritage. First, we visualize a determined, strong willed group of people that are generally slender, blonde haired, and blue-eyed, and who in the most part attend church and attempt to obey the Bible. The Christian heritage of his father, Ansel, is more clearly recorded in the churches of which he served in the leadership and as clerk. Surely, John B. Chumly, John Sheriff, and Ansel Sheriff would express their gratitude to a man named Nehemiah and his wife Cynthia who volunteered to serve them as their father and mother and for providing them meals, clothes, and a house where they could live. The memories are gone of the man who helped sick people get well and served them as the local frontier doctor. All that remains is his doctor book, "Shelton's American Medicine" and an old forgotten mortar and pestle that he used to grind up medical herbs for those that were sick. Dr. Nehemiah and Cynthia Bearden set an example to be imitated for the future generations. As we look forward, we see behind us the example of a man who followed the ways of God.

Compiled by:
Vern Bearden
2581 Old 431 Hwy
Owens Cross Rds, Al 35763
205-725-4792

Know all men by these presents, that
 Dawson County } we Nehemiah Beardon, and Thompson
 Colcomby, are held and firmly bound unto the Ordinary of
 Said County in the sum of two hundred dollars, for the payment
 of which we bind ourselves, and heirs, and assigns, jointly
 and severally, firmly, by these presents, Sealed with our seal
 and dated, this May the 15th, 1866.

The condition of the above obligation is such, that John
 B. Chumby a minor child under fourteen years old, of said
 County, has this day been bound to the said Nehemiah Beardon,
 by the Ordinary of said County, now should the said Beardon
 do and perform all the duties of Guardian, to said minor, then
 the above to be void, else to remain of full force and virtue

The day and year above written

Nehemiah Beardon (Seal)
 Thompson Chumby (Seal)

Articles of Indenture

The within Bound Nehemiah Beardon
 promises to take the Guardianship of the said John B. Chumby,
 and feed clothe, and care for him during his minority, and to
 give said John B. Chumby, a common English Education, and
 when said minor arrives at his Majority, to give him a horse,
 saddle, and bridle, and two good suits of cloths.

This May, the 15th, 1866.

Nehemiah Beardon (Seal)

Signed, sealed
 and delivered in
 presence of

Daniel Fowler
 Ordinary of
 Dawson County,