

The Legacy of Ansel Bearden

Ansel Bearden was born around 1788 in South Carolina. A few years prior to his birth his dad, Richard and his uncle John Bearden, Jr. had been away fighting in the Continental Army. He had six other cousins and uncles from South Carolina who had fought in the war as well as his uncle Benjamin from Grandville County, N.C. As a young boy Ansel was fortunate to live near his grandfather, the legendary John Bearden, Sr, and grandmother Lettice Winn Bearden. Grandfather John lived in Apartanburg, South Carolina. He owned a large plantation with several slaves. Lettice Winn Bearden had a brother, Richard Winn who served as a General in the Continental Army and later became Lt. Governor and Congressman from South Carolina. Another brother Minor Winn, Jr. was said to have been the grandfather of General Stonewall Jackson. Ansel had another Bearden relative who had served as sheriff of Greenville County, S.C. Edmond Bearden, Ansel's uncle born in 1740, became a Baptist minister, and had moved to Caldwell County, Ky. in 1799, where he served as a minister. His son John later served as a sheriff. Edmond's grandson John H. Bearden founded Benton, Ky. in nearby Marshall Co. and served as a judge there. He donated 50 acres of land where the county courthouse was built. The main street of Benton was named Bearden Street in his honor. Benjamin, Jr. and Richard Bearden, children of Benjamin Bearden of Grandville County, N.C. moved to Knox County, Tenn. after the Revolutionary War. Marcus de Lafayette Bearden, son of Richard (son of Benjamin, Sr.) was president of the Knoxville and Carolina Railroad, served in the state legislature from Knox County, was sheriff, served as mayor of Knoxville, and he served as a Captain in the Union Army during the War Between the States. The town of Bearden, TN was named after him. Another reflection of how the Beardens were known to have built America is found in the proper name of the present day map of Knox County. It is known as the Bearden Quadrangle Map. Mourning Bearden, daughter of John and Lettice Bearden, married William Smith. He served as a Major in the Continental Army and served in the tradition of public service as did his Bearden relatives and served in the U.S. Congress from S.C. Many other Beardens also served with honor in the legal field. John T. Bearden, while serving as an attorney for the railroad, had the privilege in 1882 of having the town that was laid out by the railroad in Arkansas named, Bearden, in his honor.

The family tradition that has been passed down the generations is that the Beardens came over on a ship with a father and his four sons (or there were five brothers and no father). It was thought that they came from Beardon, England with is near Plymouth. Church records show that Beardons lived in the Beardon community going back to the 13th century. Records of Beardings showed up in Virginia in the 1720's. Francis Bearding was thought to be the The other four pages will be available at the family reunion on October 10.

The Beardens were once a very close family. When William Melton and Martha Bearden moved to Winston County, Alabama in the 1890's, 6 of their children were already married. All of children and son/daughter-in-laws all moved to Winston County with them. A brother and sister of the Wehunts married a brother and sister Bearden, which produced a close set of double first cousins. The next generation were raised together. They all lived close to each other and went to church together. Their children picked cotton, went to school, and played together.

with them. Records show that Jessie was 5 ft, 9, had blue eyes, dark hair and had a fair complexion. In 1865, Jessie Blackburn signed up with the 5th U.S. Calvary out of Chattanooga.

William Melton Bearden had many relatives who fought for the Confederate Army. There was an uncle, William (born 1831), who had moved to Texas with his father, Ansel (born 1788), in 1858. He died in 1863 in Texas in the Beaumont General Hospital. Cause of death was probably yellow fever. From Dawson County there were cousins who fought for the Confederacy. Lists of Civil War Soldiers show that many Beardens were soldiers from Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina. There is a letter in the National Archives by a Union Officer who tells the story of an Ansel Bearden who died as a prisoner of war at Rock Island Arsenal, IL. This Ansel Bearden was from central Alabama and had served in the Confederacy before dying in his early twenties. There was a Bearden family from Tenn. who left in the early part of the war and moved to southern Indiana and Illinois area to avoid fighting in the war. There were Beardens who settled in Kentucky who fought for the Union. Truly this was a war of brother fighting against brother and cousin against cousin.

Nehemiah Bearden and wife Cynitha Smith were the parents of William Melton Bearden (B. 1848) and daughters Melinda (b. 1843), Mary (b. 1844), Martha (b. 1846), Marcenia (b. 1851), Medonia (b. 1853), and Malissa (b. 1860). Nehemiah also took into his home John Sheriff (8 years old in the 1870 census). An Ansel Sheriff, age 24, was living in his home, per the 1880 census. Ansel Sheriff is listed as a nephew, suggesting that Nehemiah had a sister who married a man named Sheriff. A Jinsey Sheriff was listed as a heir to the estate of Ansel B earden (Ansel the father of Nehemiah).

William Melton Bearden with 7 sisters and no brothers no doubt stayed busy around the farm. 1868 was an eventful year for William Melton Bearden. In August his grandfather Ansel, passed away. The next month on September 5th, William Melton, now twenty, married Martha Blackburn. Martha was the daughter of Jessie Blackburn. Apparently Jessie was from Wilkies County, GA. Twelve children were born in the following years. Oldest daughter, Nancy Jane married H. M. Gober, Two of the children, Sarah Cathern and William Leonard Bearden, married to brother and sister William Wehunt and Mary Ann Wehunt. Rebecca Alma Bearden married David Washington Pelfrey. Sintha Caroline Bearden married Olie Washburn. The family must have been clse and got along well. In the early 1890's, the entire family, to include all of the married son and daughter-in-laws, packed up all of their belongings and moved to Alabama.

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The Heritage of William Melton Bearden

It was in June, 1861, William Melton Bearden was thirteen years old. The family had just returned home from the funeral. His great-grandfather, Richard Bearden had just been buried at the age of 101. He was buried in a family cemetery of about 6 or 7 graves on family property off Wehunt Road in Dawson County, Ga. His son William, and wife Sarah, were also buried there. Another 100 years would pass before the Veterans Admin. would place a tombstone on Richard's grave to honor his service in the Revolutionary War. Richard Bearden and wife Sarah had moved to Dawson County, Ga when he was 85. Richard and Sarah left Tennessee to live in the community where four of his sons, William, Ansel, Roland, and Thomas had moved. The four sons were among the founding members of the New Hope Baptist Church which was near the farms that the Beardens lived. Richard's son William died in 1846. Richard and Sarah moved into the same household with William's widow, Fanny and their children.

No doubt William Melton Bearden had a lot of teaching and encouragement by his grandfather Ansel, until 1858 when Ansel and 12 of his children and their children moved to Texas. Richard must have told his grandchildren of the stories of fighting in the Revolutionary War. How he fought with Captain William Smith (uncle by marriage) and his Uncle, General Richard Winn. As a young man Richard bravely fought the British in the Battle of Eutaw Springs. While serving in General Sumpters Brigade, they undertook an operation to take Congaree Fort. After surrounding the fort for two weeks, Colonel Washington and his force joined them for a successful attack. The Sumpter brigade then went on to capture Orangeburg Fort. Richard spent time guarding prisoners at Ankrums. Catching the smallpox put Richard in the Camdom Hospital. A month later Richard had recovered and soon fought against the British in a severe engagement near Charleston. Time in training, in story telling, in encouragement by his grandparents and great-grandparents would be needed by William Melton in the years that followed

Dawson County Georgia supplied many of its sons to the Civil War that had begun in 1861. Dawson County was near several major battles and additionally hosted several minor battles. The State of Georgia continued the call for more and more soldiers. Many of those from Dawson County were Beardens. The taxes grew and became unbearable. There were many of those who did not share the view to support the war and wanted to be left alone. The North organized a band of local men known as Union Guerrillas that supported the North by attacking Confederate supply trains. The South countered by defending their supplies and attacking the Union guerrillas. There were some perilous times in Dawson County as both sides defended their homes from the other side. The Confederate Home guards rounded up union supporters, took their horses, ravished their farms, and arrested soldier deserters. One raid resulted in the arrest and handing of 12 men, one of which was the sheriff of Dawson County. The union guerrillas got revenge by showing the union troops which farms to raid. The problems and bitterness continued until after the war as some revenge killings took place. Two of union guerrillas that supported the North were brothers William (born 1837 and Ansel A. (born 1846. These two brothers were sons of Leonard Jeremiah Bearden and were therefore double first cousins to William Melton Bearden. Two other Bearden cousins who fought in this cause of supporting the union were Roland M. and Nelson Bearden. Jessie Blackburn, another local neighbor served