

OUR FAMILY HISTORY

Noah Tyson, a white slave owner, came to the northern area of Caddo Parish in Louisiana from Alabama around the 1840's. He brought with him Louisa Dunn and their child Richard. Their other four children, Jeff, Mollie, Catherine, and Robert, were born in Louisiana. Noah Tyson owned a large plantation that covered much of what is now the town of Rodessa. Louisa later married Richard Gipson and gave birth to five more children: Hannah, Chester, Augusta, Narciss, and Ludella.

Mollie Tyson, Noah Tyson's and Louisa Dunn's third child, was born in 1849. Not much is known about Molly and her sister and brothers, except they were not slaves. Mollie married George Gipson and they had five children: Madge, Mary Jane, Lou, Oscar, and Artency. Mollie died at a young age from some type of fever. George later married Annie and they had seven children: Ollie, Molly, Cora, Wiley, Nathaniel, Curley, and Wesley. George Gipson was a farmer and he grew most of the crops that grew in that area. Cotton was one of the main crops.

The Caldwell family came from North Carolina to Oklahoma when the Cherokee Nation was forcibly driven from North Carolina. This migration was known historically as the Trail of Tears. The Trail of Tears began in October 1838 and ended in March 1839. Thousands of Cherokee Indians and African Americans were forced to walk with bare feet through the dead of winter into Oklahoma. It is believed that the ancestors of Madison Caldwell were among the survivors of this death march into Oklahoma.

Madison Caldwell was a full-blooded Cherokee Indian. We do not know his Indian name; his father told him to go in the name of Caldwell. Madison Caldwell, who was known as Matt, moved from Oklahoma to Jefferson, Texas. Matt Caldwell met and married Sylvia Virginia, a full-blooded African. Not much is known about Sylvia. It is said that she was very small and dark-skinned and she was a runaway slave. Matt and Sylvia Caldwell had five sons: Pillman, Osborn, Cliston, Eli, and Benjamin.

The Homestead Act, passed by Congress in 1862, allowed any citizen head of a family over twenty-one to obtain land if he built a house and farmed the land for five years. Matt, Sylvia, and four of their sons moved to the Rodessa area of Louisiana in the early 1900's and homesteaded forty acres. He later bought more land. His oldest son, Pillman, remained in Jefferson, Texas.

Matt Caldwell had a cotton gin. He also owned a syrup mill, where pressed sugar cane juice was made into syrup; and a corn mill, a machine that shells and grinds corn into meal. Many people would come from miles around to have these services done. All these things were sold in Matt Caldwell's store. People had to work hard for a living and money was scarce. Many of the goods and services had to be bartered, exchanged for other goods or services.

There was not a school in the area for Black children so Matt Caldwell sold the land for The Cypress School to be built. The Cypress School, for primer through sixth grade, was a one-room schoolhouse, which still stands across the street from the Arkadelphia Baptist Church, the church founded by Madison Caldwell in approximately 1903. The Arkadelphia Baptist Church will soon celebrate its ninety-seventh year.

Osborn Caldwell, Matt and Sylvia Caldwell's second son, met and later married Mary Jane Gipson on July 12, 1900. Mary Jane was George and Molly Gipson's second child. Eli Caldwell, Osborn's brother, met Mary Jane's sister, Artency Gipson, and they were married. Another brother, Cliston, married Mattie Tyson, a cousin of Mary Jane and Artency.

The Pine Valley School serving children from primer to eighth grade was located next to the Antioch Baptist Church. To prevent desegregation of the schools, it was relocated to the Caldwell property on the corner of Myra-Myrtiss and Hosston-Rodessa Roads, acquired from Cliston Caldwell in the 1950's.

They all lived nearby on neighboring farms enjoying the life of an extended family. Osborn and Mary Jane were farmers who grew acres and acres of crops. Some

of the harvest was kept for home use, but most was sold. They also had a syrup mill, and they kept bees for their honey. Eli and Artency had a sawmill where they sold lumber and also made roofs for houses and also owned a syrup mill.

These families worked very hard to make a living for themselves. The wives helped the men with the farming and they canned many of the fruits and vegetables they grew so they would have food during the off-season. The wives would also make clothes for their families during the off-season. The material for these clothes usually came from sacks that were first used to package goods like flour, salt, or rice. With the scraps left over from clothes, these ladies would make quilts to use during the cold winters. Quilting bees were very common during these times. The ladies from neighboring farms would get together to quilt, exchange recipes and the latest local news. Education and a love for God were stressed in these families.

In reminiscing over the past history and astonishing stories of the lives of Eli and Artency Caldwell, it was always known that they were unable to be exposed to a formal education; however, education was one of the main things they stressed. I am grateful for this lesson and proud to share this lesson with my family.

As we enter the millennium, let us not dwell on the past. Let us look with hope to the future. I pray that you will continue to have reunions indefinitely. Our children have a lot to learn from us. May God bless everyone.

Justine Caldwell Brown

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