

Alford Brothers in West Florida

Mrs. Lena Chesnut sent a newspaper article about an Alford family in Florida to Gil Alford on Oct. 18, 1987, from an unnamed, undated paper. The following is from that article.

In the last decade of the 19th century, three Alford brothers moved into northwest Florida. They were John McRae, Sion Agustus, and William Chauncey, sons of Paisley and Martha (McRae) Alford. They were born in Marion County, SC, just across the state line from Robeson Co., NC, which had been the home of their ancestors for several generations.

Robeson County, NC

The first Alford to settle in what was to become Robeson Co. was Jacob, their great-great grandfather, who moved there with his wife Mary (Pace) Alford in 1760. According to Kent Co., Virginia, records, he was born in 1737, the son of Lodowick and Susannah Alford.

Jacob Alford established the first Presbyterian church in the area near the Alfordville community on Ashpole Swamp. The original building was a log structure which was later replaced by a frame building. After it was destroyed by fire in 1850, a much larger church was erected on the site, and it stands today, lovingly restored and kept in repair. Jacob Alford and his wife, as well as many of his descendants, were buried in the cemetery there.

When John, Gus, and Chauncey Alford left their home in SC about 1888, they went to Bulloch Co., GA, to engage in the naval stores business. While the three young men were in GA, they married: Gus in 1890 to Mary Henry of Marion Co., SC; John,

whose first wife died in NC, to Leila Green; and Chauncey in 1895 to Nancy Dekle. Both Leila and Nancy were natives of Bulloch County.

Northwest Florida

Hearing of the vast stands of virgin pines in northwest Florida, the brothers sent Chauncey, the youngest, prospecting in 1896. He settled first in northern Holmes County. His brothers soon followed, John to live in Hartford, Alabama, just across the state line from Chauncey, and Gus to settle in Chipley. They continued their naval stores operations in several locations in Holmes, Washington, and Jackson Counties, and prospered, first as the Alford Brothers Company and later with Consolidated Naval Stores, which had its headquarters in Jacksonville. The Alford Brothers Company was said to have been the largest producer of naval stores in the state.

Early in the 20th century, Chauncey moved to Jackson County, south of Marianna, to supervise operations there. The settlement which grew up near the railroad siding where the Alford Brothers loaded their products became the town of Alford. In 1913, Chauncey moved his growing family to Bonifay.

Later Years

Soon after World War I, the naval stores industry began to decline and was no longer so profitable. Substitutes were found for the turpentine and rosin, used chiefly as caulking in shipbuilding, and it also became apparent that the supply of virgin pines was not inexhaustible. The Alford brothers then turned to other interests. Some of their later ventures, such as the Round Lake Satsuma

Company and the Chipley Packing Company, were unsuccessful.

John retired about 1920 and moved to DeFuniak Springs, where his younger children by his third wife, Sarah (Van Meter), were enrolled in the academy of Palmer College. He died there in 1928.

Gus turned to banking, lumbering, and life insurance, having been a vice-president of both the First National Bank of Chipley and the Chipley State Bank, a vice president of the Aycock Lumber Company, and a director of the Florida Life Insurance Company of Jacksonville. He died in Chipley in 1946.

Chauncey became a hardware merchant, a farmer, and a banker. He was at one time a vice president and director of the Bank of Bonifay and a director of the Dekle Lane Company of Marianna. In his later years he became interested in reforestation and was responsible for the planting of thousands of seedling pines on land which he owned or controlled. He died in Bonifay in 1938.

All three brothers were lifelong members of the Presbyterian Church and all three had served as elders in their respective churches.

Descendants

Gus, who had eight children, all now deceased, has one grandson and four great-grandchildren living in Chipley. John, the father of six children, all deceased except one, has three grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild living in Bonifay. Three of Chauncey's seven children are still living in Bonifay as well as a grandson and two great-grandchildren.