



# Family Notes Special Insert

Episcopal Church of the Holy Family

April 2006 - March 2006

## God's Acreage--Yesterday and Today

The unique church building that now serves the worshipping congregation of Holy Family is blessed to be situated on almost forty acres of beautiful, rolling terrain just outside the town of Jasper, Georgia. If the stones could talk, they would remind us that we are on holy ground. Not just because God's handiwork in nature is so evident here and not just because the spirit of the Cherokee forced off the land still seems to whisper on the wind and not just because families like the Griffeths and Tates who thereafter owned and developed it have left their indelible marks, but also because, then and now, this land, as a gathering place for God's people, was and is God's land.

The Cherokee Nation in 1750 stretched from northern Georgia to parts of North and South Carolina and Tennessee. In 1805, the U.S. Government signed a Treaty with the Cherokees to build a road across the Nation known as the Old Federal Road. From that point on, the Cherokee nation began to shrink.





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Missionaries arrived in 1816 followed by whites moving into the Cherokee territory and marrying Cherokees in order to stay. Then, the rumored gold, for which DeSoto had relentlessly searched, was discovered in the North Georgia mountains 1828.

"In 1830 the Congress of the United States passed the 'Indian Removal Act.' Although many Americans were against the act, most notably Tennessee Congressman Davy Crockett, it passed anyway. President Jackson quickly signed the bill into law. The Cherokee... attempted to fight removal legally by challenging the removal laws in the Supreme Court and by establishing an independent Cherokee nation. In 1832, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Cherokee..." Led by Chief Justice Marshall, the high court's decision that the Cherokee nation was, indeed, sovereign in its own right nullified the 'Indian Removal Act.' As a consequence, for

forced removal to be legal, the Senate would have to ratify a treaty agreed to by the U.S. Government and the Cherokee Nation.

In spite of this ruling, the 1832 land lottery was established, and "by 1835 the Cherokee were divided and despondent." It was, in part, this division among themselves and the subsequent agreement to the U.S. government's treaty (endorsed by only about 500 of the 17,000 North Georgia Cherokee) that was their undoing. Strong but minority voices, like those of Davy Crockett, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay, speaking against the treaty, came close to upsetting Senate ratification which carried by just a single vote. The rest--The Trail of Tears--is among the most tragic episodes in American history, but, perhaps, the woods, the lake, the trails, and the Cherokee Ball Ground that enhance Holy Family's forty acres can serve a redemptive purpose and act as a memorial lest we forget.

By 1838, with the Cherokee gone from the land, the government enforced the 1832 land lottery. Former Cherokee land in Land Lots of 160 acres and in Gold Lots of 40 acres that had been deeded to Georgia citizens with military service, to widows of service veterans, and to the mentally handicapped were transferred to them. Land lots were also sold to the general public. Based on the Cherokee/Pickens County Deed books, Samuel Tate began purchasing lands in Cherokee County in 1834--probably from veterans and their widows-- even before the Cherokees were removed.

Influenced by their son-in-law Samuel Tate and their daughter Mary Griffeth Tate, who together as a married couple had moved to Cherokee County in 1835, the Caleb Griffeth, Sr., family apparently moved to Cherokee/Pickens County in the early 1840's. The 1849 Cherokee County Tax Digest and the Georgia Militia District #899 (located in what is now the Foothills/Marble Hill area), list three Griffeths as residing in Cherokee County: Caleb Griffeth, Sr.; Caleb Griffeth, Jr.; and Stephen Griffeth. On January 24, 1843, Stephen Griffeth, who recently had purchased Land Lot #4, Section 2, 4th District,



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sold it to his brother Caleb Griffeth, Jr., for \$100 (Deed Book B, p. 126). It is likely, therefore, that Caleb Griffeth, Jr., his wife Mary, and their family moved onto the LL#4 property around 1842-1843, built a home, and began farming the area. Their home was near the corner of Grandview and Cove Roads and was known as the Caleb Griffeth home. All of the church property is located within this Land Lot #4. As Caleb, Jr., and Mary's family grew to include seven children, Caleb steadily purchased more land and between the years 1843 and 1848 increased his holdings to 800 acres. Subsequent court records show that the Griffeths' descendants owned approximately 22 Land Lots (around 3,528 acres), at one time covering parts of the area between Mt. Oglethorpe and Tate, and that Colonel Sam Tate and his relatives also owned large sections of the area.

"Cale" Griffeth, III, (1854-1928), the youngest son of Caleb, Jr., married Winnie Malissa Pendley circa 1877. They lived in the Caleb Griffeth home, raised five sons (Charlie, William Dillard, Hardie, Homer, and Vernie), and are buried in the Long Swamp Creek Baptist Church Cemetery. By the early 1900's, "Cale's" third-son Hardie and his wife Maude Laura Dorsey were living in a home that Hardie apparently had built on what is now church property, south of the Grandview/Cove Road junction. Most of the Griffeth property, although occupied by various family members, remained in "Cale" Griffeth's name until after his wife Malissa's death (1948). Nevertheless, Cale and Malissa's fourth son, Homer Griffeth (married to Ola Belle) continued to live in his parents' home until his own death in 1955. Homer's legal will transferred parts of the Griffeths' land holding respectively to "Cale" and Malissa's children and to his own children. However, one of the deed transfers, executed in 1957, transferred 71.5 acres in Land Lot #4 (Deed Book JJ, page 260-262) to Homer's brother, Hardie Griffeth. At the time of the land transfer, Hardie was 74 and had retired from farming. In 1962, Hardie transferred the 71.5 acres to his daughter Elaine Griffeth (Deed Book M, p. 309). Hardie's health deteriorated in the mid 1960's; he died in 1968 and was buried beside his wife in Sunrise Memorial Gardens in Jasper. Some of the 71.5 acres of property granted to Elaine were sold to the Episcopal Church of the Holy Family in the mid 1990's. Thereafter, the church also purchased other acreage to create the 40-acre church campus. The church property now includes the circa 1913 Griffeth home site of Hardie and Laura Griffeth, the circa 1830 Cherokee Indian Ball Ground, and a lake built about 1975 by the Griffeths. Another lake, which is part of the Elaine Griffeth property, joins the church's property and reflects in its waters the red-roofed log home that belongs to Elaine. The two oldest remaining Griffeths, Elaine (aged 81 and now in a nursing home) and her cousin Hoyt Griffeth (aged 80 and still living near the church) have been invited to the ceremony on March 31, 2006, which will officially open the church campus to the public as a place of quiet refuge in the midst of bustling Pickens County.

Don Wells, a vital member of Holy Family and director of its buildings and grounds, has made it his personal mission to usher Holy Family into sharing its church campus with the community. To that end and with funds donated in memory of his mother, Dot Wells, Don has dramatically improved and marked four trails throughout the campus. One trail takes hikers around the perimeter of the forty acres and past the site of the former Griffeth School; another, running almost diagonally through the woods from the church to the old Hardie Griffeth home site, functions as a pilgrim way in the form of the Stations of the Cross; the other two trails take hikers to various scenic spots, especially



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within the woods and by the lake. As an avid hiker, herself; a long-time leader of Girl Scouts; and a lover of God's beautiful outdoors, Dot Wells would surely celebrate her memorial and her son's loving labor on the project. She would be among the first to invite everyone to come and hike the trails, walk the labyrinth, rest by the fountain, follow the Stations of the Cross, gaze at the lakes, search for the special wild flowers, and listen for birdsong, for rustlings through the pine straw, and especially for the "still, small Voice."

*Phyllis Seitz*

(with thanks to Don Wells for his research regarding the past ownership of the property and with credit for quotations to "The Trail of Tears," *About North Georgia* by Golden Ink, <http://ngeorgia.com/history/nghisttt.html>)

