

EARLY HISTORY of HARRELLS CROSSROADS, ALABAMA

Written by Robert Hanna DeWitt and Myrtle DeWitt Loyd about 1983

(contributed to Public stories Ancestry.com)

Dedication: This brief history of the place of our childhood is dedicated to all past, present and future residents of Harrells Crossroads, Alabama with our love and best regards.

Harrells is one of the oldest communities in Dallas County dating back to 1816 when the first pioneer settlers arrived from North Carolina. The authors wish to express their indebtedness to numerous individuals who have made this publication possible. "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

When the Creek War ended in 1814 and Indians retired to a small strip of land in central Alabama, they thought that they could remain there undisturbed. They were greatly disappointed, however, because shortly they saw a caravan of families from North Carolina moving along the wagon trail with their furniture and possessions. A picturesque scene was formed against the forest through which the swift Cahaba River flowed. These emigrants from North Carolina halted at the crossing of the Creek Indian trails north and southwest and west at what is still called Harrells Cross Roads. Harrells is one of the earliest settlements in Dallas County, Alabama with a history that dates to 1816. The journey to Harrells had been made by way of Huntsville down the southern trail and had passed the last white settlers fifty miles back at what is now known as Centreville. One of the pioneers known as **Gabriel Holmes Harrell** built near the crossing of trails a pole cabin covered with bark without windows or doors and called it home. Later logs took the place of poles and windows were added and a door with wooden latchstring hung on the outside. From this humble beginning Harrells Cross Roads was born. Among the earliest family names recorded in the **Harrells** area were **Boggs, Craig, Chisolm, Cotharl, Gibson, Gill, Johnson, Harrell, Litsey, Moore, Parrott, Potter** and **Tubb**.

Time moved on and lands were cleared. Cotton and corn were planted in abundance. Sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, squash, cabbage, okra, peas, cantaloupe and watermelons were also planted and thrived abundantly in the rich prairie soil. These foods served as staples in the diet of these North Carolina pioneers who needed super human strength as they cleared the land and erected their own homes. A cotton gin was built in Harrells around 1825 which was owned and operated by **Walter B. Moore**. Later **Charles Potter, Sr.** operated this cotton gin for many years. Harrells became a center for ginning and baling cotton and distributing it via way of railway to Mobile and New Orleans for distribution to world markets. A grist mill was also built at Harrells which was owned and operated by **Seldon Hemphill Moore**. Later this same mill was owned and operated by his son **Thomas Ervin Moore**. The grist mill also served as a large country store where groceries, hardware and clothing could be purchased. Later proprietors of this store included **Thomas E. Moore, Hubbart Price, T. D. Parrott** and **William Price**.

Many settlers from North Carolina and South Carolina came to Alabama before statehood in 1819 and settled on property in the Harrells area. They resided on the land for a period of several years before they were able to obtain titles and deeds. These pioneer forebears considered their land a gift from God and practiced a dedicated stewardship concerning

their land which is almost unknown today. These pioneers at Harrells planned for their land to be handed down from generation to generation as a sacred trust with an unwritten oath that the land become a perpetual estate which could never be sold. This explains why land is so difficult to obtain in the Harrells area even until this good day. Among those who settled in the Harrells area were **Thomas Douglas Parrott, James Shely Parrott** and **Nancy Marie Parrott**. The **Parrotts** settled on two thousand acres of land which extended from the center of Harrells to what is now Highway #80 West to the Perry County line on Highway #45. **Thomas D. Parrott** built one of the first two story log homes at Harrells for his bride **Mary Ellen Boggs**. This home was still standing in 1928 when **James Claude Moore** purchased this property. **Claudia Moore Gilmer** states that she remembers playing in this home as a child which was later removed when **Claude Moore** erected a two story home for his bride, **Vera Belle Potts**. It is reported that **Thomas Douglas Parrott** built the first Baptist Church at Harrells for his Baptist wife, **Mary Ellen Boggs**. **Thomas D. Parrott** never left his Quaker faith and on one occasion returned to North Carolina to renew his vows. The church stood across the road from the present residence of **Mr. and Mrs. A. F. Caley Jr.** A private school was also erected near this church known as Bricewood Academy. The church and school were later moved to Marion Junction. Materials from the church were used to erect the residence of **Mr. and Mrs. Joseph E. Smith**.

Nancy Marie Parrott married **Benjamin Franklin Boggs, Sr.** from Pleasant Valley in 1825 (Editors note - no record has been easily found to verify this, in fact census records show he was married to **Jane Christopher**) Her Quaker brothers never fully approved of her marriage to a Scotch-Presbyterian, but gave their belated consent by building a home of hewn logs for her at Harrells. This is the only original home which still stands on the **Boggs-DeWitt** property at Harrells. One son was born to this union (Editors note - **B F Boggs** and **Jane Christopher** had many other children shown on census, including **Burl Martin Boggs**, grandfather of the author **Robert Hanna DeWitt**) whose name was **Benjamin Franklin Boggs, Jr.** He moved to Greensboro and later to north Perry near Marion.

James Shely Parrott remained a bachelor until his death. He is buried in an unmarked grave along with his sister and other relatives on the **DeWitt-Waugh** property. His nephew **Thomas B. Boggs** inherited his property. **Florence Hobson Boggs** (mother of **Bama Boggs DeWitt**) was a cousin of **Admiral Richmond P. Hobson**, an internationally known war hero who sank the Merrimac at Santiago Harbor in Cuba. He received the national Medal of Honor in Washington, D. C, when members of his family were invited to attend the event. "Magnolia Grove" at Greensboro stands as an example of historic pre-civil architecture. There are very few of the **Hobson** relatives left.

William Hale (census shows a **William W. Boggs** in 1860) **Boggs**, a brother of **Burl Martin Boggs** of Harrells moved to Louisiana before the Civil War. His great grandson, the late Congressman Hale **Boggs** met an untimely death when his airplane crashed in the Alaskan wilds. His wife, **Lindy Boggs** continues to be active in politics in the state of Louisiana carrying forth the family tradition.

Benjamin Franklin Boggs, Sr. moved to Harrells in 1825 when he married **Nancy Marie Parrott (Jane Christopher??)**. He was a politician of note and assisted in the

organization and in the promotion of the Democratic Party in Alabama. It is reported that he sponsored barbecues under the huge oaks near the old stage coach barn at Harrells. Large crowds were attracted from across the state and political candidates came to Harrells to participate in the rallies and to spout forth the planks of their platforms. It was a tradition for **Benjamin** to serve barbecued goat on these occasions which did not meet with approval from his Associate Reformed Presbyterian neighbors. In spite of criticism from Presbyterian elders and Quaker brothers-in-law he continued this practice until his death. After the death of **Benjamin F. Boggs, Sr.**, the barbecues continued to be held below Harrells at the **Gus Summers** residence. They continued to be patriotic and political in theme attracting large crowds from the area for July 4th celebrations.

There are five graveyards in the Harrells area attesting to the fact that at one time the area boasted a large population. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church has two graveyards. One of these graveyards is located three miles south of Harrells known as the Harrells Prosperity Cemetery. This graveyard was improved and has been provided perpetual care through the efforts of **Mrs. Gladys Moore McQueen**. The other Prosperity Cemetery is located on the **Elton Ralston** property at Harrells with family names of **Boggs, Cochoran, Holley** and **Warr** appearing there. Two graveyards are located on the **James C. Moore property**. One is a Quaker graveyard of unmarked graves with family names **Parrott, Boggs** and **Martin** buried there. The other graveyard is located at Harrells which apparently served as a cemetery for Blacks. The fifth graveyard is located at Craig Hill on the **Charles Gilmer** property. Family names of **Craig, Moore, Gilmer** and **Gates** appear on markers there.

Thomas D. Parrott purchased plantations in Hale and Perry counties where virgin pine timber grew in abundance. Some of his children and relatives moved to Hale and Perry counties where logs were cut and snaked by mules to sawmills in Greensboro and Marion. Thus the beginning of the modern lumber business was born from residents at Harrells.

The **Parrott-Boggs** barn which stood at Harrells for over one hundred years was built of virgin pine timber from the **Parrott Lumber Co.** in Greensboro. The pony express had its beginning in this barn along with the stage coach express. Here fresh supplies of horses were waiting and dignitaries from Huntsville, Decatur and Tuscaloosa stopped to rest on their tiresome journey to Cahaba, Alabama's first capitol where they served in Alabama's first House of Representatives and Senate. Later a railroad was constructed which ran from Marion Junction via way of lower Harrells carrying passengers to their final destination at Cahaba.

At one time a large tribe of Creek Indians resided at Harrells. These were known as the **Caxa Creek Indians**. Recently when I worked for **R. L. Polk and Co.** in Pascagoula, Miss. my sister **Myrt** and I met remnants of this Creek Indian tribe whose descendants told us about life at Harrells, Alabama handed down by oral tradition from past generations. An Indian trading post once stood at Harrells near the stagecoach barn where furs, baskets, blankets, pottery, jewelry and blow guns could be purchased. After tribal wars ended these guns were used for hunting purposes and were carried into Mississippi when the tribe at Harrells was forced to move.

A thriving horse and mule business was established at Harrells by **Matthew V. Waugh, Sr.** and **George T. DeWitt**. The owners traveled by train into Missouri, Tennessee and Kentucky leaving **Bama** and **Nannie** wondering when their husbands would return. When they returned with carloads of healthy mules and horses, plantation owners descended from over the state coming to Harrells for auctions. The **Boggs-Waugh-DeWitt** children spent many happy hours grooming the animals for sale and attending auctions. On one occasion the author almost lost his life because he was pawed by a prancing white stallion, who did not like to have his space invaded by a curious, skinny boy.

Harrells can be divided into three areas. There is Upper Harrells, Lower Harrells and Harrells New Ground. Upper Harrells was located in the area where **Mr. and Mrs. A. F. Caley, Jr.** now reside. The dirt road in this area went to Marion Junction and to Selma. It also led to the Marion Junction Blackbelt Substation where **Mr. K. G. Baker** was the first superintendent. Travel on this road as well as Highway 80 was virtually impossible during the rainy season. **Bama Boggs DeWitt** reported that she saw four mules pulling an empty wagon which was stuck in the area and **John R. Moore** reports seeing large turkey gobblers stuck in the mud and unable to move during the rainy season. Early pioneer families who resided in Upper Harrells were **Colonel and Mrs. John Young** (Confederate Army), **Mr. and Mrs. Burrell Jackson Fort**, **Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Smith**, **Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Tubb**, **Mr. and Mrs. Miree Fuller**, **Nr. and Mrs. Charles Holmes**, **Mr. and Mrs. Porter Tubb**, **Mr. and Mrs. H. M. Morrow** and **Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Holley and Reverend and Mrs. L. C. DeWitt** (pastor of Marion Junction and Catherine Baptist Churches). When the Southern Railway came through Harrells a thriving community was established near the railroad tracks. A number of homes were moved from Cahaba and were placed there when flood waters closed the capitol. Included among homes moved to Harrells were the **Potter, Moore, Lowry and Boggs** homes. Early families who resided in this area included **Walter B. Moore**, **Mr. and Mrs. John C. Chisolm**, **Mr. and Mrs. Charles Potter**, **Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Ervin Moore**, **Mr. and Mrs. Leon Moore**, **Reverend and Mrs. Harris**. Later residents included **Mr. and Mrs. Thomas S. Boggs**, **Mrs. William H. DeWitt** (Harriett Theodosia Wiltsie), **Mr. and Mrs. John Bruce Moore**, **Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Moore**, **Mr. and Mrs. Hubbart Price**, **Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ellis**, **Mr. and Mrs. Earnest Ellis** and **Mr. and Mrs. Torbit Henry** and **Mr. and Mrs. John Rufus Moore**. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church moved from three miles south of Harrells to a site near Highway 80 in 1891. The church remained there until 1914 when it was moved to Marion Junction. A one-room public school was built in 1891 with early teachers consisting of **Miss Hattie Dale**, **Miss Mary Donald**, and **Raymond Chisolm**. Students included **Bama Boggs**, **John R. Moore**, **J. Claude Moore**, **Gladys Moore McQueen**, **Annie Moore Jones**, **Eugenia Moore Holloway**, **Howard Smith**, **Eula Mae Smith**, **Zoie Smith**, **Neal Harris**, **Bryce Harris** and many others.

Five ministers have gone forth from the Harrells community to serve in various places. These ministers include **Rev. Neal Harris**, **Rev. Turner Moore**, **Rev. Oscar H. Boggs**, **Rev. George T. Washburn, Jr.** and **Rev. Robert H. DeWitt** also **Rev. George E. Elkins**, son of **Ruby DeWitt** and **Rev. Greg Kirk**, son of **Virginia Parrott**. Harrells

also boasts of two football coaches - **James D. Warr and Ed Lacy Boggs. Two of Ed L. Bogg's sons are presently coaches. Harrells also produced a veterinarian, the late Dr. Jack J. Moore and a lawyer, William P. Boggs.** Also two medical doctors came from the Harrells area **Dr. Raymond Chisolm and Dr. Glenn Donald.** A professor at Auburn University is a former Harrells resident - **Torbit Henry, Jr.**

Harrells boasted a championship baseball team sponsored and coached by **Thomas Ervin Moore.** Outstanding players included **Glenn Donald, James C. Moore, Charles Potter, Sr., Craig Chisolm** and many others who cannot be identified. Apparently they took on teams from Selma and other areas and had a successful record.

School teachers who came from Harrells include **Miss Katie Belle Moore, Euphemia Henry Moore, Tom Ed Morrow, Ada C. Morrow, Mabel Carleton, Flo Fraley, Mary Rita DeWitt, Nancy Ann DeWitt, Harriet Stephens Carmichael, Audra Adams Westbrook, Claudia M. Gilmer and Vera Belle M. Karrick.**

Thomas Ervin Moore, Jr. was the first male from Harrells to receive an RN degree in the state of Alabama. **William Brandon DeWitt** of Harrells obtained a football scholarship from the University of Alabama. **Reverend Robert H. DeWitt, Myrtle D. Loyd and Mary Rita DeWitt** were listed in editions of Personalities of the South.

A number of individuals served in military service during the Civil War, World War I and World War II. Included in this number are: **B. Grady Boggs, Walter E. Boggs, T. S. Boggs, Spurgeon Y. DeWitt, William B. DeWitt, William P. Boggs, Ed Lacy Boggs, Glenn D. Boggs, Col. John Young (Confederate) A. F. Caley, Jr.** and many others.

Harrells has had many families who moved from other states, Highway #45 from Highway #80 to the Perry County line became known as Yankee Boulevard. These families who have made an outstanding contribution to Harrells and planted their lives in the community were these families: **Strobel, King, Epp, Dunnivant, Rainey, Kirby, Caley, Van Tassel, Tackett, Hongisto and Voscamp. Later families include Prestel, Moore, Ralston, Lindsay, Yoho, Elkins, Gaston, Wilson, Lynch and Woodfin.**

Fox hunting, raccoon hunting and possum hunting were considered popular pastimes at Harrells. Well known hunters in the area included **John Young, Walter R. Boggs, T. S. Boggs, Walter B. Moore, Spurgeon Y. DeWitt, William B. DeWitt, Stephen P. DeWitt, and Kenneth Cason DeWitt.** The **Epp family** is also internationally known for their prize winning dogs which are a delight to young and old alike.

The **Barber Pure Milk Co.** established a plant at Harrells in 1926. **Karl Madson** was the first manager. **J. E. Warren** became manager after **Hr. Hadson** and remained as manager until closing in 1956.

The **Harrells Creamery** was a thriving business for many years at Harrells and employed **Hae Dungan Hoare, Rosa Smith Ellis, Nary Luker Ellis, Willie Stevens Boggs, Peter McLendon, Frances Bell Caldwell, Carl Fitts, Charlie Bell** and many others.

In 1959 the Marion Junction Cooperative purchased land at Harrells and built its present all steel and concrete structure. Since that date an addition has doubled its warehouse space. This facility serves a large area of central Alabama.

George and Janie Washburn purchased the M. P. Jackson Country Store at Harrells in 1946. **George and Janie** operated this store until 1980 when **Frank Rogers** assumed management and ownership. **Frank Rogers** built a new store at Harrells in 1981 heralding a new era for the Harrells community. There are many long distance truck drivers who stop here for refreshments and snacks making Harrells known in many cities and states around the nation.

The former **T. D. Parrott** store at Harrells was removed in 1980 and was not rebuilt thus removing all former landmarks with the exception of the Barber Pure Milk Co. plant which still stands.

Life at the crossroads faces a brighter future. With the advent of a four lane highway from Selma to the Mississippi line it is believed that young families will return once more to the Harrells community. It is hoped that the foundation stones of faith, hope and love planted there by many pioneer families from many states will grow and become an oasis in the desert on life's highway.



ObitsforeLife.com:

Myrtle Dewitt Loyd [Co-author of above article]

Date of Birth: Monday, April 26th, 1920

Date of Death: Wednesday, October 29th, 2008

Funeral Home: [Lawrence Brown Service Funeral Home](#), 2900 Citizens Parkway

Obituary: Myrtle DeWitt Loyd

Myrtle DeWitt Loyd, age 88, formerly of Selma, resided in Stevenson, AL for ten years, died Wednesday, October 29, 2008. Survivors include her son; James D. "Jimmie" Warr (Ann), sister; Ruby Elkins of Louisburg, NC, brother; Robert DeWitt of Selma, and numerous nieces and nephews. Graveside services will be held at 11:00 Saturday November 1, 2008 at Marion Junction Cemetery with Lawrence Brown- Service Funeral Home directing. Mrs. Loyd was retired from R.L. Polk Company. In lieu of flowers the family requests donations be made to the Diabetic Association.