

Special Insert - Your History Going Forward

Our founding ancestor, Melinda Jones Cubage, was passionate about family history and genealogy, and published several articles in the Arkansas Gazette. Very recently, Tom Dillard, Arkansas' foremost historian and recently retired Director of the University of Arkansas Special Collections Library, published the following column based on her earlier article about the Civil War. It is special for Melinda's work to receive such validation as important and relevant by such a distinguished scholar. Also, I have included Tom's email to me concerning the article that I think you'll find interesting. Enjoy.

"The Nature of War" by Tom Dillard Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, March 25, 2012

As America commemorates the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, it is important to keep in mind that the war touched lives well beyond the battlefield. This was brought home to me recently when I read a brief memoir of an encounter between foraging federal troops and the Jones family at modern Caddo Gap, deep in the Ouachita Mountains.

In 1936, during the celebration of Arkansas centennial, an aging resident of Caddo Gap by the name of Melinda A. Jones Cubage wrote an article for the Arkansas Gazette about her experiences during the Civil War. Though only a short piece, Cubage's memoir vividly depicts events much dreaded by every family, both Union and Confederate: encounters with hostile soldiers or irregular forces.

Cubage established her credentials early in her memoir: I was already alert. The oldest of four, having been born October 19, 1854, I was old enough to take great interest in what I saw and heard during these exciting days.

Here is how Mrs. Cubage described the advent of war in her rural county: In May, 1861, at Mount Ida, a small village [and county seat] in Montgomery County, on foot and on horseback, crowds of men were gathering. The drum was beating and all seemed to be excitement.

While the excitement ran high, Cubage described a chilling scene when the new recruits finally loaded their oxen-pulled wagons and set out for Confederate service. Just as Captain John H. Simpson mounted his horse, Will, the youngest of Mr. Simpson's two sons, began to scream. It seemed to make the hair stand up on my head. He jumped up on the stirrup and tried to get into the saddle with his father. It took two men to get him down and hold him till his father could get away. Poor Will, that was the last time he ever saw his father.

Cubage's father, Alfred Jones, a physician and Montgomery County treasurer throughout the war, was a Confederate supporter, but he did not serve in the army. Cubage recalled that her father, being a doctor, was left at home to look after the women and children . . . Then she added a curious comment: Loop Penrod enlisted in his [Dr. Jones] place; I very well remember when Mr. Penrod was killed and Father came and told Mother about it, and

how sad they felt because he was substituting for father. This probably means that Dr. Jones had hired Penrod as a substitute, a quite acceptable practice during the Civil War. Later, however, Dr. Jones did join a company of home guards and apparently saw periodic action.

The advent of war increased the already demanding workload in Dr. Jones home. Melinda's parents purchased a second spinning wheel, and later they added a loom-all as part of the effort to contribute to the Confederate war effort. In her memoir, Melinda recalled that we kept both those wheels going from early morn till late at night, and that many good warm blankets and over shirts had been sent across the Mississippi by my mother . . .

The nature of the war changed dramatically in late 1863 when Union General Frederick Steele captured Little Rock. Union forces periodically raided deep into the thinly populated Ouachitas. One winter day the mail carrier brought word that Union forces were only a few miles away. Dr. Jones was away with the home guards.

As was repeated in communities across the South, the news of approaching Union soldiers spurred the Jones family into frantic preparations. In addition to hiding family possessions in the nearby woods, Mrs. Jones managed to hide a large chest of county records her husband had in his possession as county treasurer.

Mrs. Jones was the first to hear the approaching Union soldiers. And, sure enough, Melinda recalled, there were the dreaded Yankees coming over the hill, a long blue line. I can never forget how they looked nor how I felt. Nervously but defiantly, Mrs. Jones and her children - one of whom was an infant - watched as the Union soldiers stole everything from cash to the food cooking in the fireplace. Every bed was stripped of its quilts and covers, except for the one where the baby was sleeping. The situation worsened when the soldiers killed the family's 20 hogs and robbed the corn supply.

Poignantly, Melinda recalled that in the aftermath of the robbery we lost Christmas, the only time I ever failed to think of the day.

+++++

Hello Mike (if I may use your given name; please call me Tom):

It was a please [sic] getting your email. Thank you so much for making contact. I must say I am enthralled by your ancestor, Melinda J. Cubage. I have found some more articles by her in the Arkansas Gazette back in the 1930s... 1936, actually, which was Arkansas' centennial year. I hope to write more about her.

I am fascinated by the role of women in Arkansas history. I must admit that Ms. Cubage has completely stolen my heart. She was a great observer, had a good vocabulary, and knew how to tell a story. Wouldn't it be great if we could go back in time to meet certain people? Can you imagine sitting down with your great-grandmother!

Interestingly, I have been told by several people that the column on Mrs. Jones was one of my best. I agree. And, it is due to her being such an interesting person.

As you might detect from my enthusiasm—I sure hope to hear more from you when you have more to share with me.

Tom