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Jacquelyn Procter Reeves

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From Out of the Ashes – the Joel Eddins House

JACQUELYN PROCTER REEVES

On August 26, 2007, Jack Burwell, local attorney and former member of the board of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, presided over the official opening of the Joel Eddins' house. The ca. 1810 log home was rescued from destruction by time and elements and brought from Ardmore, Alabama to Burrirt on the Mountain. There it was reconstructed to look similar to the way it did when the Eddins family lived in it. The home was donated by Glenn and Wanda Walker, who own the property where the house once stood. Thanks to the Walkers and Jack Burwell, who spear-headed the project to raise money and oversee the project, this important piece of history will now be enjoyed by visitors to Burrirt on the Mountain. It is believed that this is the oldest log house in Madison County.¹ One source states that it is possibly the second oldest house, still standing, in the state of Alabama.² The website for Burrirt on the Mountain shows a fascinating pictorial of the old house, the process of dismantling it and transporting it to its present site





The Eddins home after it was moved

Reeves: From Out of the Ashes - The Joel Eddins Home

(all photographs courtesy www.burrittonthemountain.com)

Joel Eddins arrived in Alabama, then part of the Mississippi Territory, from Abbeville District, South Carolina. He and his wife Judith had eight children: Sara, Benjamin, Willis, Daniel, Judith, Martha Jane, Durret, and Martha. At the time that Eddins' will was probated in 1836, his son Durret had already died.³

In 1844, the property was sold to Joseph Dawson, then to William Dawson, to Littleberry Freeman and David Watkins, and then to Thomas Shannon.⁴

At the time the house was built in about 1810, parts of it were constructed of yellow poplar. The windows were shuttered in those early days when glass window panes were a luxury, and the metal hinges were hand-forged.⁵

Joel's brother Benjamin Eddins bought 159 acres in Madison County in 1813 (it is now part of Limestone County). The community known as Center Hill was nearby. His two-story dogtrot was also made of yellow poplar logs with white ash floors. It was torn down in the 1950s.⁶

Benjamin Eddins had been a veteran in the American Revolution. Although born in Virginia, he had moved to the district in South Carolina known as Ninety-Six or 96. He belonged to a small group of patriots who strongly opposed the British, and as an outspoken member, he was arrested by the British and sent to a prison camp nearby.

His son William, about 16 at the time, who had already enlisted with the Patriots, had been arrested and was part of the same group of men bound for prison. While on their way to the prison camp, the guard who had arrested William and confiscated William's horse, stopped to take a few sips of whiskey. His musket was leaned against a tree. William waited until the guard was otherwise occupied. He grabbed the guard's musket, jumped onto his own horse, and rode home with lightning speed.⁷

After William arrived home, he hid the musket in a hollow log and ran inside the house. Knowing that the British would come back looking for him, he hid between the bed and the wall, along with another brother. Minutes after the British patrol arrived, they spotted the boys' feet under the bed and hauled them out. After much pleading by their mother, the boys were released.

As the patrol turned to leave the property, William, the foolhardy 16-year-old, grabbed the musket from the hiding place and fired at them. The

British later returned to the Eddins home and stole everything of value. In the process, Elizabeth Eddins was attacked and wounded with a sword. The home and all outbuildings were torched.

In the meantime, Benjamin Eddins remained at the prison camp. The Tory commander, Colonel John Cruger, offered Eddins his freedom, as well as money, in return for his extensive knowledge of the countryside. Colonel Cruger then offered him a commission in the British army, along with restitution for the burned property and belongings. Eddins refused and was threatened.

Another prisoner, who witnessed the event, said that Eddins made the following statement: "I am, sir, your prisoner, and consequently completely in your power. You may, if you see proper, inflict any cruelty your imagination can invent. If it suits your love of torture, you may hitch a horse to each of my limbs and tear my body into four pieces. Or you can cut out my heart and drain it of its last drop of blood; but, sir, my services belong to my country, and you can never command them."

Colonel John Cruger, described as an accomplished gentleman and generous soldier, released Eddins. Soon after, Benjamin Eddins and his son William officially joined the American Revolution and served under General Pickens.⁸

Benjamin Eddins died in 1818 and was buried near Limestone Creek. Unfortunately, his gravesite is now unknown. His son, William Eddins, came to Madison County shortly before his father's death and remained for the rest of his life. William was a well-loved Baptist preacher for some 40 years. At the time of his death in Lincoln County, Tennessee in 1837, someone said that "he had been a soldier of his country – he is now the soldier of Immanuel...."⁹

END NOTES

¹ www.burritonthemountain.com

² Edwards, Christine and Axford, Faye, *Lure and Lore of Limestone County* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Portals Press, 1978), pp. 71, 72.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 65, 66.

⁷ Application papers for Daughters of the American Revolution for the late Edith Robertson Dawson, Santa Clara, California, and numerous pieces of correspondence in the Eddins Family File, Huntsville-Madison County Library. Also, Thomas M. Owens' *Revolutionary Soldiers in Alabama*, online courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives & History: http://www.archives.state.al.us/al_soldrs/first_pg.html

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

