

John T. Diamond Family Collection

(For Genealogical and Historical Research Only – Not for publication)

**THE HISTORIC WINDING RIVER ROAD
AND ITS RESOURCES**

Santa Rosa County, Florida

By

**John T. Diamond
1878 – 1963**

(Written about 1949)

Compliments
Of
Jay Historical Society

John T. Diamond Family Collection
(For Genealogical and Historical Research Only – Not for publication)

**THE HISTORIC WINDING RIVER ROAD
AND ITS RESOURCES**

SANTA ROSA COUNTY, FLORIDA

The subject of this article is located in the extreme northwest corner of Santa Rosa County, Florida and is among the oldest and most historic roads in this part of the country. This road never was marked out by blazing trees along its route to show its location, surveyed, staked out, graded or built. It just grew a little at a time as short stretches were beaten out as needed for a specific purpose. This road followed the old Indian Trading Trail and it wound along the edge of the Escambia River swamps and hammocks. This trail was so named because the Indians in carrying on trade with the Spaniards used it from the time of the earliest Spanish settlements at Pensacola and Florida Town. The trail finally extended from the Florida and Alabama state line to Old Woodbine and Florida Town.

This trail first began to be called a road on the east bank of the Escambia River approximately sixteen miles below the Florida-Alabama State Line not far from a spring called by the Indians, “Chumuckla,” meaning in their language, “Healing Waters,” because of the health giving qualities of its water. This spring had been a famous watering place for the Indians long before the Spaniards came to West Florida. Tradition tells us oftentimes when Indians were not feeling well they would camp near this spring a few days, eat little solid food, rest and drink large quantities of “Healing Water” to pep them up for the chase or the war path.

This road had its beginning in this neighborhood not necessarily because of the spring, but because the Spaniards extended their settlements up the water courses from Pensacola and Florida Town and this area was one of the earliest to be occupied. At this time the Spaniards had ceased to search for gold and silver in Florida. They were looking for Indian Trade, quantities of large straight yellow pine timber and luxuriate open range pastures, and timber for shipment to Spain and pastures for their cattle horses and hogs. They were also looking for a region having an ample supply of pure spring water for domestic purposes, and creeks having sufficient fall and narrow valleys to supply waterpower. They knew if they were to remain healthy in a land where medicines and doctors were scarce a supply of pure water must be available. Many of them had been in West Florida long enough to know the value of an ample supply of fish and game in a land where the reserve supplies of food is small.

These adventure-loving Spaniards found exactly what they were looking for in the area extending from the mouth of Moore’s Creek three or four miles below the “Spring of Healing Waters,” northeastward along the east bank of the Escambia River to the Florida-Alabama State Line in the low flood plain and hammocks along the river and among the crystal springs and clear creeks flowing through the lands adjacent to the

river's flood plain. Here indeed they found a forest primeval containing the largest and tallest trees they had ever seen, the most luxuriant and well watered pastures and the purest water in crystal springs and clear creeks the minds of adventurous Spaniards could imagine. An examination of the creeks revealed plenty of water and ample fall for supplying waterpower for all the machinery they would need. An ample supply of fish was found in the river and creeks and plenty of game grazing in the swamps, hammocks and piney woods. Truly, adventure had found the land of the present and the future. The small boats bringing the adventurous Spaniards were anchored or tied up in the mouths of the little creeks where they emptied into the river and the erection of cabins begun.

The flood plains and hammocks along the river from the mouth of Moore's Creek to the State Line were a natural jungle of hardwood trees consisting of sweet gum often spoken of as "Florida Mahogany," white ash, tall and straight, huge white hickory trees, fifty to sixty feet to the first limbs, wild mulberry trees, yellow poplar, many varieties of oaks with the white and red ones leading in number and size and in the quality of the wood. Many varieties of bays of the finest quality were abundant. Birches and sycamores of the best grade were here in large numbers. Yellow cypress trees were abundant throughout the low swampland. The size and length of these trees were exceeded nowhere in America except by the famous big trees of the west coast.

The area adjacent to the flood plains of the Escambia River was covered with a thick growth of yellow pine trees, tall and stately. Many trees were from three to four feet in diameter at the ground and more than sixteen inches in diameter over a hundred feet above the ground. To many people who never had the privilege of seeing these great forest of trees in their original state this sounds incredible now days when no trees are to be found except saplings used for paper pulp. When a small boy, many times did I hear my Grandfather John T. Diamond for, whom I was named, Uncle Neil Campbell, Uncle Gabe Capers and Uncle Tom Sunday tell about handling many huge sticks of hewn pine timber more than a hundred and twenty-five feet long and more than twelve inches square at the top.

The waters were literally alive with fish providing plenty of sport with profit for those who found time to enjoy it. The river contained large and small bass, river trout, and many varieties of bream, jackfish and blue channel cat of large size. Loggerhead, streaked head and soft-shell turtles were also plentiful. The creek sand brooks contained brook trout, bream and suckers.

White tail deer ranged along the Winding River Road throughout its length in herds plentiful like range cattle many years later. Venison was no rarity on the tables of pioneers in this area or in the smoke houses along this road. Big bronze wild turkeys traveled up and down the creeks in flocks living on wild berries, bugs, tender buds, wild grain and grasses. They were fat throughout the seasons and were best in the frying pan, roaster, and pie pan or hanging just above a smoking hickory log in a tight smokehouse. Little gray squirrels leaped and chattered among the trees thick in the swamps and hammocks. Big fat fox squirrels climbed and played among the tall stately pines where their glossy gray furs glistened in the sun. Big streaked head bobwhites ranged up and down the Winding River

Road. Many a pioneer sang a song of jubilee when the piecrust was broken and bobwhites were tasted and not heard. The ring-tailed raccoon dwelt along the low lands beside the historic road where frog legs were served for Sunday and company dinners. The cunning gray fox raced among the pines and over the hills along this road and fared sumptuously on rabbit steak and partridge pie. The hardy pioneer timber men knew the sport of a great raccoon hunt on a frosty night way-down on the old mill creek at the edge of the back water and the thrill and music of a fox chase among the tall pines and long moonlight shadows interspersed with long eerie trembling streaks of ghostly light. The American marsupial of "Possum and Tater" fame was everywhere and lived upon tidbits of the land. He always ripened with the luscious wild persimmons and at sweet potato digging time.

In the pioneer days along the historic Winding River Road the open range supplied luxuriant pastures for all livestock. The open spaces in the low flood plains of the river were covered with cane breaks and a smaller bamboo known as swamp reed. The cane breaks and reed marshes in those days kept numerous herds of cattle fat throughout the changing seasons. No feeding was necessary to have beef from the range equal to any stall fed western meat. The acorns, wild chestnuts, chinquapins and many other wild fruits and berries kept the big range hogs looking like the big thoroughbreds that thrive and grow fat in the big western corn fields. The piney woods were covered with many varieties of wild grasses and grains providing ample feed for livestock on the range. This area was extra fine in the fall when the wild oats were bending low with ripening grain.

After searching out the land in addition to erecting cabins many of the Spaniards filed applications with the proper Spanish officials for large grants of land in this area. The official records show Spanish Land Grants were issued to the following persons conveying lands in this area:

1. Joseph Falcon, containing 665.82 acres, near the mouth of Moore's Creek.
2. Mary Weaver, containing 684.35 acres, taking in the spring of "Healing Waters."
3. Henry Michalet, containing 639.03 acres, lying just north of the spring of "Healing Waters."
4. Little Berry Mason, containing 720.96 acres, situated near the mouth of the McCaskill Mill Creek, better known as the McCaskill Grant.
5. Joseph Nelson, containing 638.12 acres, situated directly north of the Wilson Branch, taking in the Dead River Log Landing and a large area of the hill country directly north of the Jay-Century Highway.
6. Mary Weaver, containing 560.48 acres. Taking in the Old Steam Mill Bluff Log Landing and a large area of the creek first known as "Governor's Creek," later known as the "Gaylor Mill Creek," and now as the "Campbell Creek."
7. John Edgley and Edward Townes, containing 1260.37 acres, covering a large area of swamp land, and extending up on the creek first known as "Edgley Creek," later as "Barrow Creek," and still later as "Bray Creek."
8. Nathaniel Hawthorne, containing 639.20 acres. This grant includes land where the Village of Jay is now located.
9. Elijah Holmes, containing 638.58 acres. This grant includes land directly north from Jay. Holmes Head was so named because Mr. Holmes built his log cabin near it and

used water from this springhead. This cabin was near the spot where the Shady Grove Mission Station was first established in 1888, later becoming the Shady Grove Missionary Baptist Church. After the Village of Jay was started the church was moved there and is now know as Jay Baptist Church.

10. Needham Parker, containing 639.22 acres, situated on the river north of the John Edgley and Edward Townes Grant.
11. Miquel Quiggles, containing 714.94 acres, situated on the river bordering the State Line.
12. Daniel Maloy, containing 638.96 acres, situated directly east from the Village of Jay. Maloy's Pond and Maloy's Branch got their name from Mr. Maloy because he built his cabin not far from a spring near the head of this branch. The Jay Public School was once located 200 yards directly east of the Maloy Pond and carried the official name, "Maloy Pond School No. 19."
12. James Brewster, containing 639.68 acres. This grant is located east of the Mt. Carmel Methodist Church.

These grants were taken up under laws and regulations similar to the American Homestead Law and Regulations. About all the grantees had to do was to agree to reside on the land, cut the merchantable timber and market it through the port of Pensacola. It is probably the Daniel Maloy Grant and the James Brewster Grant was taken up for agricultural purposes.

Titles to these grants were issued from one to four years before Florida was purchased by the United States. [*President John Tyler signed a bill admitting Florida as a state on March 3rd, 1845*]. Under the purchase agreement these grants did not become the property of the United States but remained the property of the original grantees. These people were given the privilege of continuing to reside on these lands under the protection of the United States. However, almost all of them left the area immediately after the purchase, some returning to Spain, and some going to Cuba and a few going to Mexico.

Just why almost all the Spanish settlers left his area immediately is not definitely known. However, tradition reveals many of them had been accused of helping slaves to slip across the line from Alabama into Florida and harboring them against being returned by their owners. Many Spaniards including high officials in the Territory had been accused of inciting the Indians in Florida and Alabama to make war against the United States or Alabama. Naturally when this area became a part of the United States many Spanish settlers expected the people living in Alabama who had had slaves, livestock and other property stolen and brought to Spanish Territory, to organize, arm themselves and come in to Florida seeking their lost property and revenge against any Spanish settlers remaining in Florida. This is probably the reason for the quick exit of the Spanish settlers from this area.

Soon after the purchase of Florida settlers began to move in from Alabama and other parts of the United States. However, little progress was made in the timber industry during the first few years after Florida became a part of the United States. [Florida was purchased from Spain in 1819, became a territory in 1822 and was admitted as a state in 1945] By 1830 the business of cutting and marketing hewn timber had made considerable

progress. Many round logs were being floated down the river to the Pensacola market. Like the hewn timber the logs were rafted to the Ferry Pass, at the head of the Escambia Bay, and towed from there by tug boats.

By 1837 all the abandoned Spanish cabins had been repaired and occupied and many others built and also occupied by logging workers. One or two small sawmills using upright saws had been built on creeks supplying waterpower. Business was prosperous in certain areas along the Old Indian Trading Trail. In these prosperous areas short stretches of the trail had been beaten out later to become a part of the Winding River Road. Two or three log landings had been established on the river. Much hewn timber was being marketed. Many long spars were being sold along with round logs.

In 1837 the timber market suddenly slumped. All logging and timber operations closed down. There was no employment throughout the area. Money was scarce. The words "Hard Times" were heard everywhere. What was a prosperous area a few weeks before now seemed destined for a famine. The settlers who had been making money by raising beef cattle on the range and selling them for good prices now found themselves without a market.

The Panic was not without its benefits. The stalwart pioneers did not stroll up and down their log roads gazing at the logs and timber cut and ready for market or sit around log landings looking at big rafts of logs and hewn timber tied up in the river and think of the hundreds of dollars they would have gotten for them if the market had not suddenly slumped. They did not sit around in comfortable places on the seventeenth joint of their backbones and sing a mournful song of distress to some government agency for help. They showed their bulldog courage and resourcefulness by clearing fertile areas of swamp and hammock lands and planting them in corn, peas, sweet potatoes, sugarcane and vegetables. They learned how to conserve fish and game like they had seen the Indians do a few years before. Truly, they turned the unfortunate Panic into a blessing. This was the beginning of Agriculture in the northwestern part of Santa Rosa County.

Soon after the panic and a series of Indian Wars were over the timber market again became normal. Florida was soon admitted as a State. [1845] Business gradually became prosperous. The entire area took on new life. All the abandoned cabins formerly occupied by transient logging workers were repaired and occupied by other transient workers. Within the next few years many log and timber landings were established on the Escambia River and roads opened leading to them. Beginning at the southern end of the area these landings were as follows:

1. Waters Lake Landing, a mile or so north of the mouth of Moore's Creek, so named because a man by the name of Waters owned the land upon which it was located.
2. Mineral Springs Landing, two or three miles north of the Waters Lake Landing, named because it is near the "Spring of Healing Waters."
3. The Williams Lake Landing, a mile north of the Diamond Mill Creek and close by the mouth of the Cobb Mill Creek, so named because the landing was on land owned by Wiley J. Williams. The landing was sometimes called, "Wiley's Lake Landing."

4. **The Sunday Landing, later known as Carnley's Field Landing, so named because when it was first established the land upon which it was located was owned by Frank Sunday. A few years later the land became the property of Uncle Harvey Carnley. This landing is approximately a mile and half north of where the Winding River Road crossed the McCaskill Mill Creek.**
5. **The Mim's Island Landing, so named because a man by the name of Mims owned the land upon which it was located. The landing was located near the mouth of the creek later known as Holly Mill Creek. There was a small island in the middle of the river opposite this landing formed when the river and the creek washed into each other a hundred yards above the landing.**
6. **The Dead River Landing so named because it was on an old dead river formed when the river cut an ox bow loop. This landing was half a mile north of the Wilson Branch and a mile north of the Frank Sunday old home site.**
7. **The Old Steam Mill Bluff Landing, sometimes called the Campbell Bluff Landing, so named because at one time a small stream mill was operated on the bluff for a short time, and because it was near the old home site of Pioneer Grandfather Neil Campbell. This landing was also near the old Gaylor home site.**
8. **Bett's Lake Landing, so named because a man by the name of Betts owned the land upon which it was located. This landing was half a mile north from the place where the Winding River Road crossed the Edgely Creek, later known as the Barrow Creek and still later called the Bray Creek. It was also not far from the home site of two sturdy pioneers Uncle Tom Sunday and Uncle Louis Jones.**
9. **The Fortner Lake Landing, so named because it was located near the home site of Pioneer Robert Fortner the man who owned and operated the Pollard Ferry for many, many years. This landing is a few hundred yards north of the Florida-Alabama State Line in Alabama. It is mentioned here because thousands of logs and big sticks of hewn timber were hauled to this landing from Florida soil by Florida citizens.**

Shortly after the log and timber landings listed above were established, the following mills were in operation by waterpower supplied by creeks crossed by the Winding River Road. These mills cut square timber from yellow pine logs for the Pensacola Market and were used for grinding corn meal for bread and chops for livestock feed.

1. **The Johnson Mill, on Moore's Creek; near the edge of the river swamp, owned by a Mr. Johnson.**
2. **The Centennial Mill, on Moore's Creek two miles above the Johnson Mill, owned by the McDavid Brothers.**
3. **The McDavid Mill, on the McDavid Creek, not far from the river. Owned by Grandfather McDavid.**
4. **The Diamond Mill, on the Diamond Mill Creek, owned by Grandfather John T. Diamond.**
5. **The Cobb Mill, on the Cobb Mill Creek, owned by Washington Cobb.**
6. **McCaskill Mill, on the McCaskill Mill Creek, owned by Mr. McCaskill.**
7. **Holly-Riley Mill, on Holly Mill Creek owned by Holly and Riley.**

8. The Gaylor Old Mill, on Governor's Creek, later the Gaylor Creek, and still later the Campbell Creek, owned by Mr. Gaylor.
9. The Barrow Mill, on Edgely Creek, later Barrow Mill Creek, owned by Mr. Barrow for a short while only, (probably washed out.) Mr. Barrow later settled the Barrow place just beyond the present location of the Mt. Carmel Methodist Church and built a sawmill on the creek two miles west of his home in Alabama, know years later as the Pew Mill.
10. In 1886 the Bray Mill was built on what was then known as the Barrow Mill Creek. It was owned and operated for a few years by Henry Bray.

The work of these sawmills was cutting square timber from large yellow pine logs for the Pensacola market. However, the operation of these small saw mills did not stop the marketing of round logs, hewn timber or the long straight pine trees sold as spars. Premium prices were paid for extra long sticks of hewn timber and for extra long spars. Because of these premium prices many extra long sticks of hewn timber and long spars were hauled long distances to the log and timber landings on the river. Many tall straight pines were dug up and from six to eight feet of the taproot used. Such spars brought much higher prices than those not having a long portion of the tap root attached, because in fitting them in sailing vessels the tap root portion was placed beneath the deck of the vessel so that part of the tree growing exactly level with the surface of the ground was even with the deck of the vessel where the greatest strain was on the spar enabling the spar to better withstand storms and hurricanes at sea. Many such spars sold for as much as one dollar or more per linear feet. It was not uncommon for such spars to be hauled fifteen or more miles with a slow moving team of oxen and the use of large tail carts.

Each of the log landings and sawmills mentioned in this article had short roads leading to them over which logs were hauled. These roads were never surveyed, blazed out or constructed any more than was the Winding River Road. They, like the Historic Old Road were beaten out little by little as needed, following the Indian trails made in traveling to and from landings on the river where they kept their canoes and dug-outs handy for fishing and hunting and for trading trips. The roads used in hauling logs to the saw mills nearly always followed the routes traveled by the Indians in going up and down the creeks in search of wind game and around the edges of swamps and hammocks.

Finally by degrees the roads used for hauling logs to the different landings on the river and to the different saw mills became connected. Then it wasn't long before foot logs, often called "Raccoon Bridges", were replaced by pole bridges for use of wagons in crossing each mill creek near the mill. The oldest and longest Indian trail in this part of the county then was replaced by the Winding River Road, following in almost every foot it's approximate eighteen miles of the old Indian Trading Trail. It is interesting to note how this old winding road, in following the Indian Trail, avoided steep hills and deep hollows, shunned wet or occasionally wet places that would become boggy during constant use and become impassable, but followed dry ridges. If this road had to pass up or over a hill it always wound around in gradual graceful curves so as to make the incline as gentle as possible. Foot logs, fords and pole bridges were always located at strategic places where

washouts were few and upkeep negligible. It is interesting to observe even today the route of this winding road as it crossed the “Devil’s Backbone” not far from the Holly Mill Creek, a short distance below the old mill site.

For the information of the reader, I may state the “Devil’s Backbone”, is the name given years ago either by the Indians or the earliest white settlers to a long steep narrow ridge leading along down beside the Holly Mill creek on the south side and extending out into the low swampy flood plain almost to the river and rising higher toward it’s head where it was once capped with huge rocks. (Note. These rocks were dynamited a few years ago, breaking them into small pieces and hauled away and used for curbing to hold fills made in building the Jay-Century highway through the Escambia River Swamp.)

This interesting phenomenon creates interest, wonder and admiration in the minds of all persons who see it. To climb its steep sides rising a hundred feet or more and stand on the huge rocks imbedded in its narrow summit and look out over the surrounding low swamp land where no rocks are to be found, makes one wonder how the “Devil’s Backbone” and the huge rock got where they are. If the reader has not yet seen this phenomenon may I suggest that it will be well worth a trip down to Mimms Island Log and Timber Landing for the privilege of climbing this strange hill and walking upon the “Devil’s Backbone”.

The Indians were not book-made engineers or book scientists. However, they knew their woods, its soils, streams, hills and hollows and how to locate a trail for durability under long and hard use with little or no upkeep or change in location. Because of this modern roads have been located along the route of Indian trails. When I think of the Indian’s knowledge and understanding of his surroundings, his understanding of the social order of his people and his vision in the conservation of his natural resources, his forests, soils, fish, game, and unpolluted waters, I sometimes wonder if, in our present efforts to educate our people in books, we haven’t neglected a few of the basic principles that make an educated people.

The Indian did not burn or permit the annual burning of his forests, pastures or soils. He did not clear hillside fields or permit them to wash away. He did not permit the wanton destruction of his supply of fish and game. He did not permit the crystal waters of his springs, streamlets, creeks, lakes or rivers to be polluted. Seemingly he knew more about the value of pure water than our best physicians and sanitary engineers know today.

As a small boy it was my pleasure and privilege to travel almost all of this historic winding road more than sixty years ago with father, who as a boy had assisted beating out many of the last connecting links uniting it into one continuous stretch. As a small boy he hauled freight over this road throughout its entire length. He had hauled logs from the nearby woods to every log landing on the river. He had hauled hewn timber and spars to many of the landings, either driving the team or tailing the rear cart. He had assisted in hauling many extra long sticks of hewn timber and long dug up spars from down on Gillberry Branch, from Blackjack Creek way-down on Coldwater and from the big open pond. He had hauled a few extra long ones from the area around the famous Baygall Pond

and the hills of Three Hollows. He knew all the byways, side roads and trails leading into this historic road and the reason why they were there.

At an early age I traveled a few stretches of this road in company with my Grandfather John T. Diamond, Grandfather Neil Campbell, Uncle Gabe Capers and Uncle Tom Sunday. They were among the earliest pioneers in the area. They were here during the last years of the Spanish occupation and when the Creek Indians walked the old Trading Trail. They knew the history and the traditions of the road and could give interesting information. As a boy I traveled many stretches of this road with men in the middle pioneer class among who may be mentioned Uncle William Diamond, Uncle George Diamond, Mr. William Morris, (Uncle Bud), Esquire J. W. Mann, Hon E. V. McCaskill, Uncle James W. Nelson and Mr. Louis Jones. Many of these men lived for years in sight of the road. They knew the road and the area it served. They knew the location of all the wolf pits and pens, panther hide-outs and runs, bear traps and deer stands, and took great delight in passing this information on to an interested lad who wished many times he had been here during the days of Indians, panthers, wolves and bears.

The above information has been given to show how I came to know the history and traditions of the historic road and the communities it served.

After all the links connecting the log and timber landings on the river, the several sawmills on the creeks and many of the pioneer home sites the Winding Road was as follows:

Beginning at the Johnson Mill on Moore's Creek near the edge of the Escambia River swamp the road ran almost due north approximately one mile, passing near the Waters Lake Log and Timber Landing. It continued in a northerly direction along the edge of the river swamp and hammocks to the McDavid Mill Creek. Just before crossing this creek the road passed near the famous spring of "Healing Waters".

Near this spring the road ran close by the home sites of two famous pioneer settlers, R. T. McDavid and Duncan McArthur. Both of the men reared large families. Joel A. McDavid, a son of Mr. McDavid, served his county many years as chairman of the Board of County Commissioners. W. F. McArthur, a son of Mr. McArthur, served his county many years as Chairman of the County School Board.

From the bridge on the McDavid Mill Creek, the road ran northeastward across a low flat area often referred to as "River Flats", to a ford on the Diamond Mill Creek just below the Diamond Mill. At this point the road passed near the home of two pioneer citizens, Hon. Joel McDavid, John T. Diamond. Other noted pioneer families residing in this immediate neighborhood were McMillans, McKinnons, Halls, and Wilkinsons. At this point the road passed near the Old Coon Hill Mission Station of early pioneer days on the Piney-woods Branch, just above the head of the Diamond Mill Pond. This Mission Station later became the Damascus Baptist Church.

From the ford on the Diamond Mill Creek, the road continued in a northeasterly direction to a ford on the Cobb Mill Creek. Near this place the road ran hard by the homes of two noted pioneer families, Hon. Wily J. Williams and Mr. Washington Cobb. Mr. Williams served his county a number of years as Tax Collector.

A short distance before reaching the ford on the Cobb Mill Creek the road passed near the once famous Coon Hill Race Track. Horse racing flourished here prior to the Civil War when fleet footed Spanish ponies mixed with Arabian strains were raced against each other and against farm horses from nearby South Alabama. After the Civil War and carpetbag days were over, mustang ponies brought from Texas and Mexico were raced on the track against each other and against the Spanish ponies. When timber prices were high and money plentiful, betting was fast and wagers high. Interest in this track faded away with the “Down Fall” of timber prices in 1871. By the late seventies the track closed never to be reopened. Tradition is much gold and silver was buried near this track many years ago by gamblers. Many holes were dug 30 or 40 years ago by treasure hunters.

From the ford on the Cobb Mill Creek the road ran in a northeasterly direction across open piney-woods almost to the McCaskill Mill Creek where it curved to the right running almost due east to a ford on the creek. Near the curve in the road a short distance from the McCaskill Mill Creek was the home site of two famous early pioneers, J. J. McCaskill and Hon. E. V. McCaskill, both sons of Allen McCaskill who was among the earliest English speaking settlers in this area. Hon. E. V. McCaskill served his county and state in the Legislature for many years, first as a member of the House of Representatives and later as a member of the Senate. He was affectionately known as “Uncle Edward”.

Near the ford on the McCaskill Mill Creek were the home sites of the following famous citizens: Uncle Mint Carnley, Uncle Harvey Carnley, Uncle Burl Morris and the Dean of all the early pioneer settlers, Grandpa Gabe Capers. These men all lived to a ripe old age, serving their country well. Grandpa Gabe lived to be well over an hundred years before he passed away. In many respects, Grandpa Gabe was the most interesting character who ever lived in the area of the Winding River Road.

For a number of years he moved back and forth from way-up the Conecuh River in Alabama to way-down on the Escambia River in Florida. He probably knew the people, history and traditions of the counties watered by the Conecuh and Escambia Rivers better than any person who ever lived before or since his time. It was said he knew every man who had ever lived in the area permanently, temporarily or who had even sojourned a few months while working in a timber camp. He knew the good workers from the poor ones, the good fishermen from the poor one and those who never fished at all. He knew the hunters and the make of guns they shot. His favorite gun was a long Kentucky rifle with which he could crack a cat squirrel’s head in the top of the tallest cypress trees.

Grandpa Gabe became an “old time shouting Methodist”. He knew the church goers among the Methodist and Baptist from Sepulga and Patsalaggi Creeks south of Troy to the Old Coon Hill Mission Station on the Diamond Mill Creek way-down in Florida.

Grandpa Gabe knew the traditions and legendary history of the different communities, saw mills and timber camps for an hundred miles up and down the river. He was famous far and wide as an interpreter of dreams and as one who could explain the mysteries of all the ghost stories ever heard up and down the river. He did this through his meager knowledge of the Bible, his religious instincts and things revealed to him as he traveled alone over the “Tricky Trails”, “Rough Roads”, and when running rafts on the “Rolling Rivers” of his “Long Rolling Rocky Range”.

From the McCaskill Mill Creek, the road continued in a northeasterly direction to the Holly Mill Creek almost straight for half a mile to the top of a small hill. Here it began a series of winding curves up or down gentle slopes as it would among hills and hollows, sometimes on the fringes of swamps and hammocks adjacent to the river. Sometimes it would wind around between the heads of two hollows, the one on the right leading to a branch of the Holly Mill Creek, and the one on the left leading toward the river swamp. Near the Holly Mill Creek the road crossed a rather high hill extending in to the low flood plain of the river and rising higher toward its head near the river. This strange hill at an early date was given the name, “Devil’s Backbone”. In crossing this hill the road did so in graceful winding curves.

Near the Holly Mill Creek once lived the following early pioneer citizens: Pink Holly, the owner of the saw mill on the creek, Mr. Riley, his partner in the mill business for a while, James Forbes, the owner and operator of one of the earliest ferries on the river, Frank Sunday, and Mr. Malone. Pink Holly later served his county for a number of years as County Judge.

After crossing the Holly Mill Creek the road curved to the right leading almost due east to the home site of Frank Sunday. Here the road forked, the right prong leading almost due east up the south side of the Wilson Branch. Then on to an intersection with the log and timber road over which logs, hewn timber and spars had been hauled from all over Pine Level and way-down on Coldwater Creek to landings on the river. From this intersection the Winding Road followed the log and timber road, curving to the right around a small branch head, known in the early days as Wolf Pen Branch, so named because of the location of a wolf pen near it, and later as the James Nelson Spring Branch. The road continued to the south, winding along a narrow ridge to the “Rocky Hill Pass”, which is a narrow ridge extending between two hollows. The one on the right forming the head of Red Hill Branch, the head to the north prong of the Holly Mill Creek, and the one on the left forming the head of the creek known during the Spanish occupation as “Governor’s Creek”, later as Gaylor Creek and as Campbell Creek.

This pass for years was known as the most noted one in this area. All the timber hauled from the forest lying north, east and south for several miles was brought over this pass to the river, because the hollows leading from it were too deep and too steep for the heavy timber to be hauled across them. This pass was famous as the best deer stand in the county. Deer coming from almost any direction crossed this pass to avoid the steep hills. Wild turkeys did the same thing unless crowded by a fast dog or a man on horseback. Livestock in passing back and forth from the grazing lands on the level to the grazing lands

among the hills and in the river swamps and hammocks always traveled over this pass. Even the cunning wily fox when leading in the chase never failed to use this pass unless headed off by the dogs or detected a hunter on the stand.

After crossing the Rocky Hill Pass, this prong of the Winding River Road turned almost due northeast using the northeast prong of the early log and timber roads leading to the pass. It followed this log and timber road to its intersection with the Milton-Pollard Road and the Pollard-Johnson Ferry road at the south end of the lane at the Cobb Old Field where the village of Jay is now located.

From the Frank Sunday old home site the left prong of the road led almost due north for half a mile, crossing the Wilson Branch at a ford. Approximately three hundred yards from the branch, the road turned northeastward to where it crossed the log and timber road leading to the Dead River Landing. Here it turned a little more to the east and continued half a mile to the home site of Grandfather Neil Campbell beside the log and timber road leading to the Bluff Landing, later known as the Old Steam Mill Bluff Landing. Grandfather Campbell was one the earliest pioneer English speaking settlers in this immediate community. He erected here a large split-hewn log mansion in the early thirties. This home was in use more than an hundred years during which time it was occupied by four generations of the Campbell family.

Just before coming to the Grandfather Campbell residence the road passed over a high hill overlooking the beautiful Escambia River to the north and west. Close by and on the north side of the road almost on top of this hill is located a little and almost forgotten cemetery. It is mentioned a time or two later in this article.

At the Grandfather Campbell residence the road crossed the log and timber road leading to the Bluff Landing, later known as the Old Steam Mill Bluff Landing. Immediately after crossing this log and timber road the Winding River Road led almost due east by way of the Rix Gaylor home site to a creek known in the early days of the Spanish Occupation as Governor's Creek. Later it was known as Gaylor Creek. For a number of years it has been known as Campbell Creek.

In this community during the Spanish Occupation several Spanish settlers lived, among whom were two brothers, Rix Gaylor and Talton Gaylor better known as Rix and Talc. They belonged to the Spanish aristocracy. They were proud, high tempered, courageous and full of the pioneer Spanish fighting spirit. They were timber and logging men. Each of the brothers owned and looked after a herd of fine range cattle.

Talc erected a modest log cabin near a springhead known later as the Malone Place. It was only a few hundred yards north of the Wilson Branch. Here he built his cattle pens and probably cultivated some of them as a vegetable garden. Here he and his wife lived and looked after logging and timber and fine range cattle. It was said Talc was a lover of the big woods and spent much time looking after his cattle and keeping his pantry supplied with all sorts of wild game. His cabin was not far from the old log and timber road leading from Pine Level by way of the famous Rocky Hill Pass to the log and timber landings down

on the river known as Dead River and Bluff Landings. This modest cabin was also in sight of the roads leading to the Forbes Ferry on the river near the Mimms Island Landing and to an old ferry a short distance below the mouth of the Big Escambia Creek, known many years later as Flomaton Ferry. Tradition tells us this modest cabin shared its proud Spanish hospitality with many travelers passing within sight of its friendly campfires. Tradition also tells us Talc disposed of all his cattle, abandoned his modest cabin and cattle pens and left Florida soon after it was purchased by the United States.

Approximately half way between the Grandfather Campbell residence and the creek now known as Campbell Creek, the Winding River Road passed over a hill having a rather steep slope overlooking toward the north and west the low flood plain of the Escambia River. From this hill one can see far across the beautiful river valley into the state of Alabama. On top of this hill is a sort of sloping plateau, sloping gently toward south and east, enabling one to overlook the verdant valley of the Campbell Creek. On this beautiful home site Rix Gaylor built a large double-pen log mansion in which to live and rear his family. He erected a small mill down on the creek bearing his name at the time. He cleared a few acres on the sloping fertile plateau directly across the road south of his home to take care of his herd of fine range cattle and to supply grain and vegetables for home use. The place became known throughout the county for its warm Spanish hospitality. Many travelers passing in front of this home as they traveled up and down the Old Indian Trading Trail and later the old Winding River Road were royally entertained at what was known as the "Double Pen Mansion". Rix Gaylor was one among a few other Spanish settlers who took advantage of that part of the purchase agreement by which the United States agreed to protect the life and property of all Spanish settlers who might choose to remain in Florida.

Uncle Tom Sunday, who traveled this Historic Road when it was known only as the Indian Trading Trail and traveled by Indians and Spaniards and later after it became the Winding River Road, lived not many miles from the residences of the Gaylor brothers. He related this true incident in connection with an argument between Rix and Talc.

It seems a cattle sale was being held in the community and the two brothers became involved in an argument about the sale. The argument soon waxed warm. A few harsh words were exchanged. Talc then struck Rix a hard blow over the head with an old time gun, bending the barrel, completely ruining it and causing Rix to stagger and drop to his knees. As Rix recovered and saw Talc trying to shoot him, he snatched a large knife from his pocket and stabbed Talc inflicting a severe wound, evidently cutting an artery because of the large quantity of blood flowing from the wound. A number of bystanders carried Talc to a nearby cabin and began to apply all remedies known to them to stop the flow of blood from a fresh wound. It seemed for a while Talc would bleed to death in spite of all the resourceful pioneers could do for him. In the meantime it was learned Rix possessed the supernatural power to "Stop Blood", if his brother would permit him to do so. The offer was made known to Talc who refused it by informing the men he would rather die than accept aid from Rix. The men finally got the

bleeding stopped and Talc was soon well. This incident occurred only a short time before the purchase of Florida and is probably one reason why Talc left Florida, the land of his choice, to seek adventure in other lands.

Tradition tells us the large double-pen mansion beside the Old Indian Trading Trail, later the Historic Winding Road, was occupied by Mr. Rix Gaylor and his beautiful Spanish wife and a few years later a pair of twin boys. All went well in the double-pen mansion for a few years. Under the new form of government the country prospered. The Old Trading Trail became the Historic Winding Road. The big timber remained plentiful and the range luxuriant and succulent. The wild game continued to play and scamper around the big double-pen mansion in abundance and the great woods continued to be beautiful and attractive.

Sometime after Florida became a part of the United States [March 3, 1845], when the Gaylor twins were almost grown, Mrs. Gaylor died. She was buried in the little cemetery on the high hill close beside the crooked trail, now the Winding River Road, leaving her husband with twin boys in their late teens. Approximately twenty years later Mr. Gaylor died and was buried beside his wife's grave on the hill overlooking the Escambia River and the great forest growing so magnificent in the valley. This left the twin boys, both single, as the only occupants of the now famous mansion and the sole owners of all the Gaylor property, timber, land, mill and livestock.

Not long after their father's death, the boys got into an argument over the management and division of the property. The argument continued at intervals for several weeks. Finally it became known to some of the scattering neighbors that the boys were talking of settling the matter by fighting a duel which was a common custom among many proud aristocratic Spaniards. Pretty soon people passing the old mansion, the cattle pens and the mill, saw nothing of either boy and started to search for them.

Their cold dead bodies were found on the floor of the main living room of the old mansion, lying on opposite sides of the room, each brother still clutching in his cold stiff right hand a large freshly sharpened, bloody hunting knife. The bodies were literally cut to pieces and the floor a veritable pool of blood. The door and wooden shutters were securely fastened on the inside. In pioneer fashion, the bodies of the twin brothers were buried in the little cemetery overlooking the beautiful river valley, beside the graves of their parents. Nothing marked the graves except little mounds of earth and unlettered wooden stakes. Perhaps a few wild flowers, dainty and attractive, brought from the beautiful picturesque and enchanting woods the Gaylors loved so well, were planted on the graves, soon to be moved away by the elements of passing years. The old log mansion stood on the beautiful hill overlooking the two attractive valleys for another forty or fifty years, to be occupied by squatters and sojourners of sundry sorts. All these years the blood of the twin brothers soaked deep into the floor of the main living room of the proud rustic Gaylor Mansion and remained to tell the story of the greatest tragedy of the Winding River Road.

After crossing the Campbell Creek, the old road curved back to the northeast winding around a steep hill composed almost entirely of white gravel rock and coarse white sand to a bridge on the creek first known as Edely Creek and later as the Bray Mill Creek.

Immediately after crossing this creek, the road turned almost due east to the home site of a pioneer citizen by the name of Steve Jones. A short distance from the Steve Jones place, two prominent early pioneer citizens lived for many years. They were Grandfather Tom Sunday and his son-in-law Uncle Louis Jones. During 1886 and 1887 as a small boy assisting father as a cypress camp flunky near the Betts Lake Log Landing, I had many interesting conversations with Grandfather Sunday about the early pioneer hardships. Grandfather Sunday told me he was then over 80 years old. From this we observed he was here fifteen of twenty years before the Spanish Occupation ended.

From the Steve Jones place the road continued almost due east to a ford on White Water Branch.

It may be of interest to many of the younger readers to know that just before crossing the White Water Branch the road was crossed by what was often referred to as the "First Railroad in the Community". It was built by using long straight pine poles 6 to 8 inches in diameter for the track. It had only one flat car rolling on eight wheels having large rims made to fit snugly on the round pole wooden rails. The car was used to haul logs and was pulled by a team of logging oxen. The logs were loaded at the edge of the level not far from the head of White Water Branch and carried down the West Side of the branch and dumped into the river at a place known as Rattlegut Cove. The tram road was built and operated by the Molino Milling and Logging Company. It was operated only a short time before the Civil War caused it to be closed. After the war was over Sim Lewis, a logger on the river filed a lawsuit to recover damages because several hundred of his logs were found shut up in a log boom of the Molino Logging and Milling Company. The pole road and a large part of the land held with it became the property of Sim Lewis. My understanding is the settlement was made through a compromise out of court. Later the Milligan, Chaffin and Jernigan Company bought the pole road and land from Sim Lewis. This company also bought all the land owned in this area by the Molino Logging and Milling Company. This company operated the pole road and logging business for a short time.

From the ford on White Water Branch, the road turned more to the left and followed a general northeasterly course for approximately a mile and a half, winding along the fringes of swamps and hammocks on the left and the foot of a hill on the right. In a few places the hill was real steep. It left the fringe of the swamps and hammocks at a big spring head a short distance from where the Milligan & Chaffin Company built a large farmhouse. It was used as headquarters for the cultivation of approximately seventy-five acres of swampland cleared back in the swamp on the river. From this point the road curved to the right where half a mile away it intersected the Milton-Pollard Road at the top of a big red clay hill approximately half a mile from the state line.

Before all the stretches of log and timber roads between the log landings on the river and between the different saw mills on the creeks became connected, stretches of it were used only locally. After all the connections were made the road gradually came into general use. It was used by the inhabitants of the area in traveling up and down the river in looking after logging and timber business and in looking after livestock and other business transactions handled by inhabitants of such communities. It was used to haul hundreds of tons of feed to commissaries operated at the several saw mills and logging camps along the route to feed the logging teams. It was used to haul hundred of wagonloads of supplies for these same commissaries for use of employees in the logging business and their families. A great deal of the feed and supplies was hauled from Pollard, Alabama, in big wagons pulled by three or four yoke of big logging oxen. Such wagons usually carried from 4 to 6 thousand pounds.

This road was used by people in traveling to and from social gatherings such as community or inter-community fish fries down by the river at the log landings. Plenty of fish could be caught in a few hours to supply dinner and supper for the crowd. Sometime these gatherings would be held at a sawmill when it was closed down for repairs. In such cases the water would be permitted to drain from the pond. Hundreds of fish would be floundering in small pools left in the pond. The fish could be easily picked up by men and boys and placed in big buckets. Usually the owner of the mill invited all the men working either at the mill or in the logging camps and their families to come to the mill for a big fish fry and a square dance. On such occasions the owner of the mill would usually build a platform for the use of the dancers.

The inhabitants of this area often rode in big freight wagons up and down this winding road to Fourth of July Celebrations. Big country dinners of barbecued juicy beef, crisp venison and tender brown turkey would be served with smoking hot coffee dipped from a couple of big wash-pots boiling on the same bed of coals. They also rode in these same big freight wagons over this same winding road going to and from May Day picnics at the big spring down on the creek where dinner was brought from home in big baskets and served on long tables. [These baskets were made at home from white oat splits]. This was the season when young chickens and young wild turkeys were tender and juicy. When fried brown and crisp they added joy to such picnics. The many big sponge cakes, broad frosted cakes and high build up layer cakes never failed to add sweetness to the occasion. Dancing on a big platform made of undressed lumber would supply amusement for the day. No brass band would be there with its loud "Tooting and Honking Horns" called classic music, but two or three old time fiddlers would be there with fiddles brought from Spain, mellowed by an hundred years of service. When they tuned up these old instruments and rosined their bows, with fresh rosin picked from a cat-face on a nearby pine tree, they made music that stirred people's souls and moved their feet in perfect rhythm with the music.

A few years prior to the Civil War and for ten years thereafter, Pollard, Alabama, was a thriving town and a trade center and large circuses would come there almost every year. On such occasions it was not uncommon for two or more big freight wagons loaded with from fifteen to twenty people, usually young folks with an elderly person or two in

each wagon as chaperons, to travel this Winding River Road to see the circus. Such trips are best described as “Everybody on a joy ride to see the Circus”. One of the highlights of these circus trips was the fun of camping out one or two nights. Many people who made one or more of these trips have discussed them in my presence. Each told the same fascinating experiences with enthusiasm. Aunt Mary Ann Nelson relates interesting experiences of her trip in the big freight wagon to Pollard to see the circus. This trip was made in 1871. Her party left the Diamond residence about noon. A few stops were made in picking up members of the party. They camped the first night at the old Gaylor home place. This was many years after the tragic death of the Gaylor twin brothers. The house was in a dilapidated state at the time. An old couple, living in a sort of camp fashion occupied it. The circus party went in and looked at the blood on the twin brothers still plainly visible on the floor of the room in which they cut each other to pieces. The next day after the show was over the party got back across the Pollard Ferry on the river just before night and camped at the Fortner Branch just across the state line in Florida. The trip furnished far more pleasure and fascinating fun than if it had been made in a new ford or a modern Cadillac automobile.

These same big freight wagons carried loads of people up and down portions of this same Winding River Road to the Coon Hill Baptist Mission Station on the Diamond Mill Creek. At this station one could hear an itinerant Missionary explain the Gospel of Salvation in language and illustrations readily understood by the pioneer people. These same big wagons often carried loads of people up and down portions of this same road to the Methodist Mission Station on the McCaskill Mill Creek to hear a Methodist Missionary preach the Gospel in simple language to plain pioneer people who “Heard him gladly”.

There were many byways and side roads leading into and branching out from this historic road or merely crossing it. The Indians long before the coming of the white men to the area had beaten out almost all these byways and side roads. Truly these side roads were an important part of the system once used by the red men of the forest, now partially modernized by the logging men. They mutely but strongly revealed some interesting history connected with the road and the area.

Near the log and timber landings many roads led into or merely crossed the Winding River Road. It was common for these roads to intersect the Winding Road and follow it from a few hundred yards to a mile or more and then leave it at the most convenient place for going to the landing down on the river. These roads were easily identified. In almost all instances they were worn deep from use in hauling heavy loads of logs and timber. Where such byroads entered the Winding Road, they did so in graceful curves because big carts with tongues thirty feet long loaded with logs sometimes sixty feet in length pulled by four yoke of oxen could not make a sharp turn. Such roads left the Winding Road in the same graceful curves. They too were worn deep from long and heavy use. Any one at all familiar with a logging and timber country can look at these old roads even today, washed into gullies or grown over with brush and trees, and tell he is looking at old log and timber roads worn deep in hauling the big trees to market.

Many other side roads and trails branched out from this Winding Road. Some might be dim showing little or no use. Others would show constant light use. Others would show they had been abandoned altogether. They too revealed history. Following one of these abandoned trails one would come to the ruins of an early home site now consisting of a corner of a log cabin. Perhaps a few old China Tree stubs set there by an early Spaniard and a little cleared patch now overgrown with brush and briars. A washed out trail would lead down to a spring. The man once living there had died and been buried near the cabin or had left seeking adventure or greener pastures on other frontiers.

Sometimes dim trails or side roads would be observed leading off toward the river. Such trails and roads usually led to cozy fishing coves or favorite haunt of wild game. They might lead to a former site of an Indian Village on a high shell hammock beside a cool clear spring or near the mouth of a clear creek proving a splendid mooring place for canoes and dugouts. Sometimes during the summer lulls in logging such side trails would show constant use because labor had been temporarily transferred from logging camps and sawmills to favorite fishing pools and hunting grounds.

Two large cemeteries are located only short distances from this historic road. They are known as Coon Hill Cemetery, located not far from the Diamond Mill Creek, and the Carnley Cemetery, located near the McCaskill Mill Creek. Side roads led from the River Road to these burying grounds during the early pioneer days. Side trails and roads still lead to these places. But like the old Winding River Road, they have been permitted to grow over with bushes, briars and vines. There is no authentic information relative to the exact dates that these cemeteries were established. The deeds conveying the land upon which they are located were made many years after they were first used as burying grounds. However, reasonable traditional information and markings on many gravestones indicate they were in use shortly after Florida was transferred to the United States. These Cemeteries, mutely but plainly, reveal much history of the early days of the communities in which they are located. Silently they disclose the manners, customs and character of the first settlers in the land. To obtain this valuable and inspiring information, one has but to visit these places, read the inscription on the grave markers, gaze upon the many little mounds and depressions scattered here and there over a large area, consider them well and receive instruction.

One small cemetery is located a short distance northeast from the old crossing on the McDavid Mill Creek on a little rise near the old road. It has no name and contains but few visible graves. However, a close examination of the soil near the few visible graves indicates many more bodies were buried there many years ago, probably during the Spanish Occupation and shortly thereafter. Rather definite traditional information tends to show this cemetery was established during the early period of the Spanish Occupation and a few Spaniards were buried there. Rather authentic traditional information indicates the Spaniards buried a few Negroes here, probably run-a-way slaves from Alabama or stolen and harbored here by the early Spaniards. Only a few slaves were ever owned in this area. Hence, the cemetery contains but few graves of Negroes known to have been slaves. Substantial information indicates no white people were ever buried here, except a number of early Spaniards.

A small cemetery is located approximately half a mile west of the Historic Winding River Road and the same distance north from the McCaskill Mill Creek. It is located at a beautiful spot on a high bluff overlooking the flood plain of the Escambia River. The area is partially covered with beautiful hardwood trees interspersed with tall pines. In the early spring the entire area is like a beautiful flower garden in full bloom. All during the autumn, the place is gorgeous and enchanting with gay colored leaves carrying all colors of the rainbow and thousands of combinations of colors such as none but the “Supreme Artist Himself” can produce. For more than an hundred years this cemetery has been know in its immediate community as the “Old Indian Graveyard”. There is no authentic information to indicate the place contains the graves of Indians. However, the natural beauty and seclusiveness of the place indicates it was selected by the red children of the great forest rather than by any pioneers or the palefaces.

After visiting this place recently and making a careful examination of it, I am convinced it contains many more graves than the few Spaniards and Negroes purported to have been buried there during and shortly after the Spanish Occupation. It is definitely known that one slave owner during the 1840’s and 1950’s brought to this community a number of Negro slaves to be used in clearing and cultivating large areas of low flood plain on the Escambia River valley. The project was a failure. Many of the slaves died probably from malaria contracted while working daily in the river swamp where they were bitten continuously by swarms of mosquitoes and were given no medical aid. They were buried in the cemetery. It is my candid opinion that the place does contain the last resting-place of the bodies of many Indians buried there before the Spaniards occupied the country.

What has been referred to during the past sixty years as a little cemetery, is located close beside the Winding River Road approximately an hundred yards west of the old home site of Grandfather Neil Campbell. It is on the north side of the road almost directly on top of a high hill overlooking toward the north and west the great low flood plain of the Escambia River. It is indeed a burying place full of natural scenic beauty. Rather definite traditional information indicates this cemetery was established during the Spanish Occupation and several Spaniards were buried there before Florida became a part of the United States and a few afterwards. This same source of information shows a few Negroes brought here by the Spaniards were buried in this graveyard. It also indicates a number of Negro slaves who had run-away from Alabama, or were stolen, are buried on this hill. Until recently I had supposed, as many other people who have casually passed this way, that it contains the last resting place of not more than a half a dozen bodies. However, recently I visited the place and made a careful examination of the area for several feet in all directions from the half a dozen visible graves. There is no doubt but what the cemetery is the burial ground for many more bodies than a casual glance indicates.

These three small cemeteries, like the two large ones, reveal much of the early History of their respective communities. They contain no inscriptions on grave markers to be read and contemplated. Yet, the little mounds of earth and shallow depressions, when gazed upon in contemplative thought mutely disclose pages of History to the careful observer. They show the burial ground of a pioneer people in a primitive state. These little

mounds and shallow depressions show a people once lived here close to nature, a people who really loved the great wild fascinating woods. This is only a stage in the early American civilization. They were the Abraham and Daniel Boone who went ahead and bore the hardships for the benefit of those of us who come after them.

There are, no doubt, many other graves scattered up and down the area of the Historic Winding River Road besides those in the cemeteries here mentioned. It was a common custom in a frontier country, such as this area was, for isolated pioneers to bury their dead near their home, be it a cabin or a mansion, in some favorite beauty spot where members of the family might go and sit beside the graves in meditation. No permanent markers were placed to identify these graves. Hence, the elements of time soon removed all means of locating them.

No doubt many Indians were buried up and down the Old Indian Trading Trail near their villages or tepees on high bluffs along clear creeks or near large springs. We have definite proof that Indians had their villages located along the streams and it was their custom to bury their dead not too far from their villages. They always selected a location surrounded with natural beauty where the souls of the departed ones could commune with the Great Spirit, undisturbed. Not many years ago, during a great flood in the Escambia River, a portion of a high bluff near Mimms Island Log and Timber Landing washed away. Shortly after the floodwaters subsided, several bones and skulls were observed protruding from the edge of the bank, not far from the location of an old Indian village. It is well known that many Indian villages were located on high bluffs along many creeks near the Escambia River. Naturally we have reason to believe each village had its own burial ground at some nearby grove of beautiful hardwood trees, twining flowing vines and shrubs producing flowers full of dainty colors and attractive.

It does not seem appropriate to close this article without mentioning the wild life and the flowering trees, shrubs, vines and annuals seen beside the road. They were a natural part of the area as much as the big timber trees, springs, pastures and pioneers.

Travelers on the Winding River Road during the day often were delighted to see herds of white tail deer loping beside the road and circling a hill or spring head. It was a common sight to see them from one end of the road to the other. Big bronze colored wild turkeys were in flocks throughout the entire length of the road, and were a delightful and inspiring sight to almost every person traveling only a short portion of this road. Both the big fox squirrels and the little cat squirrels were plentiful on all stretches of the road. Quail were plentiful all along the way. Many songbirds delighted the travelers. Many hawks of different sizes were often visible. Seemingly they had their homes in the swamps and hammocks along the river. Golden eagles lived in the area and were often seen at a distance, perched in the top of a tall dead tree or flying, always keeping a safe distance from travelers.

At night the travelers on this road were kept busy listening to the sounds and songs of the nearby wildlife. The croaks and lullabies of the great jumping spring frogs and the big bullfrogs were ever present and interesting. Travelers were well entertained by the

sharp piercing cries of the Whip-Poor-Wills with their one song, “Whip Will With a White Oak”. The evening lullabies of the katydids and the buzzing songs of the locusts were familiar all up and down the road. Along certain areas near swamps and hammocks the shivering freezing cries of the little American screech owl would supply entertainment to drive away the witches and evil spirits. At other places a few yards distant from big dismal swampy areas the sounds of the great American barred owl would be heard “ who, who, who?” coming from the swamp in the form of a question. If not taken as a personal question this sound would probably drive all the spooks and ghosts in hearing distance to their hideouts.

The screaming cries of the panthers and the yowling of big bobcats came in for a variety of entertainment by the wildlife of the area, not always welcome of course but never failed to keep the sleepy traveler wide awake. Probably the most lonesome sounds to be heard by travelers on this road were the lonely howls coming from packs of wolves from a few hundred yards to a mile away. Sometimes there would be as many as three packs howling in different directions, each pack howling to answer the others. Many old men told me that when one pack of wolves howled a short distance down the road ahead of a slow moving freight wagon, answered by another pack a short distance behind the wagon, it required courage in a boy, from 12 to 15 years old, to prevent cold shivers from running up his backbone and pushing his hat off. Then in a few places not far from marshy baygalls, dead rivers or swampy sloughs the bellowing of huge alligators would sometimes lull a lonely camper to sleep as he gazed at the stars and wondered about the wildlife seemingly everywhere.

Before the primeval forest beside this road felt the destructive hand of civilized man, the pristine beauty of its wild flowers was indeed a beautiful sight for the sturdy pioneer settlers to look upon as they slowly traveled this road. While traveling this road, alert travelers were never lonesome. Landscapes of perfect design were with them all along the route. They were kept busy looking at the ever-changing scenery as the road wound in circles or winding angles around the edge of the river swamp and hammocks or over small hills in graceful curves along hillsides and valleys. At one place the scene would be a group of massive trees, tall and stately, many of them having attractive foliage interspersed with showy flowers shining like gems in a beautiful setting. At another it would be a group or groups of trees decorated with twining vines draped with long spikes of colorful flowers portraying the particular season. At another it would be a group or small patches of flowering shrubs set against a beautiful background. At another it would be a beautiful creek of clear water flowing swiftly beneath a rustic bridge or a well-worn foot log. At another it would be a babbling brook or crystal water gliding and swirling over white sand bars and bright colored pebbles with little boats of gay colored leaves or snow white petals of large magnolia flowers riding with perfect ease. At another it would be a green grassy meadow interspersed with dainty flowering annuals depicting the changing seasons.

The first of the flowering trees to be mentioned is the magnolia grandiflora, tall with long closely growing branches supporting a heavy growth of dark green glossy leaves as a background for the most showy flowers of the forest. Tradition tells us the famous old romancing Spaniard who came to the new world seeking beauty and eternal youth, after

gazing a long time upon a grove of these enchanting trees in full flowering, exclaimed: “Truly, I’ve found the land of flowers and eternal youth”. He named the newly discovered land Florida. Other trees in the bay family noted for their beautiful sweet scented flowers are the white and red bays, so named because of the color of their flowers, leaves and bark.

Perhaps the next most noted flowering tree is the tall yellow popular or tulip tree bearing tulip shaped flowers, pale yellowish in color, and as large and showy as a log camp worker’s coffee cup. The dogwood trees covered many hammocks and hillsides in early spring with a solid mass of white flowers, resembling great white “Thunderhead” clouds as they often appear on bright sunny days during the dry spring weather. Occasionally a dogwood tree would be seen bearing beautiful waxy pink flowers. Their rarity added to their beauty. It was said they brought good luck to all that saw them in full bloom. The aromatic sassafras trees were here in great numbers in early spring when full of soft fuzzy flowers as yellow as pure gold. The fringe tree grew all along this road from six to twenty feet tall and draped itself beautifully in early spring with long white silky flowers often referred to as, “Grandsir Graybread”. The wild plum tree decorated the fringes of the forest here and there with its pale pink flowers early in spring before new leaves appeared, thus making it easily visible in its favorite setting. The tall white maple grew thick along the brooks, creeks and fringes of swamps and hammocks producing its fruit and flowers in gay red colors before new leaves appeared. It was lovely in its gay red robe and a joyous forerunner of gladsome spring.

Flowering vines decorated trees and shrubs in every hammock adjacent to the river swamp. They twined themselves around the trees and shrubs growing beside creeks and streamlets, on the hills, and in the valleys from one end of the Winding River Road to the other. Great hanging clusters of yellow jasmine could be seen and smelled all along the historic road and were among the earliest messengers to announce the passing of winter and the coming of spring. During warm spring nights late in February and March, although the flowers could not be seen, it was a joy to the travelers to sniff their delightful odors and see their beauty in imagination. The showy woodbine was to be seen thick along many hillsides with its cluster of bright red flowers hanging as perfect draperies from many bushes and small trees.

The mountain laurel gave outstanding beauty on almost every steep bluff adjacent to the road and along the banks of every creek and streamlet. It was at its best around the big springheads, the sources of brooks and branches. For richness of color and daintiness of texture, no cultivated flower has yet been able to compete with it. Then there were hundreds of patches and small clusters of wild azaleas, sometimes called wild honeysuckle, growing in damp moist places on either side of the Winding Road to supply abundant beauty and inspiration to the travelers. The flowers were in three colors, pale pink, bright red and pale yellow. This flower, like the yellow jasmine, furnished the travelers with delightful odors even at night when it could not be seen.

All along the roadside grew many varieties of flowering annuals that seemingly spring up and bloomed over-night after the first few warm spring days April flower

producing showers. Small they were, but colorful, dainty and full of beauty, always delighting those who traveled the Winding River Road.

Many fall flowers decorated the landscape beside the road, in colors suitable for the season. Little wild daisies in gay colors and rare combinations of colors were in clusters here and there, always as if arranged by specialist trained in the art of flower arrangement. Clusters of one color would be growing in the light sandy soil. Clusters of another color would be growing in heavy red clays. Clumps of another color would be flourishing in black loamy soil. Patches of still other colors would be growing in places damp or full of moisture. Some varieties would be bright and beautiful in sunny spots among the big trees while other varieties would be just as attractive in partially shaded spots. All were dainty and rich in autumn colors.

On many hillsides in late September and all through October could be found large patches of tall yellow daisy-like flowers. They were full of bright color and this could be seen for a long distance. There were two varieties of these flowers. One seemed to thrive on dry hillsides while the other flourished in damper soil down in the valleys. The towering fluffy goldenrod and the tall spangling buttercup stood high above all the other fall flowers. They were attractive to the travelers, always adding golden beauty and Halloween spookiness to the Winding River Road.

It seems fitting to mention the colorful beauty in the forest leaves beside this road during the autumn days. All through October, November and often times until late in December the foliage along this road was gorgeous, displaying all the colors and combinations of colors known to the great artists. The paintings on exhibition beside this Winding Road, like a great panorama on parade, were the work of the greatest Artist of all ages, Jehovah, Himself. No wonder they were full of beauty and loveliness. No wonder they were attractive, fascinating and inspiring. They were but the work of the great Artist revealing His nature in colors on His canvass made especially for this purpose, **THE FOLIAGE OF HIS FOREST PRIMEVAL.**

It seems in order, before closing this article, to mention something of the qualities of the sturdy pioneers who settled in this area and “Beat Out” little by little short stretches of this once much used Historic Winding River Road, side roads and trails, each stretch for a specific use. These men had little education, learned at school or from reading the printed page. However, let not the reader assume they were illiterate or ignorant. They had learned WISDOM and UNDERSTANDING from the GREAT BOOK of NATURE as written by the hand of the Author Himself and spread wide before them day and night. From this book they had obtained information first hand as revealed to them by the Author Himself. They accepted this information as authentic and because of this acceptance and their unfaltering faith in the Author, their neighbors and themselves were enabled to bear the responsibilities of good citizens. The bearing of such responsibilities gladly, as they did, has ever been and still is convincing proof of educated people. These men were not Botanists, Geologists, Scientists or Linguists as measured by degrees conferred by institutions of learning. Yet they knew the Flora and Fauna, the Soils, Rocks and Waters of their vicinity. They knew the language of their vocation better and spoke it

with more clearness, effectiveness and understanding than the language spoken or written by any other group of men, regardless of their vocation or profession. Their composition, grammar and rhetoric may not have been according to standard rules, yet they never used statements, spoken or written, containing more than the meaning intended. They knew exactly what meaning they intended to convey and expressed it clearly and without double or triple meanings.

Let no one get the idea these sturdy pioneers did not appreciate what was referred to as “Book Learning”, “School Education” and “Church Religion”. The convincing proof that they did is the outstanding record showing they supported both to the best of their ability.