

ECHOS FROM THE PAST

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“GREENBRIAR JOE” MARTIN, LAND BARON AT 40

There's a long list of celebrities from the 1800's that wandered through the Grand River Valley, but most of them didn't have the impact of Joseph Lynch “Greenbriar Joe”, so named because of a house he built at a place he called Greenbrier southeast of Adair. To a degree, Martin was a self – made man, but he evolved from good stock. One eighth Cherokee himself, Joe's family background can be traced to 1066, when an ancestor, William Martine, accompanied William the Conqueror when the Gauls defeated England.

The Martin family migrated to America in the early 1700's and settled in Albermarle County, Virginia where today the family name endures as Martinsville, Virginia. Joe's family soon became entwined with the members of the Cherokee Nation and, among other notables on the family tree were General Joseph Martin, a Revolutionary War officer who married Elizabeth Ward. Elizabeth's mother Nancy Ward was a Cherokee icon who fought alongside her husband against the Creeks in 1755 and, when he was killed took up his rifle and led the Cherokee to victory. This led to her being acclaimed “Ghigau” with considerable power in the tribe. She is still honored today as the inspiration for an organization, the Nancy Ward Society. Adding to the credits for the Martin family tree, Joe's father John Calvin Martin was appointed first Chief Justice of the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court. The point is, Joe had the DNA to succeed in his own right....which he did.

Now John, Joe's father had two wives not unusual in those days, but a little unique in that they were sisters. John married Lucy McDaniel in 1807 and her sister Nellie in 1810 and provided large homes for both of them about 30 miles apart near Echota, Georgia. Lucy bore John seven children and Nellie added eight more, the next to last of her brood was Joseph Lynch Martin, born August 20, 1820.

The Martin family including eight year old Joe were caught up in removal of the tribe from the southeast to what became known as “Indian Territory” and in 1838 with their possessions and slaves migrated to Saline north of Fort Gibson. Little is known of his teenage years, but at the age of 20, Joe married Julia Lombard, the first of five wives who in all presented him with a total of 15 children. The couple moved north to Cabin Creek where Joe began a ranching operation which he called “Pensacola” which, according to Joe meant “land of beautiful flowers.” The ranch grew to nearly 100,000 acres stretching from Ketchum to Salina and included Greenbrier another antebellum home further south on the Grand River.

The Pensacola Ranch is entwined in the history of northeastern Oklahoma because Joe located the buildings on the west side of the Cabin Creek crossing on the Military Trail, that ran between Fort Scott and Fort Gibson, the Civil War lifeline for Federal troops. In addition to building a fine two story antebellum style home and quarters for his slaves, Joe also constructed a stage station, trading post, and a blacksmith shop to repair equipment. There were also a few private residences. The ranch and its owner prospered for the next 20 years but with the outbreak of the war that was to end.

Because of the surrounding terrain, the crossing at Cabin Creek was an ideal spot for Confederates to attack wagon trains and, although battles at the crossing in 1863 and 1864 are highlighted in history books, there were other skirmishes there too. Early in the war

Joe was appointed a Captain and later promoted to Major of Company D in Stand Watie Second Cherokee Mounted Volunteers. And as fate would dictate, during the second battle of Cabin Creek like many who fought the war on their own turf, Joe along with his sons Richard and Alexander took part in the destruction of his own Pensacola ranch.

Now, accounts vary regarding what buildings were destroyed and what survived, some contending that Joe's house actually remained until 1904 when it was destroyed by a tornado. But regardless of the condition of the ranch buildings Greenbrier Joe, never recovered the life style of previous years. In 1866 he moved his family back from Texas where he had sent them during the duration of the war and settled in at Greenbrier where he remained until his death in 1891. Tahlequah's newspaper The Cherokee Advocate mourned his death by noting, "He was brilliant, genial and good...one of nature's noblemen."

Joe Martin is just one of a long list of outstanding men and women, pioneers, artists, sports figures and war heroes with roots in northeastern Oklahoma. Each should be acknowledged and their contributions made known to today's generations.