

REMEMBERING MALACHI BY LINDA DAVIS

Now, let me tell you Malachi's story. First of all, I guess you want to know who Malachi was. Malachi, like the last book of the Old Testament in the Bible, was the last son of Benjamin Thompson of Bryan County, GA, in addition to being my long lost great-grandfather.

Genealogy has always been a fascinating subject for me. I soon learned that my Daddy's family history had been well documented. This was done when I was in grammar school leaving me only a few loose ends after reading what others had done. This documentation proved that I had about a half a dozen Revolutionary War patriots. When it came time for me to join the Daughters of the American Revolution, I was very thankful for the research that was done years ago and left for me.

Things were different with Mama's family. Since a hardship occurred in Mama's early childhood, she and most of her siblings were placed in various homes in two neighboring states. As a result of this, Mama could not share with me any family history, not even her own grandparents' names. She did have some siblings who knew some of the family history but not their grandparents' names, which I needed.

Mama's mother had the maiden name of one of the pioneer families who settled in Florida prior to 1845, hence this line was fairly easy to trace. The maiden name was Sweat. That was just a matter of connecting my direct line to the many online researchers of that huge north Florida family. Now it was time to research Mama's father. With the surname Thompson, my Grandfather Thompson's line was going to be a challenge. Just as Christopher Columbus determined to find the new world, I was determined to find this part of my family!

In 1990 I relocated to the north Florida county of Mama's birth and knew this was going to benefit my research. Distance can be a roadblock in anyone's genealogical research. Trying to piece together this family's history, I started going through the courthouse records, talking to aunts and uncles, and making notes about my Thompson family tree. Family tree! This line was more like a beautiful but twisted southern Wisteria vine. I first found my Thompson grandparents in the 1910 Florida Federal Census. Enumerated with them were the two oldest children, but Mama, who was born in 1912, was not there. By the 1920 census, she had been placed in a foster home in another state. I could not locate the family in the 1880 Florida Federal Census. I persevered. I can remember the day at the local library that I found my grandfather, Silas Thompson, in the Florida State Census of 1895. At last I had his father's name: Malachi. The census taker had spelled Malachi wrong, but I soon deciphered the handwriting. Can you believe that "Melakia" was Malachi? Rechecking the 1910 Federal Census, I found Malachi with his wife Nellie living down the road from my grandparents. They were both born across the river in Georgia. I rechecked the 1880 Georgia Federal Census and located the family just across the state line with my grandfather, age 4, in the household. The name Malachi was again badly misspelled.

Knowing that my Daddy's grandfathers had served in the Civil War as a Confederate, I had a strong feeling that Malachi had too. He was the right age and lived in the south. I found his

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name on the Florida Civil War Pension application index. At this point, I sent to the Florida Archives for this application. There was a wealth of information about Malachi on that one record: date of birth, place of birth, wife's name, marriage date and place, and a short description of his military service.

The documented military service revealed that Malachi was wounded at the Battle of Chickamauga when a cannon ball cut a tree, which fell on him. He lost the use of his right eye and broke his collarbone in the battle, which was called the "bloodiest of the war". Other records proved that he was a patient in the C.S.A. hospital in Montgomery, Alabama for several weeks. It was like reading a story. My mind's eye gave way to pictures of him in a battle similar to the ones portrayed in the old movie of *Gone With The Wind*, but Great-Grandpa Malachi was not an actor. He was real, my family, and experiencing the terrors of the last war fought on American soil.

Looking for the next generation, I searched the census of Malachi's birthplace of Bryan County, Georgia for him. For the longest time, I could not find Malachi in that county's Federal Census. Only after going house by house in the 1850 census did I learn that he was not the head of the house, but lived with his parents, Benjamin and Bitha, until they died. To this day, Bitha's maiden name is unknown. Once again Malachi was spelled so wrong that a search machine on a computer website could not find him. Malachi was found the old-fashioned way of doing genealogy: line-by-line, house-by-house, and name-by-name. It took time to find Malachi in Bryan County, Georgia in 1850. Although I found some of his brothers living in Georgia near the borderline of Florida, I never found Malachi in the 1860 or 1870 censuses.

Benjamin Thompson, Malachi's father, was enumerated as being born in Georgia about 1790 in the 1850 Bryan County census. He was a farmer. Further research found Benjamin Thompson's family in the 1820, 1830, and 1840 censuses of Bryan County, GA. Although the first Federal Census was done in 1790, the state of Georgia does not have censuses earlier than 1820, thus another roadblock. An 1819 land document gave proof that Malachi had many uncles and one aunt, who all lived in the surrounding areas. Other documents proved that Malachi was on the rolls of that county's first school. This little information gives an insight into Malachi's childhood.

After talking with my Mama's youngest brother, I learned that my grandfather was buried in an old private cemetery about twenty miles from my house in Nassau County, Florida. Of course, I couldn't wait to visit it. There were many unmarked graves in the Thompson plot. After some investigation, I learned that the adjacent plot belonged to my great-grandmother Nellie Sellers Thompson's sister and her family. Now I had another branch of Mama's family: Sellers. A ninety-year-old man who was the gravedigger told me that my great grandparents were buried next to my grandfather as well as other members of that family including Malachi's brother Hezekiah. My great-grandfather must have had a grave marker at one time, as there was a rotten broken piece of wood in the ground at the top of his grave suggesting a wooden cross

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was there once. The survey done years ago by the local genealogy society of the cemetery listed the grave as unmarked. I felt sad that his grave was not marked.

Knowing that both of my Daddy's grandfathers had historical grave markers showing that they served in the Confederate Army, I investigated to see if Malachi was eligible for one too. The Veterans' Administration would provide one if I provided all the detailed documentation proving that Malachi Thompson served and was buried here in that old cemetery with no marker. It took over three years to get all the documentation that was needed to satisfy the Veterans' Administration, but Malachi had his historical grave marker on order by 2003.

The local order of the Sons of the Confederacy learned of my endeavors and wanted to honor Malachi with a proper gravestone dedication ceremony. I thought it was going to be simple with members of my family but it was an occasion to remember. Some 100 descendents from surrounding states along with other honored guests were present on that sunny January day in 2004 for this ceremony. Besides the local Sons of the Confederacy, a group of ladies from the Georgia United Daughters of the Confederacy were there in antebellum attire. There was a bagpiper playing "Amazing Grace" and some ancient Scottish tunes for the old soldier. Then a unit of Confederate riflemen shot their old muskets into the air in a salute of respect. At this point, a marble upright grave marker with a Southern Cross was unveiled showing:



Malachi will be remembered as a simple man who was part of this great country's history. As a young man, he fought for the ideas of the times and was defeated. Later he moved to Nassau

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County, Florida and became a family man instilling Christian values and American patriotism to his children. Before her death, my mother knew that Malachi Thompson was her grandfather, which brought her some closure to the traumatic experiences of her childhood.

Finally, I want to say that Malachi's youngest son was buried in the National Cemetery in St. Augustine, FL after serving bravely in World War I. Malachi's grandson lost the use of his left hand when a Japanese bullet hit his elbow during World War II. Malachi's nephew, who was also laid to rest in the Thompson plot, had a military grave marker showing service in the Korean War. And, more recently descendents of his have served in the wars in Viet Nam, Persian Gulf, and now Iraq. Yes, this Scottish Thompson clan fought for freedom, which is something so many Americans take for granted. Now if I can just find Malachi's grandfather, as I have a strong feeling he too fought for this same freedom in the Revolutionary War.

Malachi Thompson's grave (and the marker you see above), is in the Old Still Cemetery.