

Land Owners of Russell Cave

Thomas Russell was born to Matthew and Jane Russell in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania on June 7, 1761. As time passed, Matthew and Jane acquired land in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. It was here that Thomas Russell entered the Revolutionary War of 1776. He served in the Third Regiment of the Light Dragoons under Colonel William Polk from 1781 until he was discharged on April 7, 1782. Around this time he met Tabitha Jenkins, the daughter of Captain Thomas and Verlinda Jenkins. After courting for several years Thomas and Tabitha were married on December 2, 1784.

During the seven years following the war Thomas and Tabitha lived in York County, South Carolina. This is where their first two children of thirteen were born. Afterward they moved to Pendleton District and settled on Cane Creek, where Thomas purchased farm land near his father. After twenty two years of farming on Cane Creek, Thomas and Tabitha settled in the "Old West Territory" of Alabama.

Following in his father's footsteps, Thomas became a public figure in the community of Doran's Cove. On August 14, 1820 he was commissioned a Justice of the Peace and in 1821 became a member of the Alabama State Legislature. It was not until September 15, 1830 that Thomas purchased land from his brother-in-law, James Doran, in Doran's Cove against Montague Mountain. This land also included a cave, situated back into the mountain side.

In 1850, Thomas Russell was laid to rest in Doran's Cove Cemetery. Ten years later, at the dawn of the Civil War, his beloved wife, Tabitha, joined him. It is unclear as to why the property was not retained by the children of Thomas and Tabitha; however, the land was sold to D.T. Crownover, a Private in the 17th Tennessee Infantry for the Confederate States of America.

For unknown reasons, D.T. started deeding tracts of land to his children in 1919. The tract of land with the cave on it was transferred to his daughter Maggie Crownover Ellis and her husband J.R. Ellis. In 1925, D.T. Crownover was laid to rest in Mount Carmel Cemetery. Two years after D.T.'s death Maggie and J.R. sold the property to Oscar Ridley, son of John Oscar and Maude Ellen Lovelace Ridley. At the age of 21, Oscar married Willie Ann Samples. Oral traditions passed down say that churches had picnics and social dances at the cave on the Ridley's property.

In 1956, the National Geographic Society purchased the old Russell farm to preserve it for the American people. Today visitors come from around the world to learn about the pre-history of the land and if people look closely, they will also see remnants of the lives left behind by the Russells and Ridleys.