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A Journey of Voices
Chasing the Frontier

Diane McAdams Gladow

Cover Image: William H. Jordan's land in Bienville Parish, Louisiana.

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Dedication

In order for a book like this to exist, people have to save things. In every generation, there must be a “keeper,” a person who keeps things and passes them on. My family is truly fortunate to have had a keeper in each generation since the early 1800s on both my mother and father’s side. With every generation of my mother’s family, the keeper’s surname changed, but the treasures were still saved and handed down. Although everyone cannot be a keeper or we would never be able to get through the doors of our houses, I salute the ones who are and were. Thanks to them, we who live in the present are able to put flesh on the bones of our ancestors and begin to understand who they were, and, in the process, who we are as well. This book is dedicated to my family’s “keepers” – Martha Jordan, Margaret Jane Jordan Ferguson, Nora Ferguson Crume, and Gladys Crume McAdams.

Chapter 1

“Whatcha doin’, Mama?” I asked.

“Lookin’ through this old trunk,” my mother replied. Mom knelt on her hands and knees beside a large hump-back trunk, the wood and metal fittings dark and battered with age. She had the lid open and was removing papers, books, and a number of strange objects. Being a curious nine-year-old, I wanted to know about the trunk and its contents.

“What’s in there?”

“The past,” my mother murmured.

“What’s the past?” I continued to press for answers as my nose wrinkled up from a strange smell. I quickly pinched it closed with my fingers.

“It’s the things that long-ago people treasured enough to save and pack away in a safe place.”

“Why did they like this old stuff?”

“Because they loved the people who owned these things, and it was all they had left after the people died,” Mother tried to explain, knowing it was impossible for a nine-year-old to understand.

“Did they save these things for us to have?” I asked.

“I don’t think they thought about that at the time. They just wanted to hold onto their loved ones,” my mother mused as she sorted items into neat piles.

Beginning to lose interest, my final comment on my mother’s project, as I held my nose, was, “The past sure stinks!” Mom laughed and said, “It sure does. Really old things always smell bad - musty and moldy.” Mom dove back into her work, and I slipped away to more important occupations.

Thus began my family’s long journey into the past, a journey to discover the people who had come before us, their lives, their treasured keepsakes, and even their voices. First my mother succumbed to the journey’s lure, my father and brother followed,

and finally it captured me as well. Two very old hump-back trunks began our adventure, one representing my father's family line and one my mother's. The trunks, packed with the treasures of several generations, lovingly saved and handed down, yielded the clues that eventually unlocked the past.

The memorabilia collected in the old trunks belonged to families who bore common characteristics. They immigrated to America from the British Isles - Scotland, Ireland, England, and Wales. Upon reaching the new world, they grouped themselves together with other families from the home countries, married each other's children, and traveled across America together - always seeking a better place. Common character traits were stubbornness and pride, and these often helped them persevere in troubled times. Laughter helped to heal their sadness and made bearable their sometimes poverty-stricken condition. They loved the land, and they loved music. Although they were highly religious, they rarely forgave an insult - in typical Scotch-Irish fashion. They protected their families no matter what the cost, and they were fierce fighters in many cases. They believed in God, and they believed in themselves; they had to hold these beliefs in order to survive. Included in the great mass of common people who built a new nation and saw it through some rough times, they lived each day as it came, made what they could out of it, and didn't dwell in the past. However, some of them tried to save small bits of that past, the bits that were connected to family.

Once the trunks revealed their treasures, the objects inside became as familiar to me growing up as my dolls or toys. I never thought it unusual to see a Civil War vintage letter lying on the dining room table ready to be transcribed. An old "last" used for constructing shoes during the Civil War served as a doorstep. Genealogical records and old pictures in piles covered the dining room desk. However, of all the objects preserved in the old trunks, the pliers used to pull teeth fascinated me the most. Old family stories related that the pliers had been used by ancestor land owners to "cure" their workers' tooth maladies. Antiquated eyeglasses and pipes, straight razors, watch chains, Bibles, school books and slates, and even a paint set became familiar objects to charge the imagination.

“Come look at these things and let me tell you who they belonged to.” My mother was trying again to stir up in me some interest for the old keepsakes.

“OK,” I mumbled unenthusiastically. I didn’t want to disappoint her, but a high school student has important things to do, and at this time of my life, I had only marginal interest in the old trunks’ contents. Dead certain that I would never remember what things belonged to which ancestor, I nonetheless listened to the old stories once again.

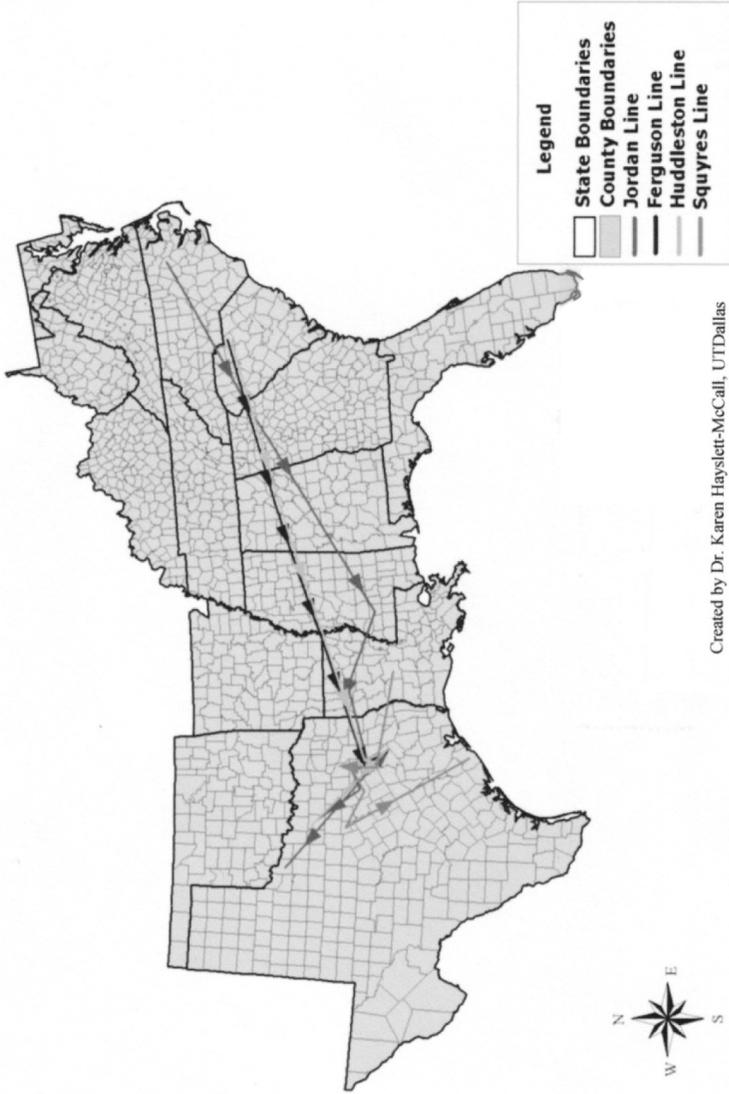
After an hour or so of listening, I finally said, “Mom, you better write down the history which goes with each one of these things and tag them because I’m not going to be able to remember any of this for long.”

Years later I realized she had listened to me that day because I found tags on each item identifying the contents of the trunks. She also identified as many of the old pictures as she could and put them in albums. Beginning with the information she found in the trunks, she completed further research and eventually traced her family back to Ireland and Scotland. My father and brother later conducted a similar search for my father’s family and traced it back to Scotland. As one of the more interesting parts of Mom’s work on the trunks’ contents, she removed for transcription and preservation one set of letters that was Civil War vintage. The Civil War letters in their protective binder were shelved, along with current books, in the family library. I looked at them sometimes and discussed them at school, but I never really thought about the people who wrote them and how they related to me as family. They were just another curious part of my family’s past and my own childhood.

It also did not occur to me to wonder if more old letters existed other than the Civil War ones, at least not until years later when my father brought the trunk and its contents to me after my mother died. I then discovered more letters did exist - many, many more - yellowed with faded ink and some chewed by mice but still readable. Also, the old trunk contained ambrotype pictures that had never been identified, pictures I was later to learn, of the people who wrote the letters. Enthralled and captured, I listened to the voices in the letters. I thought I knew

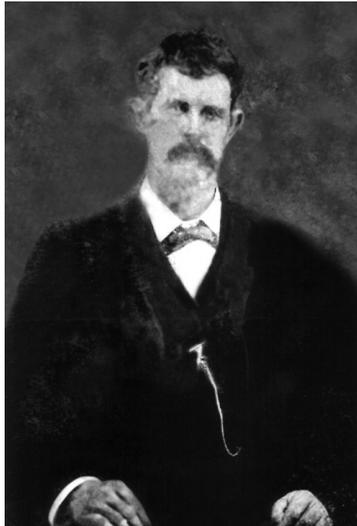
all of my mother's family because of the research she had done, but these people were new. I realized that I wanted to know these long ago people and how they related to me. Who were they? Where were these places with the unusual names? To find out, I began my own journey backward in time to 1861 when the earliest letter was written. The Civil War had just begun, and the Louisiana household of my great, great grandfather, William H. Jordan, was committed to the Confederate war effort. Born in Georgia and raised in Mississippi, his Southern blood ran deep, but he held his own views and went his own way. He had moved his family to Louisiana from Mississippi instead of staying with his father and inheriting his father's land. His father, Gray Jordan, also played a part in my journey. His voice was one of the voices from the Civil War letters, voices that had been locked in my memory bank since childhood.

Family Emigration Across America



Chapter 2

As W.H. Jordan sat on his front porch on a hot, Louisiana summer's night in 1860, he looked out upon his land and saw what he had seen all of his life, trees and more trees, tall stately pines and sturdy oaks with dense undergrowth. In the midst of the forest lay cleared fields and pastureland. Heavy with moisture, the still air was thick and difficult to breathe. His skin felt damp. The forest rustled and chirped with night sounds. What was he contemplating? Perhaps he was remembering the back-breaking work it had taken to carve his homestead and fields out of the surrounding forest. Perhaps he was thinking of his family and how fine his children were growing up to be, or perhaps he was remembering his family back in Mississippi and his boyhood home. The land he was looking at was almost identical to his father's Mississippi farm, and the hot, humid air felt familiar as well.¹ Here in the stillness of the evening, he had time to remember his youth and where he had come from to get to this place.



William H. Jordan

William H. Jordan's father, Gray Jordan, was born in North Carolina on May 19, 1794.² He and Jordan family members and friends emigrated from North Carolina to Franklin Co., in northeastern Georgia, between 1800 and 1807. After the group had lived there for about ten years, Gray married William's mother, Margaret (Peggy) Chandler, the daughter of a family friend, on December 19, 1816, and William was born the next year on August 30, 1817.³

Sometime around 1818, the entire group of Jordans and friends, including Gray and his young family, moved on to Lawrence County, Mississippi,⁴ possibly along the old Federal road which had been extended as far as Natchez, Mississippi by 1808.⁵ A road in this part of America in 1818 was little better than an old Indian trail carved wide enough through the forest to allow a wagon to pass. When the rains came, the path turned into a sea of mud, becoming impassable to travelers in conveyances with wheels. How could the Jordan families and their friends travel these roads, look at the dense forests of southwestern Mississippi, and imagine homes, fields and pasture lands? It was simply a matter of seeing potential. What they were seeing when they looked upon this land was rich soil and plentiful water, and they were not afraid of the hard work it would take to establish farms because they knew that others who had come before them had been able to build in this place.⁶

When they arrived in Lawrence County, they found a land just recently vacated by the Choctaw Indian Nation. Perhaps the only reason the land was available at all to new settlers was because the Native Americans had moved on to other places or been removed by the United States government. A village of Choctaws had thrived in what would later become the Mt. Moriah Baptist Church Cemetery area, planting maize, wild rice, yams, and hills of herbs in the rich bottom land of the Bogue Chitto River. These Native Americans were gone by the time the Jordans arrived, but several of the families with which the Jordans became acquainted in their new home had arrived early enough to the area to have interaction with the Choctaws.⁷ One of these families was the Hart family. This family in later years produced a daughter, Martha, who became William's wife.

In 1820 Lawrence County, Mississippi, was showing great promise of supporting a prosperous agrarian society. Hundreds of thousands of board feet of lumber had been removed from the forested areas to make room for homes, fields of cotton and other crops, pasture lands, and water mills for processing grain. The wealthier plantation owners in the county lived along the Pearl River because the land that lay in the flood plain of this major river contained rich soil. If the land owner could survive his land occasionally being flooded, he had fine soil for planting crops. The river also served as a highway for transporting crops to market by boat or barge and people to larger cities when necessary. Cotton was a major crop, but land owners also planted rice, sugar cane, and grains for livestock feed.⁸ In spite of all the attractions of the Pearl River region, the Jordan families and their friends moved on past the Pearl to settle farther west in Lawrence County on a branch of the Bogue Chitto River, which they named Jordan Creek, a few miles south of the area which later became the town of Brookhaven, Mississippi. The reason for this may have been that the land along the Pearl had all been claimed by the time the Jordans arrived, but then again, maybe the Jordans just preferred the land farther west in the county. It is even possible that the Jordans knew others who had moved there from Georgia. The western lands provided rich soil, adequate drinking water from springs and streams, and plenty of available land. Mills for processing grain had already been built on some of the streams, and at least one semblance of a road ran beside the Bogue Chitto River.⁹

The Jordan families' land, when counted altogether, consisted of several thousand acres, but much of it was wooded and never cultivated. Fields and homesteads were carved out of the forests on the basically flat terrain. High humidity in the summer months meant only a little activity produced a sizable amount of perspiration. The back-breaking work of clearing the land, building homes, and planting fields must have produced a lot of it. As well, the occasional swamp-like conditions of the forests due to humidity, standing water, and insects probably contributed to the numerous cases of fever among the families of the region. For the first few years, the Jordans and their friends did not have slaves but more than likely shared the labor required to establish farms. In later years, some of the Jordans became slave owners but never on the scale of the large plantations.¹⁰

They had large families to provide most of the labor they needed to work the land.

In Gray Jordan's young family, William did not remain an only child for long. His sister Malinda was born in 1818, his brother, Wyatt, was born on February 10, 1819, followed by his brothers Samuel on November 22, 1821, and James on October 22, 1823.¹¹ The boys were too young to help their father carve his farm out of the forest, but as soon as they were old enough, they helped him maintain it and enlarge the pasture and tillable land. For the boys, growing up in the forest meant many opportunities for adventure in the guise of hunting, fishing, camping, and collecting all sorts of animal pets. Old Indian trails and relics such as arrowheads made for a boy's paradise. Now, in thinking about this time of growing up with his brothers, William remembered years of hard work but also, with a grin, many happy hours of play and mischief. He could still picture himself and his brothers, Wyatt, Samuel, and James as they dodged and scampered among the trees of the forest, becoming explorers, Indian scouts, Revolutionary soldiers and spies, limited only by their active imaginations. He was especially fond of Wyatt, the brother who was closest in age to him.



Jordan's Creek

In the years that followed 1823, Gray and Margaret added four girls to the family, Martha Ann on October 30, 1825, Susan around 1826, Mary Ann on August 25, 1832, and around 1838 a daughter whose name is currently unknown. Finally on February

18, 1840, another son was born, Simeon, the last child.¹² Life was good most of the time when everyone was healthy and busy working on the farm. The other families who had emigrated from Georgia, especially the Chandlers, lived in the neighborhood surrounding Jordan Creek, creating a large interwoven community with several families who had lived in the area before the Jordans arrived. This community of families hosted many gatherings of family and friends at social events. The children grew up together, playing, learning, and exploring the land. As the years went by, several of the children from each of the families married one another, bringing the families even closer.

As W.H. Jordan's memories continued that sultry night in 1860 Louisiana, he recalled his own marriage on October 18, 1838, to Martha Price and the beginning of his family. Martha was the daughter of Joseph and Mary Hart Price, who lived further south on the Bogue Chitto River and were early settlers of the county.



Martha Price Jordan

William and Martha's first son was born in 1840, Floyd H., followed by two daughters, Mary Elizabeth on June 22, 1841,

and Margaret Jane on February 18, 1842. Two more boys were added to the family in the 1840s, James Monroe in 1845 and Pierre (Perry) Lafayette in 1849. Meanwhile, William's brother, Wyatt, married Martha McRorque (some records have McRosser) on January 24, 1844, and they had three children in the 1840s, Caroline on November 24, 1844, Julia Ann (Juliann) in 1846, and Wilson in 1849.¹³ William and Wyatt and their families lived in the Jordan Creek area and other areas of Mississippi such as Meridian, until 1850 when they decided to move to Louisiana.¹⁴ In making this move, William and Wyatt were turning away from their inheritance of Gray Jordan's estate, perhaps irrevocably. The reason for William's decision could have been a desire for independence or the lure of a new, attractive location, or simply his restless nature. However, it set a pattern for the rest of his life; a new and better place always waited just over the horizon. Wyatt followed his brother's lead because the two brothers were very close. What drew them to Louisiana?

Brush Valley in Bienville Parish, of northwestern Louisiana, was a land of red dirt considered excellent for raising cotton, and in 1850 the promise of the land must have attracted the Jordan brothers. Perhaps the land was even being advertised, because Hardy Jordan, a brother or cousin of Gray Jordan, decided to move his family to northern Louisiana around 1850 as well.¹⁵ By 1860 the promise of the land had been fulfilled and Bienville Parish was very prosperous with cotton farmers and slave owners. However, in spite of the wishes of many citizens, the parish never reflected the genteel plantation culture of other parts of the state and the South.¹⁶ Bienville Parish lacked the large river that was so advantageous for truly prosperous plantations, and this may have been the reason the plantation culture never fully developed in the area. Nevertheless, religious and educational institutions as well as local government services were well established by 1860,¹⁷ and the Jordans were undoubtedly attracted to the parish, having come from another booming cotton region in Mississippi. The now Louisiana Jordans did not own large tracts of land and were not slave owners.¹⁸ They could manage the farm operations themselves without an extra labor force, and their children were old enough to help.

The land was hilly, and it contained gravel and iron ore deposits as well as a wealth of pine and oak trees. If the land could be cleared of trees, the creek areas contained fine pastureland and soil for crops, especially cotton. The land and climate were very similar to what the Jordans had known in Mississippi, adding to the appeal of the place for them. The large salt deposits nearby at Winnfield were well known as far away as Mississippi. The sandy soil at Saline, a town not too far from the Jordan farm, was perfect for raising watermelons, and another neighboring town, Ruston, was known for its peaches.¹⁹ William settled a few miles southwest of the town of Friendship, and Wyatt obtained land in two parcels, each about twenty miles from William.²⁰

By 1854 William and Wyatt were busy building homes and farms in Louisiana, and in Mississippi, Gray and Margaret Jordan's other children were all married and/or gone from home except Simeon. One child, Malinda (married to John Robert Randall), had returned with her children to live at her parents' home after her husband died. Two of the Jordan children had also died, Susan and the currently unknown daughter. However, Susan had married James Chandler and had two children by him before her death. One of the Gray Jordans' children, Samuel, disappeared from family records, and nothing is known about him.²¹ The remaining Jordan children in Mississippi had married well, started families, and were accumulating land of their own. James married Martha Chandler, Martha married Joseph Sutton, and Mary Ann married William Martin Hickman.²²

The community around the Bogue Chitto River in Lawrence County, Mississippi, also grew and matured. When Gray and Margaret first arrived in the area, farms and plantations had to be virtually self-sufficient because no goods and services were available except through primitive trading posts. No market existed for excess grains and crops, and there was no viable means of transportation for getting the products to a market. This all changed with the coming of the Great Northern Railroad to the small hamlet of Brookhaven in 1856-57. Brookhaven grew into a town with services available for the outlying farms and plantations, and cotton and grain production boomed because of

the railroad that could transport the crops to market. At last, a market was established for the timber that was cleared each year from the land in Lawrence County, and sawmills were built.²³ Slave ownership also grew, and Gray obtained a small group of slaves to help him farm because most of his children were gone.²⁴

Unfortunately, in the midst of this successful economic and “empty nest” period, Gray and Margaret’s marriage disintegrated. After almost forty years of living together, arguments, petty jealousies, imagined slights, and real verbal abuse had taken their toll and had made continuing with the marriage very difficult. Perhaps the Jordans’ relative prosperity contributed to their problems because some of the disagreements centered around one of the female slaves owned by the Jordans. Charges and countercharges flew back and forth, filtered through the mouths of attorneys.

The conduct of the defendant [Gray] towards the claimant [Margaret] has been harsh, cold, unfeeling, and at times cruel, he has apparently lost his wanted affection for her, has refused to furnish her with comfortable clothing and many indispensable conveniences, has been uniformly harsh in his language and gross and unfeeling in his conduct towards her, and has used every means, including actual force, to drive her from home until she has been forced to take up residence with a married daughter.²⁵

The defendant [Gray] denies that he ever was guilty or encouraged or connived at any cruelty or harsh usage towards the claimant [Margaret], and avers that so far as any war of words may have happened or extended between them it was provoked, instigated and continued by the claimant herself, prompted either by an original bad and ungovernable temper or excited by other ridiculous and unfounded motives which the claimant understands and which the defendant cannot go into in his response to the charges. The claimant left of her own accord his house, when he was not at home, vowing she would never return and would have accepted his proposed settlement except that she wished to run him to as much expense and cost as possible.²⁶

Only family members knew which party was telling the truth, but more than likely some truth existed on both sides. The bitter end result became a matter of public record. Both parties mutually agreed to a divorce, and although it probably rocked the community at that time, the divorce was finalized in 1854. Margaret received three hundred and fifty dollars as a final settlement from Gray and lived with one of her married daughters, at least for a short period.²⁷ Gray married again to a much younger woman who had been married twice before and had four children of her own, Nancy Hickman Wallace Brister. Together they had three more children, Gray Jr. in April of 1857, Wilson in 1860, and Sarah in 1862.²⁸ The circumstances surrounding Gray Jr.'s birth are unclear according to his descendants because he was born in Arkansas while Nancy was there by herself being treated for diabetes or Bright's Disease as it was known then. She was not pregnant when she left home to go to Arkansas. For most of his life, Gray Jr.'s nickname was "Tap" which referred to the treatments his mother underwent in Arkansas. The treatments consisted of tapping or bleeding the patient. In spite of all this, Gray Sr. accepted Gray Jr. as his son.²⁹

William Jordan's recollections of his Mississippi family that Louisiana night in 1860 must have included the problems in his parent's marriage, and perhaps these problems were one of the reasons for his move away from Mississippi. Switching his thoughts to a more cheerful subject, his own marriage in the 1850s was solid and had produced more children, Martha in 1852 and William C. on December 3, 1855. His brother Wyatt had been similarly blessed with four new children in this time period, Ellen (Emily) in 1851, Simon in 1854, Isaac in 1856, and Andrew in 1859. (An eighth and final child, Tabitha, would be born later in 1861.)³⁰ The 1850s in Louisiana had been good years for the Jordans' with growing families, productive farms, and close family and community ties. The brothers and their wives had gotten together often to work on each other's farms, to celebrate some special occasion, or just to visit, while the cousins in the families had grown up together, attending school, church, and parties. School and church activities had provided opportunities for the Jordans to make friends with other families in the area,

creating a close, supportive community of people. There had even been a wedding in the William Jordan family in June of 1860. The first of William and Martha's children to wed, their daughter, Mary Elizabeth (Lizzie), had married George Bates on June 20, 1860.³¹

Because life was so good, William Jordan was content that night in 1860, thinking of his wife, his fine young sons and daughters, his land, and the bright future ahead in Brush Valley with his friends and neighbors. He had stayed ten years in one place and had built a life there that he enjoyed. There was no reason for him to think of moving on at this point. However, change was already in the wind, and it was not to be a good change. The talk of civil war must also have crept into his thoughts that night.

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