Family Migrations to southwest Arkansas

← – – –   NEAL family migrations in 1840s

←———   ADAMS family migration in 1861

← • • • •   EVANS family migrations in 1820s-1880s

← |||||||||| BLAKE family migrations in 1820s-1850s

From the Carolinas They Did Come

by Joy (Neal) Brown

A lot of good fortune has flowed to me, my siblings and my cousins because of the stuff of which our ancestors were made. On my father's side, it was the Neal and Adams families. For my mother, it was the Evans and Blake families. At some unknown time, an ancestor from each of my branches left a home in Ireland, Scotland or England and, with thousands of their countrymen, crossed the "big pond" in search of a better life in a new land called America.

In the winter of 2015, I submitted my DNA to an ethnicity test. The results returned as 51% Great Britain (includes Scotland), 31% Ireland, 8% Western Europe. In theory, the ethnicity would be identical for my four sisters and two brother.

My six siblings and I know, through genealogical research, that our ancestral heritage in America is almost totally southern—from the Carolinas. All four branches of our family seemed to be in North or South Carolina in the year 1800 or not long after. The earliest ancestors our family researchers have found are as follows:

From my father's (Pat Neal) side:
- Thomas Neal (born 1815 in South Carolina)
- Thomas B. ADAMS (born 1800 in North Carolina)

From my mother's (Annie Evans) side:
- John J. EVANS (born 1803 in North Carolina)
- Samuel Parsons BLAKE Sr. (born 1799 in North Carolina)

While the four different families have varying stories of migration as to the route they took and when they left the Carolina, the one common fact is that they all seemed to leave cotton fields behind at their Carolina homes, and they all ended up in the Red River Valley of southwest Arkansas where they found land suitable for cotton crops. They were all cotton growers. The Neal, Evans and Blake families can be considered some of the first white settlers on the southwest Arkansas lands. In each case, they were granted

Neal Coat of Arms

Evans Coat of Arms

Adams Coat of Arms

Blake Coat of Arms

land by U.S. Government making them the first title holder for these lands.

These early settlers weren't really trailblazers or pioneers as one would call a Daniel Boone, Jim Bowie or Davy Crockett. In all likelihood, our ancestors had information that assured them free or cheap land would be was available at the end of the wagon roads and trails that were already there. They would have used an early settlers' map and word of mouth to guide them to the available lands. Dangerous nonetheless, the trek west was considered a doable thing that would lead to a better life for them and their families.

NEAL 1840s—Thomas Neal First to Arrives in Present-Day Nevada County, Arkansas

First to come toward Arkansas seems to be Thomas Neal, with his bride, Lucinda McAteer, headed west out of South Carolina. But they didn't come straight through-they were in Alabama in 1841 where my grandfather, Samuel J. Neal was born. They stopped in Mississippi in 1842 before arriving in what is now Nevada County, Arkansas, sometime around 1849.

BLAKE 1850s—Blake Plantation Established in Columbia County, Arkansas
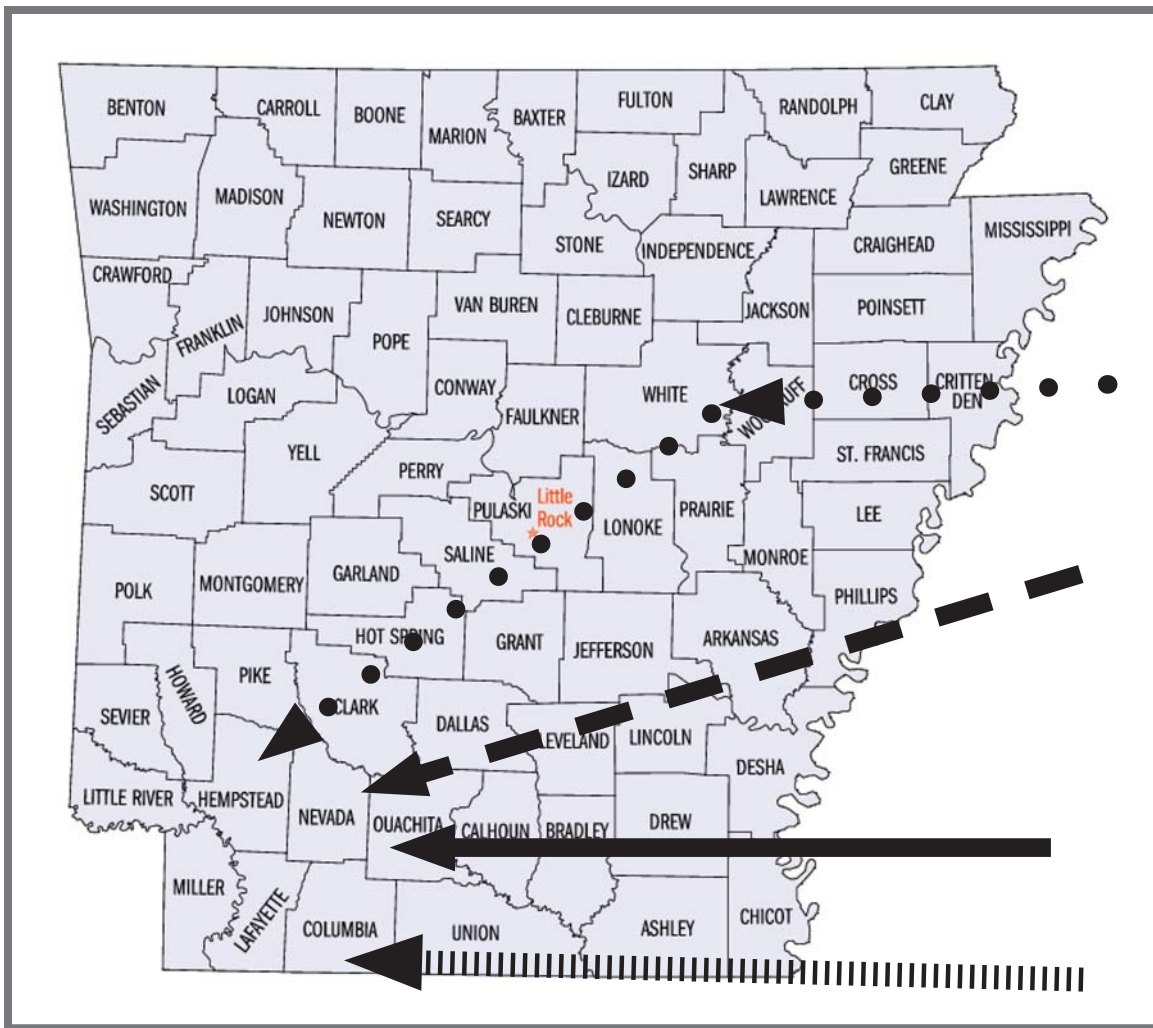
Our ancestor, Samuel Parsons Blake, Sr., had a plantation in Moss Township of Columbia County, Arkansas, right on the Louisiana line. Dating back to the 1820s, the Blakes could be found living in Alabama, then in Mississippi in the 1830s and 1840s and finally in Arkansas. The 1860 Slave Census Schedules showed many owned by members of the Blake family in Columbia County.

ADAMS 1860s—James Stepto Adams Arrives in Ouachita County Arkansas

Trying to take his family away from the Civil War in South Carolina, Stepto headed for Arkansas in 1861. Old timers tell of the Mississippi River being flooded, the party ran out of provisions and almost starved along the way. He homesteaded west of Camden near what is now called Adams Chapel.

EVANS 1870s or 1880s—Descendants of John J. Evans Arrive in Hempstead County, Arkansas

The Evans Family owned land in Williamson County, Tennessee in the 1820s, and were in White County Arkansas, northeast of Little Rock, in the 1840s up into the 1870s and eventually arriving in Lafayette and Hempstead counties sometime later.
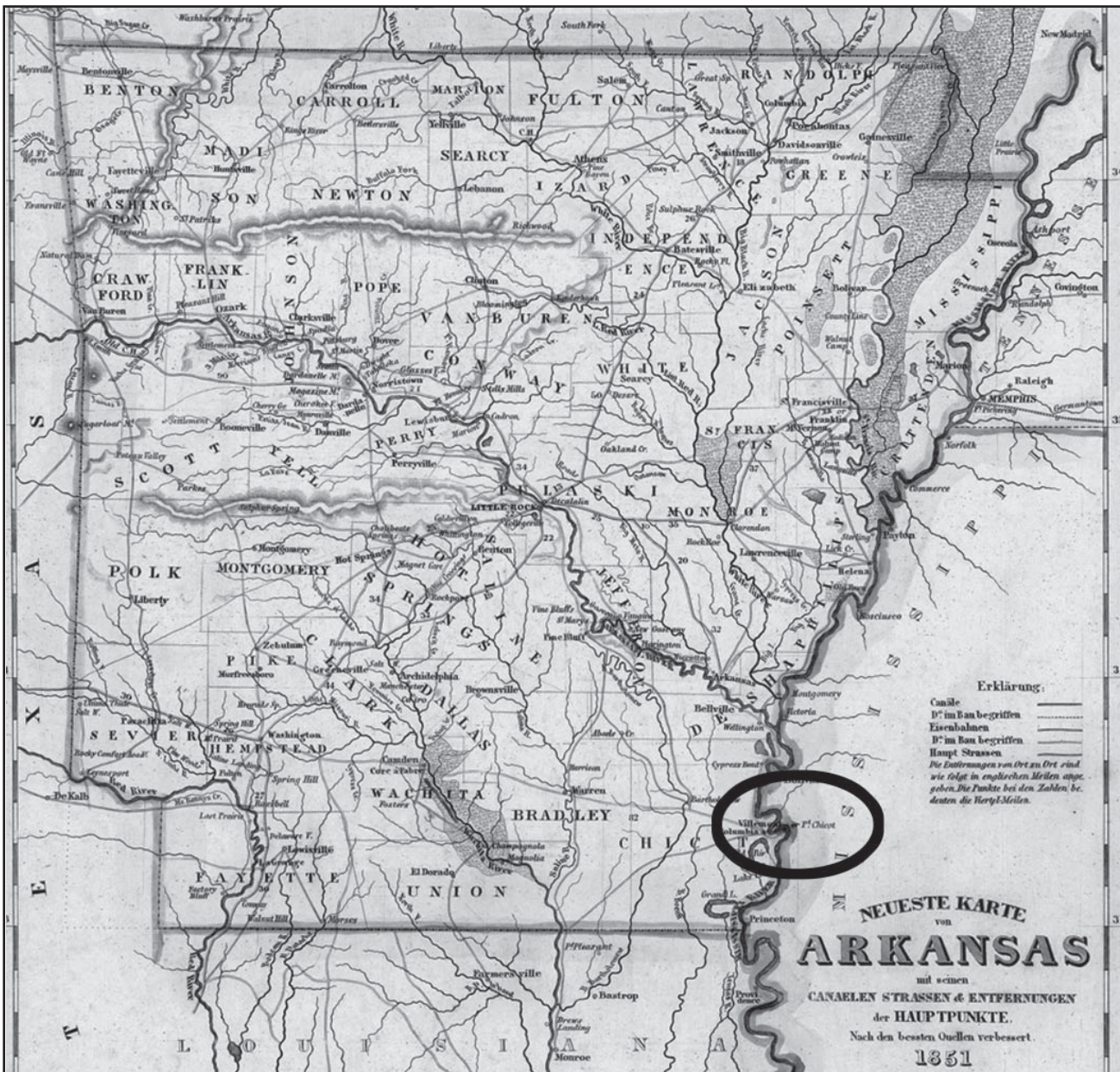
NEALS—Before 1850, Thomas Neal arrived from Mississippi to what was then Ouachita and later Nevada County Arkansas where he gained title to land in 1857

ADAMS—In 1861, James Stepto Adams arrived in the western portion of present-day Ouachita County.

EVANS—The Evans family was in White County during the Civil War and were in Hempstead County by the 1880s.

BLAKE—By 1859, Samuel Parsons Blake had brought his family from Mississippi and had a plantation in Columbia County along the Louisiana border.

On What Trails and Rivers Did Our Families Come?

This historic 1851 German-made map of Arkansas suggests the ways in which the Neal-Adams-Evans-Blake families came into southwest Arkansas. The Neal and Adams families could well have crossed the Mississippi at Point Chicot (circled on the map above) which is present-day Lake Village, and then and traveled straight across the state to Camden. A second way that was most certainly used by the Blake family, coming from Louisiana, was to come by boat up the Ouachita River (shown as the Wachita on the map). But the Evans family came from White County Arkansas through Little Rock and would have used the "Southwest Trail" that went diagonally across the state toward old Washington in present-day Hempstead County.

Family Names and Their Meanings

Adams Name Meaning

English (very common in England, especially in the south Midlands, and in Wales) and German (especially northwestern Germany): patronymic from the personal name Adam. In the U.S. this form has absorbed many patronymics and other derivatives of Adam in languages other than English. (For forms, see Hanks and Hodges 1988.

Source: Dictionary of American Family Names ©2013, Oxford University Press

Evans Name Meaning

Welsh: patronymic from the personal name Iefan (see Evan), with redundant

English patronymic -s.

Source: Dictionary of American Family Names ©2013, Oxford University Press

Blake Name Meaning

English: variant of Black 1, meaning 'swarthy' or 'dark-haired', from a byform of the Old English adjective blæc, blac 'black', with change of vowel length.English: nickname from Old English blac 'wan', 'pale', 'white', 'fair'. In Middle English the two words blac and blac, with opposite meanings, fell together as Middle English blake. In the absence of independent evidence as to whether the person referred to was dark or fair, it is now impossible to tell which sense was originally meant.Irish: Anglicized form of Gaelic Ó Bláthmhaic 'descendant of Bláthmhac', a personal name from bláth 'flower', 'blossom', 'fame', 'prosperity' + mac 'son'. In some instances, however, the Irish name is derived from Old English blæc 'dark', 'swarthy', as in 1 above. Many bearers are descended from Richard Caddell, nicknamed le blac, sheriff of Connacht in the early 14th century. The English name has been Gaelicized de Bláca.

Source: Dictionary of American Family Names ©2013, Oxford University Press

Neill Name Meaning

Irish and Scottish: reduced form of Irish Gaelic Ó Néill or Scottish Gaelic Mac Néill 'descendant (or son) of Niall', a personal name of Irish origin, thought to mean 'champion'. The personal name was adopted by Norsemen in the form Njáll, and was brought to England both directly from Ireland by Scandinavian settlers and indirectly (via France) by the Normans. Among the latter it had taken the form Ni(h)el, which was altered by folk etymology to the Latin name Nigellus. Source: Dictionary of American Family Names ©2013, Oxford University Press

Neal Name Meaning

English, Scottish, and Irish: from an Anglo-Scandinavian form of the Gaelic name Niall (see Neill). This was adopted by the Scandinavians in the form Njal and was introduced into northern England and East Anglia by them, rather than being taken directly from Gaelic. It was reinforced after the Norman Conquest by the Anglo-Norman French and Middle English forms Neel, Nihel, and Nigel, which were brought to England by the Normans.Scottish and Irish: reduced form of McNeal (see McNeil). Source: Dictionary of American Family Names ©2013, Oxford University Press

Neel Name Meaning

Irish and Scottish: variant of Neill. Source: Dictionary of American Family Names ©2013, Oxford University Press