Profile of Lloyd Davis

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PROFILE OF LLOYD DAVIS

By SPESSARD STONE

Lloyd Davis was a pioneer black cowhunter and orange grower of Joshua Creek and Homeland, Florida.

Lloyd Davis, also known as Lloyd Doves, was born into slavery near present-day Ona in Manatee County (now Hardee County), Florida in June of 1861. He was the son of Rachel Davis, the Negro slave and mistress of Capt. John Parker, a wealthy cattleman.

Rachel Davis and her children were an aspect of the peculiar institution" of the antebellum South that Southern apologists of the time preferred not to discuss in genteel society.

Albert DeVane in DeVane's Earl Florida History, however, related:

"During the early pioneer period, especially before the Civil War, the plantation owners and large cattlemen all owned many slaves. It was not unusual to find children sired by their master or his son. The children grew up among his children.

"Following the close of the Civil War, many of the women slaves continued to live on the plantations, especially the old nurses who had become attached to the children. The mulatto children, in almost every case, took the name of the mother, instead of the white father.

"In my research of such cases, over the years, there are several cases to my knowledge in the south and southwest section of Florida. A similar case was the Negro of Captain John Parker of Homeland and Arcadia. Captain John was the progenitor of the Parker Brothers large cattle dynasty.

"Lloyd Doves, his mulatto son, was to become the bodyguard and, should I say, trigger man for his sons, Thomas and Lewis. There is much history surrounding him."

Rachel Davis was born ca. 1831. The 1850 Slave Schedule of Hillsborough County, Florida shows that William Parker owned one 19-year-old female slave, who is believed to have been Rachel.

William Parker and John Parker, his older brother, had moved in 1843 from Columbia County, Fla. to Simmons Hammock in Hillsborough County. A planter, William and his wife Wineford (1827-56), the natural daughter of William B. Hooker and Mariah Henderson, resettled in the 1850's at (now) Homeland. During the Third Seminole War, the 35-year-old Parker, was killed in the Tillis Battle on June 14, 1856.

William B. Hooker (1800-71), a prominent planter and cattle rancher, was appointed administrator of Parker's estate. On January 9, 1858, he placed in the Tampa newspaper, the Florida Peninsular, the notice of the sale at the courthouse door in Tampa from the Parker estate of about 800 head of cattle and "at the same time and place, the servant woman Rachael (sic) and her three children will be hired out for 12 months." The 1860 census of Manatee County enumerated five slaves as part of William Parker's estate under the custody of John Parker.

John Parker (1818-81) and his wife Jane (1809-91) had in 1843 homesteaded in
Hillsborough County where he ranged his cattle and served variously as county sheriff, county commissioner, and justice of the peace. By 1856 they were living near present-day Ona in (then) Manatee County where John expanded his cattle herds, becoming an early cattle baron. In 1849 and 1856 he commanded companies during the Seminole conflicts. In May 1861, he was elected Lt. Colonel of the 20th regiment of Florida Militia. In 1860 and 1861 he represented Manatee County in the Florida House. After the Civil War, he settled at Homeland.

Rachel Davis, after emancipation, continued her life with Capt. Parker and moved to Homeland. Canter Brown, Jr. in *Fort Meade On The South Florida Frontier In The Nineteenth Century* related of the Negro community in Homeland:

“At Homeland, the Negro community was in the process of becoming much more well established (than Fort Meade). A. C. Robinson and his family moved to Polk County from Sneads. By 1873 Charles McLeod and the family of Rachel Davis, including her sons Samuel, Corrie and Lloyd, who would become prominent cattlemen, were on the scene. Two years later, Jack Vaughn married Margaret McLeod and settled, followed in 1878 by Moses Allen, who married Eliza Davis. By 1880, Charles Flowers, Charles Harden, Mary Jones, Mary Holloman, and, possibly, the family of Charity Williams were listed as residing in the area.

"Homeland's Negro community was further enhanced with the presence in 1885 of Tom Walden, J. L. Robinson, Emma Hendry, and their families."

Brown further illustrates there was some hostility to the Negro settlers, but also support from at least two of the area's leading white settlers, James T. Wilson and James B. Crum:

"James T. Wilson and James B. Crum moved to the defense of their fellow residents (when outsiders threatened Homeland's Negro voters). On election day (Sept. 1887) Wilson and Crum led a group of Homeland men, including the area's ten Negro voters (which probably included the Davis men and their brothers-in-law) in a public procession to the county seat where they cast their ballots together."

Rachel Davis died August 1, 1913. She had eight children, of whom seven were alive in 1900, but the names of only six are now known. It cannot definitely be stated who was the father of her children. William Parker, her first master, probably was father of the three children advertised in 1858, but it is possible that another black slave was. John Parker was the father of Lloyd and, most likely, of the others.

Rachel Davis' known children are:

1. G. Alfred Davis, born ca 1852; married on January 17, 1882, Charlotte Hendry.

2. Samuel J. Davis, born ca. 1854; died April 13, 1928 at Homeland; married on August 24, 1892, Matilda Shavers.

3. Eliza Davis, born ca. 1856; died May 17, 1932; married on March 14, 1878, Moses Allen.

4. Lloyd Davis, born June, 1861; died August 15, 1937; married on December 25, 1889, Crissie Brown.

5. Minerva Davis, born ca. 1862; died August 13, 1928; married on May 24, 1877, Charles McLeod.

Lloyd Davis, as a mulatto servant, was enumerated in the home of his other white half brother, Jasper N. Parker, in the Joshua Creek area in the 1880 Manatee County census. In the 1885 Polk County census, he was shown to be living with his mother and brother, Corrie. As earlier given, Lloyd married Crissie Brown on December 25, 1889. The 1900 Polk County census recorded in precinct 16, Homeland, the couple and their four children: Beulah (b. Dec. 1888?), Ida (b. Mar. 1892), Lewis (b. Mar. 1895), and Clara (b. June 1898). Another child had died in infancy.

As previously quoted, Albert DeVane described Lloyd as trigger man for his white brothers. This writer has been unable to obtain documentation for the charge, but Kyle VanLandingham, historian and co-author of *Parker and Blount in Florida*, confirmed to me in a personal interview on August 6, 1990 an account I had previously heard of a killing instigated by the Parker family.

As the corroborated story is recalled, Poleamon Parker Forrester, Jasper N. Parker’s 37-year-old daughter, suffered what today would be called "battered spouse syndrome." Her husband of fourteen years, Charles W. Forrester, 42-year-old senior partner of the Arcadia law firm of Forrester & Burton, was a heavy drinker and, when drunk, frequently beat his defenseless wife. Lloyd was at times employed as a cowhunter for the Parkers, one of whom was Zeb Parker, Poleamon’s brother. Unwilling to endure Forrester’s brutal misconduct any longer, the family authorized his assassination by Lloyd, who then shot and killed the lawyer while he was dining in the Arcadia House on June 5, 1908. Lloyd, whose escape had been prearranged, was apparently never prosecuted.

Lloyd returned to his farm in Homeland where he lived quietly until his death on Sunday, August 15, 1937. His wife, Crissie, who had been born in 1864, and, apparently, also their daughter, Clara, died before him.

The *Polk Count Record* of August 19, 1937 eulogized:

"Lloyd Davis, 75(?), one of the oldest colored residents of the Homeland section, passed away Sunday (August 15). The funeral will be held next Sunday at 2 o’clock at the colored Church of God in Homeland. He is survived by one brother, Corrie, and three children, Beulah Reed, now in Connecticut, but expected home for her father’s funeral, Lewis Davis of Homeland, and Ida Silas of Bartow.

"The deceased was a well-known character both among the people of his own race and white people as an Indian herb doctor and cow hunter. In his earlier years he hunted cows for Col. Lewis Hooker, Capt. Hendry, and others. He became owner of an orange grove which he turned over to his children several years ago."

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Editor’s Note:

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