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**Aiken – Barnwell Genealogical Society
 of South Carolina**

News and Journal

VOLUME XXXIV NUMBER IV

FOURTH QUARTER 2018

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The Sprawls Heritage Farm and Family of South Carolina

By Perry Sprawls, Jr. on behalf of Eight Generations

Farming and the Early Settlement of South Carolina

Land for farming was a major factor that attracted early settlers to South Carolina. Agriculture and rural life provided families with virtually all of their needs including food, fuel, clothing, building materials, financial income, and recreational resources. Many of the early farms were “family farms” owned and operated by families for multiple generations and they became centers for many events and activities including births, weddings, funerals, reunions, and neighborhood gatherings. It is the combination of these family experiences with the ongoing developments and evolution in farming methods that gives special definition to each family generation and forms much of our rich rural South Carolina history and heritage.

The Sprawls Farm, located in Barnwell County on Sprawls Farm Road about four miles west of Williston, has been owned and operated by multiple generations of the Sprawls Family for over 200 years and was designated by the State of South Carolina as one of its Heritage Farms in 1976. Its story is provided here in an effort to share many of the events and transitions that form much of the history and heritage of rural South Carolina.

The Family and Farm Land Come Together

The land that was to become the original Sprawls Farm was a tract of 640 acres granted to Peter Brenan by the state of South Carolina in 1786 for the sum of 14 pounds and 18 shillings Sterling Money. In 1812 Brenan sold this land to Samuel Sprawls for \$150. This was the beginning of the Sprawls farm.

This branch of the Sprawls Family had originally emigrated from Ireland and settled and farmed in Richmond County, North Carolina. In the early 1800s the North Carolina farm was sold and the relatively large family separated and moved in two directions. One group moved west, and one came to South Carolina, buying Brenan’s 640 acres and settling and operating the Sprawls Farm. The family moving from NC consisted of three generations, Samuel, son Perry, and grandson Drury who was born in 1804.

The Samuel and Perry Sprawls Generations (1812 – 1847)

Samuel and his wife, Jane, were the parents of Perry. Perry married Susannah and their four children were Drury, born in 1804, James in 1810, Samuel, Jr in 1814, and Perry, Jr. Drury and James were to become the ancestral heads of the two branches of the Sprawls family in South Carolina.

During this time Samuel and Perry exchanged some of the land within the family and also acquired some adjacent property to form a relatively large tract of land. James owned land within this property but his dependents did not continue farming. Drury acquired the family property and added some of the neighboring land to form a large plantation. He first acquired 365 acres from his parents, Perry and Susannah in 1824. Then he inherited 500 acres from his father’s estate in 1847. In 1851 he purchased 495 acres from Samuel. In 1858 he purchased the neighboring Riley Place, containing 209 acres.

The Drury and Frances Baxley Sprawls Generation 1847 – 1891

Drury married Frances Baxley in 1830 and their children were:

Martha, born in 1832, who married Henry Smith.

Mary Ann, born in 1834, who married John M. Woodward

Eveline E., born in 1836, not married

Angeline F., born in 1838, who married William Smith, brother of Henry Smith

Adeline, born in 1840, who married George Franklng Toole.

John, born in 1842, who married Susan and was an apparent casualty of the Civil War.

William Perry, born in 1843, not married

Joseph H., born 1846, who married Alice Weathersbee

Ellen Hasseltine, born in 1848, who married Julius Toole

Richard Calhoun, born in 1851, who first married Ann Johnson, then Ida Toole

In 1856 Drury built the house shown below that was to become home to four generations of the Sprawls family.



It was designed to house a large family. The upstairs consisted of two large rooms without heat, and they were bedrooms for most of the children, probably girls in one and boys in the other. The kitchen was a relatively large building out in the back yard separated from the house by a plank walkway. In later years it was moved further away from the house and became one of the cotton barns.

This home was one of the few in the area to escape burning by the invading Union Army, but more on that story later.

The 1860s, the Decade of Dramatic Change

In 1860 all twelve members of the family, including children ranging in age from 9 to 24, were living at home. Large farm families were common and a source of labor. At that time three of the young men were reaching plowing age. The farm was, at its largest size, approximately 1600 acres. Cotton was the principal commercial crop and required extensive manual labor in three phases. The first phase--preparation of the soil, or “breaking up”, laying out rows, and planting--was done with mules and skilled men workers. The second phase was “chopping” with hoes to thin out some of the plants and remove grass and weeds and was typically done by women. The third phase was gathering the cotton from the plants by hand--or “picking”-- and was done by the women, men, and children.

Slaves provided much of the labor and were a major part of successful farms at that time. Of the 18 slaves on the farm four were men, who would have plowed and planted, four women who chopped, and at least four teenagers who joined in for picking cotton. Since farming, and especially raising cotton, required extensive human labor, the slaves were a major factor complementing the land and other resources provided by the farm owner. Some operations, including plowing with mules, were not only hard labor but required considerable experience and skills developed by the slaves.

The Sprawls Farm, like the state of South Carolina and much of the South, was drastically impacted by the Civil War that began in 1861. The four young men who served in the army were:

Darling Peoples (son of John) ~ SC 1st Infantry Regiment (Hagood's) Company G,E

John F. ~ SC 1st Infantry Regiment (Gregg's) - Company A

Joseph H. ~ SC 2nd Artillery Regiment Company H

William Perry. ~ SC 2nd Artillery Regiment Company H

At first the battles were some distance away and the impact was on the economy, trade, and availability of many things. But in February 1865 the War came to the farm. A contingent of the Union Army was moving through South Carolina not so much to engage in battle but to burn and destroy the communities, sources of livelihood and the economy. A major target was the railroad, but the destruction extended into the countryside as the army moved through.

An army unit arrived at the farm and began destruction. They were in the process of burning the home when it was revealed there was an ill person inside. They extinguished the fire and are believed to have said, “We don’t burn homes with sick people inside,” but they continued to burn farm buildings and destroy equipment. This was witnessed and the story passed on by one of the sons, Richard, who also watched as they stole his pony.

With the destruction of much of the farm facilities, the end of slavery, and the devastating effects of the War on the economy this was to bring to an end the large farm developed by Drury.

Drury died in 1868 at the age of 64 and was the first to be buried in the Sprawls Family Cemetery on the farm. This was in keeping with the tradition of farm families to have cemeteries on the property that would be used by several generations and become memorials to family heritage.

In the 1870 census Frances was the head of the household and identified as a “lady farmer”; daughter Eveline as “domestic help”; son William as “farm laborer”; and son Joseph as “farm manager.” There

were several black persons listed as members of the Sprawls household and identified as “farm laborers” or “farm helps.”

In 1872 with the settlement of the Drury estate the large farm of approximately 1600 acres was divided into six tracts. Four were sold to non-family members. Two hundred two acres were acquired by Joseph and it was known as the “Joe Sprawls place” but did not remain in the family after his death. Frances inherited three hundred sixteen acres which included the home place, and this was the farm that has passed down to other generations and was later designated as the Sprawls Heritage Farm by the state of South Carolina.

In the settlement of Drury’s estate, money from the property sales was distributed to the benefactors and then they had the opportunity to bid and purchase individual items from the estate. Most of the farm equipment and livestock was acquired by Frances and Joseph who were then operating the two adjacent farms.

Frances died in 1891 at the age of 79 and her will specified that son Richard was to inherit this property.

The Richard Calhoun, Ann Johnson, and Ida Toole Generation 1891 – 1931

Richard first married Ann Johnson in 1876. Their children were:

Luther Calhoun Sprawls born in 1878, who married Susie Toole
Leila, born in 1880, who married Samuel Trotti

Ann died in 1881 and Richard then married Ida Toole. Their children were:

Francis, born in 1883 and died in 1889.
Fairy, born in 1884, who married William Chester Bell
William Walton, born in 1886, who married Ruth Weathersbee
Lessie, born in 1890, who married Thomas Pickens Mitchell
Ida Rosena, born in 1892, died in 1893.
Bryant, born in 1894, who married Essie Edwards
James Calhoun, born in 1900, who married Parnelle Oxner
Mary Lou, born in 1902 who never married
Perry, born in 1906, who married Neva Mathis.

The photograph below shows the family in the backyard, probably after a Sunday dinner.

Richard Calhoun Sprawls Family 1910 on the Sprawls Heritage Farm



Back Row: Luther, Samuel Trotti, Mary Lou, Bryant,
Pickens Mitchell, Walton, Fairy, Chester Bell
Second Row: Susie, Lessie, Lela, Ida, Richard
Children: David, J. C., Perry, Murray, L. C

Marriages

Luther Sprawls - Susie Tool
Lessie Sprawls - Pickens Mitchell
Fairy Sprawls - Chester Bell
Lela Sprawls - Samuel Trottie
Richard Sprawls - Ida Toole
David, Murray, and L.C are sons of Luther and Susie

Back then walking, or riding horses or in buggies were the methods of transportation, so most social activities were within a few miles of home. As a result, many married friends living on adjacent or neighboring farms with weddings taking place on the farms. An example is the marriage of Fairy to Chester Bell shown below.

Fairy Sprawls - Chester Bell Wedding January 1, 1907 on the Sprawls Heritage Farm



**Adults: Mr. Owens (Minister), Richard, Ida, Bryant, Jeff Kennedy, Samuel Trotti, Chester Bell, Lessie, Fairy Dora Bell, Lula Bell, James Bell, Lela Trotti. Dosia Hair, Buddy Hair, holding Nadine, Frank Kennedy, Walton
Children: Mary Lou, J.C., Murry, Nina Bell,**

This photo shows the house as it was then with wood shingle roof, open front porch, shutters on the windows, and a picket fence.

The farm hosted many family and neighborhood gatherings such as the Sunday dinner shown below.



This family dinner was in the backyard around 1912. Of special interest is how everyone is dressed and the chairs brought out from the house. The building in the right background was the original kitchen that was now being used as a barn.

Richard died in 1915 at the age of 64 with the cause of death listed as rheumatism. Ida died at home on Friday, May 8, 1931 at the age of 70. An undertaker provided service at the home. On Sunday the funeral was at the house with burial in the family cemetery on the farm.

The original Sprawls home place was to pass on to Perry, son of Richard, and then on to Perry's children, Perry, Jr, Richard (Dick), and Emily.

A portion of the original Sprawls Farm was acquired by Joseph but then passed out of the Sprawls family. Darling P. acquired some farm land that was not part of the original Drury estate but that has also passed out of the Sprawls family as described below.

Joseph H. and Alice V. Weathersbee Sprawls

After the war Joseph married Alice Weathesbee and their child was Minnie (1872–1939) who married Leland Paul Williams. Joseph acquired 202 acres of the Drury estate but it later passed out of the Sprawls family.

Darling Pickney (D.P.) and Florence Hair Sprawls

Darling and Florence are the ancestors of the Sprawls family line who were not the decedents of Drury and lived on the Sprawls Farm but farmed on other property in Barnwell County. In 1850 Darling, at the age of 12 was living in a household with three females, assumed to be his sisters Susan, Martha and Mary. On April 12, 1862 he enlisted in the Confederate Army at Coles Island, and mustered in Company E, 1st (Hagood's) South Carolina.

He married Florence Hair and their children were:

Willie A., 1861–1895

Laurie Maldon 1867–1925

Ellen Sprawls Walsh, 1869–1944

Wylie O'Neal 1871–1921

Mary Louise Sprawls Powell 1872–1942

Leland Sprawls, 1877

Emma Sprawls Grubbs 1879–1916

Darling farmed up until about 1900 when his son, Laurie Maldon, age 21 and living at home, took over and farmed up until his death on his farm in 1925. After that the farm passed out of the Sprawls family.

Laurie Maldon married Belle Dicks and their children were:

James Maldon Sprawls 1909–1995

Leila Wood Sprawls Carroll 1911–1993

The Perry and Neva Sprawls Generation 1931 – 1998

Perry, the youngest son of Richard and Ida, was living at home at the time of Ida's death. The family had arranged for a young nurse from Augusta, Neva Ione Mathis, to come and care for Ida in the last days of her life. This provided the meeting of Neva and Perry and they were married in 1932.



Their son, Perry, Jr. was the last of the Sprawls generations to be born in the house on the farm. Following his early morning birth on March 2, 1934, fruitcake and coffee was served to those in attendance. The other two children were Richard (Dick) and Emily Ida who were born in the hospital in Augusta.

Perry, Sr. acquired the farm through inheritance and purchase from siblings and operated it for many years. It was during this generation that farming and farm life went through major changes from a self-sustaining and labor dependent operation to more mechanized farming with the introduction of power equipment and technology.

As the country was recovering from the depression, farm family life was directly improved by two of President Roosevelt's New Deal projects.

In the late 1930s the Works Progress Administration (later renamed Work Projects Administration) came to the farms and built new outdoor toilets, or "outhouses" in the backyards. The number of seats was determined by the size of the family. The Sprawls family qualified for a "one-seater". A typical construction is shown below.



A pit was dug, a concrete base including the seat was poured, and the pre-fabricated houses were set in place. This project is credited with improving sanitation and health conditions, especially in the rural south.

At this time on the farm water was drawn by hand from an open well and heating and cooking was with firewood cut on the farm. Lighting was with kerosene lamps and the radio was battery powered.

Another New Deal project, the *Rural Electrification Act* of 1936, provided federal loans for the installation of electrical distribution systems to serve isolated *rural* areas of the United States. The funding was channeled through cooperative electric power companies formed by farmers. In **1938** the Aiken Electric Cooperative became the first cooperative in South Carolina to receive its charter and began providing service later that year. Even though it was in Barnwell County the Sprawls farm was able to become a member of the neighboring Aiken Electric Cooperative and received electricity in 1941 for both the family home and the other houses on the property.

In addition to providing lighting the major impact was an electric water pump and hot water heater that made possible indoor plumbing, soon to be followed with an electric stove in the kitchen.

Into the 1940s all planting and cultivation was with skilled farm hands and mules as shown here.



Roosevelt Carrie and his family were one of the two longtime tenant families living and working on the farm. He is pictured here with our mule Mike.

Cotton continued as a major crop and boll weevil control was with a mixture of *arsenic and molasses* applied with a mule drawn implement that “mopped” the mixture onto the cotton plants. This was later replaced by DDT that could be dusted with tractors or airplanes.

Under Perry’s ownership and management the farm operation expanded by purchasing and renting neighboring farms.

Cotton was the major crop, but “truck crops” such as cantaloupes and watermelons were also significant products. At that time Williston claimed to be the Asparagus Capital of the country, and the Sprawls farm did its part. In the late 1940s the farm added a dairy operation and a herd of beef cattle. Hogs, which had been a major product for generations, especially for family food, continued both as food and also for market. The livestock required considerable corn for feed and this occupied a significant part of the farm land. Turkeys were raised and delivered live to local residents before the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

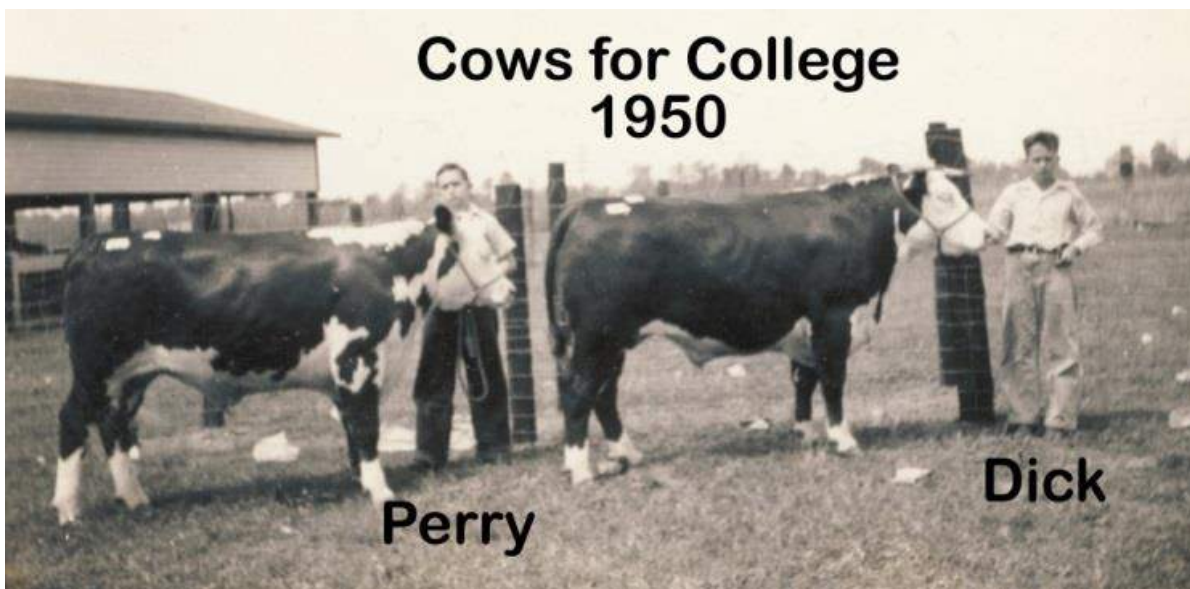
The beginning of an evolution...

In the late 1940s the first tractor, a one-row Farmall Model A, later to be upgraded to a two-row Farmall Model H, was purchased. It was perhaps not recognized at the time, but this was to be a major turning point and advancement in farming, from men and mules to highly productive machine farming requiring somewhat less human physical labor. With Perry's death in 1992 the farm passed on to Neva but was already being operated by son, Dick.

The Perry, Jr., Richard (Dick), and Emily Sprawls Generation

The three children of Perry and Neva became the sixth Sprawls generation owners of the farm in 1998 when it was inherited from Neva. However, their active involvement and operation of the farm began many years before that. As they became of age they worked on the farm in many capacities, including field work, milking cows and caring for livestock.

For them, the blending of family and farm was to be a life-changing experience in a very special way. They were to be the first generation of the Sprawls farm families to have an opportunity to attend college, but it was with a challenge. Within the family with Neva and Perry as parents there was never any discussion of "if" they would attend college. The only questions were which college and how would it be paid for. The parents had a plan. During their high school years each of the three was given a young calf by the parents. It was then theirs to care for, show in 4-H Club competitions, sell, and place the money in a college savings account. Perry Jr. was the first to graduate from high school and to enter college. His choice was similar to many South Carolina farm boys—Clemson Agricultural and Mechanical College, as it was then known. In 1952 one cow just about covered the tuition for one year at Clemson, supplemented with various student work opportunities on campus. Dick and Emily had similar experiences but their choice was the University of South Carolina.



In the 1960s Perry Sr. began working with the Clemson Extension Service, and in 1965 he became Auditor of Barnwell County where he served until 1976. During this time the management and operation of the farm was passed on to Dick. Under Dick's operation, which has extended over 50 years, the farm has transitioned to a highly efficient cotton, peanut, or soy bean production using modern equipment and

requiring much less human labor. Typically Dick operated the equipment and one other person on the ground handled supplies and produce as it was harvested.

The Sprawls Farm has been home or the place to visit for eight generations of the Sprawls family for over 200 years. The most recent large gathering shown here was in 2009 to celebrate Emily's 70th birthday.



Emily, on the lower step, married Aubrey Eugene "Gene" Rountree and they had five daughters, Dana Andrassy, Julie Durnford (Shawn), Gina Hammond (Mark), Maria Rountree (Jeff Monts), Amy Rountree (Jeff Eichhorn) grandchildren, Nicholas, Jordan, Luke, Ben, Morgan, Anna, Ally, Jack, Carl, Mathis, Bailey, Perry, Mamie and Emmie. All are shown here along with her brothers, Perry and wife Charlotte and Dick with wife Cecilia. Charles Perry, son of Perry and Charlotte, is the other member of this generation living in New York and not in the photograph.

Over the years the Sprawls Farm has been a special place for these young generations to visit and experience rural life in the cotton fields, exploring the woods, riding horses, and connecting with the family heritage.

The Sprawls Family of South Carolina Biographies and Relationships

Posted on Find A Grave Website

The Find A Grave website is an excellent resource for exploring the family relationships and information on individuals for several generations.

This begins with Drury Sprawls (1804-1868) who was the first to be buried in the Sprawls Family Cemetery located on the Sprawls Heritage Farm.



On the web at: <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2386326/sprawls-cemetery>

From this website you can see other family members and connect to decedents with graves in other locations, especially the Williston, SC Cemetery. The link below can be searched for members of the Sprawls Family here.

<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2159520/williston-cemetery>

Sprawls Family memorials in other locations.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/146952867/philip-claudius-sprawls>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/43517027/james-calhoun-sprawls>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/111304114/elbridge-bryant-sprawls>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/82630553/james-maldon-sprawls>

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/96669550/frazier-walton-sprawls>