

THE AUCILLA RIVERMEN



Aucilla River (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.)

By: John E. Ladson III and George M. Cole
 Courtesy of the Aucilla Research Institute

J.E. Ladson Sr.
 In the meantime, J.E. Ladson, Sr. a Moultrie, Georgia lumber company owner, acquired a large tract of land having considerable frontage along the Aucilla River and the Wacissa Slave Canal with its main entrance at Nutall Rise.

and whose countenance somehow reminded the boy of a horse. Always clad in blue overalls and frequently wearing a red leather baseball style cap, he was an imposing figure moving through the woods in his brogans or boots. Although suffering from a chronic respiratory problem, he remained a strong, tough man who could still wrestle a wild hog out of a trap (they were sold live) and paddle a 14-foot cypress fishing boat all day long with ease.

Cephas Lewis managed the property in the early to mid-1950's. He then moved on to pursue other opportunities. Circa 1956, Ladson hired Lee Jackson to oversee the tract. He and his wife, Clyde, moved into the caretaker's house near the Ladson cabin situated at the final rise of the river named for William Nuttall, an early and prominent Jefferson County plantation owner and entrepreneur.

He possessed remarkable skill with both rod and gun and as a boatman, all of which attracted the Ladson boy who frequently sought his company.

Lee's duties included controlling trespass, guiding Ladson family members and their guests, maintaining the cabin, fences, gates and other rudimentary improvements, keeping the property's crude road system cleared and running a series of hog pen traps.

In the opinion of many who knew him, Lee was considered a bit ornery and taciturn. Defensive might be a better description, and perhaps this was rooted in his lack of education and trouble with those who used that to his disadvantage.

The latter provided a continuous income stream which was split 50-50 between Lee and Mr. Ladson, a.k.a. "Old Man J.E."

Nonetheless, he was the same man who brought spring wildflowers, gathered in the swamp, to his wife, Clyde, and who occasionally exhibited a sense of humor, often mischievous. He also had the sensitivity to recognize a boy who admired him and was eager to enter his world and learn.

Various members of the Ladson family would spend time on the place hunting and fishing. Included among them were some of J.E.'s grandsons.

During the boy's periodic family trips to Nutall Rise, Lee would find time to spend with him. Noting his interest in firearms, he would take the boy into his house and show him his most cherished possessions, a Browning Auto Five, 12-gauge shotgun, a lever-action Model 1894

Winchester rifle in .25-.35 caliber, a Browning Semi-Automatic .22 rifle and a .32 caliber Smith and Wesson revolver he often carried.



Browning Semi-Automatic .22 rifle.

The little Browning .22 was his favorite, and his accuracy with it was widely praised. He loved to squirrel hunt with the Browning rifle and his small feist dog.

The .25-.35 Winchester had the ability to deeply penetrate water with special metal-cased bullets, which Lee used to shoot large fish and alligators.

The boy was learning to shoot his Remington bolt action .22 rifle, so to provide some practice, Lee took him to "Skimpy Sink" one afternoon and

his rifle and a box of ammunition with instructions to shoot every garfish he saw. The sink was full of very large gars marauding about just under the surface, and every time the boy fired they would roll as though hit.

Quickly exhausting his cartridges, the boy proclaimed this foray the most fun ever, claiming to have killed 32 of the toothy predators. Subsequent examination of the sink by Lee did not reveal any casualties, a fact never revealed to the boy, whose marksmanship he consistently extolled.

He also passed along tips on how to catch bass and bream in the dark tannic waters of the Aucilla and the many sinkholes on the property, including which lures to use and their best colors.

He gave him a homemade bass lure he often deployed in the Slave Canal to land bass weighing 8 to 10 pounds.

It was made from a "meat skin," as Lee called it, with two sets of treble hooks. Modern fisherman would refer to it as a "pork rind lure." Whatever it was, it was deadly when worked off Jackson's bait casting reel and rod.

Accompanying Lee onto the Gulf flats was also an exciting time. The boy learned to drift fish using a long, sturdy cane pole with a short line and cut shiner (pinfish) bait.

Lee showed him how to slap the water's surface with his pole to simulate a baitfish strike and attract the attention of speckled trout hiding in the grass on the ocean floor.

Perhaps the most memorable day was an afternoon spent bream fishing on the tract's "Little River" section of the Aucilla. The boy had never heard anyone who could whistle like Lee Jackson. It was strong and clear and featured



The Ladson Boy

hoisted him onto the top of a large, old cross-cut sawed cypress stump at the edge of the sink. He handed the boy



J.E. Ladson Sr. -- also known as "Old Man J.E." -- is shown with a haul of fish.

old tunes like those by Stephen Foster. "Beautiful Dreamer" was a favorite, which, alongwith others, created a serene experience as Lee quietly paddled his boat and cast a small rubber "Schumann's" bug toward the banks and under the overhanging vegetation.

vine in its path of travel. The result confirmed his expectations, but he patiently endured the learning experience. When the boy tired, he summoned him to his side on the rear seat adjacent to the transom-mounted 10 horsepower Evinrude outboard motor.

The rhythmic whistling seemed to aid Lee's respiratory system, which labored from what was probably Mesothelioma, a condition caused by exposure to asbestos he may have encountered while working in the Jacksonville shipyards during World War II.

After discussing the motor's controls and how to crank it, the boy was thrilled to run the boat downriver and back to the landing under Lee's

His whistling must have appealed to the fish as well, because the boy watched him pull in numerous large, beautiful redbreasts.

(To be continued)

Perry Newspapers, Inc. thanks the authors (John E. Ladson III, George M. Cole and the Aucilla Research Institute) for sharing this multi-part series on the Aucilla River, as well as William Wright for providing historical photos. The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Mary Lou Bennett, local historian and daughter of Cephas Lewis, who provided some of the material and photos featured in this series.

Obituaries



Joanie Diane Floyd

Joanie Diane Floyd

Joanie Diane Floyd, 66, a longtime resident of Perry, passed away Saturday, March 12, 2022, in Cape Coral surrounded by her family. She was born Sept. 1, 1955, in Perry to Rayford and Corine Ratliff, now deceased. Joanie was a member of

the Center Street Church of God in Perry, most recently attending First Assembly of God in Perry.

She was a loving mother and grandmother who enjoyed putting her faith to work by helping others and volunteering at her local church.

Some of the things she enjoyed most were spending time with family and friends, reading her Bible, crabbing, fishing and walking on the beach.

She is survived by: her beloved daughter, Niki Imbery (Bryant) of Cape Coral; two brothers, Randy "Buddy" Ratliff and Gary Ratliff, both of Perry; daughter-in-law, Carolyn Floyd of Perry; and seven grandchildren, Dillon, Amanda, Jordan, Jacob, Gracie, Victoria and Abigail; as well as host of

nieces and nephews.

Joanie was preceded in death by: her beloved husband, Terry Floyd, in 2008; a son, Terry "Shawn" Floyd; and granddaughter, Kayla Floyd; as well as two sisters, Shirley Morris and Faye Combass; and one brother, Johnny Ratliff.

A celebration of life service will be held on Sunday, March 27, at 1 p.m. at First Assembly of God in Perry with the Rev. David Stevens and the Rev. Robert Kirkland officiating.

Memorial contributions may be made in her memory to Hope Hospice, 9470 Healthpark Circle, Fort Myers, FL 33908 or the American Cancer Society, 4575 Via Royale, Suite #110, Fort Myers, FL 33919.

Friends are invited to

send condolences via the online guest book, which can be found at www.MullinsMemorial.com.

Mullins Memorial Funeral Home & Cremation Service, Cape Coral, is entrusted with final care.

Robert Wayne York

Robert Wayne York of Perry passed away surrounded by his loved ones on Wednesday, March 2, 2022.

He was born on May 14, 1947, to Lester Eugene "Bunk" York and Ina Ruth (Thames) York.

After Robert graduated from Taylor County High School, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served during the Vietnam War.

Upon his return to Perry, he was briefly employed with Buckeye Cellulose, and met his wife of 51 years, Peggy (Denmark) York.

Robert and Peggy went on to have two children, Alicia Beshears and Robert York Jr.

Robert retired after 35 years of employment from the United States Postal Service and enjoyed fishing, spending time with his family and making others laugh every chance he had.

Robert was predeceased by: his parents, Lester Eugene York and Ina Ruth (Thames) York; his siblings, Timothy Earl York and Lilly Kathryn (York) Grubbs; and his son, Robert Wayne York Jr., who he affectionately referred to as "Little Rob."

He is survived by: his wife, Peggy; daughter, Alicia Beshears (Rob); and his granddaughters, Marissa, Chelsea and Bethany Snodgrass and Hannah Beshears.

A celebration of life service will be held Friday, March 18, at 3 p.m. at the Family Worship Center, located at 1304 North Jefferson St. in Perry.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the Family Worship Center or the Special Operations Warrior Foundation.

Big Bend Hospice offers grief support to those in need and is open to local residents. Please contact Wendy Vargo at (850) 878-5310 for additional information.

LEGALS

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when it is your turn to speak, and notify you by announcing the last 4 digits of your telephone number. Please announce your name and address. You will be allowed to speak for 3 minutes. THE MEETING WILL ALSO BE LIVE STREAMED ON THE TAYLOR COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS FACEBOOK PAGE - <https://www.facebook.com/taylor.bocc> NOTICE IS FURTHER HEREBY GIVEN PURSUANT TO FLORIDA STATUTE 286.0105, THAT ANY PERSON OR PERSONS DECIDING TO APPEAL ANY MATTER CONSIDERED AT THIS MEETING WILL NEED A RECORD OF THE HEARING AND MAY NEED TO

ENSURE THAT A VERBATIM RECORD OF THE PROCESSING IS MADE, WHICH RECORD INCLUDES THE TESTIMONY AND EVIDENCE UPON WHICH THE APPEAL IS TO BE BASED. THE PUBLIC HEARING WILL BE HELD AT THE TAYLOR COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MEETING ROOM, 201 E. GREEN STREET, PERRY, FLORIDA 32347. ALL PERSONS INTERESTED IN THIS MATTER SHOULD BE GOVERNED BY THIS NOTICE. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM: JAMI EVANS, GRANTS COORDINATOR (850) 838-3553 OR AT jevans@taylorcountygov.com. TAYLOR COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS TAYLOR COUNTY, FLORIDA



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