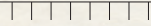


R
RENAISSANCE®
BIRMINGHAM ROSS BRIDGE
GOLF RESORT & SPA

ROSS BRIDGE

Developing The Character of the Area

- AT THE INTERSECTION OF HISTORY -



Welcome to the Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa. Though the resort is young, opening in mid-2005, the land and heritage of the family who settled on this land gives depth to an authentic story that lives throughout the resort.

In the mid-1800s, James Taylor Ross moved his family from South Carolina to Alabama's Oxmoor Valley. Ross, a farmer and Scotsman, brought along a taste for the finer things and a spirit of entrepreneurship. In the late 1800s, Ross allowed the Confederate Army to build a bridge on his land; the bridge allowed the Confederacy to

transport munitions from the Oxmoor furnaces through Brock's Gap to the railroad on the other side of Shades Mountain. That bridge, built by Irish stonemasons, stands today a short walking distance from the resort.

The Ross story is a colorful tale of perseverance. The land they devoted their lives in cultivating today has bloomed into a picturesque golf resort, featuring luxury amenities exceeding James Taylor Ross's wildest dreams.

- SCOTTISH ANCESTRY -

There was an ancient Celtic earldom of Ross in the north-east of Scotland, in what is now the county of Ross and Cromarty, between the Cromarty and Dornoch Firths, north of Inverness.

The Ross motto is “Spem successus alit” - literally, “Success nourishes hope”, which nowadays we would call “Success breeds success”.

- MOVING THROUGH THE SOUTHEAST -



While the Ross name originated in the northern Scottish Highlands, it made its way to the United States in the 1600s, in Virginia, when a Thomas Rosse worked among the first settlers along the James River. Over time the Ross name moved south to South Carolina. According to the 1790 census, there were 38 Ross families in the Palmetto state; among them was Elias Ross, a rice farmer in Orangeburg.

Elias Ross had a number of children, including James Taylor Ross who would later move west to Alabama to settle the area in southern Jefferson County that now bears his name.

- SETTLING IN ALABAMA -

James Taylor Ross was a schoolteacher in South Carolina in the years before he married Mary Louisa Coward in 1836. In 1858, they moved west to Alabama, settling alongside the native American tribes of the region.

J.T. Ross's wife, Mary Louisa Coward, was part Cherokee Indian. She married James Taylor Ross in 1836, and they had four sons:

- William Elias Ross (nicknamed "Ellis")
- Andrew Campbell Ross
- John M. Ross
- Albert Alexander Ross (nicknamed "Alec")

James Taylor Ross purchased more than 140 acres in 1858 in the land south of Oxmoor, near Shannon. His immigration to the state was not unusual, as about 15 percent of the people in Alabama at the time had migrated to the state from South Carolina

J.T. Ross farmed cotton, a common crop in those times. Martha Ella Ross Dunham, J.T. Ross's granddaughter wrote of "exploring the wild woods" of Alabama on horseback with her grandfather "looking for deer, wild pigs, and bees." She remembered "climbing up on high steep places where there were no roads and looking down on valleys and hollows".

Martha Dunham also writes of him "raising cattle", and his love of "the country and wild life". James Taylor Ross died in 1890, and is buried at Union Baptist Church in Lipscomb, just 8.3 miles east of the Renaissance Ross Bridge Resort.

- THE DISRUPTIONS OF WAR -

All four of James Taylor Ross' sons fought in the Confederate Army. William enlisted on July 15th, 1861 and was discharged in 1865. He was wounded in battle near Fort Morgan, according to his niece, Martha Dunham.

Andrew Campbell Ross, enlisted in the Calvary in April of 1861 under General Nathan Bedford Forrest. According to his daughter, Andrew Ross fought in many battles, including Chickamauga and Lookout Mountain. Despite engaging in some of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, Andrew was never wounded, a feat duplicated by few.

J.T. Ross's third son, John, died during the war, but from disease not battle. He fell to measles while stationed in Selma.

Reports on the fourth son, Albert Alexander, differ. There is record of an "Alec" Ross in the Confederate records, and he did indeed fight in the war, according to another descendent, Robert C. Curren. (Mr. Curren is James Taylor Ross' great great nephew.) However, Mrs. Dunham makes no mention of his military service in her notes.

- ROSS BRIDGE -

At the onset of the Civil War, the South's deficiencies were soon evident. The effort to move men, supplies and munitions was enormous. Toward the end of the war, the Confederate Army built a railroad through what is today Jefferson County (remember, the city of Birmingham did not exist at the time) to speed men and supplies to Selma.

At the point where the railroad was to cross Ross Creek, they built an immaculate bridge, using contractors, slaves and Irish craftsmen. Some claim that that the bridge is the only remaining structure in Jefferson County built and financed by the Confederacy.

Evidently, the contractors used stone from a quarry (owned by the Coward family) on Shades Mountain to haul the stones down to the

creek. They would then use a rope pulley to swing the stones in place. These Irish masons knew what they were doing. No mortar was used in building the culvert, and some large stones at the base of the culvert have been missing for as long as anyone can remember.

According to Marilyn Davis Barefield's book, *A History of Hoover*, Union General James H. Wilson (Wilson's Raiders) "destroyed the bridges over which the tracks crossed the streams to cut off transportation by railway." One of the early residents of the area, Jake Lagle, feels certain that those stones were lost when Union soldiers tried to blow up the bridge, but there is no proof.

- BROCK'S GAP -

Within the same area of Ross Bridge is Brock's Gap, named for Pinkney L. Brock, who was also a farmer in this area.

In Ethel Armes's 1911 book, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama*, Shades Mountain was the "last obstacle in connecting Montgomery and Nashville by rail." In 1858, John T. Milner, chief engineer of the North and South Railroad, decided that the railroad should run through James Taylor Ross' property and over Brock's Gap. This was to be no easy task. The mountain was made of solid limestone.

In 1858, the Alabama legislature authorized the building of the Alabama Central Railroad, to connect "the isolated portions of northern Alabama with southern Alabama". The depth of the cut through this mountain is as high as 75 feet in some places. The men used dynamite to blast the rock from the mountain, but when the War started, the powder and money all went to the cause, and the work was done "by hand"...using wooden wedges, crowbars, and sweat.

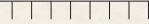
Since the railroad was not completed during the war, the railroad bed was used to haul pig iron and coal, carried by mule and oxen teams, across the Ross farm (and the newly created Ross bridge) and through Brock's Gap to the railroad line terminal. The iron was then hauled to the Selma arsenal.

After the war, J.F.B. Jackson supervised the completion of Brock's Gap, which served as Birmingham's railway gateway to the South for 36 years. Ethel Armes writes of a ballad about the Gap, composed by Railroad gangs who worked on the Gap at that time. Robert Curren wrote an article in 1998 about Brock's Gap in the *Journal of History for the West Jefferson Historical Society*. According to his article, the same contractors who built Ross Bridge also worked on Brock's Gap.

Fortunately for James Taylor Ross and his family, the settlers in this area were not as affected by the war as some of the wealthier families. The Union soldiers didn't waste their time burning farmhouses. According to Marilyn Barefield, "the little farms along the Cahaba River and on the mountain escaped destruction by the army." They had learned to live off of the land, and the farmers had long become self-sufficient.

Our mediteranean style restaurant, Brock's, is named for this local landmark.

- THE RED MOUNTAIN IRON COMPANY (OXMOOR FURNACE) -



According to Marjorie White's book, *The Birmingham District, an Industrial History and Guide*, the Confederate Government's desperate need for iron during the Civil War prompted several investors to build the Red Mountain Iron Works, in addition to other iron making

ventures in the area. The furnace at Oxmoor, however, was the first of these furnaces to go into blast in 1863. This furnace, along with others were destroyed by Wilson's Raiders in 1865. At Oxmoor furnaces "coke" (heated, refined coal) was used for the first time.

- THE ROSS FAMILY AFTER THE CIVIL WAR -

After the Civil War, William Elias Ross married Katherine McLaughlin and they had 3 children: William Alexander, Archibald McLaughlin, and Mary Lodiska (nicknamed "Lola").

Andrew Campbell Ross married Frances Jane Wood and they had seven children, one of which was Martha Ella Ross Dunham. Mrs. Dunham made a few notes on August 10th, 1951 about the Ross family, which form the basis for much of what is known about the Ross family once J.T. Ross moved to Alabama.

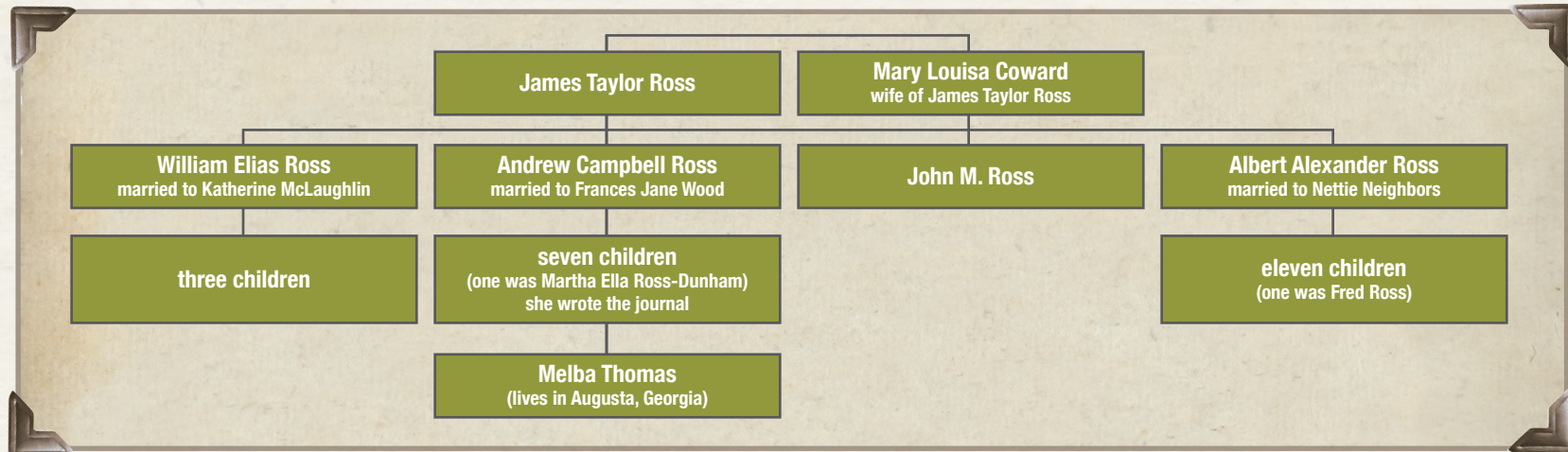
By accounts, Andrew Campbell, unlike his older brother, stayed closer to home and helped his father with the farm. Andrew came back home after the War, ran a grocery store in Jonesboro (today's Bessemer), farmed, worked as a timber contractor for the L & N

Railroad, and ran a commissary at Brock's Gap. He was an industrious man who assessed the situation and utilized it for his benefit.

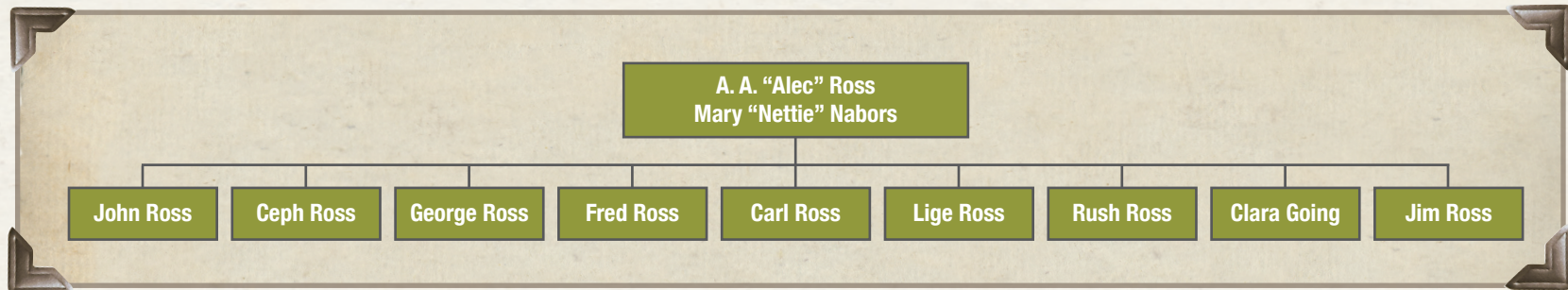
Andrew Campbell lost his first wife and remarried Laura Harrell, who is described by Mrs. Dunham as an "old maid." Prior to remarriage, he relocated to Helena, Alabama around 1876. His second wife took care of his four children still at home, and after she died he married a third time. Mrs. Dunham describes this marriage as "unfortunate," and Andrew Campbell died shortly after his wedding.

Albert Alexander (Alec or Alex) Ross married Nettie Nabors, and they had eleven children. Alex Ross was an alderman for the Bessemer Library, according to James H. Walker's book: *Things Remembered: Stories about West Jefferson County, Alabama*

- THE JAMES TAYLOR ROSS FAMILY TREE -



- ROSS FAMILY DESCENDENTS -



- THE REFERENCE SOURCES -

The Birmingham Public Library – Linn Henley Research Building

The Birmingham District – An Industrial History and Guide – by Marjorie Longenecker White

Census Data – 1800 S.C. census, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870 Alabama Census – Microfilm Department

Yesterday's Birmingham – by Malcolm C. Mitchell

Things Remembered – Stories about Western Jefferson County by James H. Walker
Cemeteries of Jefferson County by Marilyn Davis Barefield

Bessemer Area Cemeteries by Fred Ward

Confederate Military Records – Microfilm Department

Jefferson County, Alabama, Ancestral Homesteads – compiled and published by Bill Tubbs

The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama by Ethel Armes

The Alabama State Archives – Montgomery, AL

Jefferson County, Alabama, 1850 by Will F. Franke

A Record of the Descendents of Isaac Ross and Jean Brown compiled by Anne Mims Wright

Copy of speech made by Robert E. Steiner at the Dedication of the Milner Bridge

The Bessemer Hall of History – Bessemer, AL

The Practical Dreamer – A Story of John T. Milner, His Family and Forebears by Dorothea Orr Warren

West Jefferson County Historical Society Quarterly – Winter/Spring 1988,
The History of Brock's Gap by Robert Curren

*It is also through a contact at the Hall of History that I was able to reach a direct descendent of J.T. Ross, Fred Ross in Bessemer, a 51 year old lawyer.

The Hoover Historical Society

A History of Hoover, Alabama by Marilyn Davis Barefield

Interview and discussions with Robert Curren

Notes from descendent of James Taylor Ross: Martha Ella Ross Dunham