

Allen Bonner, Reprint from SUN by Mark Bonner

The Bonner Family

Allen Bonner, A Harvard Lawyer, Helped Form Parish Government Was Prosecutor in First Court; Co-drafted, Signed Louisiana Secession Ordinance

A Harvard lawyer, Allen Bonner, according to recorded history, is credited with having played an instrumental role in the formation of Franklin parish, its governmental organization and first courts...1842-1845.

The first organizational meeting to form a parish government from parts of the old Catahoula and Ouachita districts (old barbecue pits were still visible in the writer's youth,) the first grand jury, the second police jury and the first court sessions were held on Allen Bonner's property near the Boeuf Prairie Methodist Church...also rebuilt on his estate in 1837.

Allen Bonner was also the first state's prosecutor in that first court, held in one of his cabins "near" the church. Foreman of the first grand jury was Col. Lem Bowden, a staunch friend. Along with another friend, C. H. Ramage of Winnsboro, (then a mere clearing in a cane wilderness and headquarters for bear hunters) Allen Bonner was the first residential lawyer to set up practice in what is now Franklin parish.

Considering that he had been in the state but a relatively short while before Civil War clouds began to gather, Allen Bonner had gained a remarkable degree of recognition among political leaders throughout Louisiana by the 1850s. He was a leader in the "States Rights" movement prior to the War.

As a delegate to a special convention, he helped draft and signed the "Declaration of Secession" from the Union on January 21, 1861, which officially separated Louisiana from the United States. He did this despite the fact that he apparently did not personally believe in division of the Union, and had made plans to free his own slaves on a fixed schedule. In fact, he was the subject of some suspicious speculation because of this liberal stand.

Yet, Allen Bonner left his wife and four children and joined the Confederate army, after having spent much time organizing troops. A Captain in the army, he died during the siege of Vicksburg and was interred in that city.

Sidelight

A daughter, Sally Bonner, II, one of the first public school teachers in Boeuf Prairie, who died in the 1930s, often recalled that her father signed 'the Declaration' because he knew that was what the majority of home people wanted."

"Father, educated in the north and much traveled, thought division of the Union and Civil War sheer folly...that slavery was on the way out in any event...that the South could not win because of its lack of industry." She recalled that he often said: "We have only courage...that is not enough."

Allen Bonner couldn't have been anything other than a subject for major discussion when he arrived in Boeuf Prairie in the 1830s...even among the many families of cultured lineage established in the community. He was young and extremely well educated, had studied in Paris as well as at Harvard.

Not much more is known of his origin, other than that he came from Alabama via Arcadia, where he met and eventually married Sally Reynolds, member of a family with large land holdings. It is known that he was a descendent of one of the first 100 families to settle in the English colonies – Virginia. (Authority: Library of Congress.)

His daughter, Sally, is reported to have said that he came westward because some of his Virginia forebears had remained loyal to the English Crown during the Revolutionary War, creating a family upheaval and local disapproval. He wished to escape the stigma...start anew.

He wasn't a wealthy man; however, he was obviously a young man of means. After purchasing considerable property around what is now Fort Necessity, he brought in slaves, household furnishings, some said to have come from France, and a remarkable library...described as one of the largest private libraries in the state at that time.

The Library

That library is still discussed among some of the older people of Boeuf Prairie. Mr. Jim King, 102-years old next November, [in the year 1956] recalls that "it filled the huge living room from floor to ceiling...never had seen anything like it." Former Rep. J. C. Buie termed it, "Amazing...a source of wonderment in my youth."

It is entirely possible that the library, most of a legal nature, played a major role in the organization of the first parish court and government. It could have well been the reason why the first parish governmental functions were held on Allen Bonner's property.

(Miss Sally Bonner had planned to donate the library to the parish schools. It burned when a fire destroyed the Bonner homestead, located about a mile due west of the Fort Necessity High School and later inherited by the Wiggers family through George W. Bonner.)

Although the family slaves (Pleasants, Wilsons, Johnsons, Whites and a few eventually took the family name) remained loyal, some living on the family estate for many years, the war created havoc. Captain Allen Bonner not only lost his life, great hardships were created for his family. (Note: The Leavens' also owned slaves called, "White.")

Federal Troops

Federal troops swooped down upon the homestead, driving off all mules and cattle. Nothing was left with which to till the soil. Although she managed to retain the land, Allen Bonner's widow had to teach private school at her home for a while to help maintain the family.

Later, her son, Wesley, taught a private school in a cabin near the old church. Among his students was W. S. (Spencer) Desha of Extension. Wesley Bonner later attended the Tulane Medical School after fathering seven children.

After Wesley's death, his widow, the former Carolina (Lena) Frazier, taught a private school in the family homestead adjoining the Boeuf Prairie Methodist Church. Among her students was Eli Moore, son of the Jesse Moore who named the first Fort Necessity, located just above the old church.


Other children of Allen Bonner were: Allen, Jr., (died young - son of Allen and first wife, Zelia Buie Bonner), George W., Sally and Lucy. Affectionately known as "Capt'n Bonner," George married the former Henrietta (Rittie) McDonald, daughter of Confederate Captain William McDonald and a pioneer settler. They had one child, Mamie McDonald Bonner (Wiggers) who resides at the family home near Fort Necessity. [in 1956] The estate is managed by her son, Herman Bonner Wiggers, a large farmer within his own right.

Children of Dr. Wesley Bonner: Robert Paul Bonner, who died in 1952; Bessie Bonner (Mason,) a pioneer school teacher in the parish; Charlie McDonald Bonner; Miss Edith Bonner; Agnes Bonner (Holloway), deceased, a school teacher; Sally Bonner (Hitt,) who died just recently; and Mark Herbert Bonner, Sr.

Sally Bonner, II, [daughter of Allen Bonner] remained single. She vies with Miss Sally Whatley in honors for having taught the first tax-supported school in Boeuf Prairie. Miss Whatley may have been first. The first school built by public funds was called "Reform" and was located on the Jim Ross estate.

Families connected with the Bonners are: Frazier, Ogden, Hitt, Mason, Wiggers, Wooldridge, Matthews, Buie, Holloway, Kincaid.

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