

THE LONG JOURNEY

Customer Rediscovered And Reclaims His Family's Lost Land

It's a story that dates back to the Civil War but ties in to the present day, a story about land lost and found.

Robert Taylor Perry is a land surveyor who makes his living by digging into the history of local tracts of land. One day a client contacted him about taking a look at some land that was being foreclosed. The landowner needed the 20-acre property researched and surveyed.

That research led Robert to a document dated Sept. 21, 1860. It was paperwork on a loan for the land originally owned by William Nicholson Sears. Robert was amazed — Sears just so happened to be his great, great, great grandfather.

Robert learned that Sears was one of the founders of the town of Franklin in 1837. He was one of the first justices of the peace for Macon County in 1840. Documents from Huntingdon College show that Sears also was a Methodist preacher, who traveled on horseback preaching the gospel from community to community.

Even more amazing, the piece of land Robert was investigating, named "Sears Tract A," was once a part of a much bigger stretch of land owned by Sears. The original tract, located in Macon County in the town of Franklin, measured one mile wide and three miles long.

Civil War Forces Sale of Land

The note taken out on the land in 1860 turned out to be a losing battle. One year later, the Civil War began, and afterward Sears' Confederate note was worthless. He was in danger of losing his land, and as if that wasn't enough, he also lost one son in the war, and his other son was badly injured.

Sears was left virtually alone to tend to the acreage. With foreclosure looming and no help to take care of the land, he was forced to sell Sears Tract A, along with several other tracts of land. Over the next nearly 150 years, Sears Tract A was bought and sold many times.

"I couldn't believe what I was reading. It was just so bizarre — sounded like something from a mystery novel," Robert says. "I decided right then that if I was going to invest my money into anything, it would be buying back our family's lost land."



Robert holds a picture of his great grandmother, Leottie Sears Taylor, who once walked across the land he now owns.

Back in the Family

Buying the 20 acres known as Sears Tract A is exactly what Robert did. He immediately started trying to get a loan for the land, but he found the process to be more than he bargained for.

"I called a friend of mine and told him I was tired of fooling with banks that had too long of a process because it was too complicated. He said he understood, and then told me I needed to call the folks at the Federal Land Bank Association," he says. "FLBA Montgomery Branch Manager Ed Nelson came out and walked over the land with me, looked at my documents and before I knew it, the loan was closed.

"Other banks were real stiff and impersonal, but Ed was easy to work with. It was the easiest loan closing I've ever experienced, plus he returns my phone calls better than any banker I've ever

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worked with. Since then I refer other people to the Federal Land Bank Association every chance I get,” Robert says.

Restoring the Land to Its Original Splendor

In the meantime, Robert is staying busy working his new tract of land. With his degree in civil engineering, the skills he once studied are coming to life as he works on building fire breaks, fixing washed-out terraces, creating a pond from a natural spring and taking out scrub plants.

“It’s like I have a 20-acre adult playground. Ten years from now I hope to be living on this property surrounded by crops, gardens, wildlife and the sheer beauty of this land.”

Robert plans to plant corn and 1,000 trees a year on the property to get it back to its original condition. He says it gives him a sense of pride to link the present to the past and to continue what his family started decades ago.

“I’ve taken the reins where previous family members left off,” Robert says. “It’s nice to have something that is completely yours. You can see the benefits of your efforts and watch your property grow.

“It’s like being brought back into the family. This land is part of my family, and I even have memories of playing here when I was four or five years old. I’m as much a part of this place as the trees and the bees. It’s like having an old friend that will always be there for you. Land gives me nourishment, and it’s my job to give back to it,” he says.

Robert is already in the process of looking at another 50 acres of the original tract of his family’s land, and as more tracts come up for sale, he hopes someone in his family will take interest.

“This land is back in the family and will be protected and watched over. It’s kind of like having a lost friend or family member come home after a long journey.”



This Sweet Bay Magnolia on the property measures 110 inches around at chest height.



Robert sits in a chair on top of a flatbed truck on his property where he plans to build a house one day. He calls it his “back porch.”



Robert Taylor Perry stands in the middle of a crater 20 feet around and five feet deep. Years ago, during World War II, a plane from the Tuskegee Army Airbase crashed near this site. Debris from the crash was scattered across the area, and it is rumored that this is the spot where one of the engines crashed.