

Lying in the Northeastern portion of original Berrien county, four miles southeast of Allapaha, and six miles North-east of Nashville, lies an almost impenetrable swamp known far and wide as the "Ten Mile Bay."

It is the source of Ten mile Creek, a stream running southward through the flat woods of eastern Berrien, flanked by numerous flat ponds and fed by sluggish pond drains until it mingles its wine colored waters with those of the Fivemile Creek, near where Empire church is located when together they form Big creek, a stream of no mean importance in the county and which, harboring thousands of perch, pike, jack and trout, to say nothing of the unlimited number of catfish, winds its tortuous and limpid way on past Milltown to mingle its leave stained waters with those of Alapaha river.

Ten mile Bay has been the scene of several thrilling episodes. Its denseness, its dreary solitudes, its repulsiveness on these accounts and on account of the numerous wild animals rattle snakes that frequented its fastnesses rendered it a place which the ordinary mortal dreaded to enter. It covers an area of about ~~XXXXXX~~ twenty square miles, being about six miles from North to South and an average width of three to four miles. It is covered in water for a portion of the winter and spring season with a depth of anywhere from one to three feet deep, and interspersed with numerous elevated hummocks which lift their surfaces anywhere from six inches to a foot and a half above the water and from a quarter to a half acre in extent. These hummocks are overgrown with vines and brambles, Ty Ty and other swamp growth and thickly dotted with the tall growing huckleberry or blue berry bushes anywhere from three to ten feet high and from which every year thousands of berries are gathered by the neighboring citizens, who often go from a distance of ten miles away to gather berries. It takes a stout heart and a brave resolution, to say nothing of intrepid courage and a power of endurance to hardships to get a tenderfoot into that swamp a second time. Only the person who has been through the swamp under the direction of native guides is willing to undertake an excursion into this "No man's Land," for the chances are that he will become lost and consequently experience the greatest difficulty in finding his way out of the dreary wilderness of bog and fen, bramble and thicket.

This dreary place became the rendezvous of many deserters during the war on account of its impenetrableness at that time and between it and the Withlacoochee river on the west of Nashville, the deserter from the Confederate army had a hiding place that required the courage of a super man to explore. Such a thing as searching for deserters was fraught with many dangers not alone from the deserters themselves, who had become desperate from seeing the want and privation to which their families become subjected on account of the enforced absence of the husband and father and therefore resolved that rather than go to the front they would face death nearer home, but from the dangers of being bitten by rattlesnakes or set upon by some wild beast.

But there was one who undertook to brave all these dangers in order that he might serve the Confederacy. His position was that of Captain of details whose business it was to round up deserters from the Confederate ranks with headquarters in Nashville.

It is useless to say that his mission soon became known to the band of deserters. They were kept posted by their families and friends as to his whereabouts and his maneuvers. He was a brave officer, he undertook to do his duty fearlessly and with satisfaction to his superiors. He didn't falter or quit the field but each day Capt William H. Sharpe undertook to push his campaign to success but unmindful of the dangers to his person as a result of his labors.

Thomas J. Christian.

There was living at Flat Creek at this time a staunch friend and rigid supporter of the Confederacy, a man who had more than once spoken fearlessly of the perfidiousness of the band of deserters whose base of operations lay so near to his door. He had opened his doors to Capt. Sharpe and aided him in every way he could to carry out the success of his undertaking in rounding up the deserters. He was a man of considerable means, was excused from military duty on account of his being a miller, he possessed some twentyfive slaves who lived on his farm, cultivated his crops and tended his cattle, helped to run his mill and gins. His immunity from military service naturally provoked the enmity of the soldiers who had had to go to the front and when it became known to the band of deserters that he was aiding, harboring and abetting Capt. Sharpe in his efforts to apprehend them and put them back in the army it more than ever incensed them and with what results we shall presently see.

In order that the reader may more fully understand this portion of Berrien's history in its true light it will be best to give herewith a sketch of the life of Thomas J. Christian which we think will be of interest to every student of our county and the citizens who have figured in her career to the extent that did this gentleman.

Mr. Christian was born in Monrow county, Ga., in the year 1822. His father was Gabriel Christian, and his mother's name was Harrison Blair Gilmer, a daughter of John Gilmer and Mildred Meriwether of Virginia, their marriage being solemnized in Albemarle county Va., in the year 1800. Thomas J., was one of seven children as follows: John Gilmer, Martha Taliaferro, Abner Hobbs, Julia Ann, Nicholas Thornton, Hope Hull and Thomas Johnson.

To go back further, Thomas Johnson Christian was the grandson of John Christian and his wife, Elizabeth Crawford, John Christian was captain of horse in the Colonial army and fought the Indians along with Daniel Boone and Col. William Christian in whose honor Christian county Ky. was named. John Christian was the only surviving member of a party of twelve attacked by the Indians while attempting to survey lands drawn by Col. Wm. Christian as a bounty for services rendered in fighting the Indians.

To go still further back, Thomas J. Christian was the great-grand-son of Gilbert Christian who was born in the Isle of Man and who came over to Philadelphia and from there came on down into the valley of Virginia where John Lewis Christian had already settled near where Staunton, Va. is now located. There the father of the subject of this sketch was born, reared in the Presbyterian faith but later became a Methodist and became a preacher of that denomination. Coming to Georgia he located in Monrow county where he purchased a tract of wild land where with his slaves he cleared up a farm and there Thomas Johnson, the subject of this sketch was born in 1822.

At seventeen years of age and after the death of his father in 1839, Thomas J. Christian and his mother moved to Florida, carrying with them their slaves. He entered government land in Madison county and cleared up a farm. He sold this in 1856 to his brother-in-law, Dr. J. W. Hines, and moved up into Georgia, locating 8 miles south of where Quitman was afterwards built. There he remained until after the laying out and establishing of Brooks county and was a member of the first Jury drawn in that county. Selling this property in 1860 he moved to Hamilton county, Fla., to a place near Bellville, There in company with a relative of his wife, Green McCall, he built what is known as "A fall fish trap" in the Withlacoochee river, a structure that is still standing and in operation after having been built these many years. From this trap he hauled fish by the two horse load. (See Harden's History of South Georgia.)

Selling out this property, he removed in 1863, to Flat Creek mills, having traded for this place with James Griffin, This property consisted then of grist mills, gins and a saw mill and some three or four lots of land. Taking the stand he did, aiding Capt. Sharpe by opening his home to him and furnishing him with information concerning the whereabouts of the deserters, all tended to make Mr. Christian the target of the hatred of the entire band of deserters. It is said that they worked great damage to his property, killing his stock and burning his kitchen, setting on fire his dwelling, which would have burned had it not been for the faithfulness of his slaves, especially one Summer, who descended into the well for the purpose of keeping the blankets wet in order to smother the flames, the buckets having been removed from the well by the deserters before starting the fire. Of course he felt that his life was in constant danger. Capt. Sharpe disappeared and for several weeks was not seen by any one. During such scene and such turmoil, it was a dangerous proposition for any one to search the swamps, no citizen dared to venture into these fastnesses unless it be a friend to the deserters. All able-bodied men were at the front and this being near the closing of the war no one could go into a thorough search for a missing Captain of details, if they had cared to. It remained for later days but peaceful ones to unravel the mystery of Capt. Sharpe's disappearance however, Georgia had been placed under military rule, Union soldiers stood guard everywhere, indignities were piled upon the citizens of Berrien county by scalawags and carpet baggers who subjected war worn soldiers to almost brutal treatment in order to force them to take the oath of allegiance. During this period, some searchers in Withlacoochee swamp west of Nashville, one day happened up on the remains of Capt Sharpe. His watch and other possessions were lying by, his clothing was intact enough to serve as a positive means of identification, although the body had been subject to the depredations of beasts and birds until the bones were bleaching when found. The remains were gathered up and brought to Nashville, rigid inquiry was instituted, several parties were proven and the mystery of Capt. Sharpe's death remains unsolved until this day. Probably the last participant in that dark deed performed in the dreariness of the night in the loneliness of Withlacoochee swamp has passed to the dreary realms of the unseen world where he shall ever more face the deeds done in the body and here on earth.

Thomas J. Christian, with his slaves freed, his property run down and his residence in a community which had witnessed such scenes naturally unpleasant, again sold out, this time to Richard G. Hamm and moved to a property nine miles south of Valdosta, at which place he remained six months, after which time he moved on down into Madison county, Fla., to the place he obtained for his Berrien county property. There remained fifteen years when he again moved to a farm located in Brooks county ten miles south of Quitman where he spent the remainder of his life, passing away January 6th, 1885.

Mr. Christian's wife was Mary Susannah McCall, a cousin of Col. John G. McCall of Quitman, they being brother's children, John G. McCall's father being Francis S. and Mrs. Christian's father George Robert McCall, sons of William McCall and Grand daughter of Francis McCall, a native of Scotland. William McCall was a resident of Screven county, coming there from Society Hill, S. C. He was twice married, the first time to Nancy Fletcher, daughter of William Fletcher, who is reputed to have been the oldest man who ever lived in south Georgia, he having died in a southeast Georgia county at the advanced age of 132 years. The maiden name of the second wife was Mary Pierce. William McCall served as a soldier in the Revolutionary war and for many years was a noted Missionary Baptist preacher.