

## **HISTORY OF THE RELAFORD FAMILY**

The Relaford family of today is quite different than it's humble beginning. Today the offsprings of our founding fathers have done many things to enhance the Relaford Legacy. There are several ministers to carry on the spreading of God's word as was done in our past. The descendants have moved throughout corporate America, there is a military service contingent that demonstrates the Relaford's dedication to this country. There are many that has embraced the medical community. The professional sports world has also been embraced by family members. The family has sent representatives to Broadway and television. The foregoing was just a few examples of the contribution the Relaford family has made to the nation and in no way represent the total contribution of this very large and talented family.

It all began in May of 1858 when Issac Relaford was born in Lee county Georgia. Not much is known of his childhood or how he ended up in the Portal community of Bulloch County. There is ongoing research to see if he can be found on a slave plantation in one of the Georgia counties. Being born in 1858 meant he was born into slavery and we only have our imagination to picture what life would be like for a little boy born in to perhaps the most degrading of circumstances.

We find Issac in history when he weds Ovelia Wilkerson February 8<sup>th</sup> 1889 in Bulloch County, Georgia. The record also show that he was a sharecropper. As was customary during that time many hands were needed to farm the land so families had lots of children. There were twelve children born to Issac and Ovelia. Here is the order and dates.

John H Relaford- December 1889; Ardellia & Ophilia (twins)- November 1892;  
Steven- December 1894; Demonthenese- February 1896; Zulene- September 1899

These children were born in Denmark, Georgia, the remainder were born in Portal, Georgia. Seth- 1902; Booker-1903; Roosevelt- 1905; Maggie- February 12, 1908; Dewey- 1911; Julius- 1914

The Relaford family lived in a number of places within Bulloch County notably Statesboro, Portal and Denmark.

Ovelia died April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1921 The cause of death is not clear, but appears to have been classified by the coroner as Appor(x)y. She died at the age of 42.

Issac married for a second time on July 4<sup>th</sup> 1922 to Mary Williams of Bulloch county.

Reports from some family members puts Issac as a landowner in Portal around the turn of the century, it is reported that he had 53 acres for which he paid \$2300.00. Quite unusual for a former slave and a sharecropper in the jim crow south. Research is still being done to validate

that story. Another story told by Maggie was that the family were Christians because she was introduced to church at an early age. She often said it seemed that her father was not only an agitator, but a minister as well. Her mother was also from a large family and would often tell her stories about her parents sitting around praying after a long day's tribulations. As a family, these sittings would often turn into prayer vigils. The family were faithful members of the Scarva Grove Church in Statesboro. Many of the Relaford siblings moved to the north to escape the injustices and harshness of life in the deep south. Ardelia and Ophelia moved to Philadelphia and that started an exodus for the others. Seth, Booker, Maggie, Dewey and Julius ended up in Philadelphia. Roosevelt migrated to Baltimore. John, Demonthenese, Steven and Zulene remained in the south. Much of this writing from here on out will concentrate on the southerners. The Relaford family is a patriotic family as well, there are some 35 members who served in the various branches of the military. Love of country was deeply rooted in the Relaford family culture.

Thus begins the life and legacy of John named John Henry Relaford. It is reported verbally and historically that John was born in the Portal, Denmark area of Bulloch county, he was a sharecropper and was a hard working farmer, supporting his family the best way he knew how. He met and married the love of his life, Coatney Wheeler of St Marys, Georgia. Sixteen children were born to this union, but only twelve survived, the four died as infants. He was blind much of his adult life losing his sight due to a stroke to the optic nerve at age 30 while stripping fodder in the fields. John never let his blindness be a hindrance to him or allowed it to let him feel sorry for himself. He was often heard saying "I may be blind, but I'm not crying". This was indicative of his fierce rugged individualism that served to propel a blind man to never give up and support his still growing family. Because of his determination he demonstrated his faith in God by his willingness to move his family from Bulloch county to Liberty county not knowing anyone or having a job to go to, reminiscent of Abraham's journey during biblical times. He along with his oldest daughter Odness went to Fort Stewart Army post with a bushel of peanuts to sell to the workers building the base. The story of the move to Liberty county is chronicled in a document written by his son Andrew B. Relaford, Sr.

This story has many chapters left to be told and written, so stay tuned and contribute as much as you can to its completion. My plans, with your help, is to write a book on the Relaford family. You can help by providing your information to me. I want everyone from your family from the youngest to the oldest so that I can put it on the Relaford Family website:

<https://www.myheritage.com/site-117595141/relaford-wheeler>