



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

1. Overview

This paper explores the history of land ownership in the vicinity of present-day Shellman. From 1837 onward, farmers assembled individual land lots (202 ½ acres) into large tracts of more than 1,000 acres; the paper identifies the larger holdings and gives a brief bio of the owners.

Two primary sources were used to compile the information:

- Randolph County deed books: All of these books can be accessed online, but they must be manually searched. This is a tedious process; it is easy to miss deeds, or misread the handwriting. Some deeds are missing and on occasion deeds contain errors. As a result, there are undoubtedly errors in the information that follows. However, the overall picture should be reasonably accurate.
- *RANDOLPH COUNTY, GEORGIA. A COMPILATION OF FACTS, RECOLLECTIONS, AND FAMILY HISTORIES*. Randolph County Historical Society. 1977: This volume contains many family recollections which provide context to the information from the deeds. Particularly insightful are the recollections of Eliza West Ellis, who came to the area as an infant in 1837 and remained until her death in 1920. Information from this volume is noted using the format, *RANDOLPH* [Page number].

A third reference should also be mentioned: *A source book on the early history of Cuthbert and Randolph County, Georgia*, by Annette McDonald Suarez (compiled by William Bailey Williford). This in-depth source does not cover Shellman directly, but has a great deal of relevant information on Randolph County, and particularly the Creek Nation. It is available online; to access the volume, [click here](#).

Land ownership patterns evolved over time, so the paper is organized in five periods.

2. Creek Nation (Until 1827)

The early inhabitants of Randolph County were tribes of the Creek Nation, more specifically the Lower Creek tribes. The tribes were indigenous to loosely defined areas, in which they established permanent communities with frame buildings. They were highly skilled farmers who cleared large tracts of bottom land along the creeks and rivers before the settlers arrived. *RANDOLPH* [1-2], Suarez [1-68]

The Creek Nation sold a vast tract (including Randolph County) to the United States in the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1825. The treaty is a tale of intrigue and corruption; it was voided, and the Creek leader who signed it was executed, as described here [link](#). It was replaced by the Treaty of Washington in 1826. Afterwards the Creek Nation moved across the Chattahoochee to Alabama, but were removed to Indian Territory in the mid-1830's, as described here [link](#).



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

3. Early Notchaway (1827-1836)

Once the land had been ceded, it was distributed in two steps:

- The land was surveyed in 1826-7. Each tract was divided into sections (which became the first counties), districts and lots. Section 1 of the survey became Lee County; Randolph County was formed from Lee in 1828. In the 1826-7 survey, lots were 9 chains (2,970 feet) square, or 202 ½ acres. In following sections, land lots will be identified by county (original, not present day), district and lot number; for example, the center of Shellman is in Lot 269 of the 5th District of Section 1, or Lee/5/269. For more information on the surveys, see **Appendix A: The Survey of 1827**.
- The lots were distributed by lottery in 1827. Winners, known as “fortunate drawers”, could claim their lot for \$18. There was no time limit, so lots were still being claimed for 2-3 decades. For more information on the 1827 lottery, see **Appendix B: The Lottery of 1827**.

The area around present-day Shellman was known as Notchaway in the 1830’s. Notchaway was not a settlement, as there were but a few, well-spaced settlers, nor a specific location. It is more accurate to think of Notchaway as vaguely defined district in which stagecoaches stopped and mail was delivered weekly.

The first settlers arrived slowly. The first family to settle near Shellman is thought to be the Lay family in 1827. They settled inside the fork where the two branches of the Ichaway-Notchaway Creek join. Their son, “Uncle Willis” Lay, remained there for many years. He lived in three counties without ever moving; his land, originally in Lee, was placed in Randolph when it was formed in 1828 and in Terrell when it was formed in 1856.

In 1837, the William West family arrived and settled near the eastern boundary of Shellman. At the time, there was but one cabin in the current corporate limits, that of Wash Stanton. Stanton remains a mystery; he is not listed in any census nor did he own the land on which he lived. Perhaps that is why he did not stay for long. The Wests also relocated quickly, moving to southern Randolph County in 1841.

Eliza West was an infant when the family came to Shellman and spent 83 years in the area. She later recalled, *“Where the town is now, was then unbroken forest in 1827. Even as late as 1845, bears, panthers, wolves, deer, wild turkeys, duck, wild hogs, wild cattle and small game were plentiful in this area.”* and *“the howls of panthers and wolves reverberated through the air. Wild bears prowled about through the pine forests with the other creatures, and deer were so abundant that they had to be shot by the settlers in order to preserve their cleared patches of grain.”* Our current town was the favorite deer-hunting area of the William West. *RANDOLPH [162-173]*

There was the arduous task of clearing the land and constructing log cabins, also described by Ellis, *“The people endured great hardships in clearing the land of the virgin forests, and building homes. As the trees were felled, great bonfires were built to burn them. The fertile land had to be cleared to plant crops.”*

In addition to the wilderness and wild animals, there were Creek tribes in the area. The local tribes had fought with Gen. Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, so they were allowed to remain after the



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

treaty. As more and more settlers arrived, friction grew; it erupted in July, 1836, when the Creeks burned the Roanoke settlement on the Chattahoochee River. Militias were formed, and the Creeks headed south to join the Seminole Nation. The militia pursued, and caught them at the Ichaway-Notchaway Swamp near present-day Dawson on July 27, 1836. A bloody battle ensued. The Indians retreated to Florida, with the militia in pursuit, never to return. Settlement was to begin in earnest. The battle is described in detail [here](#).

There were no large land holdings around Notchaway in 1836, but the groundwork was being laid. The Bynum family, already in the area, would go on to play an important role in the settlement. Note that many of the links below connect to Ancestry.com, most of which will require a paid subscription to view.

The Bynums

- **Reuben Bynum (1808-1881)**
- **Reason Bynum (Ca. 1810-Late 1860's)**
- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Ancestry.com search [link](#)
- The Bynums were from Pulaski County, GA, and probably were the family of a Reuben Bynum, who was deceased by the time of the 1827 land lottery. Sylvy Bynum (his widow) and Reuben Bynum (an orphan) won lots that were not close to Shellman. "Rewbin" Bynum drew Lee/5/269, which includes the center of present-day Shellman. Since this lot was later sold by "Reuben" Bynum, the two were probably the same person under different spellings of the first name.
- Unlike most of the lottery winners, the Bynums moved to the area where they won land. They were in Randolph County by March, 1835, and were actively involved in buying and selling land. At one time or another, they briefly owned many of the lots around Shellman. In October, 1836, Reason Bynum purchased Lee/10/2, where the family took up residence. During that time, Reason served with the militia in the Creek uprisings of 1836 ([Creek wars](#)).
- In the 1840 census, it appears that Sylvy, Reuben and Reason were living in one house on Lee/10/2. Later, Reuben moved to the adjacent lot, Lee/10/3.
- Reason sold his property in 1848 or 1849 and moved to Pike County, Alabama. Reuben sold Lee/10/3 after 1850, but remained in Randolph County until his death.
- The Bynum family were not major landholders, but they facilitated the building of large holdings through the buying and selling of lots to those who built the large holdings. They were early real estate developers, as well as farmers. In addition, Reuben owned Lee/10/1 during the period when Rehoboth Church was formed. He allowed them to worship there until he sold the lot in 1842, thus playing an important role in the spiritual development of Shellman.

4. Later Notchaway (1837-1858)

With the Creek tribes removed, settlement began in earnest. Very quickly, individual lots were assembled into contiguous tracts of land that the deeds of the period called "places", so this paper will use that name rather than plantations, a term that began appearing in deeds after the Civil War and was used for very large tracts.



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

Each of the places is detailed, and maps are provided, under **Major Landowners** below; an overview follows:

- In 1836, James W Oliver began assembling lots west of Shellman, growing to 2,000 acres immediately around Shellman, and more elsewhere in Randolph County.
- In 1836, Edmund W Hodges began assembling lots including the heart of Shellman, growing to 1,100 acres.
- In 1837, Barzillai Graves began assembling lots in the northern and western sections of Shellman, reaching 1,300 acres when he moved to Alabama in 1851. His land was then acquired by the Hodges family.
- In the early 1840's, David Ferguson began assembling lots south of Shellman, growing to 1,800 acres when he died in 1859.
- In 1843, Thomas McWilliams began assembling lots. His holdings were spread among his children when he died in 1852. His stepson, Benjamin W Orr, acquired some of his land as well as land on his own. The combined family holdings reached 3,200 acres.
- In 1850, John P Ward purchased the grist mills north of town (built by Oliver and Hargroves) and assembled 1,700 acres around them. In 1856, he acquired another 1,500 acres from Edmund Hodges.

During this period, the land was gradually cleared for agriculture, and the area acquired the markers of civilized society:

- A grist mill was built by James Oliver and Harmon Hargraves in 1844 (now Merritt's Mill).
- Rehoboth Church began worship under a bush arbor in 1839. In 1845, a frame church building was erected.
- Rehoboth Academy was built in 1844, and operated as a boarding school.
- Notchaway Post Office was established in 1851, located in Brooksville.

Brooksville was the commercial center of this section of Randolph County, thanks to being on the intersection of two stagecoach routes as well as having good sites for mills. The town that became Shellman grew around the railroad depot built in 1859. For more information on the history of the railroad and how it came to this area, see **Appendix C: The Railroad**.

The development eventually occurred, but was delayed by the war and the ensuing depression. Ward sold the Hodges Place in 1861 and moved to Florida. Ironically, he sold the land for slightly less than he paid for it. It would eventually fall to others, primarily the Crittenden Brothers and Z T Phelps, to profit from his vision that became Shellman.

Once the railroad was in business, Notchaway became Ward's Station. It was still sparsely settled, comprised of farms rather than a settlement.

Following is a brief description of the major landowners of this period and their holdings. There are two types of links:

- Map links will connect to interactive maps that show their holdings on a current map of Shellman.
- Biographical links connect to Ancestry.com, most of which will require a paid subscription to view.



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

Major Landowners

1. William W West (1790-1883)

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Map of West's holdings circa 1840 [link](#)
- Purchased 810 acres (four lots) just east of Shellman in 1836-7.
- Moved from Houston County in 1837, with his one-year-old daughter, Eliza, said to be the first child in Shellman.
- Sold his four lots in 1840-41 (one at a sheriff's sale), and by 1848 had settled on a single lot in the south of the county.
- Eliza West (1836-1920, [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)) married Joseph W Ellis, another early settler. Her recollections of the early days of Shellman are an important source of Shellman history.

2. Edmund William Hodges (1809-1866)

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Map of Edmund W Hodges' holdings circa 1851 [link](#)
- Edmund W Hodges assembled a farm beginning in 1836, when he was a resident of Houston County. He brought his family to Randolph County by 1840. His house was located ≈300 yards west of the present-day Wooten-Evans House, on the property of the SW Georgia STEM Academy.
- Hodges owned 500 acres in 1848 (Randolph County Tax Digest [link](#)). Other family members also moved to Randolph County and acquired land, including his father and brothers Matthew and William B Hodges. His uncle, Edmund K Hodges, purchased the Barzillai Graves Place in 1850.
- He later acquired several other lots, including Barzillai Graves' land from his uncle. When he sold his land, the total was 2,921 acres:
 - To John P Ward in 1856 (1,500 acres) and
 - To James Ball, Stewart County, in 1857 (1,421 acres).
- An 1857 letter from Edmund W Hodges ([link](#)) indicates that he began his six-week journey to Minden, Louisiana, in December of 1857, accompanied by his father and brother Matthew. They were the last of his immediate family to leave Georgia. They had cash from the sale of Georgia land, but had not yet acquired land in Louisiana.
- By 1860, Hodges was a large landowner and cotton grower in Cotton Valley, Louisiana ([1860 census](#))

3. Edmund Keneda Hodges (1801-1862)

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Edmund K Hodges was the uncle of Edmund W Hodges. He was a large landowner in Houston County when he purchased the Barzillai Graves Place (1,288 acres) in 1850.
- Edmund K left Georgia for Louisiana in the mid-1850's, and was joined by the rest of his Randolph County family in early 1858. After leaving Randolph County, Edmund W seems to have assumed control of Edmund K's land, and combined it with his own land when sold in 1856 and 1857.



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

4. **Barzillai Graves (1802-1866)**

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Map of Graves' holdings circa 1851 [link](#)
- Graves was a highly accomplished public figure who moved to Randolph County to escape contentious politics ([biography](#)). He purchased 785 acres from Reuben Bynum in April, 1837, and moved to Randolph County in the fall of 1837.
- His brothers Iverson, Solomon II and William B Graves also moved to Randolph County by 1850; they purchased land (Randolph County Deed Book J), but not around Shellman. The community of Graves is named for Iverson.
- Graves owned 1,291 acres in 1848 (Randolph County Tax Digest [link](#)).
- Graves moved to Alabama in 1851 to provide a better education for his children. He sold his holdings to Edmund K Hodges in 1850.

5. **David Ferguson (1801-1859)**

- Ancestry.com search [link](#) Note: Little can be found on Ferguson's genealogy.
- Map of Ferguson's holdings circa 1850 [link](#)
- Ferguson purchased town lots in Cuthbert in 1839 and lived there until 1845, when he moved to Lee/5/263, about a mile southwest of Shellman. He remained in Randolph County until his death. He built a fine home in 1853 which burned around 1963. The family cemetery is still there, near the homesite.
- Ferguson assembled a farm of ≈2,200 acres south of Shellman between 1842-1850 and kept it until his death. Afterwards his family gradually sold off his lots.
- He purchased Lee/10/1 in 1842. The lot was separated from his farm, so it is possible he purchased it to ensure that the Rehoboth congregation, begun in 1839, could continue to meet there. In 1845, Barzillai Graves built a frame church for the congregation. Ferguson later deeded two acres to Rehoboth Church and two acres to Rehoboth Academy.
- Ferguson served for a time as the Justice of the Peace, which was at the time the highest official in the county.

6. **James W Oliver (1808-1857)**

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Map of Oliver's holdings circa 1857 [link](#)
- Oliver began buying land in Randolph County in 1836 while still a resident of Laurens County, and moved to Randolph later that year. His brother John may have been the John Oliver of Screven County who drew Lee/21/30 in the 1827 lottery.
- He steadily acquired land in the area, owning 2,632 acres in 1849 (Randolph County Tax Digest [link](#)). The land comprised three tracts:
 - North and west of Shellman: Lots Lee/5/190-191, 193, 221, 223, and 226-228; Lee 10/4, 6, and 27-28. Lot 227 is the site of the Oliver homeplace. The family cemetery is on Lot 228.
 - South of Shellman: Lots Lee/5/250 and 280-284
 - South and east of Shellman: Lots Lee/4/11, 28, and 30



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

- Together with Harmon Hargrove, he built the first grist mill in the area in 1844. The mill was later known as Ward's Mill, Crittenden's Mill and Merritt's Mill.
- He died intestate; his land was divided between his wife and three sons. The family gradually sold land, reducing their holding to 1,800 acres by 1878. However, son William Jesse Oliver married Mary Lou Taylor in 1877, and became guardian in 1879 of 1,200 acres she inherited. William Jesse later moved to Shellman, where he has extensive business interests, including the Shellman Banking Co. the Oliver Oil Mill and the Shellman Gin Co. ([link](#)).

7. **Thomas N McWilliams (1788-1852)**

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Born in Scotland, he immigrated to the US and served in the Georgia Militia in the War of 1812.
- He was married three times. His second wife, Lydia Irwin Orr, was the mother of Benjamin Whitaker Orr; his daughter Elizabeth married Orr. He was thus both stepfather and father-in-law to Orr.
- McWilliams occupied at least three farms in Georgia:
 - In 1825, he lived in Washington County, owning 900 acres in three counties [link](#).
 - By 1830, he lived in Houston County, where he still owned land in 1846 [link](#).
 - He began purchasing land in Randolph County in 1843. By 1848, he lived in Randolph County and owned 1,185 acres in the county, plus other land elsewhere (Randolph County Tax Digest [link](#)). He probably lived on Lee/4/21, but may have moved to Cuthbert after he remarried in 1849.
- He married his third wife, Margaret Fulton Buchanan, in Randolph County in 1849.
- In 1844, McWilliams built Rehoboth Academy, said to be the first frame building in the area.

8. **Benjamin Whitaker Orr (Circa 1815-Circa 1895)**

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#). Biographical note [link](#).
- Map of Orr's holdings in 1857 [link](#).
- Orr was married six times. His first marriage was in Houston County in 1838 to Elizabeth McWilliams, daughter of Thomas N McWilliams. They moved to Randolph County by 1840, and owned land in the 4th District, but sold it in 1843. In 1850, Orr was an overseer in Baker County.
- Orr's mother, Lydia Irwin Orr, was widowed and married Thomas N McWilliams in 1842.
- After McWilliams' death in 1852, Orr returned to Randolph County. Between 1855-7, Orr accumulated 1,600 acres east of Shellman, largely from the holdings that had been accumulated by McWilliams.
- By 1882, Orr's holdings were reduced to 750 acres (Randolph County Tax Digest [link](#)).

9. **John P Ward (1802-1865)**

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Map of Ward's holdings circa 1861 [link](#)
- Ward was listed in the 1850 census (taken in November) as a farmer in Stewart County, who apparently owned no land. However, he was already in transition to Randolph County. In December, he purchased 350 acres (including the Oliver/Hargroves grist mill) in the 10th district



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

of Randolph County for \$3,000. This holding was later expanded and became known as Ward's Mill Place.

- Around 1855, Ward constructed a house (Buckfoot Lawn) on Lee/5/304, situated on the road from Starkville (now Leesburg) to Cuthbert, between Rehoboth Church and Reuben Bynum's house. He did not purchase Lee/5/304 until 1859, with the deed stating that the land already contained Ward's dwelling.
- In 1856, he purchased the Edmund W Hodges Place: 1,500 acres for \$9,000. This became known as Ward's Home Place. This purchase gave Ward three lots through which the new railroad would pass. In addition to the right-of-way for the railroad, Ward granted a 10-acre "privilege" to the railroad. This ensured that the depot would be built in Lee/5/269. It was inevitable that a town would grow around the depot; Ward Station is thus a product of the railroad, and named for the man who played a large role in determining the path of the railroad.
- Ward sold his Home Place in 1861 and moved to Gadsden County, Florida.
- Ward's Mill Place was sold in 1862.

5. Early Ward Station (1858-1869)

When the railroad arrived, land ownership in the immediate area of the depot was concentrated, as shown in this map ([link](#)). These holdings soon became further concentrated in the hands of absentee investors:

- John Ward moved to Florida, selling his holdings to Benjamin Franklin Adams of Eatonton.
- Jared Irwin Ball died in 1863; his holdings were acquired by Virgil Powers, a Macon attorney, who later became superintendent of the railroad.
- In 1866, a group of Harris County investors known as Barden & Co. acquired the Randolph County holdings of both Adams and Powers, but on credit. The combined holding of 4,000 acres was the largest holding of land in the vicinity of Shellman, before or since. By comparison, when incorporated in 1883, the town of Ward consisted of only 2,000 acres.
- One of the Barden investors, Samson Bridgeman, in partnership with Joseph Glass, bought out the other investors, again on credit. He lived on and attempted to farm the tract, but was bankrupt by the end of 1867. He was allowed to keep a 70-acre homestead, but sold it in 1869.
- B F Adams took back his holdings, and still owned them when he was declared bankrupt in 1869. His holdings were acquired by Alexander Reid, also of Eatonton. Reid then promised the tract to his two daughters and their husbands if they took up residence: daughter Fannie and her husband, Robert F Crittenden; and daughter Anna and her husband, Hiram A Crittenden.
- The Barden group was able to keep the Powers holdings. One of the Barden investors was Henry Dean, who bought out the other investors to acquire the Powers place. He divided the land among family members. One of those was his son, O Z Dean, who moved to Ward Station to manage the farm.

For the area within a mile or so of the new depot, this was a period of absentee ownership. However, that was about to change as the Deans and the Crittendens would become prominent members of the soon-to-be community of Shellman.



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

Commercial Development

The railroad depot was the first commercial structure in Shellman. The traffic it engendered created opportunity, and stationmaster Z T Phelps took advantage.

- An 1861 deed reveals that Phelps has already been granted “one acre on which Mr. Phelps’ stable lot now stands.”
- Z T Phelps opened a store by 1861:
 - “This same Mr. Z. T. Phelps built the first store in Shellman and for ten years was the only merchant here,” *The Sun* (Shellman newspaper)
 - A newspaper called it a “family grocery store” in 1861.

The resident landowners who had built large holdings surrounding Ward passed away during this period (Oliver, Ferguson, and McWilliams). Their holdings were gradually dispersed, but generally remained within the original family for decades. Following is a brief description of the major landowners of this period and their holdings. The links connect to biographical information on Ancestry.com, most of which will require a paid subscription to view.

Major Landowners

1. Benjamin Franklin Adams (1821-1888)

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#), obituary [link](#)
 - Adams was a large landowner who lived in Putnam County and was a neighbor of A S Reid ([1860 census](#)). His major land holding was the Cheraw Place near Starkville (now Leesburg).
 - John Ward’s father had owned a great deal of property in Putnam County, and Adams and John Ward were friends. When Ward moved to Florida in 1861, he advertised his land for sale without success, so his friend Adams purchased most of his holdings:
 - In 1861, he purchased 1,700 acres from Ward (the Home Place) for \$10,000
 - He also acquired Ward’s Mill Place, a tract of land bisected by the Ichaway-Notchaway Creek surrounding the mill, and half-interest in the mill, about the same time.
 - Adams continued to advertise it for sale, without success due to the wartime economy. The farm was operated by an overseer who lived on it; Adams himself is known to have lived on it for part of the war years.
 - Adams sold his holdings in 1866 on credit:
 - The Home Place and the section of the Mill Place east of the creek were sold on credit to a group of investors in Harris County. This note was never paid, and Adams retained ownership. This was the same group of investors that later bought the land which became Dean Family Land.
 - Adams by now had sold his half-interest in the section of the Mill Place west of the creek (containing the mill); he sold his remaining half interest to William B Blackmon, Terrell County. This note was paid in 1867, so Adams no longer owned the property.
 - Adams was bankrupt in 1868; the Home Place (for which the 1866 sale fell through) was sold at sheriff’s auction ([link](#)).



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

2. Bridgeman-Glass Partnership

- **Samson D Bridgeman (1819-1873)**
[Ancestry.com Family Tree](#) , bio sketch ([link](#))

- **Joseph F Glass**

- Glass's genealogy and life story are unknown. He was a briefly a resident of Randolph County; he did not appear in either the 1860 or 1870 census, but he took the reconstruction oath there in 1867.
- Bridgeman moved from Tennessee to Harris County, Georgia, in 1864, where he became involved with the investor group, Barden & Co. He moved to Randolph County in 1866.
- Bridgeman & Glass acquired 4,100 acres (on credit) in Randolph County in 1866-7, but were declared bankrupt in December, 1867 (Bankruptcy documentation [link](#))
- Bridgeman was allowed to keep his homestead on Lots Lee/5/229-30, where he remained until moving to Dougherty County in 1869.
- Bridgeman's son, Benjamin E Bridgeman, moved back to Randolph County in 1872. He became a doctor in 1882, and lived and practiced in Shellman until his death in 1908.

3. Alexander Sidney Reid (1804-1871)

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Reid was a large landowner in Putnam County who was a neighbor of Adams ([1850 census](#)).
- In 1869, Reid purchased 2,630 acres for \$7,925 from Adams' bankruptcy sale:
 - Ward's Home Place:
 - Lee/5/267-9, 270 (East half), and 301-4
 - Lee/4/16-17
 - Ward's Mill Place:
 - Lee/10/62-63 and parts of 34-35, 61, and 64
- Reid's involvement with the Randolph County land was a family affair:
 - His son John C C Reid married a daughter of Benjamin F Adams
 - He promised the Home Place to his daughters Isabella Indiana "Anna" (who married Hiram A Crittenden) and Sara Frances "Fannie" (who married Robert F Crittenden) on the condition that they settle there, which they did.

4. Zebulon Thomas Phelps (1818-1891)

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Phelps moved to Ward Station around 1859 to become stationmaster, and soon opened the first store in Ward Station. He moved into the house built for the previous stationmaster (Phelps-Jay House).
- He later acquired land: Lee/5/269 (53 acres in town) and 271-272 (405 acres of farmland south of town). The land in Lee/5/269 lay north of Phelps Street, from Pearl Street on the east to Dean Street on the West, as well as a stretch on the west side of Pearl Street from the railroad north to the Phelps-Jay House.
- Phelps moved around 1885 to a home at the corner of Phelps St. and Dean St. His land was subdivided to allow homes on to be built on both sides of Phelps St. from 1890-1920.



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

6. Later Ward Station (1869-1883)

The area around Shellman was still dominated by major land holdings during this period, but there was a major change: the absentee landowners sold their holdings to families who would take up residence and become prominent citizens.

The Crittenden Family

Alexander Reid of Eatonton purchased B F Adams' holdings in Shellman. Two of his daughters married two Crittenden Brothers:

- Isabella Indiana (Anna) Reid married Hiram A Crittenden
- Sara Frances (Fannie) Reid married Robert F Crittenden

Family history records that Reid promised the old Ward Home Place to the two couples on the condition that they move there, which they did in late 1869. The Crittendens were farmers and merchants, but above all they were entrepreneurs and developers. Robert was the brother who managed the farming interests, and he quickly added to the family holdings.

The Dean Family

Henry Dean of Harris County was part of a partnership with extensive holdings in eastern Randolph County. The partnership unwound in 1869, with Dean taking the Powers Place. The land was divided among family members. His son, Oziah Z Dean, moved to Shellman soon afterwards and married Z T Phelps' daughter, Tallulah.

To see an interactive map of the Dean's major land holdings circa 1883, click [here](#).

The Emerging Town of Ward

The placement of the depot ensured commercial development around it, but the war and the ensuing depression delayed that inevitability for over a decade. John P Ward moved to Florida before he could capitalize on his vision; that lot would fall to the Crittenden family. The growth of the town is described in greater detail in *Commercial History of Shellman (1844-1950)*, published on this website ([link](#)). A summary is provided below.

Commercial Development

Hiram was the Crittenden brother who managed the commercial endeavors of the family. He envisioned and realized a commercial district, south of and centered on the depot, which is today Shellman's "downtown." The first stores occupied that strip of land running east to west, immediately south of the railroad right-of-way.

By 1873, the Crittendens were operating a store which still stands, although it is now gutted. It is the earliest known brick structure in Shellman. By the time that the town of Ward was incorporated in 1883, stores had been opened by B K Arthur & Sons and W J Oliver. John M Anthony operated a blacksmith shop and wood shop, and there was a livery stable. Shortly after incorporation, development activity took off: other stores, warehouses and a hotel were all open by 1885.



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

The Crittendens sold tracts to the Payne family and the Arthur family, both of whom developed their own businesses, but also subdivided their tracts for sale to others. Arthur St became the gateway to the depot from the south, and was lined by stores and warehouses. By the late 1880's, Shellman was a bustling hub of commercial activity for surrounding farms.

Residential Development

The new businessowners needed homes, and nearby affluent farmers wanted town homes, so the Crittendens soon began subdividing their land for residential use. It does not appear that they created a master residential plan, as Cuthbert had done 50 years earlier.

- The first homes were those built by the Crittendens. The Robert F Crittenden family moved into John P Ward's home, Buckfoot Lawn. The Hiram A Crittenden family is thought to have lived on Calhoun St, near the emerging downtown. By 1883, the Crittendens had also built homes for their father, Cincinnatus D Crittenden, Sr., and two younger brothers, J Fernando and Cincinnatus D, Jr. These later homes were near one another: just east of Pearl/Calhoun St, along the railroad.
- Beginning in 1881, the Crittendens subdivided and sold town lots (two-four acres in size) along the east side of Pearl St. This was the first coordinated sale of residential property in Shellman.
- Further development came soon after 1883. The Crittendens sold residential lots along E Ward St and E Railroad St, and along Calhoun St. The Z T Phelps family developed the west side of Pearl St starting in the mid-1880's, and W Phelps St starting around 1890.

Civic/Cultural Development

Rehoboth, with its Baptist Church, Academy, and Masonic Hall, was the traditional cultural hub for the farmers around Shellman. That changed in 1873, when a 2-story, frame building was erected just north of the railroad reserve (now the city park), facing the depot.

- The first floor was used as a school until Shellman Institute was opened in 1885,
- The second floor as used as a Masonic Hall,
- In 1878, a Methodist Church was formed, which met on the first floor until a sanctuary was built next door in 1890.
- As the only public building in the community, it no doubt was used for court and other government activities, as well as civic and social gatherings.

Following is a brief description of some major figures of this period. The links connect to biographical information on Ancestry.com, most of which will require a paid subscription to view.

Wistar Thaddeus Jay (1860-1914)

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Wistar Jay was a brickmaker in Eufaula, which apparently brought him to the area on business. He married Z T Phelps' daughter Virginia in 1884, and moved to Shellman, taking the Phelps' house on Pearl St.



Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

- Jay was a successful contractor who built many large commercial and government buildings in Southwest Georgia. He left a mark on Shellman by building many of the fine homes in the early 1900's, as well as the First Baptist Church.

Crittenden Brothers and Their Wives, The Reid Sisters

- Hiram Albert Crittenden (1840-1922, [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)) and Isabella Indiana (Anna) Reid Crittenden (1841-1879) [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Robert Flournoy Crittenden (1837-1914, [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)) and Sara Frances (Fannie) Reid Crittenden (1839-1924, [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#))
- Joashley Fernando Crittenden (1855-1929, [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)) and Emmeline Ambrose (Emmie) Edwards Crittenden (1855-1933, [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#))
- Two Crittenden Brothers married Reid Sisters; family history records that Alexander Reid purchased the property in Randolph County to give to the two couples on the condition that they move there. This could well be true, as they moved to Randolph County in 1869, but the property was not deeded to them during Reid's lifetime. The Home Place was purchased, jointly by all four, from Reid's estate, in 1871. The Mill Place remained with other heirs until later purchased by the Crittendens.
- The third brother, Fernando, was not involved in the Reid gift. He married in 1877 and moved to Shellman, where he joined his brothers in many of the land purchases they made.
- The Crittendens were farmers, merchants, and entrepreneurs. They acquired several additional lots between 1880 and 1882, leading up to the incorporation of Ward in 1883. It was they who developed Shellman by subdividing their lots for homes and businesses. This began in the 1870's, and accelerated after 1883.

Oziah Z Dean, Sr. (1849-1931) and the Dean Family

- [Ancestry.com Family Tree](#)
- Henry Dean of Harris County was part of a partnership that owned the Powers Place and the Brooksville Plantation in Randolph County. The partnership unwound in 1869, with Dean taking the Powers Place. The land was divided among family members.
- Oziah Z Dean (son of Henry) moved to Shellman soon afterwards and married Tallulah Phelps, daughter of Z T Phelps.

Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

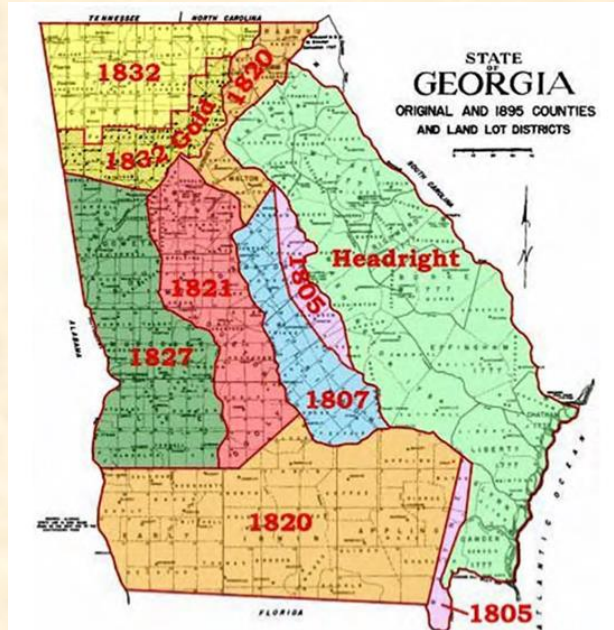
Appendix A: The Survey of 1827

Georgia was surveyed several times to prepare for distributing land via lottery, as shown in the map below right. An online version of the map which can zoom to specific areas with high resolution is available [link](#).

Each survey area was divided into sections which became counties; each county into land districts; each land district into land lots. Lots were numbered within each district, beginning with 1, so that lot numbers were reused in other districts, and districts reused within other counties. To identify a specific lot requires the county (original, not based on later subdivisions)/district /lot, e.g., Lee/5/269.

The land around Shellman was included in the 1827 survey, shown in green. It is in Section 1, which became Lee County:

- Randolph County was formed from Lee in 1828 ([history](#)).
- Terrell County was formed from Randolph in 1856.

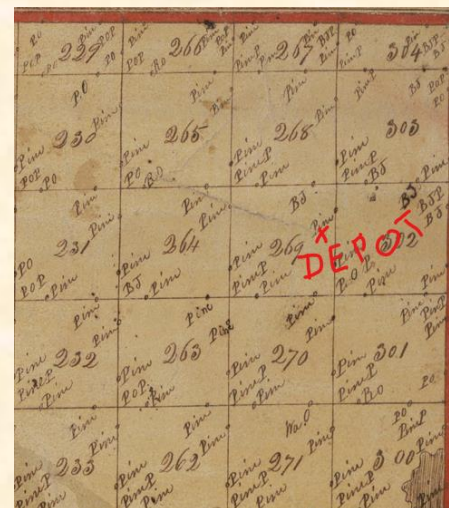


Shellman is located near the intersection of Districts 4, 5, 10, and 11. In this blow-up from the map above, the red circle approximates the city limits of Shellman; a one-mile circle whose center is the depot. Over 90% of Shellman lies in the 5th District, but some of the eastern area falls into the 4th District.



The surveys used a grid system. In the 1827 Survey, lots were 2970 feet (9 chains) square, or 202 ½ acres. In reality, the difficulties of irregular terrain and primitive surveying equipment meant that pins were not always placed precisely where they should have

been, and lots were not as regular as they were shown on the map. However, the survey was close enough to place lots on a current map using the theoretical boundaries with reasonable accuracy. An interactive map of the lots around Shellman, with notes on historical ownership, is available [here](#).



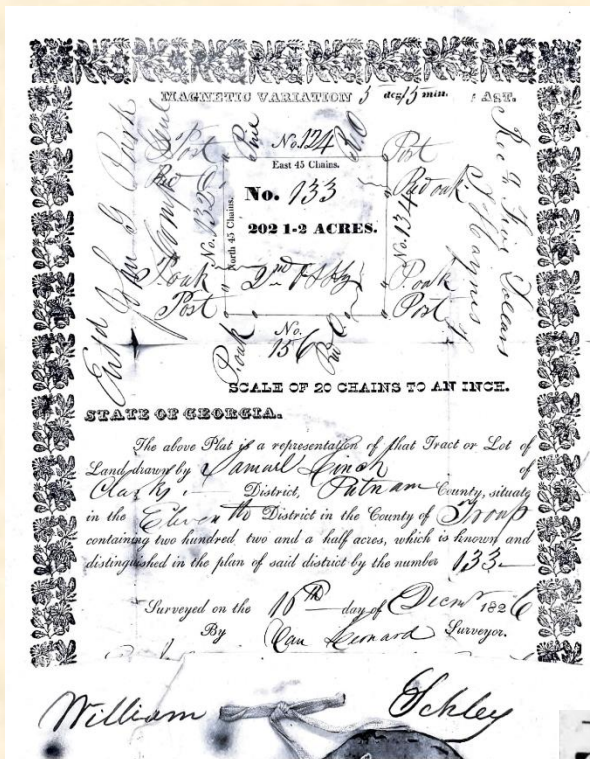
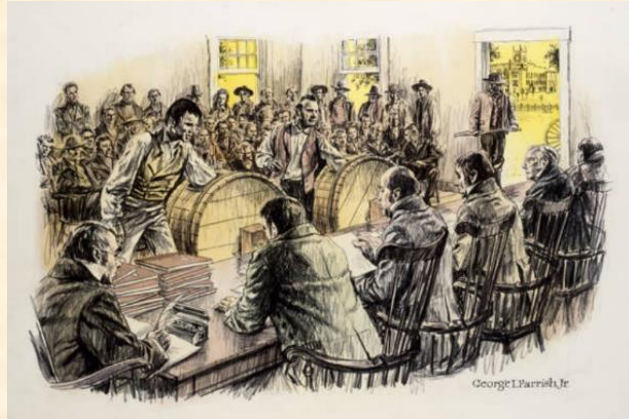
Copies of the 1827 survey maps are available online. The map at right shows the northeast corner of District 5. The X marks the approximate location of the depot, which is the center of Shellman. It is in Lot Lee/5/269. For more information on the surveys, visit [link](#).

Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

Appendix B: The Lottery of 1827

Once the survey of 1827 was completed, land could be distributed by lottery. Citizens of Georgia as of January 1, 1824 were eligible to draw, with extra chances given to certain people, e.g., Revolutionary soldiers and abandoned families.

The illustration at right depicts the 1827 lottery. One barrel contained the slips of paper with the names of those who qualified (the lottery tickets). The other barrel contained slips of paper with the land lots. The lottery officials drew a name from one barrel and a lot from the other.



The winners, who were called fortunate drawers, could claim their lot(s) for \$18 each. When a lot was claimed, the new owner received a certificate signed by the Governor (example at left). There was no time limit on claiming a lot. Most of the winners claimed their lots in the 1830's and 1840's, but the process continued into the 1850's and beyond.

Winners had no control over the location nor the desirability of their lots. Some people qualified for two draws, and their lots might be 100 miles apart. For this reason, most of the winners sold their lots to speculators. Many of the speculators remained in their home counties, but a few moved to Randolph

County to conduct their business. The advertisement at right (from the Macon Telegraph in 1837) was placed by a non-resident group of speculators.

For a list of winners of the 1827 lottery, visit [link](#). For more information on lotteries, visit [link](#).

Valuable Lands for sale.
THE subscriber offers for sale Thirty-one Thousand Acres of Land, situated in the counties of Baker, Early, Lee, Stewart, Sumter, and Randolph. The lands lay in bodies of 500 to 3000 acres, and the largest and most valuable part of them have been selected by the best judges and are situated in the second district of Baker county. Persons desirous of purchasing can ascertain the quality and location of the lands by applying to John Williams, Esq. and Col. H R Ward of Milledgeville, Col. H H Tarver of Twiggs county, and John Rawls, Esq, of Hawkinsville.
Mr. Wm. Dennard, whose residence is in the 2d of Baker county, is authorised to sell and make titles to the above lands, and will be ready at all times to shew them. Feb 23 21 1837 J. COWLES.

Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

Appendix C: The Railroad

Southwest Georgia is landlocked. Early settlers had only rough dirt roads for transportation, which limited their production of cash crops. The railroad was seen, not merely as a solution to the problem, but as the path to great prosperity. It promised greater profits for farmers, and also opportunities for new businesses in the communities along the route. A discussion of the benefits of the railroad to Southwest Georgia can be found here [link](#).

By around 1840, Macon was connected by rail to the port of Savannah and to the Tennessee Valley via Marthasville (later called Atlanta). Entrepreneurs were rushing to extend the rails southward and westward to link the system to the ports of the Gulf Coast.

The South-Western Railroad Company was chartered in 1845 to build a railroad from Macon "to Albany, in the county of Baker, and Fort Gaines, in the county of Early, or to points below those places on the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers..." ([link](#)). The company soon began raising capital by selling shares (advertisement at right, [link](#)). Nineteen hundred shares were sold; the company's organizational meeting was held in February, 1848 ([link](#)). A contract had already been awarded for the first section of the line. In 1851, service began to Oglethorpe on the Flint River via Ft. Valley ([link](#)).


Further progress was slowed by the difficulty in raising capital. It was also complicated by the politics of choosing the route, as existing railroads tried to keep the new road as far from their line as possible, and communities jockeyed to have the line come through them. Each community made its case based on how many bales of cotton it could deliver to the new line. It was also understood that a community desiring rail access would have to subscribe to shares in the company; in fact, that was how construction was to be financed.

The line was extended to Americus in 1854 ([link](#), [link](#)). The citizens of Albany had taken matters into their own hands and formed the Georgia & Florida Railroad Co. in 1856; they built a line from Albany to Americus, which they immediately sold to the South-western and then dissolved their company ([link](#)).

With the line from Macon to Albany completed, attention could be turned to connecting that line with the Chattahoochee River.

- Citizens of Stewart County lobbied for a route from Americus through Lumpkin to Eufaula.

NOTICE.
SOUTH-WESTERN RAIL ROAD COMPANY.



AGREEABLY to the provisions of an act passed by the last Legislature, incorporating "The South-Western Rail Road Company," notice is hereby given that books of subscription to the stock of said Company will be opened on the first day of March, 1846, at the following places, under the superintendence of the Commissioners named, to remain open two days: viz:

AT MACON, under the superintendence of Elam Alexander, T. G. Holt, James Dean, Briggs H. Moultrie, Charles Day, and J. Cowles.

AT PERRY, Houston county, under the superintendence of James Everett and William Felton.

AT TRAVELLERS' REST, Dooly county, under the superintendence of John Young and Abel Holton.

AT LANIER, Macon county, under the superintendence of John Bryan, and John C. Helvinston.

AT AMERICUS, Sumter county, under the superintendence of James K. Daniel and William Denuard.

AT STARKVILLE, Lee county, under the superintendence of Joseph Bond and Leonidas Mercer.

AT ALBANY, Baker county, under the superintendence of George B. King and Phineas M. Nightingale.

AT CUTHBERT, Randolph county, under the superintendence of Barzilla Graves and William A. Tennille.

AT FORT GAINES, Early county, under the superintendence of Joel Crawford and Samuel Gainer.

The above named Commissioners will meet at the several places mentioned, on the first day of March, and receive from individuals, corporations or companies, subscriptions for any number of shares they may see fit to subscribe for—five dollars on each share to be paid down at the time of subscribing. The other installments on each share, to be called for in such amounts, and at such times, as the Board of Directors may deem necessary, not to exceed one hundred dollars on each share, giving at least sixty days notice of such call.

Macon, January 27, 1846. 18—46

Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

- Citizens of Randolph and Terrell County lobbied for the route to pass through Dawson and Cuthbert to Eufaula and Ft. Gaines.

In October, 1856, the company agreed to the route through Dawson to Cuthbert if the citizens purchased \$175,000 in stock, which they did. The estimated total cost of the 35-mile route was \$601,293. Construction began late in 1857 ([link](#)). The tracks were laid from Smithville westward toward Cuthbert with a crew of 400. Service reached Dawson in July, 1858; the young town held a barbeque to celebrate ([link](#)). Construction reached the Little Ichaway-Notchaway Creek around New Year's Day, 1859 ([link](#)); trains were running to the newly built Ward's Station by March, 1859 ([link](#)). Service to Cuthbert began on June 2, 1859.

The Company had already arranged with the US Postal Service to deliver mail along its route ([link](#)). The trains would carry freight, passengers, and mail to/from Randolph County.

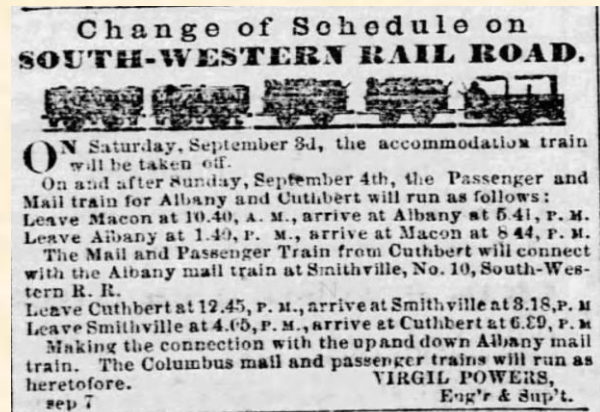
Once the route from Dawson to Cuthbert was chosen, the exact path of the road was determined by the Chief Engineer. The goal was to build a level grade at the lowest cost.

In 1858, there was no settlement at the spot where Ward's Station was built; the placement of the depot was based on two factors.

- The only major north-south road between Dawson and Cuthbert was the Brooksville-Bainbridge Road. Its approximate route brought it just east of present-day Shellman. There was also a road extending southwesterly toward the settlement of Bethel (later Fountain Bridge Rd). These roads would provide good access for the farmers, so it made sense to place a depot there.
- Realizing this, John P Ward purchased the Hodges Place in January, 1856. The railroad passed through two of his lots. Ward sold the right-of-way to his land for only \$1, and also granted the railroad a 10-acre "privilege" for a depot. Ward's strategy was clearly to acquire the land, then ensure the depot was placed on it, so he would benefit from the development that would inevitably occur.

A second speculator, Jared Irwin Ball of Stewart County, bought the Barzillai Graves Place. Thus most of present-day Shellman was owned by speculators from 1856 until around 1870, when the Crittenden and Dean families acquired it and moved here.

In September, 1859, the Company adopted a permanent schedule for daily service from Smithville to Cuthbert (at right, [link](#)). The completion of the lines to Eufaula and Ft. Gaines was expected within eighteen months; Macon was enthusiastically anticipating a boom ([link](#)).



**Change of Schedule on
SOUTH-WESTERN RAIL ROAD.**

ON Saturday, September 3d, the accommodation train will be taken off.

On and after Sunday, September 4th, the Passenger and Mail train for Albany and Cuthbert will run as follows:

Leave Macon at 10.40, A. M., arrive at Albany at 5.41, P. M.
Leave Albany at 1.49, P. M., arrive at Macon at 8.44, P. M.

The Mail and Passenger Train from Cuthbert will connect with the Albany mail train at Smithville, No. 10, South-Western R. R.

Leave Cuthbert at 12.45, P. M., arrive at Smithville at 8.18, P. M.
Leave Smithville at 4.05, P. M., arrive at Cuthbert at 6.39, P. M.

Making the connection with the up and down Albany mail train. The Columbus mail and passenger trains will run as heretofore.

VIRGIL POWERS,
Eng'r & Sup't.

sep 7

The South-Western was completed as planned and has served as Shellman's sole railroad from that time. Years later, attempts were made to build additional rail routes through Randolph County, but they were unsuccessful.

- In 1882, a plan to extend the Brunswick & Albany Rail Road from Albany to Columbus was announced. It would have crossed the South-Western at Ward's Station, but was never built ([link](#)).
- The Newton, Morgan, and Lumpkin Railroad Company was formed in 1887, and would have connected Morgan to Lumpkin via Shellman, but was never built ([link](#)).

Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883)

The original depot was probably built at the time the tracks arrived. In 1889, the Georgia Railroad Commission ordered the by-then dilapidated depot to be replaced ([link](#)); the work was completed in 1892 ([link](#)).