



Aerial photograph of Cooper Basin and Cooper Cemetery taken in 1995

COOPER BASIN

East of Milton, Florida

In May of 1856 John Jordan Cooper and his family had traveled from Washington County, Florida to Santa Rosa County, Florida and had staked claim to land surrounding a basin off of the Blackwater River, east of Milton, Florida. After the Homestead Act passed by Congress on May 20, 1862, the maximum land that would be granted to settlers on the Public Domain was 160 acres, which reduced the land that he claimed to the eastern side of the basin.

John's father, Washington Arnold Cooper whom had moved to Santa Rosa County with his son, was a Millwright and his knowledge and skills would have been valuable to the Mills along the Blackwater River. It is believed that this fact may have contributed to the decision to claim the land around the basin to have access to the calm waters of the basin for entering logs into the water for the trip up and down river to the saw mills. During John's 41 years of marriage he had 10 children 8 of which were born at the Cooper Basin homestead. Six of his eight sons worked in the timber industry for a period of time and spent time on the basin.

Over the years, six of John's children and many of his grandchildren continued to live and raised their own families near the old Cooper Homestead. For a period of time the area around Cooper Basin and east to Harold was called Cooperville and in 1916 the Milton Gazette had a section in the paper labeled "Cooperville Items" which was local news about the goings-on among the Cooper family and neighbors. Many of John Jordan Cooper's and Louisa Slay Cooper's descendants still live in Santa Rosa County and the surrounding area and as of the year 2002, after 146 years, one of John Jordan Cooper's descendants still owns and lives on part of the old Cooper homestead.

In 1996 the "Cooper Basin" Cooper's annual family reunion was founded by Miles Davis Cooper, great great grandson of John Jordan Cooper and Louisa Slay Cooper.

Each year since 1996 as many as 125 descendants have gathered together to honor and to perpetuate the memories of their ancestors, John and Louisa and their children.

At the reunions family members receive updated printed materials on the previous years research findings, view the displays of historical photographs and documents, enjoy a family sit-down meal using old family recipes and share old family stories. The second day of the reunion is held at the Old Cooper Cemetery near the east edge of the old Cooper Homestead. Family members honor those that have passed and continue to share family stories.

The old Cooper Cemetery is the final resting-place for 20 of the older members of the Cooper family and there may be more but due to the wooden head-markers having rotted away and some of the stone markers being destroyed by vandals the exact number is unknown. The first person to be buried in the Cooper Cemetery was a close friend of the family and a RLDS Missionary by the name of T. H. Wadell. He was buried in 1868. On April 20, 1869 John Jordan Cooper's father, Washington Arnold Cooper dies and is the first one in the family to be buried in the Cemetery. Over the next 72 years, 19 more members of the Cooper family were buried in the Cooper Cemetery and perhaps more for there are 11 graves that have no headstones and no one alive that can identify which Coopers are buried where. The last person to be buried in the Cooper Cemetery was Michael Raleigh (Ike) Cooper, fifth child of John and Louisa. He died April 24, 1941 at the age of 77 years.

For the past 134 years descendants of the John and Louisa have maintained the family cemetery even though, for many years, the land surrounding the old Cooper Cemetery hasn't been owned by any family member.

*Written by: Miles Davis Cooper, great great grandson of John Jordan Cooper.
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