Exodus from Snow Hill
1847–1850

by Timothy D. Hudson

The back-to-back crop failures of 1845 and 1846 triggered an exodus from Snow Hill, a coordinated westward migration that significantly reshaped the community. What followed was a family-linked migration, unfolding in overlapping waves as the interconnected Lee, Albritton, Scarborough, Griffin, and Fowler households began leaving Snow Hill.

The migration began in 1847 as multiple intertwined family groups closely associated with Bethsaida Primitive Baptist Church left Snow Hill and migrated to north Louisiana's Ouachita Valley. Those making the journey in this initial wave of migration included Martin Batte Lee and Levincy Albritton, the families of their four married daughters, and Martin's brother, Eaton Lee. They were joined by Levincy's siblings, George W. Albritton and Mary Albritton Stokes; Noah Scarborough and his wife, Samantha Fowler; and James D. Griffin and his wife, Permelia Hill.

These departures did not occur all at once. The earliest indications of the impending migration appear in late-1846 land records involving two of Levincy and Martin B. Lee's daughters. On 7 November 1846, Mary Ann Lee and her husband, Robert Matthews, sold an 80-acre tract of land in Wilcox County to Ira Skinner for $100 [1]. Two days later, on November 9th, Nancy Lee and William Parrott sold a 40-acre tract near Snow Hill to the same buyer for the same price [2].

Although these land sales mark the earliest signs of departure, no first-hand accounts of their westward journey survive. The evidence indicates that the Snow Hill migrants did not travel as a single group [3]. The first identifiable group to leave included Levincy and Martin's son-in-law, William Parrott, and Martin's brother, Eaton Lee. On 27 February 1847, William Parrott—by then a Union Parish resident—paid $142 in cash for a 40.38-acre tract of land a few miles from Farmerville, the parish seat of Union Parish [4].

Additional court records strongly suggest that Eaton Lee traveled with Parrott to Union Parish in early 1847. Back on 18 August 1845, the Wilcox County Orphans Court had appointed Lee as the guardian of Benjamin T. Peace, an orphaned minor. On 1 March 1847, the Court revoked Lee's letters of guardianship, *"he having removed beyond the jurisdiction of the State of Alabama"* [5].

By 1850, Eaton Lee lived in Union Parish with his family and owned real estate valued at $500. Although the deed in which he purchased this land was not recorded, his early 1847 departure from Alabama strongly suggests that he accompanied Parrott [6].

Even after leaving Alabama by late February 1847, Eaton Lee soon returned to settle his remaining legal obligations. On April 20th, he appeared before the Wilcox County Orphans Court to file his final account of his guardianship of Benjamin T. Peace. The justices approved it, Lee turned over $141.16 to the boy's new guardian, and he soon returned to Louisiana [7].

Around the same time, Noah Scarborough and Martin Batte Lee moved from Snow Hill to Union Parish, Louisiana, possibly making the initial journey with William Parrott and Eaton Lee. Noah was still in Snow Hill on 15 January 1847, when he signed the commissioner's report for the division of the real estate of a deceased man [8]. Although Noah did not purchase land in Union Parish until 22 February 1848 [9], two of his daughters later recalled that the family established residence there in 1847 [10].

Noah next appears in Union Parish records on 1 February 1849, when he witnessed Robert Matthews's purchase of a 160-acre tract of land [11].

Unfortunately, we cannot pinpoint the precise departure of Martin and Levincy Lee from Snow Hill since the deed in which they sold their farmland there was not recorded. However, a court official identified Lee as a Union Parish resident on 23 August 1847, when he paid $500 cash for a 40.17-acre tract of land and the preemption rights on the adjoining vacant tracts [12]. Together, these records reveal the earliest wave of the Snow Hill exodus—couples aged 25–50 with their families whose mobility made them the natural vanguard of the migration.

Another key figure in the migration, George Washington Albritton, may have followed a slightly different timeline and remained in Snow Hill in 1847. He had married a daughter of longtime Snow Hill resident Richard Fowler in 1842, but she died about 1846, leaving him with two young sons who remained in Snow Hill until early 1850. In an undated Union Parish transaction, Albritton paid his nephew, William Parrott, $200 for the 40.38-acre tract of land northeast of Farmerville that Parrott had bought in February 1847 [13].

On 12 December 1848, Parrott bought a nearby 160-acre tract for $200. Given the identical consideration, Albritton's purchase was almost certainly made at the same time [14].

On 12 July 1849, George W. Albritton gave his residence as Union Parish when he bought an adjoining 40.39-acre tract of government land [15]. That winter, he returned to Snow Hill to reunite with his two young sons who had remained behind [16]. On 3 January 1850, he married in Wilcox County to another daughter of Richard Fowler, and then soon moved his family permanently to Farmerville [17].

Levincy and George's widowed mother and sister, Penelope Albritton and Mary Stokes, made the trip to Louisiana sometime between 1847 and early 1850. The two women may have remained in Snow Hill and cared for George's sons, then traveled to Louisiana with him in early 1850.

The final Snow Hill resident who joined the 1847–1850 migration, James D. Griffin, presents a more complicated case. No known evidence suggests that he made the trek to Union Parish, Louisiana in 1847, although his whereabouts that year are unclear. He is documented in Wilcox County throughout 1848. On May 15th, he served as security on his father's tax assessor's bond [18]. He witnessed a land transaction there on May 30th and signed a mortgage to ensure his payment of various notes on September 14th. On 17 January 1849, as residents of Wilcox County, Alabama, James D. Griffin and his wife sold their 80-acre farm for $110 [19]. He soon moved his family to Union Parish, in 1849 or early 1850, perhaps traveling with George W. Albritton. In mid-1850, Griffin worked as a blacksmith east of Farmerville near the others [20].

The main wave of the Snow Hill exodus had fully unfolded by early 1850, leaving only the question of their route. How did these intertwined families actually cross the rivers, bayous, and coastal waters that lay between south-central Alabama and north Louisiana?

Although no firsthand account survives, the known transportation infrastructure of the late 1840s allows us to reconstruct the route taken by the Snow Hill migrants on their journey westward. They undoubtedly traveled by steamboat, by then the safest, fastest, and most desirable method of transportation throughout the Alabama and Mississippi River Valleys.

Although land routes were available by the late 1840s, overland travel by wagon was incredibly arduous and far more dangerous. Gulf Coast thunderstorms frequently converted roads into boggy tracks, rendering them impassable for extended periods. Such trips also experienced lengthy delays, as the journey required numerous river and creek crossings. Land trips were typically undertaken only in the spring and summer seasons by wealthy planters who hired teams of herders to drive large herds of livestock [21].

By contrast, the Snow Hill settlers were middling farmers who carried only a few prized livestock. Further, they made their journeys during winter months, when plentiful rainfall allowed steamboats to regularly navigate the rivers and bayous [22].

By the late 1840s, Alabama newspapers regularly advertised the schedules of the *"River Packets"* between Montgomery, Alabama and New Orleans. Steamboat companies in Alabama issued special notices to attract *"emigrants, families, and passengers,"* promising to deliver them and their baggage *"within a few minutes walk of the Steamboat Landing"* on the Mississippi River in New Orleans [23].

The Snow Hill settlers heading westward to Louisiana would have traveled by wagon to the nearest steamboat landing on the Alabama River, where they loaded their wagons, families, slaves, and prized livestock onto a steamboat bound down the Alabama River toward Mobile. There, they transferred to another vessel that traveled through the Inner Passage—a route along the Alabama and Mississippi coast that ran between the shoreline and the barrier islands. This protected them from the open, *"boisterous"* waters of the Gulf of Mexico and carried them into Lake Pontchartrain.

Once inside the lake, they steamed to the mouth of Bayou St. John, then up the bayou to the Carondelet or Old Basin Canal. This took them to the back of the New Orleans French Quarter, where they disembarked from the steamer.

After only a few minutes' walk through the French Quarter, they arrived at the bustling New Orleans wharves on the Mississippi River, typically lined with several dozen steamers. For the final leg of their journey, they boarded a boat bound for the Ouachita River and Bayou D'Arbonne, which carried them directly into the heart of Union Parish, Louisiana.

The trip from south-central Alabama to north Louisiana only took about one week. The leg of the journey to New Orleans lay along the mail route toward Washington, D.C., so steamboat companies had worked to reduce travel times. By the late 1840s, they promised to make it in forty-eight hours, although such a quick trip came at the premium fare of about $13 [24].

Slower and more economical steamboats charged lower fares, although the specific cost of such a trip from Cahaba, Alabama to Farmerville, Louisiana is unknown. However, comparing it to similar routes throughout the Mississippi and Alabama River Valleys, the trip would have cost about $7–$10 for deck fares, the cheapest passenger rates that these families would have purchased. This gave them space on the open deck, but they had to provide their own meals and brave the elements. Despite the expense, deck passage remained affordable for middling families like the Snow Hill migrants [25].

The family groups who migrated from Snow Hill, Alabama to Farmerville, Louisiana in 1847 all had close ties to the leadership of Bethsaida Primitive Baptist Church. Martin Batte and Eaton Lee served as deacons, while the other two known deacons—Addison Scarborough and James Griffin—were the fathers of Noah Scarborough and James D. Griffin. Allen Albritton, the oldest brother of George W. Albritton and Levincy Albritton Lee, took over the office of deacon at Bethsaida after his relatives left for Louisiana. These departures had measurable consequences, reducing Bethsaida's membership by nearly 25%. In the calendar year 1847, ten of Bethsaida's forty-four members received letters of dismissal [26].

In the aftermath of these departures in 1847, the Snow Hill community experienced additional disruptions in 1849–1850 when two longtime residents, Addison Scarborough and Richard Fowler, sold their property and moved away. Both had arrived at Snow Hill in 1827, just as the village formed, and they had each played a role in the formation of Bethsaida Baptist Church. After selling his Snow Hill lands in 1849, Addison Scarborough moved eastward to Butler County [27]. Richard Fowler remained in Snow Hill until November 1850, when he sold his farms and followed his relatives to Farmerville [28].

The late 1840s exodus from Snow Hill of this established kin-based network was not a sudden rupture but the cumulative result of years in which environmental disaster, economic fragility, and kinship obligation converged to make departure the only viable path forward. What began as a drought became a slow unraveling of a community whose stability had depended on the delicate balance of credit, subsistence farming, and the shared life of Bethsaida Baptist Church. As the Lee, Albritton, Fowler, Scarborough, and Griffin families established new homes along Bayou d'Loutre in the Ouachita Valley, they carried with them the habits, relationships, and religious culture formed in Alabama, transplanting the social and religious world of Snow Hill into the pine hills of north Louisiana.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Notes

1. Wilcox County AL Deed Book I, p. 233: Robert and Mary Ann Matthew to Ira Skinner, 7 November 1846. The deed stated that Robert and Mary Ann were residents of Dallas County, Alabama. The Matthews sold Skinner the SE¼ of NE¼ and NE¼ of NE¼ of Section 12, T12N R10E.
2. Wilcox County AL Deed Book I, p. 230: William and Nancy Parrott to Ira Skinner, 9 November 1846. The Parrots sold Skinner the SW¼ of SW¼ of Section 7, T12N R11E, containing 39.44 acres.
3. Some of the Snow Hill settlers arrived in Union Parish, Louisiana in early 1847, but James D. Griffin remained in Snow Hill through early 1849. See references below.
4. Union Parish LA Conveyance Record A-1 (1846–1848), pp. 87–88: Jesse J. Hardy to William Parrott, 27 February 1847. Hardy sold the SE¼ of SE¼ of Section 2, Township 21 North, Range 1 East, a total of 40.38 acres.
5. Wilcox County AL Orphans Court Minutes:
   Book 5:
   p. 175: *"Orphns* [sic] *Court August Term 1845. Being the 18th day of Said month."*
   p. 194: Letters of Guardianship of Benjamin Peace, a minor, issued to Eaton Lee.
   Book 6, p. 112: *"Orphans Court Special Term March 1st 1847. Benjamin Peace A Minor. In this Case It is ordered by the Court that the Letters of Guardianship heretofore granted to Eaton Lee be and the Same are hereby revoked, he having removed beyond the jurisdiction of the State of Alabama…"*
6. 1850 Union Parish LA Federal Census, p. 385b, Dwelling #517, line #23: Eaton Lee – age: 50; Farmer; real estate: $500, born: North Carolina. Union Parish LA Conveyance Record D (1845–1852), pp. 318–319: Eaton Lee to Thomas B. Killgore, 30 December 1850. Lee sold 320 acres of land in December 1850, but the deed in which he made this purchase is not recorded.
7. Wilcox County AL Orphans Court Minutes, Book 6:
   p. 141: *"Orphans Court Regular Term. April 20th A D 1847."*
   p. 143: *"Benjamin Peace A Minor. This day came Eaton Lee Guardian of Benjamin Peace a minor…Ordered adjudged and decreed by the Court that Robert Ursey his present Guardian have and receive of Eaton Lee his former Guardian the sum of one hundred and forty one 16/100 Dollars…"*
8. Wilcox County AL Orphans Court Minutes Book 6:
   p. 47: *"Orphans Court Third Monday December AD 1846."* Administrators of the Estate of Allen Moore petition to divide Moore's real estate among his heirs. The Court appointed Wiley J. Polk, Noah Scarborough, Arnett Albritton, Allen Albritton, and James Gulley as commissioners to make the division.
   pp. 98–100: *"Orphans Court Special Term February 1st 1847…This day came the commissioners appointed…"* to divide the real estate of Allen Moore among his heirs. Their division was completed on 15 January 1847 and signed by all five commissioners, including Noah Scarborough.
9. Ouachita, Louisiana Land Office Cash Entry #9304, Noah Scarborough, 22 February 1848; land bought: NW¼ of SW¼ of Section 4, Township 21 North, Range 1 East; cost: $49.94 cash; acreage: 39.95 acres.
10. Louisiana Confederate Pension Applications:
    LDS Film #4110928, Images #1116–1141, Application #8239: Samantha E. Ham (widow of Hillory H. Ham), Union Parish, filed 8 December 1909 and 1 September 1920.
    LDS Film #4126796, Images #626–632, Application #13385: Susan Malissa Scarborough (widow of George N. Scarborough), Union Parish, filed November 24, allowed December 11, 1928.
    Both Samantha Elvyann and Susan Malissa Scarborough are daughters of Noah and Samantha. Both women stated in their applications that they had resided in the State of Louisiana since the year 1847.
11. Union Parish LA Conveyance Record C (1848–1850), p. 279: Joseph B. *"Mathews"* to Robert *"Mathews,"* 1 February 1849; witnesses: Geo. A. Hammond, Noah Scarborough. Robert Mathews bought the E½ of SW¼ and W½ of SE¼ of Section 23, Township 22, Range 1 East for $325.
12. Union Parish LA Conveyance Record A-1 (1846–1848), pp. 149–150: Reuben Ellis to Martin B. Lee, 23 August 1847.
13. Union Parish LA Conveyance Record C, p. 130: William Parrott to George W. Albritton, undated. Albritton purchased the same tract that Parrott had bought in February 1847: the SE¼ of SE¼ of Section 2, Township 21 North, Range 1 East, a total of 40.38 acres. The deeds on adjoining pages were dated in January, March, and April 1849.
14. Union Parish LA Conveyance Record C, p. 278: Alexander Ambleton to William Parrott, 12 December 1848. Parrott paid $200 for 160 acres of land, the identical amount he charged Albritton for 40.38 acres.
15. Monroe, Louisiana Land Office Cash Entry #10018, George W. Albritton, 12 July 1849.
16. Louisiana Confederate Pension Applications, LDS Film #4113607, Images #1329–1336, Application #7156: E. R. Albritton, Union Parish, filed 12 April 1911. Albritton is a documented son of George Washington Albritton. He gave his birth date and place as 20 June 1843 in Snow Hill, Alabama. In response to the question, *"How long have you been a resident of the State of Louisiana,"* Albritton responded, *"Since I was seven years old."* This indicates that

he moved to Louisiana in 1850. This contrasts with statements made by two of his Scarborough first cousins, both of whom reported living in Louisiana since 1847.

17. Barefield, Marilyn Davis. *Records of Wilcox County Alabama.* Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1988, p. 117: G. W. Albritton to Sarah A. Fowler, Harris Stuart, security, 3 January 1850. 1850 Union Parish LA Federal Census, p. 358b, Dwelling #130, line #1: G. W. Albritton – age: 38; Farmer; real estate: $300; born: Georgia.
18. Wilcox County AL Will Book 2, p. 286: Bond of James Griffin as tax assessor, with James D. Griffin as security.
19. Wilcox County AL Deed Book J:
    pp. 25–26: William C. Skinner mortgage to indemnify William M. Purifoy, 30 May 1848; witness: James D. Griffin.
    p. 82: James D. Griffin mortgage to M. P. Watts to secure payment of notes due 1 January 1849, 14 September 1848. Mortgage signed by Watts as *"Satisfied"* on 17 November 1849.
    p. 147: James D. and Permelia Griffin to F. M. Purifoy, 17 January 1849.
20. 1850 Union Parish LA Federal Census, p. 357a, Dwelling #115, line #9: J. D. Griffin–age: 34; Blacksmith; born: Georgia.
21. Memoirs of Louisa George Tompkins describes the only documented overland trip from central Alabama to Union Parish, Louisiana. In 1848, Rev. Elias George, a wealthy Perry County Baptist preacher, moved his large family westward in a caravan of wagons. They left in the spring of 1848, and according to his daughter, Rev. George took 400 Durham cattle driven by hired herdsmen on the trip. Their journey took weeks and required numerous problematic river crossings.
22. 1850 Union Parish LA Federal Census, Agricultural Schedule, LDS Film #7857191:
    Image #794–795, pp. 737–738, line #10: Noah Scarborough – 1 horse, 3 milch cows, 3 other cattle, 20 swine valued at $150
    Images #798–799, pp. 741–742, line #40: Elias George – 50 *"other cattle,"* 20 *"milch cows,"* 10 asses or mules, 200 swine valued @ $1000
    Images #808–809, pp. 751–752:
    line #29: Martin B. Lee – 1 milch cow, 4 horses, 75 swine valued @ $325
    line #30: James Hayes –1 horse, 1 milch cow, and 20 swine valued @ $100
    line #31: W. Gulley – 2 horses, 1 ass/mule, 2 milch cows, 6 other cattle, 25 swine valued @ $250
    line #32: G. W. Albritton – 1 horse, 1 milch cow, 40 swine valued @ $175

    The limited livestock holdings of the Snow Hill migrants further indicate that they only brought their most prized livestock to Louisiana compared to Rev. George's large livestock holdings.
23. *"Advertiser and State Gazette"* (Montgomery, AL), November 28 (p. 3, column 5) and December 5 (p. 3, column 4), 1849.
24. *"The Daily Delta"* (New Orleans, LA), 23 January 1846, p. 4, column 2. *"The Daily Picayune"* (New Orleans, LA), 15 June 1847 (p. 1, column 6) and 24 June 1848 (p. 4, column 2). *"Tri-Weekly Flag & Advertiser"* (Montgomery, AL), 27 November 1847, p. 1, column 2. *"The State Guard"* (Wetumpka, AL), 25 April 1848, p. 3, column 5. The fare from New Orleans to Montgomery on the daily mail line was $13, with the downriver fare somewhat lower. Steamboat trips varied widely, but the mail line promised to make the trip from New Orleans to Mobile in eighteen hours. The upriver trip from Mobile to Montgomery was promised at about forty hours, so the downriver trip on the Alabama River was less.
25. Haites, Erik F. and James Mak. "Steamboating on the Mississippi, 1810–1860: A Purely Competitive Industry." *The Business History Review,* 45, 1971, pp. 74–75.
26. 1838–1847 Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Association Minutes, Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama. Wilcox County AL Deed Book M, p. 512: Addison Scarborough to James Griffin, Martin B. Lee, and Eaton Lee, Deacons of the Bethsaida Baptist Church, 25 October 1845; Deed Book N, p. 462: William and Mary W. Gully to Allen Albritton and James Griffin *"Deacons of Bethsaidea* [sic] *Church,"* 2 November 1859. At the organization of Ebenezer Association in 1838, Bethsaida Church was represented by Addison Scarborough, James Griffin, and Martin B. Lee, an indication that they served the church as deacons. The 1845 and 1859 deeds identify the others as deacons.
27. Wilcox County AL Deed Book J:
    pp. 191–192: *"Adison"* Scarborough to Edmund Hobdy, 16 January 1849; signed: *"Addison Scarborough"*
    pp. 313–314: Addison Scarborough to John A. Lee, 30 August 1849
28. Wilcox County AL Deed Book J:
    pp. 588–589: Richard and Sarah Fowler to William M. Purifoy, 13 November 1850
    pp. 590–591: Richard and Sarah Fowler to Francis M. Purifoy, 13 November 1850
    pp. 593–594: Richard and Sarah Fowler to Edmund Hobdy, 13 November 1850

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦