



TONYA'S TALES

By Tonya Brantley

— More Than a Vacation —

I recently had the opportunity to do something that I have been wanting to do for a very long time. I went on vacation. I can't remember the last time I actually got a chance to pack a bag and get out of town away from the hustle and bustle of my everyday "go, go, go" routine. I had an incredible week of relaxation and fun. I even took the opportunity to go whitewater rafting down the Ocoee River. I highly suggest that everyone try that at least once. It was a blast!

I took a trip to Sparta in Hancock County Georgia to visit some of my relatives. The only difference is, the relatives I visited are deceased. As many of my readers know, I am very

passionate about my ancestry. I have been researching my Brantley lineage for over a decade. I have always wanted to go to Hancock County to find the graves of my loved ones. I found my great grandparents and also my great great grandparents graves. I solved a mystery that plagued me about my 2nd great grandfather James Amos Brantley, a Civil War Soldier who was a Confederate guard of the Georgia volunteer infantry. There were two graves in two separate cemeteries with the same information on them according to information I found on the internet. As it turns out, the information wasn't the same after all, they were cousins. One

grave I longed to visit was that of my fourth great grandfather Amos Brantley. He was a Revolutionary War soldier who was a private in the company commanded by Captain Baccott of the regiment commanded by Colonel Archibald Lytles in the North Carolina line from 1782 to 1783. For many years there had been an unsolved mystery in regards to the headstone on his grave. There are the initials T.R.B. 1937 at the bottom and until recently, this has been a piece of the puzzle I couldn't solve.

If you think about it, that's what doing research on your family is all about. Putting the puzzle pieces together. Several months ago a gentleman named William "Bill" Jones from Jacksonville, Florida, contacted me after reading my article "A Promise Kept" to

inform me that his family owns the land on which Amos is buried. He agreed to meet me in Hancock County to take me to Amos' grave.

Prior to our visit, Bill was contacted by Nancy Etheridge Lasley of Chehalis, Washington. She found a query Bill had posted online questioning the initials T.R.B. as well. In her words she, "happened to stumble on Bill's pondering about who was T. R. Brantley that erected the headstone on Amos Brantley's grave." As it turns out, Thomas Ryal Brantley was her great grandfather and he was Thomas Jefferson Brantley's son... and thus Amos Brantley's grandson. He and his wife Cora Jackson Brantley had one child, Mae Alma who was her grandmother. Her dad was his only grandchild and she is his only great grandchild. Finally, after over a decade of wondering that puzzle has been solved. Not only did I add another piece to the puzzle, but I was able to connect with a distant cousin sitting an hour away from the Pacific Ocean who I never knew.

She told me a story about when Thomas Ryal was a very little boy and the sol-



diers began to return from the war, he stood on the road and spoke with them and counted them. They gave him Confederate money and he carried it home and his mother sewed each piece as if it were a piece of fabric, onto a quilt back. Nancy said, "In my lifetime it was called "the money quilt." It's really a stunning thing and beautifully done and well preserved." She took the quilt and put it on loan to a museum and now children and adults are viewing Confederate money for the first time. Nancy did that, because like Thomas Ryal, she wanted to honor her family and "tell a story."

In an e-mail Nancy sent to me, she said, "Story tellers are needed... and you are one and Thomas Ryal was one and now I get to tell his story. Stories connect us just as much as DNA. I think they connect us more than genetics. They provide pride, a sense of value and of having a spot in a bigger

family tree, then do you want sets of numbers or tales of who those people before you were? I vote for tales! It's human nature to want to define ourselves... and that's the genealogy "bug" but I'd rather have a collection of stories than names and numbers."

I would have never been able to find Amos Brantley's grave on my own. Bill guided me to the spot which was far back in the woods behind the old Waller family home. Surrounded by nothing but wilderness and quiet, I knelt down beside the grave as tears of pride and joy filled my eyes. I truly had a loss of words being there with my 4th great grandfather's (presence) right in front of me. I had been waiting for that moment for over ten years and to actually be there was one of the proudest feelings I've ever had.

Do you have questions or comments about Tonya's Tales? If so e-mail Tonya at: people4news@aol.com.

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