

Finley Holmes (born 1802)

Finley Holmes, son of the first Finley Holmes in America, was born in Columbia, SC, in 1802.^{1, 2} He was the fourth child of Finley and Jane Downs Holmes. After his father's death in 1815, Finley moved with his mother and living brothers from South Carolina to Georgia, near Macon and bought land there. His older brother, James, had purchased land in Pulaski County Georgia for Finley in 1816.³ Finley was only ~16 then and as such, was a minor. James had married a Georgia girl ~1810 and had looked to Georgia as a place to settle and farm. James probably persuaded the whole family into moving there after Finley senior had died in 1815. The parents of James' wife, Mary "Polly" Bryan, lived in west central Georgia and that is where James and Polly finally settled.

Finley met and married Miss Emily Goodwyn Raines. She was the daughter of Thomas Raines and Sarah Abercrombie Raines, both parents from old, established families in Georgia. Finley and Jane were married on December 17, 1823 in Bibb County, Georgia.⁴ They lived near Macon, Georgia, where young Finley continued to acquire farm lands in, adjacent, or near the newly formed Bibb County.^{5, 6} Between the 1816 and 1836 Finley Holmes' land holding continued to increase as he purchased additional land. His total acreage in 1836 was about 1000 acres.⁷ Finley had land in Pulaski County, Bibb County and Jones County - all located in south central Georgia.

In the year of 1836, young Finley having decided to sell his holdings in Georgia, took his family further West into a recently-admitted state that was often referred to as "Mississippi Territory." The previous move from South Carolina to Georgia in 1823 and now the move further West in 1836, from Georgia into Mississippi, seems to have been in keeping with a trend of the times; a general migration from the Carolinas to the states which lay further inland from the Atlantic.²

Upon their arrival in Mississippi, Finley bought a section (640 acres) of land from a land agent who had bought the land directly from the Chickasaw Indians. Finley paid \$6,000 for the land.⁸ In 1837 he purchased an additional 640 acres for \$5000 and started the preparation for construction of his new home.⁹ The first building consisted of a single story of thick walled brick that were fired on the property. The main room, 32 by 16 feet, had large fireplaces at each end, and a 15 foot ceiling. Four doors opened to the front and rear galleries to allow ventilation. The 9 foot tall doors were hung with black hinges engraved "Bristol England, 1830." This building, a "temporary cabin," which was the home while the main residence was under construction was to become the overseer's house with sleeping quarters and an office.¹⁰ This house, along with a nice-sized brick smoke house constructed about the same time, remain at the site and are presently inhabited. The cabin took nearly two years to complete and was occupied by the family for almost 12 years while the main house was under construction. The cabin is, at present, the oldest building in DeSoto County, Mississippi.¹¹

Next Finley constructed a large mansion at the plantation, Valley Grove, as it was named. It was of a Colonial design and took nearly 10 years to complete - sometimes around 1852. The two story, six bedroom, white clapboard house and was approached from Tchulahoma Road.¹²

Leading to the house from Tchulahoma Road was a small road lined with huge cedar trees. Slaves cut the timber from the forests and laid full-length trees across the foundation. Axe-hewn bald cypress beams that were cut on Holmes' section of land in Arkansas and floated across the Mississippi River were used for floor joists. The frame of the house went up with slave-milled lumber, and pine-board shingles were used on the roof. Four huge white wooden pillars, two stories high, supported the roof of the front porch. On each side of the front doorway of the house was a large stained glass window, imported specially from France for the home. The home was warmed by the fireplaces of four huge brick chimneys. All of the bricks used on the plantation were made from the clay on the property.^{12,13} Again, in 1850, Finley bought another 320 acres in Mississippi near the house.¹⁴

Finley, his wife, and the younger children moved to Mississippi and took with them a large number of slaves - around 25 - hands for clearing land, but also skilled craftsmen of the building trades - carpentry, blacksmiths, carvers, and brick making/masons. By 1850 his slaves numbered 101 and by 1860 the slave population was 118.¹⁵ He was the largest slaveholder in DeSoto County. On the plantation, cotton was a major cash crop, as well as Indian corn. Wheat, potatoes, beans, hay, and livestock were grown for cash and/or for use and consumption by the family and slaves at Valley Grove.¹⁰

Finley acquired 640 acres of donation land in Arkansas. Donation land was land that originally belonged to the federal government, i.e., land taken from the Indians. It was sold by the government, but the new owners had abandoned it. Finley paid \$1.25 an acre for the land in 1851.¹⁶ He acquired even more land there during the 1850's, and by 1860, 67 slaves worked on that land. At his death, he owned 12,000 acres of land in Desha and Jefferson Counties in Arkansas.^{1,9}

Finley and Emily had a total of twelve children. One, Emily G. Holmes, died in infancy. Of the other children, five were born in Georgia and six were born at Valley Grove.⁵ In the years before the war, the Holmes family flourished and had become quite prosperous.

During their lives at Valley Grove, Emily and Finley lived through the period of the Civil War. Their son, Thomas, died of poison ivy while in the army. Their son, Francis, was wounded in battle at Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, captured, and held in various Yankee prisons until the war was over.¹⁷ In 1865 Finley petitioned for a pardon for his taking part in the "late rebellion" against the Government of United States¹⁸ and in that year, he received a full pardon by the President of the United States of America.¹⁹

As the years passed, six of their children died. Five others married and moved away, so that when Finley died at Valley Grove on March 24, 1884, at the age of 82, only one of his twelve children, Francis, was still at the old home.²⁰ At his death he left 2000 acres at Dumas and Walnut Lake, Arkansas to each of his five (living) sons.¹ Francis who, in 1873, had purchased for \$12,000 the two sections of land on which Valley Grove stood, was living and managing the plantation. He did not want to move to Arkansas and swapped his portion of the Arkansas land for land in Mississippi held by William B. Dumas.¹ Finley was buried first at Valley Grove then the grave was moved to Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis. He rest in Lenow Circle along with his wife, Emily G., his son, Finley Jr. and his brother, Robert. His daughter, Marcia

Elbertina Holmes [Treadwell] Beardsley, is buried in the adjacent site with her first husband, Bertie D. Treadwell.

Obituary from the *Pine Bluff Weekly Commercial*.²²

HOLMES - At his residence in the vicinity of Memphis, on the 24th. Inst., FINLEY HOLMES, aged 82 years.

He was born in Georgia, and emigrated to De Soto, Miss., in 1837; from thence he removed to Memphis at which time there were only two buildings in that city. He was an enterprising, live man. The first settlement ever made in the beautiful section known as Walnut Lake was made by him. At that time it was a trackless waste of forest from there to Arkansas river; not one cabin or settlement was there to cheer or guide the immigrant. He established a plantation and then left two of his oldest sons in charge. The deceased was a gentleman of energy, of character, social and kind in disposition and leaves a host of admirers in Arkansas, Tennessee and Mississippi to mourn his demise. This tribute to his memory is from one who saw him first plant his foot on Arkansas soil thirty years ago.

R. F.

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