

I PRAYED IN MY SLAVEMASTERS' PEW

Not really my slave master. I've never been a slave. Today is April 17, 2003 so you can tell that statement is not literally correct. But my great grandfather was a slave. His name was Joseph Talbot. My name is Evelyn Tolbert. I am involved in genealogy. Using the vernacular, I am "lookin' for my peoples". When I visit Texas, the people in the area around my historical home site all write "Tolbert", but they all say "Talbot". I have located a relative who was known by both "Talbot" and "Tolbert". I should soon pinpoint exactly when we changed the spelling from "Talbot" to "Tolbert".

Anyway, back to my slave masters' pew.

The slave master who owned my great grandfather was named Matthew Talbot. Matthew Talbot was an honorable man. "Honorable" in all meanings of the word. Mr. Matthew Talbot was honorable because he was a devote Christian. Mr. Matthew Talbot helped organize and found the Christ Episcopal Church of Matagorda, Matagorda County, Texas in 1839; the "Mother Church of Texas".

Mr. Matthew Talbot was honorable because of the role he played in the rescue of his niece, Ann Harvey, after her abduction by Indians as portrayed in the movie "The Searchers", starring John Wayne. Mr. Talbot's niece had been kidnapped upon the murder and scalping of her family in 1836, and finally discovered alive in 1840. I don't know what happened to the 14-year-old slave girl who was kidnapped with Ann Harvey.

Mr. Matthew Talbot was honorable because he was "propertied". Men who owned large plantations and large numbers of slaves were honorable. The 1850 census lists 49 of Matthew Talbot's slaves, but there are no slave names.

Mr. Talbot was honorable because he was a town officer. He is shown as serving as an Alderman for the City of Matagorda in 1854.

Mr. Talbot was honorable because he was an attorney and became a famous area judge. Judge Talbot ruled on court cases, married couples and did all of the things that judges normally do. He was the "Honorable Matthew Talbot, Chief Justice, Matagorda County in 1858".

But Matthew Talbot was most honorable, because he believed, as I believe, that Holy Baptism is a holy sacrament. Mr. Talbot believed, as I believe, that the first requirement to participate in this holy sacrament is to renounce Satan, repent of our sins, and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Mr. Matthew Talbot believed, as I believe, that a person should be baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew Talbot had his slaves baptized in Christ Episcopal Church. I know this because I have a copy of the Church registry pages showing my Great Grandfather Joseph Talbot, and his brother John Talbot, "slaves of Judge Matthew Talbot", being baptized. I know that this same Joseph Talbot and John Talbot are "my peoples", because I have tracked

their existence from their baptisms, through the 1867 Voter Registration, where John Talbot, ex-slave, was registered to vote on August 23, 1867 and Joseph Talbot, ex-slave was registered to vote on September 5, 1867.

I have tracked Great Grandfather Joseph through the 1870 Census where he is seen living with his wife Martha, daughter Ida, nine years old, son Jacob, four years old, and son John, two years old. I have traced Great Grandfather Joseph through a copy of the marriage certificate of Joseph Talbot to Martha Talbot in 1872, the year they felt comfortable going to the Brazoria County Court House to get officially married.

I know that Martha Talbot is found in the 1880 Census living with her second husband James "Calvin" Parks. I know that in their household are "Jake" Talbot, 14 years old, and John Talbot, 12 years old, both listed as James Parks' stepsons. I know that this 12-year-old John Talbot was my Grandfather, John Tinsley Tolbert, and that he died at 4:50 p.m. at 715 Wickman Street, Houston, Texas on September 17, 1926.

On my April, 2003 trip to Texas; I entered the empty Christ Episcopal Church in Matagorda to see for myself where my Great Grandfather had stood. Using the "sitting arrangement of 1850 - 1860" diagram of the pews, I went to sit in the Matthew Talbot family pew. I praised the Lord for His everlasting goodness. I thanked God for bringing me to the Christ Episcopal Church in Matagorda, Texas. I thanked God that Matthew Talbot recognized that his slaves had souls. I thanked God that Matthew Talbot brought his slaves to church with him so they could hear the Holy Word. I thanked God that Matthew Talbot had been an honorable man.

Evelyn (Talbot) Tolbert
Thursday, April 17, 2003