

THE DOMINECKER SETTLEMENT

The Dominecker Settlement is located in Holmes County, about half way between Westville and Ponce de Leon, Florida. Westville prides itself on being the town that made boot-leg liquor famous, and the Domineckers owned and operated the stills. Ponce de Leon is a small village – a trading post for farmers.

During the time that lumber and turpentine were leading industries, the town thrived. Now, a small saw-mill employs a few people and cull lumber is shipped to the paper mill at Panama City. People trade one product for another and there is very little money spent. The town derives its name from a small spring on the Pea River, called Ponce de Leon Springs. The spring claims to be the original “Fountain of Youth” discovered by Ponce de Leon.

The Domineckers live in their little settlement and have few outside interests. The children are not allowed to attend the white schools. For a child from the settlement to attend school was unheard of until 10 years ago, their efforts to enter their children in school caused such an upheaval, the school board finally compromised by establishing a grammar school for them. A few exceptions have been made in Westville for high school students, but they are never allowed to actually graduate. Two families have moved to Shamrock, Florida to send the children to a white school.

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The Domineckers attend the Mt. Zion Baptist Church. It is supposed to be a white church, they are allowed to go to any church to “preaching” but cannot take a part in church affairs. They seldom attend any services but their own – unless it is a holiness revival.

These people are sensitive, treacherous and vindictive. They never start a disturbance but if any one bothers them – the whole family will do childish things to get revenge, to steal a hog or mutilate a crop is as good as a want. They are pathetically ignorant and an entire family will work hard for little compensation.

The Domineckers come to town once a week for supplies. Their dilapidated wagons are drawn by anemic looking oxen. Each wagon is literally spilling over with children. They attend their business quickly and quietly and leave as unceremoniously as they came. They are treated with the same courtesy that a Negro receives – never served at a public fountain nor introduced to a white person. It would be ridiculous to prefix “Mr.” or “Mrs.” to their names.

The Domineckers differ in size but they are practically the same type. Their skin is dark, swarthy and thick looking; some have medium skin with big brown freckles, their eyes are brown and sharp, usually deep-set. They have beautiful

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white teeth and bright pink gums. Most of them have black straight hair, none of them have real kinky hair and one family has three children that are decided blonds – their skin looks sun-burned. They are a type of people that age quickly, probably from lack of care. The men are big and burly looking, noted for their strength and famous for “halter breaking” calves and horses.

The women are low in stature, fat and shapeless, they wear loose-fitting clothes and no shoes. One woman 74 years of age has never owned a pair of shoes. When a person is the smaller type his is almost dwarf-like in size. There seems to be no in-between size. The people move from one hut to another, often living alone for awhile and then moving back into the family group. Men, women and children work in the fields. Some houses are scrupulously clean while others are filthy. They just live from day to day – certainly not an ambitious group. Each generation marries into the lower class of white people, their original group will soon be extinct. Common law marriage is practiced, as a matter of fact – most of them “take-up” with each other.

Local people claim that the Domineckers are 95% Negro. This statement is absurd. They are about three fourths white and one eighth Negro and one eighth Indian.

Jim Crow, the oldest son of Sam Story, Chief of the Euchee Indians, married a servant girl that was two thirds white.

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Her name was Harriet, she came to Walton County with the McLendon family. When the Euchee Indians left Walton County to go the Everglades, Jim Crow led the tribe. This was three weeks after the “Big Chief’s” death. Harriet refused to go with the tribe so she and her baby daughter were left behind with the McLendon family. Years later this child married a yellow boy from Freeport, Florida. He was the son of a servant that came from South Carolina with the McLain family. Their descendants married into another half-breed family. One white man was the sole heir to a plantation, after the Civil War. This was in Holmes County. One family of slaves remained on the plantation and the owner had four children by one of the daughters. He is supposed to have married the Negro woman but there are no records to prove it.

In 1837, during the Indian War, the whites drove the Indians into Alabama, near River Falls, and captured a squaw and little baby and a boy about eight years old. The squaw strangled the baby during the night and disappeared. Later she was seen with three Indian men, one of these was killed but the others escaped and it is supposed that they joined the Creek Indians and went to Texas. The white men brought the Indian boy home, he was about 30 years old at the time of the Civil War and fought with his white friends. White men named him Henry Simmons, his widow and eight of their nine children

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live at Ponce de Leon. The Simmons woman claims to be white but a Negro man living nearby claims they have the same grandmother. However, they refuse to associate with Negroes, but they ride in Negro coaches and use Negro waiting rooms.

The Simmons family are proud of their Indian blood. They try to follow the old customs and hunt with sling-shots and bows and arrows. They do some of their cooking out in the yard and eat meat and fish about half raw. Every year they plan to pay tribute to their forefathers, but this ceremony has never been performed – before Henry’s death the family often visited Indians.

About 20 years ago, the people in the settlement were just “mixed breeds” – living their own lives and practically unnoticed, until a white man and a white woman were divorced and the

mother had custody of their one child. Later the woman married one of the men from the settlement. The white man did not want the child to live in such surroundings so he employed a lawyer to gain legal custody of the child. The case was tried in the Walton County Court – the father explained the case by saying that his former wife had married a “black and white man – just plain black and white like a common Dominecker Chicken.”

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He gained full custody of the child and the people in the settlement, much to their distress, are still called “Domineckers.”

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