

The Story of Elias (Clevelands Cross Roads)

By

Don C. East

At the outset, it should be emphasized that very little information could be found relative to the history of Elias, commonly called "Cleveland's Cross Roads." The majority of the information in this brief historical sketch was derived from taped interviews with John Aubra Cleveland, son of the founder of Elias. Two taped interviews with John Aubra Cleveland were made by his grandson (the author) in 1975 and 1981 when Mr. Cleveland was 92 and 98 years of age respectively. Other data used to round out and substantiate the information in the interviews was found through research in the Alabama State Archives and History Library in Montgomery, Alabama, and in oral history handed down through the generations in the Cleveland and Nail families of Elias.

Before beginning this historical sketch, a few words are in order to geographically define Elias. For the sake of clarity, the community of Elias is herein defined as the area within a two-mile radius of the original commercial area, where the homes of the late Gladys Cleveland East and Virginia Thomas Green now sit. The Elias site is located 1.5 miles directly east of the point where Alabama State Highway #63 junctions with State Highway #9. The community is five miles north of Goodwater and six miles south of Millerville. The center of the Elias community is situated on the east side of a north-south range of foothills measuring 800 to 1100 feet elevation. This unnamed range of hills is the watershed between East Alabama's two major rivers, the Coosa and Tallapoosa. The major stream draining the Elias area is Broken Arrow Creek (originally Likachkahatchee Creek in the Creek Indian language). A large spring, which is the headwaters of Broken Arrow Creek, was the source of water for the old commercial section of Elias. Elias is one of the southernmost, currently active settlements in Clay County, being about one mile from both the Coosa and Tallapoosa County lines.

A flood of White settlers poured into the lands between the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers after the expulsion of the Creek Indians in the mid 1830s. Some of these first White settlers eventually found their way westward, first to Pinkneyville, and later on to the present site of Elias. But before this mass migration by the white man, what would later become Elias was at the geographic center of the Creek Indian Confederacy. As this brief history will show, the Creek Indians played a role in the settlement of Elias.

The Creeks, properly called Muskogees, derived their common name from the many streams that ran through their territory. By the early 1800s, the Creeks became divided into the Red Sticks and the White Sticks, or more commonly, the Upper and Lower Creeks, respectively. Those occupying the Clay County area were the Red Stick (Upper) Creeks fiercely believed in their ancestral traditions and customs. They looked with scorn upon their White Stick (Lower) former brethren who adapted more readily to the ways of the oncoming flood of Whites. Because of their geographical location, it was inevitable that the Creeks would be caught up in the imperial ambitions of the American, Spanish, British and French at the turn of the 19th century. A complex sequence of events led first to a Creek Civil War in 1812 between the Red and White Stick factions, that later, in 1813, turned into a war between the Red Sticks and the United States. At the conclusion of the Creek Indian War, the Treaty of Fort Jackson gave the majority of the Creek Indian lands to the United States, leaving the Creeks only that 5.2 million acre portion roughly between

the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers. Later, there was further encroachment on these Indian lands by the onrush of White settlers, amplified by the discovery of gold in the area in 1832. Thus, more conflict arose between Indians and Whites, which eventually led to the Indian Removal Treaty of 1832 and the expulsion of the Creeks and other Indians of "The Five Civilized Tribes" to the west of the Mississippi River by 1836. Although the Creek Confederacy is gone from this area of Alabama now, it left its imprint on Clay and surrounding counties in the names of streams, towns, mountains and other geographic features. It also left a Creek heritage behind for many Clay County citizens with Creek Indian blood in their veins.

In the vicinity of Elias, there were several Creek Indian sites of historical importance. Located one and a half miles to the east of Elias was Hillabee Town, the site where Brigadier General White of General Cooke's Eastern Tennessee Volunteers massacred about 65 sick and wounded Creek braves in November 1813 during the Creek Indian or "Red Stick" War. These Indians had been wounded a few days earlier at the Battle of Talladega. Other historical sites include Pochusehatchee Village, about four miles westnorthwest of Elias on Hatchet Creek; and the site of the Battle of Enitachopko, about two miles east of Elias, where a portion of General Andrew Jackson's command was ambushed by the Creeks on January 24, 1814. In this battle, "Captain Jack" was forced to leave the field at great loss. The author can recall finding many stone arrowheads and other Indian artifacts in the Elias area during his childhood.

With this brief background on the Creek Indians, it is appropriate at this point to make a more specific historical connection between those Indians and the Settlement of Elias.

Robert Grayson, a native of Scotland, gained the trust of the Creek Indians and settled among them as a farmer and trader sometime in the late 1700s. He settled in an area just north of the confluence of Harbuck Creek (formerly called Colloffadehatchee by the Creeks) and Little Hillabee Creek, two and a half miles east of Elias. Grayson married a Creek woman named Sinnugee, became fluent in the Creek language, and soon developed a large farm and trading post. His wife bore eight children. These half-breed Grayson children and their descendants intermarried with both the local Creeks and with early White settlers. Grayson had many acres of farmland where he grew mostly cotton. However, he also grew rice, corn, vegetables and fruits. U. S. Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins reported Grayson as having 40 Negro slaves, 300 cattle and 30 horses in the late 1790s. Grayson used the skill of the local Creek Indian women from Hillabee Town to pick the seeds from the cotton before sending it to markets in Tennessee, Mobile and elsewhere.

By the time of the expulsion of the Indians to the west in the mid 1830s, a mixed community of Whites, Indians, Blacks (from Grayson's slaves) and mixed bloods had begun alongside Grayson's farm. This village was later named Pinkneyville. Although many of its citizens were of mixed blood, Pinkneyville became the first recognized White settlement in the southern section of what would later become Clay County in 1866. Pinkneyville was one of only 12 settlements listed in the initial census taken of Clay County in 1870; the others being Lineville, Ashland, Millerville, Coleta, Copper Mines, Bluff Springs, Flat Rock, Delta, Mellow Valley, Weyokaville and Blake's Ferry. It was subsequently the growth of Pinkneyville to the west that gave rise to the settlement of Elias. Meanwhile, Pinkneyville eventually became a Negro settlement, and by the early 1960s it was a ghost town. The only sign of civilization there today is the New Hope Negro Church and Cemetery. The early Negro settlers at Pinkneyville descended from Grayson's slaves, slaves freed from the local area during the Civil War, or a combination of both.

The first White settlers in the Elias community, mostly from Pinkneyville, probably arrived in the middle of the 19th century. These early settlers were primarily operating small farms. Although there were few slaves owned by these farmers because of their small land holdings, many of the Elias men nevertheless joined the Confederate Army when the American Civil War began in 1861. Many of these men, such as Captain Martin Slaughter, along with William and James Vardaman, signed up with Hilliard's Legion. This organization was named for its organizer and Colonel-in-command, Henry W. Hilliard. The rural cemeteries around Elias hold the remains of numerous Confederate veterans that survived the war to return to Elias, such as Captain Martin. However, there were also many that were killed in action and interned on battlefields far away from home. Such was the case with the Vardaman brothers. After the Civil War, Elias appeared to have little or no growth during most of the Reconstruction Era as the citizens struggled to rebuild their lives and farms.

Many of the early Elias community family names appear in the 1870 census, the first taken after Clay became a separate county. Some of these family names were Vardaman, McPhail, Saxon, Luker, Shores, Gilbert, Carmichael, Munrow, Hardagree, McDairmid, House, Smith, Slaughter, Thompson, Adair, Shadix, Harlan, Brown, Swindle and Patterson. Today, some of these family names can be found in the Elias community or on tombstones in the local cemeteries of New Prospect, Rock Springs, Hatchet Creek and Liberty.

The 1870 Census reveals some details about the lives of early Elias pioneers. The Edwy Vardaman family will be used as an example of personal wealth and education level. The Vardamans are in the maternal branch of the Cleveland clan. In the 1870 Census, Edwy Liles Vardaman was shown as head of household. Also listed were his wife, Martha (Conway) Vardaman, and four children. Prior to this time, two of the Vardaman boys had been killed in the Civil War (discussed earlier), and six others had either died before 1870 or married and moved out of the household. E. L. Vardaman reported in the census that his real estate worth was \$800.00 and his other personal possessions totaled \$425.00. All the Vardamans in the household were reported as being able to read and write. However, over fifty percent of those in families residing in the Elias area at that time could neither read nor write according to the census information.

The Cleveland family name did not appear in the 1870 census. According to information in the interviews with John Aubra Cleveland, his father, Elias Brantly Cleveland (son of Richard Cleveland and Barbara House, born August 25, 1849), did not move to Elias until about 1871. He moved to the community from the area of Gilbert's Mill, where he was employed as the operator of a steam-powered sawmill and grist mill. Gilbert's Mill was located about three miles northeast of Elias on a tributary of Little Hillabee Creek. The only trace of the Gilbert's Mill remaining today is a partial stone foundation.

John Cleveland said his father arrived in Elias, at age 22, with a yoke of steers, pulling a wagon loaded with all the family's possessions. With him were his wife, Narcissus Maria (Cissy) Craddock Cleveland, and three young daughters, Kate, Ester, and Edna. John Aubra Cleveland would be born later (1883) followed by four other sons: Troy, Julius, Cecil and Robert (who died as an infant); and two daughters, Barbara and Rosa. Elias Cleveland moved into an old, one-room log schoolhouse where the current Highway #63 passes the old Talmadge Shaddix residence. The family began clearing the land for farming and Elias Cleveland built a blacksmith shop. Mr. Cleveland eventually operated a four-horse farm along with the blacksmith shop. He later opened a general store/trading post. By 1886, Elias Cleveland had built a steam-powered combination grist and saw mill and the community was growing.

Because of his ownership of all commercial activities in the area, Elias Cleveland was considered the "unofficial" mayor and the area began to be known as "Cleveland's Cross Roads." The community's commercial activities were situated at the intersection of the East-West Chapman Road and the North-South Goodwater/Ashland Road. As mentioned earlier, the considerable volume of water coming from the spring that formed the headwaters of Broken Arrow Creek provided the water for the mill's steam engine.

In 1886, a post office was established, making Elias an official town and giving it a place on subsequent editions of the official map of Alabama. According to family oral history and the interviews with John Aubra Cleveland, when the government postal official arrived in Elias at Cleveland's Trading Post, he began filling out the forms necessary to establish the post office and the discussion went as follows*: "Mr. Cleveland," asked the postal official, "What is this place called." Cleveland responded "Cleveland's Cross Roads." The postal official looked at the form and said, "That name is too long for my form. What's your first name, Mr. Cleveland?" When he heard the response, "Elias," the postal official said, "That will do just fine. From now on, this place will be on the map as Elias, Alabama." Elias was then appointed Postmaster over the post office consisting of a cubby hole in the back of his grocery store. With the title of Postmaster, came an annual salary of twelve dollars and forty-two cents (\$12.42). This salary slowly rose to the whopping sum of fifty-one dollars and eighteen cents (\$51.18) by 1905 when the Elias post office was disestablished.

After the post office was established in 1886, the community continued to grow and Elias Cleveland continued to add businesses required of any population center: a cotton gin, a flashing mill, and a syrup mill. In addition to the commercial activities already mentioned, there was also a school house and a church.

The initial school in the community was the same one-room log building that Elias Cleveland bought and moved into when he settled in the area. The second school house in Elias was built in the late 1860s on top of the hill, south of Highway 63 near where it leaves Highway #9 today. This room log building that had only one teacher according to John A. Cleveland. Mr. Cleveland attended this school for two years from about 1890 until 1893. At that time, the teacher was a Mrs. McPhail. There were a total of about twenty students in the school, at all levels or grades.

In 1892 a new church was built about 400 yards to the east. School was held in this new church building during the week, with Church services being held there on Sundays. The New Prospect Primitive Baptist Church sits on this site in Elias today. School was held in the New Prospect Primitive Baptist Church until about the turn of the century when Elias' fourth school building was constructed. This school, named Center, was located about one half mile north of the church on the road that crossed the Old Chapman Road at the church and led north ward to the Shady Grove community. The Center School remained in operation until consolidation with the Millerville School in 1929.

By now, new family names began to appear in the census rolls of Elias such as Berry, Dunn, McRight, Reynolds, Williams, Hutchinson, Murphy, Burns, Kelly and McCord. Several Black families also settled in the Elias community, most after being freed from slavery during the Civil War. Like the Elias Whites, most worked as tanners or saw millers. Old Black family names such as Moon, Horton, Slaughter, Lauderdale, Carmichael, Ross, Brown and Thomas were common. As a youngster, the author can remember being fascinated by watching "Prince" Carmichael, then about one hundred years old making

beautiful white oak cotton baskets and chairs. Born in about 1850, Prince said he was born into a slave family. Another memorable Elias Black was Will Brown. Will was admired by blacks and whites alike in the community for the beautiful and productive farm he owned in Pinkneyville along Harbuck Creek. This farm was located on a portion of the old Robert Grayson farm discussed earlier. Every Saturday morning for as long as the author can recall, another local black, Jim Thomas came through "downtown" Elias with his horse and buggy going south to Goodwater for his weekly shopping excursion. Like clockwork, about dark. Mr. Thomas would pass back through Elias headed northeast to his farm on Little Hillabee Creek, about one mile northeast of Pinkneyville. Finally, there were Henry and Minnie Ross. This couple lived on a farm on the Old Chapman Road about one mile east of Elias. Like many of the local young blacks in the 1950s, most of their children had migrated to the North to work in the automobile and steel mills. Living by themselves, and with their nearest neighbor about a mile away, Henry and Minnie would frequently walk to the stores in Elias to shop and pass time talking to friends and neighbors. No one could make pear preserves like Minnie Ross! The author traded many squirrels and rabbits he'd killed in nearby Hick's Swamp for precious pints of her mouth-watering preserves. Henry and Minnie are buried in the New Hope Cemetery in Pinkneyville.

Although more rooms had been added, by now Elias Cleveland's family had outgrown the old log school house home. In about 1890, he built a new house from lumber produced at his mill. This house, which remained standing until about 1945, was of typical southern frontier style. The bedrooms were on the west side of a north-south breezeway or dog run, and the living room, kitchen and dining room were on the east side. There was a front porch facing south for wintertime use and a back porch facing north to provide a cool place to sit on hot summer evenings. A hand-dug well with a log windlass was enclosed on the back porch. In approximately 1896 Elias Cleveland moved to the Shady Grove community to the northwest. He lived in the Shady Grove community for a few years before moving to Goodwater. After his wife, Cissy, died in 1935, he moved to Birmingham to live with his daughter, Rose, until his death in 1944 at age 95. He and his wife are buried in Goodwater in the Methodist Church Cemetery.

After Elias Cleveland moved away from the settlement that bore his name, his son, John Aubra Cleveland, remained in Elias fanning and operating the mills. When Elias Cleveland moved to Shady Grove in 1896, he sold his house and half-interest in the mills to James Ira Nail. James Nail moved his family into the old Cleveland house and operated the mills in a fifty-fifty partnership with John Cleveland. James Ira Nail was born in Randolph County in 1870. He was the son of Joseph H. And Seniya C. Nail. James' parents moved to Clay County in approximately 1875, where he grew up near Ashland. In 1890 he married Zarrella Day Luker (Zadie) of Clay County and moved to the Elias community to start their family. James and Zadie Nail raised seven children in the old Cleveland house in Elias. One of these children, Ethyl, married John Aubra Cleveland in 1910 and continued the Cleveland tradition of living, working and dying in Elias.

In order to paint a picture of life in Elias, Alabama during the late 1800s to early 1900s, the following edited excerpts are offered from the taped interviews with John Aubra Cleveland:

EDUCATION: The school house was just one room and was made of logs. There was one teacher for the total of about twenty students. There was no division of the students into grades, just individual attention by the teacher according to each student's capability. No one went to school for twelve full years, but just long enough to learn to read, write and cipher (arithmetic). Most of the students only attended for two to

five years; by then it was time to go to work helping out on the farm. There was liberal use of a hickory switch to maintain order and discipline in the school. My daddy, Elias Cleveland, never attended school. My mother taught him to read, write and cipher after they were married.

NEWSPAPER: We received a monthly newspaper delivered to Elias. I don't remember where it came from. That was all the news we had from the rest of the country.

MAIL DELIVERY: The mail was delivered to the post office in my papa's store about once each week. The mail man made his rounds with a horse and cart. He came from Goodwater, to Elias, to Pinkneyville, and then on up towards Millerville.

LAW ENFORCEMENT: We didn't have any law enforcement officers in Elias. The nearest law man was in Hackneyville, five miles to the southeast. If we had a problem, we just formed up a group of local citizens and did what we thought was right (true frontier justice!),

PUBLIC ROAD MAINTENANCE: All able-bodied men, 18 years and older, were required to work a total of nine days each year to maintain the roads in the area. There was one overseer, paid by the County, to direct the work. We used mule-drawn plows and scoops, along with shovels and lots of muscle to maintain those dirt roads.

FARMS: First, we had to clear the land and that was a big job. I especially remember the pines; they were great big trees. We would chop around the trees (girdle) to kill them. Then, when they died and fell, we would pile them up and burned them. The stumps remained for many years, and we just plowed around them. We picked up all the rocks from the field and piled them up. We raised corn, cotton, vegetables and some wheat. We had cows, pigs, chickens and some sheep for wool. The cows were branded or marks put in their ears and they just ran loose. The chickens usually ran loose also so they could fend for themselves in the woods and fields.

COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE EFFORTS: We always helped each other out in the community. If one family needed something done, all the other families would meet and help out. They would usually have big dinners afterwards and "likker" drinkings. When we had a com shucking, the owner would usually put a five gallon jug of homemade moonshine under the big pile of corn to be shucked. This way, you had to finish shucking all the corn in order to get to the likker. The women had a rotating quilting bee so that during a year, each family would get a new quilt.

HUNTING AND FISHING: We had lots of game and fish then. The deer were hard to kill, but we got plenty of squirrels. After it got cold weather in the fall, we would kill and clean squirrels and put them in barrels of salt to preserve them. The fishing trips were a community effort. We would take mules and wagons, seines and fishing poles, and all go to Hillabee Creek. We caught lots of fish and eels and also packed them in barrels of salt if it was getting close to winter. We had lots of wolves and wildcats (cougar and bobcat) in those days, too.

TRIPS TO TOWN: We used Goodwater as our shopping town since it was closest. We would only go there about four times a year because it took two days by mule or oxen and wagon, one day down and one day back. Mama and Papa would go once each season of the year; fall, spring, etc. One or two of the

children would get to go each time. There was only three stores in Goodwater then: Carmichael's Hardware Store, Gilliland's Guano Store (feed and seed), and Dave White's General Store.

SOCIAL LIFE: There wasn't the kind of social life you have today. We had to work most of the time. But we did have parties at people's houses. We sort of rotated these between the family's houses from one time to the next. We would use big pine lightered knots for torches to light our way. The only other entertainment was a traveling man with a dancing bear that would come around once in a while.

John Aubra Cleveland remained in Elias and continued the family tradition of farming, black smithing and running various mills after the turn of the century. From 1914 until 1931, his wife Ethyl gave birth to six children: Gladys, John Aubra Jr. (Buzz), Sara Nell (Doodle), James Robert and Billy Joe. Their sixth child, a boy, died shortly after birth.

In the 1920s, when portable gasoline engines became available, John Cleveland converted the sawmill portion of the mill complex into what was known as a "peckerwood" sawmill. The peckerwood mill, with its portable gasoline engine, no longer requiring a source of water for the bulky steam engine, could now be moved from one tract of timber to the next. Cleveland, along with such names as Twilly, Nelson, Shaddix, McCord and Hooten, became major saw millers in the Clay County area. According to interviews with Johnny Cleveland, his sawmill sites ranged from Shelby County on the West, to Hackneyville on the East and from Chandler Springs on the North to Goodwater on the South.

The author recalls an incident of possible historical interest that occurred in approximately 1948 when John Cleveland's sawmill was cutting a tract of timber about one mile east of Elias. When the carriage was transporting a huge log through the circular saw a loud noise occurred, accompanied by flying sparks and saw teeth. After shutting down the saw and backing out the carriage, the workers chopped open the log and found what appeared to be a solid iron cannon ball embedded in the center of the huge tree. Although we did not understand the significance at the time, it could have been one fired during the Battle of Enitachopko, the tree being cut in the immediate vicinity of the battle site.

By the end of World War II, the old mill complex at Elias was only a grist mill, powered by a gasoline engine. This, too, was closed by the end of the war. In the 1950s, John Cleveland bought a grist mill in Millerville, but after a short while, moved it to Elias where it was put in a new building just 300 yards south of the cross roads, on the east side of the old Goodwater-Ashland Highway. Cleveland continued to operate this mill until about 1960. The events surrounding its closing form a case study in Alabama frontier spirit. One day, an inspector from the Federal government showed up at Cleveland's grist mill and after looking around, told Cleveland that the law required that he install an attachment to his mill that would add a vitamin supplement to the corn meal as it came out of the grinding stones. John Cleveland told the inspector that the residents of this community had been using meal from Cleveland grist mills for about one hundred years now without seeing any need for a vitamin supplement. The government man told him it was either add the supplement or close down the mill. Being of true pioneer spirit and resolve, John Cleveland padlocked the last grist mill in Elias and walked away. He continued to live in Elias as a farmer until his death in 1981 at age 99 — the last of the Elias pioneers!

Meanwhile, in the early 1900s, Elias Cleveland's original general store began a series of ownership changes and a second general store was built in Elias. Elias Cleveland's store was sold to the Blair family

sometime after 1905. This store was later sold to the Carter family and subsequently to the Meachums. In the interim, the building was moved a few hundred yards to the northwest corner of the (intersection of the two main roads making up "Cleveland's Cross Roads." In 1932, Julius Elliott Thomas moved to Elias from the Hissop community in Coosa County. J. E. Thomas bought the old Cleveland store from Mr. Meachum.

The second general store in Elias was opened sometime in the 1930s by the Crew family and was later sold to Harold Robbins. Dan East of Glencoe, Alabama, married John Aubra Cleveland's oldest daughter, Gladys, and bought the general store from Mr. Robbins in about 1940. This establishment, now the Dan East General Store, sat on the northeast corner of the Cross Roads. Those two general stores and the old Cleveland grist mill were all that remained of the old "downtown" section of Elias by the end of World War II.

Later, in about 1949, Lonnie Bramlett opened an automobile repair shop just across the street, east of the J. E. Thomas General Store. When business was slow, Mr. Bramlett was also the local barber, using a wooden nail keg as a chair. He used the old-fashioned hand-squeeze clippers, which pulled out more of your hair than it cut. Being a jack-of-all-trades, Mr. Bramlett also preached at the local Brush Arbor Holiness Church.

The Dan East General Store closed its doors in the mid 1950s. Meanwhile, in 1951, J. E. Thomas built a new store building about one quarter mile to the northeast on the new highway #63. He continued to operate this business until his health failed in 1968. At that time, his daughter, Alice Virginia, operated the general store until 1984. J. E. Thomas died in 1971.

Also in the mid-1950s, Talmadge Shaddtx opened a small general store in Elias on Highway 63 just west of the old "downtown" section. This store was subsequently operated by Jimmy Smith, Palmer Thompson, Oren Luker, and finally, the Sims family before it, too, closed in the mid 1980s. After these closings, there were no more commercial activities in the once-thriving Elias community.

In the early years, these Elias general stores carried most of the day-to-day items needed by the Elias residents, such as axe handles, plow blades, lamp globes, kerosene, groceries and staples, and so forth. Horse, cow and hog feed, as well as flour, came in colorful, patterned cotton sacks that were used by the housewives to make shirts and dresses. Each of the stores sold coffee beans that produced a very pleasant aroma when ground in the old-fashioned coffee mills. During the winter, salted mackerel fish were available in large wooden barrels. After the advent of the automobile, gasoline was sold from glass-topped gravity pumps. About half of the local shoppers charged their purchases and paid up by the week, month or in the autumn when a crop of cotton or corn was sold. Plastered and nailed to the old store buildings and grist mill in Elias were the common commercial signs of the day advertising the likes of Brewton Snuff, Brown Mule Chewing Tobacco, Buffalo Rock Ginger Ale, Clabber Girl Baking Powder and of course, the ever present "See Rock City" sign. I-hen in the 1950s, a large oak tree by the J. E. Thomas General Store still had metal rings attached to it for hitching horses.

The life of Elias citizens was not easy, since they worked long and hard hours on the farm, in the log woods or, in later years, at the defense plants and fabric mills in Alexander City, Talladega, and Sylacauga. However, Elias was not without its local colorful and humorous characters. Most unforgettable to the

author in the 40s and 50s was great, great Uncle Belius R. Nail. He was the brother of James Ira Nail who was discussed earlier. "Uncle Rill" as he was known, had ran away from home as a young boy and traveled about America working at various professions including fur trapping. He finally returned to settle in Elias when he was about 35 or 40 years old. Being of mixed Indian and White blood, Uncle Bill preferred to live alone in the backwoods. He was locally known for his humorous stories, tall tales, practical jokes, good fox hounds, and the powerful "moonshine" he made for sale at a still in the hollow behind his house. Uncle Bill was a member of a group of Elias men that passed the day sitting around the East store's pot-bellied stove or out front on a bench swapping yarns. A young boy could learn a lot by listening to this "spit and whittle gang," some of which should have been censored! Uncle Bill died in 1950 from an overdose of his own moonshine. He is buried in the Nail family plot at nearby Rock Springs cemetery along wife his brother James Ira and his wife Zarellia Day.

All that remains of Elias today is the New Prospect Church and about two dozen widely-scattered homes. Elias, like so many other frontier towns of early Alabama statehood, has been reduced to a small, residential community. However, the old stone terrace and chimneys that can be found among the fields and forest of the area remain as monuments and testament to the toil, hopes and spirit of our early Clay County forefathers.

(Note: This article, along with several photographs, can also be found on pages 126-136 of the book entitled "The History of Clay County, Alabama.")