

Berrien Borders Change Through The Years

By Skeeter Parker

Two weeks ago in this series we looked at the act of the Georgia legislature that created Berrien County from lands formerly in Irwin, Coffee, and Lowndes Counties. After Governor Herschel Johnson signed the law creating Berrien County on February 25, 1856, the borders changed many times in the ensuing years with lots along the edges of the county either being added to or taken away from our home land. Then in the early 1900s another spree of county creations carved out a tremendous portion of area from Berrien County.

This week we will look at those many changes in the borders. Much of the information here comes from the minutes of the Georgia legislature.

1857

Two changes occurred in our borders in 1857, both resulting in lost territory. On December 15, the residence of Joseph Walker and his land lots #286 and #287 were made part of Irwin County by the legislature. A week later on December 22 lots number 516, 467, and 469 containing the residences of West Roundtree, James Roundtree and Berry Wells, all of whom lived in the 9th land district, were transferred to Lowndes County.

1858

The legislature taketh away, and the legislature giveth back. After removing land from the county the previous year, on December 13, 1858 the general assembly changed the border between Berrien and Coffee County, giving land to Berrien. According to the act, "the line now dividing the counties of Berrien and Coffee, be so changed as to include the territory in the fork of said Alapaha and Willocoochee Rivers, south of Coffee's Road, in the said county of Berrien; and to make Willocoochee River, from its junction with the Alapaha, the substantial line between Berrien and Coffee counties; and that the citizens in said territory, with their lands and localities, be, and they are hereby included in the said county of Berrien."

1859

In December 1859 Berrien gained some land back from Irwin County. Land lot 239 in the 5th district of Irwin County was transferred to Berrien County. This lot included the residence of G.G. Mobley.

1870 and 1873

In 1870 an act changing the line between Berrien and Lowndes Counties became law by the lapse of five days from its receipt by the Governor without his approval. All or parts of land lots 516, 524, 523, 522, 521, 520, 519, 493, 492, 491, and 490 in the 10th land district were to be transferred to Lowndes County. A detailed description of what was to remain in Berrien County and who owned the land was part of the act.

Interestingly though, in February 1873 that same act was repealed by the legislature, and the lands reverted back to Berrien County.

1877

The ever-changing northern border with Irwin County was changed once again in February of 1877. Mother Irwin raided the northern end of the county, taking back some of the land she gave up 21 years earlier. The residences of Richard Gibbs, Sampson Gibbs, and ___ Easters on lots 281 and 272, and lots 274 and 271 in the 6th land district "which are immediately on the county line" were changed from Berrien County to Irwin.

No more instances of lands changing counties have been found at this time, so from 1877 until 1905 the county borders remained unchanged. Whereas the changes in the 1800s were just a few lots here and there, in a 15 year period from 1905 to 1920 Berrien lost tremendous acreage to the creation of new counties. Tift County (1905), Cook County (1918), and Lanier County (1920) were all formed at least partially from lands from Berrien.

1905 – Tift County Formed

At the March 1905 term of Berrien Superior Court the grand jury recommended the formation of a new county, as is found in their presentments published in the March 31 edition of *The Nashville Herald*. Their reasoning was based on the rapid growth of Berrien County and the distance from Nashville to Tifton, which was the largest business center in the county.

The presentment read in part: "On account of the rapid growth of our county, both in wealth and population, and the great distance from the county seat of largest business center and the consequent inconveniences attendant upon the transaction of the public business affecting the territory around Tifton, we recommend the creation of a new county, with Tifton as its county seat ..."

On August 17, 1905 a new county was formed, and the amputations began. Tift County took lands from Berrien, Irwin, and Worth.

1918 – Cook County Formed

As early as September 1907 it was reported in *The Nashville Herald* that people in the Adel area wanted to form a new county. A bill was to be introduced at the next session of the legislature. In a meeting held in Adel Mr. F. Shaw presided and Mr. J.M. Sutton was secretary. A committee of A.A. Parrish (chairman), J.H. Kennon, W.A. Baskin, M.T. Shaw, Wm. Scandrett, J.F.W. Woodall, J.T. Wilkes, and H.L. Parrish (secretary and treasurer) was formed. Their main argument quoted in the article was that "many citizens now have to travel 20 miles or over to a county seat."

The Nashville Herald was opposed to the forming of the new county at the time. In its February 21, 1908 edition they opined "it would be rather tough on Berrien to lose another big slice of her richest and best territory at this time." By the end of July 1908 the *Herald* reported that "the bill to create Adel's new county has not been introduced, and we understand Representative Parrish says it's no use."

While Adel and vicinity did not get its new county in 1908, they would only have to wait ten more years to get approval by the legislature for a statewide referendum. By this time new counties could not be created without a constitutional amendment, so on July 30, 1918 the legislature approved the referendum. On November 5, 1918 Georgia voters approved a new county called Cook, and Berrien County lost 230 square miles of land, as the entirety of the new county was carved from Berrien.

1920 – Lanier County Formed

The northwest and southwest corners of Berrien County having already been chopped away, it was time to whittle away at the southeast corner. I have not done any research at this time as to events leading up to Lanier County's creation, but the reasons were probably much the same as in the creation of Tift and Cook: travel time and distance from the county seat. On August 11, 1919 the legislature approved a constitutional referendum to be held at the next general election to let the public vote on whether lands from Berrien, Clinch, and Lowndes counties should be formed into a new county called Lanier. On November 2, 1920 the amendment was approved by voters across the state, and Berrien once again lost territory.

As was stated in the Berrien County Centennial book from 1956, Mr. Griffin wrote "she has stood the ordeal of amputation with fortitude and courage and there is plenty of life in the old girl yet!" Those words still remain true all these many years later.