

## Was it Simon or Francis?

# Will the Naming of Nashville Controversy Be Settled?

By Skeeter Parker

After reading the front page article in last week's *Berrien Press*, I feel it is time to "rush" an article I had planned for in the future. It seems the "Who was Nashville named after?" controversy has reared its ugly head again. Was it named after Francis Nash, a Revolutionary War general who never came to this area, or was it named after Simon Nash, a character of local repute in the 1850s and 1860s?

I must admit, I have selfish reasons for this article because Simon Nash was my third-great grandfather. He also was an ancestor of the Nash's and many other families still living in Berrien County today. It only makes sense that if the town was named after a Nash that it would be named after one who actually lived here.

We may never know who Nashville was truly named after because of the two stories, one of which was brought to light again in last week's article. Not knowing the author's source, I can only assume that maybe he consulted Lucian Lamar Knight's 1913-14 book *Georgia Landmarks, Memorials, and Legends* that gave the nod to General Francis Nash. Some Nashville and Berrien County maps through the years have also made this same assumption, but articles appearing in *The Nashville Herald* as early as 1909 dispute what others have held to be "the truth."

In its December 24, 1909 edition *The Herald* reported that our town almost was called Griffin but the people recalled there was already a Griffin in Georgia. "It was then that a man named Nash walked out with a water bucket full of corn licker and plenty of dippers and proposed that the town be named Nashville. . ." Much the same was reported by William Henry Griffin in *The Griffin Papers* compiled in the 1920s or 1930s. *The Griffin Papers* were a series of historical and genealogical writings compiled through interviews with the Berrien County residents of the day, including some "old-timers" who were around "in the beginning" or near about it.

While it may be offensive to some to say that Nashville was named because of someone offering up free booze, we cannot sanitize history. Many ugly moments have occurred through the pages of time, but we should learn from even the most heinous of acts and not try to pretend they never happened. Additionally, we must look at the pioneer life being lived in this area in the 1850s. If Nashville was named because a local resident offered up drinks, then what harm has it caused 150 years later?

*The Herald* repeated its whiskey story in its October 14, 1910 edition which was dedicated to the history of Nashville. Then on June 13, 1935 *The Herald* reprinted a story about "Nashville's – All Fifteen of Them" that originally appeared in the Nashville, Tennessee *Banner* magazine section on June 2 of that year. This article also backs up the theory that Nashville was named for Simon Nash, as does another *Nashville Herald* article from June 29, 1944.

In an October 12, 1950 article about cleaning up the "Old Indian Cemetery" commonly known today as the Griner Cemetery on Jackson Street, mention was made "that Simon Nash, the man for whom the town was named, was laid to rest there." Two years later on November 27, 1952, further mention was made about cleaning up and marking the cemetery with yet another mention of Simon Nash being buried there and that the town was named for him.

Further evidence for Nashville being named after Simon Nash was printed in the March 5, 1953 edition in an article titled "Manuscript of 1937 Furnishes Interesting History of County." The manuscript had been written by the late W.G. Avera, the long-time school superintendent of Berrien County. In it

Avera wrote: "The birth of Nashville is coincident with the laying out of the present public square and the building of the first court house. The village was named Nashville in honor of Simon Nash, a noted antebellum chair maker."

In 1956 when Berrien County celebrated her centennial the commemorative plates also noted this same information on their reverse sides.

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Simon Nash was born around 1822 and died around 1874. Various stories have him buried at the old Griner cemetery, at Sandy Bluff, and at Flat Creek, but he came to this area sometime between 1840 and 1850, as he appears in the 1850 Lowndes County census.

He served as the bailiff of the first petit jury in Berrien County after its founding, and has been noted was a chair maker. Other sources also report him as being a mechanic. *The Griffin Papers* reported Simon Nash "was of social habits and to a certain extent popular among the people of that day." Griffin also stated that unfortunately, "he was an eccentric character and that eccentricity grew upon him as he advanced in years."

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While we may never solve the "controversy", I hope that the sources and articles I have listed will be enough, if you will pardon the pun, "proof" that the town which I grew up in and dearly love was named for Grandpa Simon.