

**Shalom and Hey, Y'all!**

**Jewish-American Indian Chiefs in the Old South**

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Recent surname investigations by Family Tree DNA similar to the study published in the journal *Nature* about the “Cohen gene” of Jewish priests suggest the core gene pool of the mysterious Melungeon ethnic group that has long baffled Southern anthropologists is Sephardic Jewish. The Sephardim are one of the main divisions of Jewry. They are also known as Maranno, Ladino, Portuguese, Spanish, Hispanic, Iberian and Western Jews.

I had always known that my mother’s family was Melungeon with some Indian blood. We proudly traced our heritage to Isaac Cooper of Grainger County, Tennessee and Wayne County, Kentucky, who married a daughter of the Cherokee chief Black Fox, or Enola (died 1811). My mother is a Cooper from Sand Mountain, a forlorn echo of the Appalachians in the tristate area of northeast Alabama. In fact, we were doubly descended from Black Fox, for another daughter married Chief William Davis (1753-1848), my grandmother Dovie Palestine Goble’s ancestor. It was said that the Coopers were Irish and the Davises were—well, guesses ranged from Scottish to Australian. Both families came out of Daniel Boone’s Kentucky and settled in the fastnesses of Sand Mountain when the Cherokee left on their forced removal in the 1830s. Family stories hinted that the Coopers started out as soldiers for the English Crown, won a baronetcy in Scotland from the earls of Shaftesbury, then served Oliver Cromwell until they had a falling out with him in Ireland.

Then I received a startling e-mail from Elizabeth Hirschman, a scholarly author and professor of marketing at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Titled simply “Cooper ethnicity,” it detailed how we were distant cousins through the Coopers in Coeburn, Virginia, the Melungeon heartland. I agreed to read Hirschman’s book-in-progress, *The Melungeons: The Last Lost Tribe in America*. All the surnames on my mother’s side of the family were suddenly revealed to be Sephardic! What if I was Jewish-Indian? The thought conjured up images of peddlers in war bonnets selling tonics in a traveling medicine show.

Were there any historical Jewish Indian chiefs? I immediately asked the Internet search engine Jeeves, “Who is the most famous Jewish Indian?” The answer: Norman Greenbaum (60’s musician and creator of the one-hit wonder “Spirit in the Sky”). That sent me on a bizarre journey through the obscurities of crypto-Judaism, Indian mascots, the theory of the Indians’ descent from the lost tribes of Israel, Freemasonry, the Spanish Inquisition, the Watauga Settlements in Tennessee and the history of the Confederacy.

Jewish Indians, it seems, are an old joke. Bernard Malamud’s posthumous novel *The People* is a classic instance of a shtick that can be traced to a “well-defined line of Jewish-American entertainment,” in the words of one critic. It deals with a Jewish schlemiel who is adopted by the Indians out west and becomes Chief Jozip. The Austrian writer Else Lasker-Schueler styled herself an American Indian, and Franz Kafka joked that he wanted to be a “Red Indian.” According to Lilian Friedberg, citing an article by Seth Wolitz, “the tradition of spoofing Jewish-Indian interrelations...reaches back to a Yiddish playlet, *Tsvishn Indianer*,” an 1895 entertainment translated as “Among the Indians, or the Country Peddler.” Fanny Brice’s claim to fame was the song “I’m an Indian,” and Eddie Cantor, Woody Allen and Mel Brooks milked the same gag. Today, Marx Toys makes an accessorized series of “Cherokee Chief Black

Hair The Movable Indian,” described as looking “very much like the actor Ed Ames (Mingo of Daniel Boone show),” the Jewish-American entertainer (Illustration 1: Ed Ames as Mingo, a Cherokee, in 1965 television series “Daniel Boone”).

But did the murky nether regions of American history contain any “real” Jewish Indians? The American Jewish Historical Society had one candidate that answered the description. Don Solomon Bibo, Jewish Indian Chief, was born in Prussia in 1853. His brothers, who settled in New Mexico in 1866, preceded him west. The Bibo brothers worked for the Spiegelberg family of pioneer merchants. Eventually they set up a trading post to exchange goods with the Navajos, and Solomon joined them from Germany at the age of sixteen, in 1869. He soon became governor of the Acoma pueblo. In 1885, he married Juana Valle, the granddaughter of his predecessor, who converted to Judaism. Their children were sent to Hebrew school in San Francisco. “Solomon Bibo, governor of the Acomas, America’s only known Jewish Indian chief, is buried with his Indian princess in the Jewish cemetery in Colma, California.”

The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society dedicated its 12<sup>th</sup> annual conference in November 1999 to “the Jewish pioneers of the Territory of New Mexico and the Pueblo Indians with whom they became so close.” The keynote speaker was Mel Marks, author of the groundbreaking 1995 book *Jews among the Indians*. A picture of Jake Gold, “among the first Jews to settle in Santa Fe, with unidentified Pueblo Indian woman and baby” decorated the program, and conference goers could view the first public display of Solomon Bibo’s revolver.

The trail was becoming somewhat more credible and tantalizing. But how about Jews in the South? I learned from a brief article by Louis E. Schmier in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* that Jews were more prominent in the civic affairs of the South than most people realize. Well appreciated are the facts that David Emanuel (1744-1810) was governor of Georgia (also

the namesake for the county neighboring Bulloch County, where I now live), that some of the earliest Jewish communities were in Savannah, Charleston, Pensacola, St. Augustine, Baltimore, Natchez, Wheeling and Louisville, and that reform Judaism received its impetus largely from Southern Sephardic Jews. Perhaps not so well understood are where Southern Jews came from, why they settled in the places they did, and how they recognized and supported one another in various migrations through the Southland.

Some random points that are mentioned in the “Ethnic Life” section of the encyclopedia are:

- “[U]ntil the post-Civil War period, the centers of American Jewish life and the sources of many social, cultural, and religious institutional changes shaping the character of all American Jewry were found in Charleston and in Savannah, Ga., which had gathered a Jewish community as early as 1733.”
- “Individuals such as Mordecai Sheftall of Savannah and Francis Salvador of Charleston stood among the southern leadership during the American Revolution.”
- “...Jews such as Abraham Mordecai, who is credited with founding Montgomery, Ala., moved westward, occasionally joining other Jews who had been living along the Mississippi since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.”
- “[Jews] started as peddlers and shopkeepers, and many rose to the ranks of the most prominent and influential businessmen...the Rich brothers in Georgia, the Sanger brothers as well as Neiman and Marcus in Texas, Godchaux in Louisiana, Psitz in Alabama, the Maas brothers in Florida, and the Levine brothers in North Carolina.”
- “Adolph Ochs, who was from Chattanooga, developed the *New York Times* into the great American newspaper.”

Brent Kennedy in *The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People* adds some intriguing sidelights, such as the Melungeon heritage of Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis and the true ethnic mix of the Pamunkey/Powhatan Indians of Virginia (Illustration 2). A final clue: the man on the Confederate \$2 bill is Judah P. Benjamin (1811-1884), a Jew. What was going on here?

To continue in our quest let us consider the Indian trader James Adair and his *History of the American Indians* (London, 1775), one of the first encyclopedic works on Southeastern Indians. Largely dismissed as a misguided attempt to show Indians were descended from ancient Jews, the book is seldom read today. I can remember finding a rare copy of this curious volume in an antiquarian bookshop in Chicago, paying the hefty price tag and thinking, I now have the grail!

Who was James Adair? Until the year 2000, no one really knew. It may be instructive to quote the entire article dedicated to him in *The Dictionary of American Biography*:

ADAIR, James (c1709-1783), pioneer Indian trader, author, is said to have been born in County Antrim, Ireland. The dates given above are merely conjectural. The known facts of his life are few, gathered in the main from the personal incidents narrated in his book, *The History of the American Indians* (1775) and occasional references in South Carolina chronicles. A recent book, *Adair History and Genealogy* (1924), by J.B. Adair, gives many biographical details purporting to be based on family tradition, but few of them are verifiable by any available records. It is certain that Adair was highly educated. By 1735 he had come to America, probably entering at the port of Charleston, SC. In that year he engaged in trade with the Catawbas and Cherokees, continuing with them until 1744. He then established himself among the Chickasaws, whose villages were on the headwaters of the Yazoo, in Mississippi, where he remained for about six years. During the latter part of this period he frequently visited the Choctaws, in an effort to counteract the influence of the French and to win them to an alliance with the English. The effort was successful, but it involved him in difficulties with other traders and with James Glen, royal governor of South Carolina from 1743 to 1756, which resulted, he asserts, in his financial ruin. In 1751 he moved to District Ninety-six (the present Laurens County), SC, and resumed trade with the Cherokees, remaining there until about the end of 1759. His activities during these years covered a wide range. He was several times called in council by Gov. Glen, with whom he could never agree and whom he heartily detested. Among the Indians he was a diplomat and a peace maker, but he was also a fighter--"a valiant warrior," says Logan; and when he could not compose their quarrels he not infrequently took sides in their wars. At various times

he was engaged in conflicts with the French. In the Indian war of 1760-61 he commanded a band of Chickasaws, receiving his supplies by way of Mobile. In 1769 he visited New York City. Either then or a few years later he probably voyaged to London. Of his later life nothing authentic is recorded. He was, as the conclusion of his book amply shows, a vigorous defender of the rights of the colonies, but there appears to be no mention of him in Revolutionary annals. He is said to have been married and to have had several children and also to have died in North Carolina shortly after the close of the Revolution.

Adair is chiefly known through his history of the Indians. Primarily it is an argument that the Indians are the descendants of the ancient Jews. The theory was accepted by Elias Boudinot, one-time president of the Continental Congress, who gave it hearty support in his book, *A Star in the West* (1816) Adair's work has outlived its thesis. Its' account of the various tribes, their manners, customs, their manners, and vocabularies, its depiction of scenes and its narration of incidents in his own eventful career, give it a permanent value. It is a record of close and intelligent observation, and its fidelity of fact has been generally acknowledged. The book must have required many years of toil. In his preface he says that it was written "among our old friendly Chickasaws" (doubtless during his second period of residence with them) and that the labor was attended by the greatest difficulties.

Though some passages may subsequently have been added, it was probably finished by the end of 1768. In the *Georgia Gazette*, of Savannah, October 11, 1769, appeared an item dated February 27th of that year, apparently copied from a New York newspaper, announcing the arrival of Adair in New York and saying that "he intends to print the Essays." The care with which the book is printed indicates that he gave it personal supervision through the press. From the dedication it is evident that he had the friendship of the noted Indian traders, Col. George Galphin and Col. George Croghan (with the former of whom he may for a time have been in partnership) and Sir William Johnson; and from various references it is certain that he was highly respected by those who knew him. Logan credits him with the quick penetration of the Indian audacity, cool self-possession, and great powers of endurance, and Volwiler says that he was one of the few men of ability who personally embarked in the Indian trade.

[J. H. Logan, *A Hist. of the Upper Country of SC* (1859); John Thos. Lee, letter in the *Nation* Aug 27, 1914; manuscript notes supplied by Robt. L. Meriwether; brief references in A.T. Volwiler, *Geo. Croghan and the Westward Movement, 1741-1782* (1926) and Edward McCrady, *Hist. of SC Under the Royal Government* (1899).]

Adair, then, was a cipher. New information surfaced only recently. Apparatchniks on the Internet brought to light a forgotten historical marker on Highway 710 near the town of Rowland in Robeson County, North Carolina. It noted that James Adair, Indian trader and historian, was buried nearby. Persistent delving turned up a lost will, preserved in an old genealogy compilation, *Kinfolks*, the labor of love of great-great-great-grandson William Curry Harllee.

The will was filed in Elizabethtown, Bladen County (parent county of Robeson), about 1778, probated apparently in 1787, and later destroyed in a courthouse fire. It names a wife, previously rumored to be Cheraw Indian, plus three daughters—no sons:

#### WILL OF JAMES ADAIR

In the name of God, "Amen." I, James Adair in Bladen County in North Carolina, being weak but praises be to the Almighty God, in perfect sense and memory, I do humbly make and ordain this my last Will and Testament in manner and form following:

I do recommend my soul to God who gave it hoping through the merits of my Lord and Blessed Savior Jesus Christ to obtain pardon of all my sins. My body I commit to the grave to be buried.

My Temporal Estate my just debts being paid I do humbly appoint my loving daughter Saranna McTyre my whole and sole Executor of this my last Will and Testament.

I give unto Robert Adair or his heirs near the town of Billymansborough and Nutrann a short mile of Gilgoram in the county of Antrim in Ireland ten pounds.

I give unto James Box or his heirs in the Island of Bennet the sum of nine pounds.

I give unto Alexander Johnston or his heirs in Ireland or his heirs in the county of Chester, Pennsylvania, the sum of seventeen pounds all proclamation money.

I give unto my daughter Saraanna McTyre, all my lands or improvements in Wilkinsons Swamp together with all my negroes and their increase to wit: Four negroes Pomp, Babby, Sam and Jack, two negro women named Hannah and Nelly, one negro girl named Lucy, my personal and real Estate both within and without doors, crop and stock together with all money, bonds, judgments, notes of hand, book accounts and debts whatsoever and whomsoever during her natural life and when my daughter Saraanna McTyre receives and collects in my money due on judgments, notes of hand and book debts, I desire it may be put out immediately on good security mortgages on improved lands and negroes until there is a fair and open trade from Guinea to this country for negro slaves, then to call in all the money into her hands immediately lay the money out in purchasing and buying negro slaves, boys and girls, and when bought then I give a part of the negroes so purchased and bought as has cost my executrix four hundred pounds proclamation money with their increase unto my daughter Elizabeth Hobson Cade during her life and at her death I give the said negroes with all their increase unto my three grandsons Stephen, James, and Washington Cade, and their heirs lawfully begotten forever, and the residue and remainder of the said purchase and bought negroes, after my daughter Cade has received her part and property as above mentioned then I give unto my daughter Susanna (sic) McTyer with all their increase during her life.

I give unto my grandson Adair McTyre the plantation whereon I now live one hundred acres more or less named Pached or Patcherly place on Wilkinson Swamp, together with all the improvements to him and his heirs lawfully begotten forever.

After my daughter Saranna McTyer's life I give unto my Grandson one plow horse and one cow and calf two sow pigs and all the working tools within and without doors, suitable for carrying on a crop and corn and provision both without and within doors, should anything happen after my daughter's life. I give all my other lands more or less unto my grandson William McTyer and his heirs lawfully begotten forever when he comes of age.

I give unto my five grandchildren Adair, Elizabeth, Clark, Katrain, and William McTyer, all my negroes and their increase and my personal estate to be equally divided amongst them, to them and their heirs lawfully begotten forever after Saranna McTyer life.

I do give the free use of my means to my daughter Cades family as long as my daughter Saranna McTyre and Elizabeth Hobson Cade live convient [sic] one to another.

I give unto my daughter Agnes Gibson and to John Gibson one Shilling sterling.

I do desire my daughter Saranna McTyer take my daughter Agnes Gibson into her family should it so happen she is a widow and only one child and no good home, and maintain she and her child during widowhood and until her child comes of age, in meat drink lodging washing.

I do desire none of my estate may be sold by order of Court, when goods come as cheap as they have in the year 1774.

Then I do desire my Executrix will buy each of my daughters, Elizabeth Hobson Cade and Agnes Gibson a gown of Black Crepe and mourning ring.

In testimony of this my last Will and Testament I hereunto set my hand and seal, this twenty first day of September one thousand seven hundred and seventy eight.

James Adair (seal)  
Signed sealed and Witnessed  
Archd McKissack  
Benilla Bullard

(Source: Elizabethtown, Bladen Co., North Carolina, Record of Wills No. 1, p. 476, reprinted in "Kinfolks" by Wm. Harllee, pp. 1245-1247. –Thanks to Lisa Bowes of Old Saybrook, Conn. for this information.)

Robert Adair, remembered in the document with the not-insignificant bequest of 10 pounds, might be Sir Robert Adair (1763-1855), the son of Dr. Robin Adair and Lady Caroline Keppel. The popular ballad “Robin Adair” tells the story of an English lady who had a romantic adventure with a dashing and witty young man rejected by her family:

What's this dull town to me?

Robin's not near.

What was't I wished to see,

What wished to hear?

Where's all the joy and mirth

Made this town

a heav'n on earth?

Oh, they're all fled with thee,

Robin Adair!

Does history record any specifically Jewish traders among the Southeastern Indians? Benjamin Hawkins, the Indian agent, mentions one: “Abraham M. Mordecai, a Jew of bad character” (*Letters of Benjamin Hawkins 1796-1806*, page 168). Pickens interviewed Mordecai for his history of early Alabama and wrote: “Abram Mordecai, an intelligent Jew, who dwelt fifty years in the Creek Nation, confidently believed that the Indians were originally of his people.” Where there are open Jews is it not reasonable to expect there were also undeclared Jews? Many Indian traders in the Southeast not labeled as such appear to have Sephardic names: Benjamin and James Burges (from the Spanish city of Burgos?—they later changed the name to Burkes and were intermarried with the Coopers), William and Joseph Cooper (a trail guide and linguist active among the Cherokee since 1710, said to be the first ones), Cornelius Dougherty (since 1724—another family that moved from the Lower Towns to the Upper Towns in Tennessee), Eleazor Wiggans (whose Indian name was Old Rabbit, license revoked 1714, a

corroborator of the Jewish descent theory about Indians), James Beamer (from Boehmer, “Bohemian”?), the namesake of the Cherokee headman called Judd’s (“Jew’s”) Friend, John and Daniel Ross, Christian Russel (“a Silician”), Nicolas White (“a native of Mersailles, but resident in this nation 30 years”), Mrs. Durant (a female trader), Obediah Low, John Van, James Lessle (Lesley), James Lewis, Aron Harad, Zachariah Cox (a land developer), Richard Sparks (a captain at Tellico Blockhouse), Gen. James Robertson (founder of Nashville, Roberson, “of Moro District”), Abraham Gindrat, Davis (a blacksmith), John Marino (“a Spaniard”), John Sheppard, John Clark, McBean, and McKee. Moreover, the trading houses of Clark in Virginia; Rae, Galphin and McGillivray of Augusta; Panton, Leslie, and Company in Pensacola and the Francis family of silversmiths appear to have Sephardic mercantile connections in London, Amsterdam, Barbados and the Barbary Coast.

Most traders not of the itinerant or “fly-by-night” kind married a daughter or niece of the relevant Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw or Creek headman. It was a common prerequisite for anyone remaining within the nation over one winter to take a wife and become an adoptive citizen. Sequoyah’s father Nathaniel Gist followed this practice, marrying Wurteh, or Wutteh, said to be a chief’s daughter. He subsequently abandoned her and went back to his white wife in Kentucky. Beloved woman Nancy Ward’s husband Bryant Ward followed the same pattern of behavior. The mixed breed Hildis Harjo, better known as Josiah Francis, was a typical product of such unions. Another such in my family history was Dr. William Alexander Davis (born about 1790), the son of the previously mentioned William Davis and Mary Ann Black. He signed the treaty of July 8, 1817 as Young Davis, between Charles Hicks and Saunooka. By the time of the Treaty of New Echota in 1835 he was recognized as a chief. He married Mary Burns, the daughter of Chief Arthur (or Author) Burns and Aky Lowrey, daughter of Chief George Lowrey

(Illustration 6). With the chiefdom, he inherited the North Sauty reservation near Blowing Cave on Sand Mountain, comprising 640 acres. He sold this just before the Cherokee removal.

A doctor and a lawyer? That seems like every Jewish mother's dream. Dutifully, I input the new information, but my genealogy program gave me a firm error message. Too many titles. It reminded me of an old Viennese joke. Count Rudi goes on vacation and sends Count Bobi a postcard. When they meet again in the city, Count Bobi asks why there was no message included on the card. Count Rudi explains that after he wrote in all of Count Bobi's titles—two doctorates, an honorary professorship, and a rank of petty nobility conferred on his family by the Kaiser—there was no room left for any greetings.

Could the trader James Adair's name have been Robin (Reuben)? Several genealogies have it so. According to family tradition, it was a pet name. We have no picture of James Adair, only family recollections of him as "splendidly muscular, fine-looking, broad-shouldered, bearded man of a little more than medium height." But his nephew John Adair became governor of Kentucky and favored posterity with a likeness (Illustration 3). Could Adair, the honorary chief of the Chickasaws and first white man to see the Cumberland Gap, actually have been an Irish, or Scottish, Jew? Once again we seem to have landed in the realm of entertainment. Such a supposition, however, would go far to explain how a frontier adventurer who traveled light, was able to fill his book with Hebrew words and phrases, compiling it in a Chickasaw lodge in the Mississippi wilderness at a time when only a handful of Christians, mostly Oxford and Sorbonne divines, knew Hebrew. Adam Smith lamented in *The Wealth of Nations*, published the same year as Adair's *History*, that there was little or no reason to even study Hebrew. Upstanding Jews learned how to read and write it, particularly Sephardic Jews rediscovering their heritage in Enlightenment England and Holland. Adair even slips on at least one occasion and speaks of

Hebrew greeting customs as “*our* method of salutation” (p. 47). He also quotes current Hebrew witticisms and notes that the Hebrew heard today is more guttural than the dialect of the American Indians.

Notice the harsh treatment Adair accords his daughter Agnes, leaving her and her husband John Gibson the nominal sum of only one shilling (if he had left her nothing, she could have protested to the probate court that he simply forgot her). John was one of the “mulatto” Gibsons of the Great Pee Dee river valley region. Gideon Gibson stands large on the pages of history for his role in the so-called Regulators Revolt. The Gideon Glass Antiques Store today pays testimony to the “richest man in South Carolina” of his time. When members of the Gibson family first moved to the state in 1731, representatives in the House of Assembly complained “several free colored men with their white wives had immigrated from Virginia.” Governor Robert Johnson summoned Gibson and his family and reported:

I have had them before me in Council and upon Examination find that they are not Negroes nor Slaves but Free people, That the Father of them here is named Gideon Gibson and his Father was also free, I have been informed by a person who has lived in Virginia that this Gibson has lived there Several Years in good Repute and by his papers that he has produced before me that his transactions there have been very regular. That he has for several years paid Taxes for two tracts of Land and had several Negroes of his own, That he is a Carpenter by Trade and is come hither for the support of his Family [Box 2, bundle: S.C. Minutes of House of Burgesses (1730-35), 9, Parish Transcripts, N.Y. Hist. Soc. By Jordan, *White over Black*, 172.]

The Gibsons are discussed as Melungeons in Brent Kennedy and as true-to-form Sephardic Jews in Hirschman. Melungeon Gibsons derive their origins from the Chavis family, one of the oldest Portuguese-Jewish names in America (from *chavris*, “friend [of the Nation],” modern slang “shaver”). If they are Jewish, it is ironic—and probably funnier than any Fanny Brice skit—that historians trot them forth as shining examples of non-slave African American colonials owning land and marrying white women.

The early years of the nineteenth century were a time when the forces of westward expansion in the new American Republic violently collided with the lives of the Cherokee. These ancient mountaineers of the South have passed into modern history as the most numerous and probably the most adaptable of all Indians. Illustration 4 depicts Moses Looney, a half-brother of Cherokee Chief John Looney, the son of Captain John Looney and the sister of Black Fox. Chief Looney fought with Andrew Jackson at Horse Shoe Bend, signed the act of union between the Eastern and Western Cherokee (with his cousin Sequoyah) and died on May 15, 1846 in Washington, D.C., while acting as a delegate for the Indians. Less is known about Moses. He married a cousin, Mary Guest, a descendant of the Baltimore Indian trader and spy, Christopher Gist, Sequoyah's white grandfather. (Curiously, a remote ancestor had married Edith Cromwell, a relative of the Lord Protector.) This rare early photograph shows him in the final decade of his life (he died January 9, 1855). He is wearing a "Cherokee" turban similar to that worn by Sequoyah and Chief George Lowrey.

The first Looney entered the port of Philadelphia in 1731 and like many new arrivals joined the Quakers. The Luna clan (note the spelling, hardly an English-sounding name and more likely Spanish or Portuguese) then became one of seventy families that moved south to the colony of Virginia with Alexander Ross and Morgan Bryan, settling in Orange County (now Frederick) and moving to Augusta, then Botetourt, where the patriarch of the family, Robert Looney, died September 14, 1769. The Looney men distinguished themselves by building and operating ferries and forts, fighting at Kings Mountain and later against the Cherokee. When the State of Franklin was daringly proposed Looneys were in the thick of it, and when James Robertson established the Cumberland settlement in Nashville many of them followed westward. Moses Looney's stomping ground was Maury County. His father and brothers moved from

Maury to St. Clair County, Alabama after the Creek War. Looney branches later went to Texas with Stephen Austin and Sam Houston. At least one kept going to Old Mexico. Today near the town of Celaya in Guanajuato province lives a band of blond haired, blue-eyed Cherokees who have reverted to the original name and call themselves Luna. The inventor of the Cherokee system of writing, Sequoyah, arguably the most famous Southern Indian chief, is said to be buried about twelve miles out of town (information of Molly Running Wolf Mills, a Sequoyah descendant in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands—see Illustration 5).

In the 1820s the Looneys were among the first pioneer white families in the area of Alabama now home to the glorious Bankhead National Forest. The second-largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi, it stretches almost completely across the state, from Fox's Mountain, Creekspath on Sand Mountain and Deerhead Cove in the east to Choctaw and Chickasaw country in the west. A mute reminder of the Indian gift to the pioneers is the Looney Tavern, previously known as the Black Fox Tavern, near Cullman. The two-story double-dogtrot log cabin recently acquired an amphitheatre complex, complete with steamboat cruises and putt-putt golf. An outdoor pageant "The Incident at Looney Tavern" attracts tourists from all over. Few, however, probably know the complete saga of the Looneys. Once again, history seems to have dissolved into entertainment....

Genealogy is—or should be—a window on history. Before discovering the "key," I never could fathom why my Coopers lived where they lived, married whom they married and gave their children monikers like Mahala, Harmon, Zachariah, Palestine, Elzina, Mariah, Huston, Delitha, Malilah, Millea, Alvis, Milton, Elvirah, Manorah, Lila, Lula, Lillie, Feny, Selena, Sophia, Telitha and (my favorite) Lucinderella. Though some of these are Biblical, they are not the names of Christian saints. How to explain that my 3<sup>rd</sup>-great grandfather Isaac Cooper, pet-

name Zack, married Mahala Jane Blevins, pet-name Linny, and they went all over the South as railroaders? Coopers exchanged letters with family members in Arkansas, Texas and Mississippi at a time when the literacy rate was, in general, very low. They bought land with cash on the barrelhead and borrowed money from informal banks owned by extended kin (the Lowreys helped the Coopers and others with loans in the Great Depression). They remained to found towns like Guntersville, Adairsville, Willstown and Cooperstown after the Indians were removed. They spoke the Cherokee, Chickasaw and Choctaw languages and knew arcane arts like joining, engraving, silversmithing and smelting. Many, like my grandfather Dolphus Cooper (1881-1960), had jet-black hair, olive complexions and deep blue eyes.

Isaac Cooper, described as Choctaw-Cherokee-Scotch-Irish, was the son of Nancy Black Fox, a Cherokee chief's daughter. He was born in an ambiguous place on the Kentucky-Tennessee line claimed by both states, at one time part of Virginia, North Carolina, and the lost states of Franklin and Transylvania. His father Isaac disappeared into another sort of Bermuda Triangle where Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio come together, and is remembered today as the first rabbi of the Wheeling (W. Va.) Temple Shalom congregation. The younger Isaac worked for the Little South Fork Salt and Iron Works, participated in the accidental sinking of the world's first oil well and went off to conquer Mexico with Gen. Winfield Scott after building a farmstead for his large family in Deerhead Cove (Anawaika), another place "not on the map." (Tucked away under the brow of Fox Mountain behind a maze of dirt roads, it is nigh unto impossible to find even today.) He is buried in Mexico in the Church of San Francisco, built 1775, near the Plaza de la Reforma, once part of a Franciscan convent, used as a hospital by the American army during the 1847-1848 occupation of Vera Cruz. These were no storybook

Indians. Nor were they ordinary Jews. Their lives were the stuff of legend, and of some strange ethnic mix.

I excitedly called my 84-year-old mother in Florida. “Mother, I found out what the Coopers were, or are—they’re, uh, Jewish!” Long silence on the other end. “Mother, you yourself are, uh, Jewish!” More silence, then finally, “Well, what of it?” I was glad she did not go into denial.

Which reminds me...how many Jewish Indians does it take to change a light bulb?

Light bulb? What light bulb?

Donald N. Panther-Yates

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### Illustrations



**Illustration 1** Russian-Jewish-American entertainer Ed Ames, born Edmund Dantes Urick, as Mingo (Choctaw for “chief”), a Cherokee, in 1965 television series “Daniel Boone” (Courtesy University of Maryland Library of American Broadcasting Archives)



**Illustration 1a.** Ed Ames publicity shot.



**Illustration 2** Pamunkey Indian Chief William Bradby in 1899 (Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives, negative 893).



**Illustration 3** Gen. John Adair (1757-1840), a governor of Kentucky, was a nephew of James Adair, Indian trader and author, who died in Robeson County about 1787.

The Adair family came from Scotland and Ireland to Chester County, Pennsylvania, and moved to Kentucky and Tennessee from plantations on the South Carolina-North Carolina line in 1788.

In 1789, the North Carolina legislature established a storehouse for provisions for the Cumberland Guard, which escorted families to Nashville under James Robertson. The storehouse was in Hawkins County at the home of another John Adair (about 1755-August 11, 1843).

(Courtesy The Kentucky Historical Society)



**Illustration 4** Moses Looney (1780-1855) of Maury County, Tennessee and Lawrence County, Alabama was a half-brother of Cherokee Chief John Looney (1776-1846). He married Mary Guest, the daughter of Moses Guest, a relative of Sequoyah (George Guess). He is shown about 1850 wearing a Masonic apron and senior warden's regalia from Danville (Ala.) Lodge 95. (Photocopy of tintype courtesy Larry W. Johnson, Southlake, Texas; original said to be in possession of Wanda Looney Buss of La Puente, California)



**Illustration 5** Sequoyah (about 1770-1843,

occupation silversmith, also known as George Guess) was the half-blood son of Wurteh (or Wutteh) and trader Nathaniel Gist, who was born in Baltimore, Maryland, October 15, 1733, and died in Clark County, Kentucky in 1796. Was his “syllabary” inspired by the Hebrew writing system, which uses consonants combined with diacritical marks for vowels? (From Thomas McKenney and James Hall, *History of the Indian Tribes of North America: with biographical sketches and anecdotes of the principal chiefs...* Philadelphia: E.C. Biddle, 1836-1844. Courtesy of Hargreave Rare Book Room, University of Georgia Library)



**Illustration 6** Maj. George Lowrey (1770-1852), Assistant Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, about 1844. He lived in Willstown near present-day Valley Head, Alabama and later in Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation West. His parents were George Lowrey, said to be a Scotsman, and Nannie, said to be Cherokee. A distant relative of the Lumbee folk hero Henry Berry Lowery, he married Lucy Benge (Bunch), a half-sister of Sequoyah and member of the frontier family that gave us the word “binge.” Notice the silver Star of David nose ornament. His earrings are also of Sephardic Jewish, or Ladino, design. (Courtesy Gilcrease Institute, Tulsa)