

Swift - Roberts Family  
of Baldwin County, Alabama



Charles A. Swift (left), Ira A. Swift (right),  
standing on a logging train locomotive.

The Swift-Roberts clan of Baldwin County began with the immigration of Peter Roberts, (d.1706) and Isaiah Swift, (b. 1749) from England to America. They settled in Rhode Island and New York State; married and had their own families. Several generations later, after moving around the northeast, the Swifts and Roberts were brought together in the Deep South by the marriages of two Roberts sisters and two Swift brothers in the mid 1880's.

William Henry Roberts came to Mobile, Alabama by wagon train in 1835 when he was 18 years old. Eventually he became a partner in the Cotton brokerage firm of Ross and Roberts. He married Sarah Bull and they had six children: William Henry Jr., Cornelia Miriam, Emily, Susan Platt, Louise Dubose, and John Platt. William Henry was in the "Home Guard" during the Civil War, but could not stop the Yankees from burning a large quantity of his cotton bales ready for shipment on the docks. This action resulted in a great financial loss for the firm.

The family built a home in what is now Monterey Place, just off Dauphin Street in Mobile, and in the mid 1880s', Susan and Louise (Susie and Lulie D.) began teaching school in lower Baldwin County near the Dowty Place. This was close to "Swift," Alabama, where brothers Charles and Ira Swift had a logging operation on Wolf Creek.

John Swift, (Isaiah's son) fought in the war of 1812 and was given a large tract of land by the government, in Madison County, Florida. John moved his family south and his children and grandchildren lived in this area for many years.

His grandsons, Charles and Ira Swift came to the Mobile-Baldwin County region and worked for a time with George W. Robinson of the Southern States Lumber Company.

Charles was general Superintendent, and Ira, logging Superintendent. They bought and sold land and timber all over south Alabama and the northwest portion of the Florida panhandle. Logging camps were set up in different locations and narrow gauge railroads were built to move the timber out of the woods to the main line.

In 1885, Charles Augustus Swift married Susan Platt Roberts in the Government Street Presbyterian Church in Mobile, Alabama. (Many years later, one of their sons, William H., referred to that imposing structure as "The Lord's Headquarters." Mother was not amused.) Charles and Susan settled on Wolf Creek in the Mifflin area near the logging center. There was a large commissary, several nice homes and a railroad track running from the water's edge far into the piney woods. Every week a steamer from Millview, Florida would arrive to tow huge rafts of logs back to the mill.

There was also a school in the community and on one particular road lived so many small children that it was known as "Squall Street."

Susan Swift's father, William H. Roberts, along with his daughter Miriam, had moved to this place after his first wife died. He later married a teacher, Ann Byard, and they had a son Byard, and daughter, Amelia. Mr. Roberts worked as a bookkeeper for his son-in-law, Charles Swift, at the mill and was also Postmaster and a Notary Public.

Miriam Roberts stayed behind with a few of the other families when the logging business moved to Seminole, but she was very lonely for her friends and her church.

She dreamed of building a new church and talked to her brother-in-law, Charles Swift about it. He gave her the land and lumber for the project and in spite of many setbacks over the years. Swift Presbyterian Church eventually was built. It was dedicated in 1910 and still serves a thriving congregation today.

Miriam Roberts' brother, Byard, married Anna Miller from Bon Secour in 1911. Byard was Postmaster after his father died in 1901 and also served as deputy sheriff. Byard would sometimes keep prisoners in a small house in the back yard to the dismay of his wife. He was a gentleman farmer and had cattle roaming from Fort Morgan to Bay Minette. The cattle had to be rounded up periodically,

cowboy style. Byard and Anna Roberts had three children: Miriam and Gavin, deceased, and Therese Roberts, a retired principal and teacher who still lives in the family home in the woods on Wolf Creek.

There are four great-grandchildren of William H. Roberts from his son Byard's family: Robert Gordon, Jr., William Byard Gordon, Miriam Elizabeth, and Anna Katherine.

Other descendants of William Henry Roberts, which include 15 crossed bloodlines with the Swifts, have contributed much to Mobile and south Alabama. One grandson, architect Platt Roberts, designed a number of public buildings, homes and churches in Mobile, among them the Waterman Building. Platt's brother Ed was president of Waterman Steamship Company. Ed Roberts was also a partner in Southern Industries, which for many years included the Grand Hotel at Point Clear in its holdings.

To return to the Swift side of this large family, Charles and Susan moved the mill to Bon Secour River and built a large home there about 1900 which was always referred to as "The Big House".

The last of their 13 children were born there. Charles Swift and Mark Lyons of Mobile put an export sawmill in that location and Ira Swift worked as logging Superintendent. This endeavor lasted about ten years. Charles kept an office in Mobile and had a fleet of boats and barges to transport the lumber from Bon Secour to Mobile, and from there it was shipped to South America.

Charles Swift died in 1912 and his oldest son, Robin, moved the mill to Knoxso, Mississippi for some years and then to Atmore, Alabama where it has grown tremendously in the hands of his son, Robin Swift, Jr., his nephew Byard Swift, Jr., and their sons, Robin III, and John, David, and Tom Swift. Robin Swift has two daughters, Margherita Jones, Century, Florida, three children; and Susan Norman Pensacola, Florida, four children; numerous grand and great-grandchildren live in other parts of the country.

Swift school in Bon Secour was built for the children of Charles and Susie (the older ones attending UMS and private girls' schools in Mobile) and the mill worker's children. Charles gave land and lumber for the school.

Charles' widow, Susan, in later years was instrumental in helping to build St. Peters' Episcopal Church in its present location near Bon Secour River. She lived in the family home until her death in 1932.

The children of Charles A. and Susan Swift are: Charles (died in infancy); George Robinson, State and U.S. Senator; Miriam S. Martyn, Teacher; Emily M. Swift, Bookkeeper; Eleanor S. Stevens, Teacher; William Henry Swift, Ship Captain (Captain Billy); Isaac (died in infancy); Susan Cornelia Swift Marshall,

Nurse; Ira Platt, West Point graduate and 4-Star General, U.S. Army; John Byard, Gentleman Farmer; Amelia S. Wakeford, Teacher and Restaurant owner of "Meme's"; Florence S. Williams, Nurse; Edward Gavin, Owner of Swift's Cottages on Bon Secour River.

Ira Austin Swift married Louise Dubose Roberts, (dates unknown). Their children were: Ira Austin Jr.; Lulie D.; Charles Platt; William Dean; Cornelia Miriam; John Bates.

Ira Swift and "Lulie D" moved to Mobile in the early 1900's, He continued to work with his brother Charles and would take the "Bay Boat" across Mobile Bay to see his family. His youngest child, John Bates, was born in Ellisville, Mississippi in 1903. His father Ira C. died 1911.

John Bates' daughter, Sandra Straughn, lives in Orange Beach, Alabama. She has three daughters: Stephanie Botkin of Citronelle, three children, Elizabeth Davis of Pensacola, one son, and Jamie Smith of Fairhope, four children.

In Mobile there are two grandchildren of Ira Swift: Morgan Tyler Swift, three children, and Doris Swift Cunningham, three children. Also living in Mobile is a great-granddaughter of William Henry Roberts; Emily Helen Townsend Miller and her son John (Jack) Miller and his family.

Charles and Susan Roberts Swift have two children living in Mobile: Sarah Marshall Shields and Charles Swift Marshall. Also, Sarah Shields' three children, the Reverend Bry Shields, Sally Greene, and John Shields.

Two grandchildren also live in Baldwin County: Lyman Martyn of Fairhope, four children and four grandchildren and lone Swift Jurkiewicz, Magnolia Springs, five children: Mary Robin Jurkiewicz, Emily Susan Jurkiewicz Nelson, Jane Anne Jurkiewicz, John William Jurkiewicz and Charles Swift Jurkiewicz and five grandchildren.

There are numerous other great and great-great, grandchildren around the United States and Europe.

Written 2001 for The Baldwin County Heritage Book by lone Swift Jurkiewicz. Sources: Therese Roberts; Byard Swift, Jr.; Mrs. William Henry Swift; Doris Swift Cunningham; Sandra Swift Straughn; Lyman W. Martyn.



The Swift family has been a part of Alabama history since the early 19th century. They have been in the sawmill and timber business in what is now the Florida panhandle and southern Alabama since 1835. The family moved to Bon Secour in 1900 to form Swift and Lyons Sawmill. By 1906, the name was

changed to Swift and Son. After a series of changes over the last century, it has evolved into two companies: The Swift Lumber Company and Swift Supply, Inc. The latter operates the truss manufacturing business and their chain of building center stores.

Taken from the Alliance eNewsletter, July 2006, a publication of the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance.