

February 13, 2003

To the membership of the 1000 Churches:

My name is Melvin Robertson, Jr of San Jose, California. I am a retired 31 year employee of the Hewlett-Packard Company as of June 14, 2002. Fourteen years after the end of slavery, in 1879, my great-grandfather Jesse Robertson bought 100 acres of land in East Texas and bequeathed it to his descendants. In Mach 2000, my sister and I spearheaded a successful effort to save the land by paying \$35,000 in back taxes, court cost and attorney fees as the property was slated for a tax sale. We have continued to keep the taxes paid and now up to date.

We face further hurdles and hope that you may be open to assisting us by putting us in contact with any non-profit groups or persons you know of who may be sympathetic to our cause and willing to help us. The land lay disregarded for 50 years except for timber poachers and litterers who took and continue to take advantage of the property being unoccupied. We hope to reclaim our heritage by making the land productive and of service to others. We know that there are organizations geared toward helping communities and people that need land to provide their services. Our thoughts have turned to ways to utilize the property with businesses such as a home for wayward children, a nursing home for the elderly or even private business enterprises... anything to keep it in the family.

We are in the process of trying to incorporate the Jesse Robertson Foundation but we need a lawyer who can help us organize and setup the Foundation (or another type of legal organization) and coordinate the effort of bringing the numerous heirs together, some of whom contributed generously to paying the back taxes. We would also like help toward clearing the title. We have done extensive research relating to deeds, oil/gas leases and wills pertaining to the property and have copies of the documents. In addition, we have obtained a property survey and other activities to put corrective actions in place in regards to the property. Unfortunately, my sister and I had to contribute the bulk of that money and so are looking to working with someone who can get started without an enormous up front fee. We would also like to buy back the 5 acres that Jesse Robertson sold to the railroad which splits the land. This 5 acre strip has been sold and bought by three parties since the railroad went out of business. We can only imagine what it must have taken for an ex-slave to come up with the \$500 that the land cost at that time.

I feel that doing something positive with this land will not only validate the efforts of our long-ago slave ancestor, but will allow us to carry out my father's death-bed wish that my sister and I get involved in saving the land. Our father died in Phoenix, Arizona but was born and raised on the property in East Texas. His last wish was to keep the property in the family. The immediacy of slavery is highlighted by the interesting fact that Jesse Robertson's last child, my uncle, Lee Robertson, died only in 1989. Jesse Robertson had fourteen children, so getting the title clear is no small deal. I will say one thing for it, though: I have talked to and even met relatives I didn't even know about. We are in contact with the majority of the heirs and they want to work together to come to a successful solution for this project.

No one is living on the property currently. Nor are we aware of any of our relatives planning on moving to live on the land any time soon. We would like to see some organization or person get some use of the property and we get some help too in the way of organizing our Great Grandfather Jesse Robertson's estate. Our Great Grandfather was one of the founders of the Snow Hill Baptist Church as well as having a school named after him in the area. The school is no longer in existence but the church is still serving the community.

The property is prime land in a prime area of that part of East Texas. There is much development in progress in that area. So there is a tremendous upside to an organization or someone working with us to take control of the property and use it for productive purposes. If someone in your congregation is a practicing Real Estate/Probate Attorney in East Texas (Tyler, Marshall, Longview, other) or know of someone who is, I have much more detailed information to share. As mentioned above, we have done a lot of research to date.

We would like to thank you in advance for any suggestions or referrals you might give us.

If you can or cannot help us, a return reply will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Melvin Robertson, Jr on behalf of the Robertson Heirs

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