

# Claiborne Clippings

Spring 2010

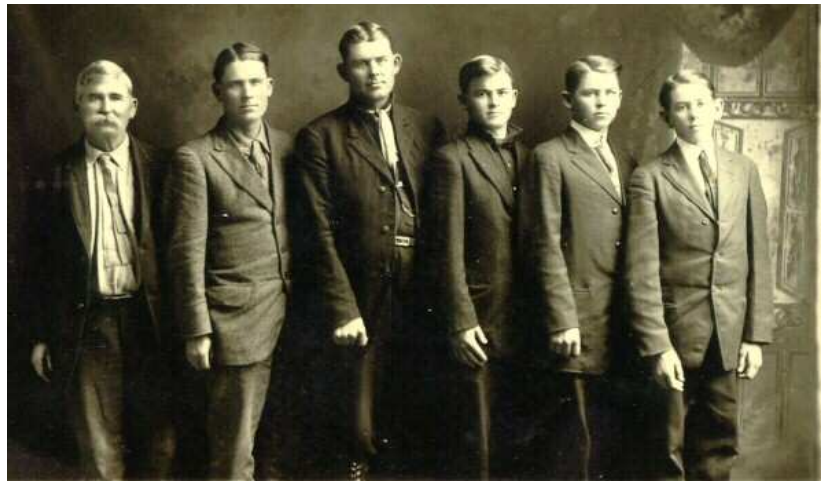
We will be running a series of family articles for your enjoyment. This is the first of the series:

## James Ernest Claiborne

By Harold Claiborne

James Ernest Claiborne was born April 18, 1891 in Caldwell County Texas, the son of Patrick Henry Claiborne and Marguerite Robinson Claiborne. Pat was a second generation Texan; his father James Elam Claiborne came to Texas in 1844 from Chesterfield County Virginia where his forefathers had lived since 1620. James was a descendant of John of Dale Parish and his son Jonas Cliborn.

Pat was a farmer by trade, and like many farmers of that era - late 1890's - he thought that the land was "worn-out" when the production of cotton fell off. The number of farms he had was an ever growing list, from Atascosa County, where he married Maggie Robinson, to Gonzalles, Frio, Red River, Hayes, Caldwell, Bandera, and Coleman Counties in Texas. He had no less than five different farms in Coleman County after arriving in 1891. The first, and where he lived most of his Coleman County life, was near Camp Colorado, adjoining the land of John Elkins. This Elkins place is now the Ben Cox property. Pat donated two acres near the road from Camp Colorado to Coleman to build the Union Hill School.



Patrick Henry Claiborne (1845-1940) and His Sons  
left to right: Patrick Henry Claiborne, William Henry Claiborne, Thomas Howard Claiborne,  
James Ernest Claiborne, Sidney Claiborne, and Glen Edgar Claiborne

His older children went to school at Lone Star School on Hords Creek before Union Hill was built. James Ernest received his schooling for eleven years in this one room school house. In its later years it became a two room school - progress.

James Ernest married Carmel Harman November 20, 1910 in Voss Texas. They had two sons in Coleman County before 1916 when homestead land opened up in South Eastern Colorado. They, Ernest and Carmel, decided to go look for "The Elephant".

They first homesteaded near Model Colorado on 640 acres of dry land. Earnest stayed on this land long enough to "Prove it up", that is, he improved it and lived on it long enough to get title. Farming in this region was not too swift to say the least. Ernest looked for, and found a home site about 20 miles East of Aguilar Colorado with a seasonal stream, arroyo, that had shallow permanent water. Perfect for a ranch headquarters. He sold his first homestead and bought this 640 acre tract. This ranch headquarters adjoined a National Grass Land, with an abundance of prairie grass.



**The Spanish Peaks  
looking west from Aguilar, Colorado**

This was the time of "Open Range". The way this worked all ranchers grazed their cattle together. Each rancher had his own identifying brand. At roundup time the cattle that were ready were shipped to market in Denver. There the cattle were sold, the brand recorded at the stockyards, and a check was sent to the owner of the brands sold. A rancher need not have been the shipper to receive credit for his stock. Any stock going through the stock yard without a bill of sale to the contrary, the check was cut for the brand holder. All brands were registered by the state.

The stocking of cattle on this ranch was not too big a problem. In the beginning Ernest engaged in a partnership with a Denver financier. Gradually this arrangement was phased out as more and more cattle were solely his.

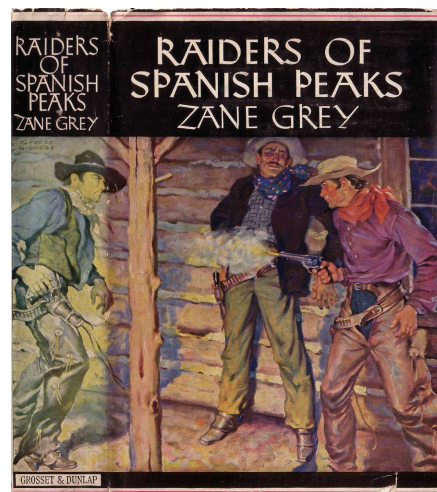
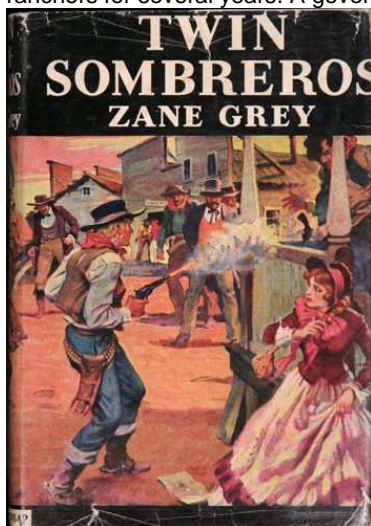
Horses were a different proposition. Quality saddle horses were not only expensive, but hard to find. There were a number of wild horses on this grass land and into the foot-hills of the Spanish Peaks. There was one such herd, with an extremely fine stud as a leader fairly near the Claiborne ranch. In a low range of hills there was a box canyon, a canyon with a fairly narrow mouth and no other outlet . Ernest and some of his hands built a brush fence across the mouth of this box canyon except for an opening into which this herd could be driven. Enough brush was cut and readied to close this breach once the herd had passed. The plan went as expected, all horses, including the leader were inside the trap, and the door was closed.

As soon as the stud realized his predicament he made a break for freedom. When he reached the brush gate he managed to jump high enough to reach the top and climbed the rest of the way over this barricade. Ernest realized that if he made good his escape all was lost, he would return to the herd until he rescued them all. He then slid his 30-30 Winchester from it's saddle holster and shot the stud, killing him. He then took a tame and gentle stud from his remuda named Butler, introduced him into the herd. Butler wasted no time in taking the herd back to the ranch headquarters where he knew his oat bucket awaited.

At one time, wolf predation on live stock became a big problem. There was an old she wolf of particular ferocity that plagued the area ranchers for several years. A government trapper came in to try and

end this problem. He caught or killed most of the clan, including the alpha male of the group. His mate, the old she wolf, lost a toe on one of her fore paws to this government trapper. The result was that she left a track showing one toe missing. This led to her being known thereafter as old three toes.

The Claiborne family had a male shepherd cow dog, I think his name was Giggs; my brother disagrees. Regardless of his name, he took up with old three toes and sired several litters of wolf/shepherd puppies.



He would leave home and stay with her for several weeks at a time. He would then come home and become the family pet for a time, then return to her and her wild ways. The trapper finally caught her offspring and shot her, putting an end to her reign of terror. The shepherd returned home to stay, probably longing for the wilder times.

If these last two stories seem familiar, especially to a Zane Grey buff, they should. He stayed at the Claiborne ranch one winter compiling information to be transformed into western novels. These two can be found in his books. "The Raiders of the Spanish Peaks" was one of them and "Twin Sombreros" was another. I believe Ernest Claiborne even became a character in one of his novels. Even though he was a fiction writer these accounts are fact.

There was an occasion when Ernest sent two men out to an area known as The Smith Flats to round up some stray cattle and drive them back to the open prairie grass land. These two were Pat Parkis, Ernest's nephew, and a wrangler named Charley Hill. Charley was from Tahoka Texas originally. Pat and Charley split up, as one went into the hills and the other stayed along a ridge following an arroyo. Charley Hill took the ridge. They agreed to meet at a predetermined place and drive the strays back together.

Not long after they split up a sudden thunderstorm came up. There was heavy rain with hail falling. Charley took refuge under a large tree. A lightning bolt tore down on him, killing him and his horse. When he did not make the rendezvous at the prescribed time and place, a search for him was started. He was not found until the following morning. The coins in his pockets were fused together, and the nails in his boots were melted out.

This ranching operation was successful for about fifteen years. In the winter of 1929/1930 one of the worst snow storms in recent times hit this southeast Colorado area. This land is relatively flat, not like you would think of for Colorado. The snow was over four foot deep on the prairie, and drifts of twenty foot deep in places. Our house, being in a canyon, was completely covered. Exit from the house was not possible for two weeks; the house stayed covered, except for an exit tunnel, for 30 days. Snow that fell in November was still on the ground in May. We ran out of flour and other staples. There was plenty potatoes and beef; we didn't starve but didn't have what we may have wanted.



**The Claiborne Cowboys**  
left to right: Curtis Claiborne, James Edgar Claiborne,  
James Ernest Claiborne and Marion Minor (a hired hand).

This was the beginning of the great depression; the number of cattle that survived didn't amount to enough to pay the feed bill. Ernest decided to return to Texas. After liquidating his assets and paying his bills he took what money he had left and bought horses, lots of horses. The best I can remember there were nearly 150 head of fine saddle horses.



**James Ernest Claiborne holding his son Harold Claiborne**

There was a U.S. Cavalry troop stationed at Mineral Wells Texas. This is where Pat Claiborne, Ernest's father, was living, having moved there to take advantage of the hot mineral baths. He suffered with what I think now was arthritis. Ernest decided to drive these horses overland from the ranch near Trinidad Colorado to Mineral Wells Texas, as they had a



standing offer to buy quality mounts at Camp Wolters.

My oldest brother Curtis had a 640 acre ranch that joined Ernest. He decided to stay in Colorado on the free grassland. Fred Poole, a nephew of Ernest, Pat Parkis another nephew, and his cousin Judge Parkis (a nickname), and Ernest, and to the best of my knowledge a wrangler named Marrion Minor made the drive.

Ernest bought a 1929 Chevrolet automobile with less than 100 miles on it that had been in a fire that burned the body off it. He modified this Chevy into a chuck wagon and mobile wardrobe for the trip.

The drive was uneventful until they reached the Canadian River near old Tascosa, west of Amarillo. This had at one time been a frontier town, but was nothing but a ghost in 1931. There is now a boys town located there.

There was no bridge, or road for that matter. This river bottom is several hundred yards wide there with very little water. There were just small rivulets or streams and wide sand bars. A man could stand on one of these sand bars in one place for a while and he would slowly descend, not into the sand but with it. As he descended water would fill the resulting indent. At one place the river was a hundred feet wide or so. Its depth was less than two feet at the deepest. This is the spot that was chosen for the crossing.

Crossing the horses presented no problem, but the "Chuck Wagon" was something else. The fan belt was removed, so the fan would not pick-up water and throw it on the distributor shorting out the ignition. Two of the stronger horses were selected to assist. Lariats were secured to the front bumper with the other end dallied around the saddle horn. None of these horses knew what work harness was, so the use of lariat and saddle horn was necessary.

The "Chuck Wagon" was started and across they went. About mid-stream the sand bottom sank enough to allow water to reach the distributor. Had they allowed the "Chuck Wagon" to sit there long enough, it's tires undoubtedly would have broken through the sand; who knows where it would stop. At any rate the horses' riders spurred up their mounts, and across the river they went without a bobble.



James Ernest Claiborne's  
cattle brand  
"J E Quarter Circle"

Another encounter occurred while on a fenced road, one of the few on the trip. This was a stretch near Plainview where the road followed the railroad. These horses had been saddle broke and cow trained, but they were not freight train savvy. The site of and the noise from a passing train caused the herd to panic and stampede. Now the fence on both sides of this narrow road was made of barbed wire. Several of the horses were so badly cut they were left in the pasture of one of the local ranchers. He later wrote Ernest telling that all the horses survived and made him good saddle mounts.

Horses were sold to the local ranches as they proceeded to their destination. Many were sold around Plainview and Maryneal, on the 69 ranch in Nolan County.

Ernest's father-in-law lived at Maryneal and his brother-in-law Herbert Currie was foreman of the 69 ranch at that time. The horses were rested at Maryneal for a time before continuing on to Mineral Wells. I don't know how many horses made the final lag to Camp Wolters at Mineral Wells but the drive terminated there.

Two of his finest and his pride and joy horses were "loaned", as he couldn't bring himself to sell them, to a ranch between Palo Pinto and Breckenridge where the quarter horse breed was being developed. These two became a part of this project. Ernest visited them often but never reclaimed them.

Ernest had a brother in Mineral Wells that had learned the refrigeration trade from another brother who was an engineer with the Frigidaire Division of Delco Light, that eventually became part of General Motors. This brother trained Ernest in the trade. He then eventually returned to Coleman from where he had started some fifteen plus years before. Here in Coleman he took care of the refrigeration needs of the citizens of Coleman and Coleman County for the next thirty five years. I doubt any of his customers knew of his "Cow-Boy" past.

This article is compliments of Patricia Clayborn from Windsor, California. The author is Harold Claiborne of Coleman, Texas.

If you have family history that you would like to submit for publication in future newsletters, please email your information to Ann Claiborne Case at [CaseAC45@aol.com](mailto:CaseAC45@aol.com).

**Order of Descendants of Ancient Planters**

The Order of Descendants of Ancient Planters, is a historical, educational, lineage society whose purpose is to honor the Ancient Planters. If any Claiborne descendants are interested in becoming members of the Order, please see the website at [www.ancientplanters.org](http://www.ancientplanters.org) or just type in Ancient Planters.

**2011 Claiborne Family Reunion: New Orleans**

The Claiborne Family Reunion will be held in New Orleans, LA in late September or early October 2011. As plans and agendas are finalized you will be notified.

**2010 Claiborne Society Dues**

The Annual Dues for the Claiborne Society are \$10. In addition, a lifetime membership is available for \$200 for current members. If you are receiving this newsletter by mail and have a red dot on your address label, your dues have not been received for the current year. If you receive this newsletter by email, you will receive an email alerting you if your dues are in arrears.

Dues are to be sent to the Treasurer, Mary Ann Gilman  
P. O. Box 5  
Port Haywood, VA 23138

If you have any questions, please contact Mary Ann at [magilman@rivnet.net](mailto:magilman@rivnet.net)  
or (804)725-2032 – work phone / (804)725-8112 cell phone

**The National Society of Claiborne Family Descendants Treasurer’s Report:  
January 1, 2009 – December 31, 2009**

Balance January 1, 2009 \$7,171.53  
Balance December 31, 2009 \$6,612.47

Receipts

Dues \$1,305.00  
Life Memberships 600.00  
Sale Bissell Books 60.00  
Sale Journals/CD 115.00  
Sale Geneological Charts 12.00  
Interest – Checking Acct. 12.94

Reunion Reservations 7,235.00

\$9,339.94

Disbursements

Printing, Postage: Dues/Roster 494.76  
Geneological Charts – Printing 12.50  
Clippings – Printing/Postage 173.01

Reunion Expenditures 9,118.73

Balance \$6,712.47

Chesapeake Bank CD #296404073: \$10,786.31 (Matures 7/8/10)  
Chesapeake Bank CD #296397647: \$ 5,134.92 (Matures 6/22/10)

Balance includes monies from the Lolita Hannah Bissell Memorial Fund in the amount of \$730 and for the Vicar of Nidd research Fund of \$200.

Mary Ann Gilman, Treasurer

IN MEMORY OF

LT. COL. THOMAS CLAIBORNE

AUGUST 17. 1647 TO OCTOBER 7. 1683

SON OF IMMIGRANT WILLIAM CLAIBORNE

BURIED ROMANCOKE

KING WILLIAM COUNTY

MOVED TO HOLLYWOOD CEMETERY

RICHMOND 1926

AND

SARAH FENN

MARCH 22. 1660 TO OCTOBER 18. 1716

WIFE OF LT. COL. THOMAS CLAIBORNE

BURIED BRICKHOUSE NEW KENT COUNTY

MARRIED 2ND TO CAPT. THOMAS BRAY

ERECTED BY

THE CLAIBORNE SOCIETY. 2009



The Claiborne Society had the stone shown on the previous erected in memory of Thomas Claiborne and his wife Sarah Fenn at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in New Kent County, Virginia, in early December 2009. Thomas was the son of the first William Claiborne in Virginia. Where Thomas attended church is unknown, but Sarah is mentioned in St. Peter's records as being a member, and the present church building was erected during her lifetime. Thomas's original gravestone is now in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery, and Sarah's on private property (but not on her grave) whose owner will not let us move the stone. The new Memorial stone, for the first time since their deaths, unites their names and dates in one spot where descendants can easily visit.



This photo of St. Peter's church shows the location of the newly installed memorial stone. The side edge of the memorial is the whitest stone, on far right and the third stone from bottom in the location that was designated by the church.

### **The National Society of Claiborne Family Descendants Officers and Board**

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