

Family Tree Continued...



Gibson. Another eventually emigrated to England and married John Jacob Astor, Jr., eventually becoming Lady Astor and serving as the first woman in the House of Commons.

According to Joe, she had a famous encounter with Winston Churchill at a dinner party. During an argument, she told the Prime Minister “Winston, if I were married to you, I would put poison in your tea.” Churchill’s famed

response: “Madam, if I were married to you, I would drink it.”

In late 1859, another descendant, Vincent Witcher, had a granddaughter who was suing her husband for divorce. The troubled marriage was the impetus for the Witcher – Clement feud. Witnesses were being deposed in a general store in Sandy Level, and an argument ensued. The husband, one of three Clement brothers, reportedly became belligerent and started a knife fight, bringing the proceedings to a close.

They continued about three months later, in the back room of Dickinson’s Store, but again, there were heated arguments, devolving this time into gunplay. When all was said and done, all three Clement brothers lay dead, and all the Witchers present stood accused of their murders.

Needless to say, the divorce became moot, and the Witchers were put on trial. Since the witnesses’ accounts of the incident varied considerably, the judge dismissed the case. Naturally, the Clement family was determined to hold the Witchers accountable, but to no avail. They held a grudge for generations.

This feud reared its ugly head, probably for the last time, in 1967. When Emmett Jefferson sold his farm, he made an offer to purchase some property on which to build a house. As it turns out, that land had previously belonged to the Clement family. One of the current trustees expressed reservations about selling land that had once belonged to the Clements to a descendant of the Witchers, but eventually agreed to the sale.

Joe speaks a bit more fondly of his great-grandfather, William Tazewell Jefferson, who participated in Pickett’s Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg.

He was one of the few survivors, and eventually attended the Confederate surrender at Appomattox. In 1923, Molly Graves and her husband Frank, who was Joe and Lib’s great-aunt, bought property that was part of the grounds where the surrender had taken place in Appomattox. A historical marker on the old property marks the spot where Robert E. Lee was stopped by his men, to ask if it were true that he intended to surrender.

On that same land, there is a grave, cordoned off by a split rail fence, of a man named Sweeney, who is credited with adding the 5th string to the banjo. He was a member of Jeb Stuart’s unit, and frequently entertained Stuart’s entourage with his musical stylings.

Joe and Lib love to tell the story of how their grandparents met. She had gone to school in what is now known as the Holland Duncan House, which today houses the offices of Stanley, Houchens, & Griffith. After completing her education, she stayed on as a teacher.

At first, it may seem scandalous to report that she eventually married one of her students, but not in the context of the late 19th century.

“Of course, Granddad didn’t go to school except in the middle of winter, when there was nothing to do on the farm,” Joe explains. “They’d send him over there for a month or so.”

They happily complete the story by explaining that both grandparents were in their 30’s when they married. For Joe Jefferson and Lib Walker, it’s just a small sample of their rich family heritage. ■

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