

## **Claiborne County (TN) Progress**

### **Nell Quesenberg Report**

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#### **UPPER CANEY VALLEY**

By Nell Quesenberg

Caney Valley is a long, narrow valley covering the whole south section of Claiborne County. To the north, the length of the valley is bordered by the south side of Comby's Ridge. To the south, the length of the valley is bordered by the Clinch River. This river separates the valley from Grainger County. The easternmost tip of Caney Valley touches Hancock County, while the westernmost tip of the valley is bordered by the Norris Lake.

Highway 25E runs through the center of this valley, separating them into two distinct districts. The valley east of the highway is called Upper Caney Valley. The valley west of Highway 25E is called Lower Caney Valley. The portion of 25E that runs through Caney Valley is called the "Front."

Bordering the south side of the valley along the Clinch River is a small ridge formation called River Ridge. In Upper Caney Valley, this ridge takes on the various names of the different families who own the ridge land.

In Lower Caney Valley, the ridge along the river is called Raven's Ridge. Bunch Town and Raven's Ridge Village are located on this ridge.

Upper Caney Valley has yet another ridge formation called Caney Ridge that runs between Comby's Ridge and the Clinch River. Caney Ridge divides Upper Caney Valley into Big Caney and Little Caney.

This is a valley where I've been only a few times, but always, I find the women's faces lightly pink and beautifully gentle. The men are "oft times" handsome and are always quietly courteous.

My friend, Helen Collins, a beautiful woman with golden-lashed green eyes and honey-stained hair, has lived in Little Caney for almost thirty years. Her handsome husband, Clarence Collins, owned a farm in the Little Caney section of Upper Caney Valley, where he was born.

The Collins' have had four children: Bruce, married to Patty Lynch; Ronnie, who was tragically killed in a car wreck at age seventeen, April 1973; Cathy, married to Sonny Robertson, and David, who still lives at home. There are four living grandchildren.

Often Helen tells me of her valley and its people. I enjoy listening, especially since another beautiful friend of mine, Betty Manning, lives in Helen's valley.

Helen tells me the name of the original settlers of Upper Caney were: Collins, Johnson, Willis, Roberts, Greene, Posey, Smith, Singleton, Lane, Shelton, Manning, Reed, Lee, Seals, Henry, Ashbury, Hodges, Harvey, Hipshire, Ward, Davis, Griffin, Brogan, Clark and Ogan.

While the families living there now are: McDaniel, Johns, Worley, Carpenter, Brogan, Shockley, Cook, Frazier, Farmer, Lane, Collins, Posey, Singleton, Daniels, Smith, Barnard, Shultz, Manning, Shelton, King, Bolden, Wilcher, Ramsey, England and Trent.

Before World War II, about fifteen houses stood on the bank overlooking the Clinch River. Now all the houses are gone. Families by the name of Johnson, Greene, Lane, West, Singleton, Kelly, Posey, Roberts, Lee, Carpenter and Jackson lived in those houses.

Upper Caney had two schools which are now closed. The Upper Caney Valley School closed in the middle '60s. The last teacher was Lucy West, now retired. Occasionally, Lucy West acts as substitute teacher at Springdale School.

Johnson's School is on the Clinch River, near where the big spring flows across the road. Grissom Island Church is near the school. Johnson's School closed around 1968. The last teacher was Howard Pearson.

Both churches in Upper Caney are Missionary Baptist. Besides Grissom Island Church, there is New Bethel Church, near the old Upper Caney Valley School.

Cemeteries in Upper Caney Valley are: Barnard, Singleton, New Bethel, Collins, Manning, an unknown old cemetery on Jessie Frazier property, Brogan, McDaniel, Green, Bingham and an ancient cemetery on the Bobbie Carpenter farm.

Helen often speaks of the people who live in her valley. I agree they are nice, telling Helen of my visits to Vallie and Velva Lane, Dewey and Rosa Roberts and Sterling and Oma Johns. Vallie and Velva Lane, both widows, do very nice quilting.

Lizzie Shultz is a particular friend of Helen's who makes dolls from dish detergent bottles. She also makes beautiful quilts.

John N. Smith (Bonnie Brogan's childhood friend) and Bob Collins (Clarence Collins' father) are the two oldest people in Upper Caney.

Until about two years ago, John was church clerk and Sunday School teacher at New Bethel. (John Smith called Bonnie when I wrote her story.) John is blind now and unable to live at home by himself. However, John is quite cheerful, and he always manages to find his seat in the front of the New Bethel Church.

Bob Collins was eighty-three years old on August 4, 1981. Helen says her father-in-law doesn't hear very well and walks with a cane, but that he still loves to attend church. He attends revivals in Grainger, Hancock, Hamblen and Claiborne counties. He has sung in churches in Maryland and Ohio.

"Time and age have not changed the clearness of his voice. It still rings and is clear as a bell," says Helen. "Amazing Grace" and "Oh, Daddy, My Daddy" are the two songs that Bob most enjoys singing in church. Helen plaintively sung me these words, "Oh, Daddy, my Daddy, don't work in the mines; for dreams have so often come true. I dreamed that the mines were all streaming with fire."

Upper Caney Valley does not have a country store. Henry McDaniel (deceased) ran a store in the Grissom Island community, while Neal Lane (deceased) owned a store on the Upper Caney Valley road, near the New Bethel Church.

Louis Lane (deceased husband of Vallie Lane) owned a grist mill near the New Bethel Church. This mill was located at the fork in the road that leads to Clinch River and Little Caney. There was also a water mill near the Peter Johnson farm.

In the summer of 1952, just before Helen came to Upper Caney Valley, there was a tornado. This fierce air funnel twisted down two barns and a smoke house. It struck the house of Dewey and Rosa Roberts, turning the house around on its foundation. This day, Rosie had washed all the “few” best clothes they had, hanging them on the line. The house chimney blew down on them, destroying most of the clothes.

The waters of the “Flood of ’77” rose above the windows of the Grissom Island Church. The benches floated in the water. However, the church covenant, nailed to the wall, was not damaged. Later, Clarence Collins made a frame for it, while John K. Hipshire fitted it with a glass cover. All the people of the community worked together to restore the inside of the church and to redo the benches.

I enjoyed learning about Caney Valley from Clarence and Helen Collins. They love their valley. I would like to give this history in memory of their son, Ronnie Collins, who at age seventeen, was killed in an auto wreck on Highway 25E eight years ago, April 1973.