

THE STORY OF THE FAMILIES

By Joseph Vernelle Phillips

PART 1: THE AMERICANS

Chapter 4: The Sooner Shootout North of the Red River



Confederates Firing on the Union's Fort Sumter, April 12, 1861: The Civil War Begins
(Painting Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

It was a sunny, hot and lazy mid-August day in 1861 atop the Sugar Hill Plantation in McDowell County, North Carolina. And a small breeze was blowing across the cotton fields, cornstalks and red burley tobacco patches down the dirt road from the main house. But ominous black clouds charging in the distance meant a storm was on the way. Three black women slaves were topping and suckering the tobacco plants along with the half-white young slave Daniel, son of the late owner of the plantation, Henry Elliott and one of his female slaves. A mule cart stood nearby to take their cuttings.

Daniel's two white twin half-brothers, Jesse (Jessie) William and William Jesse Elliott, dawdled nearby on

the grass in the shade of a tall oak tree and close to their horses, their legs arched upward. They talked to one another in low voices, sometimes whispers, while chewing on long cornstalk straws.

Fort Sumter, the Union fortress at Charleston, S.C., had fallen to Confederate forces on April 13, and 10 other Southern states followed South Carolina's decision to secede from the Union. North Carolina passed an act of secession on May 21.



Confederate Battle Flag



North Carolina Rebel Secession Flag

The twins had just come back up the mountain from Old Fort where they saw news bulletins tacked or pasted all along the walls of businesses in Old Fort calling on young men to join up and fight for the Confederacy. Many boys a year or two older—the twins were then only 15--were screaming rebel yells and lining up to enlist in Confederate Captain James M. Neal's "McDowell Rifles" or Captain Alney Burgin's "the McDowell Boys," who later fought with Stonewall Jackson at the Battle of Second Manassas and Robert E. Lee in the Army of Northern Virginia. They were at the battles of First and Second Manassas, Gettysburg, Fredericksburg (where many completed a long winter march from Shepherdstown barefoot), Petersburg, Richmond and many other battles and were with Lee at the surrender in Appomattox. They lost 580 men in the war, many of them friends and acquaintances of the twins.



The Railroad Station in Old Fort Adjacent to the Frontier Fort Monument

(Courtesy Joseph V. Phillips)



Log Cabin in Old Fort and Fence of Split Logs

(Courtesy Joseph V. Phillips)



Entrance to Village of Sugar Hill Near the Elliott Plantation

(Courtesy Joseph V. Phillips)



Sugar Hill Near the Elliott Plantation

(Courtesy Joseph V. Phillips)

Jesse William and William Jesse were avid backers of Abraham Lincoln, fervent supporters of the Union and staunch Republicans. They had talked about all this bad news for months. Now, they were becoming angry and talking loudly. The black slaves turned to look at them over the mule wagon and wondered what was going on. Their black half-brother Daniel decided to approach them and find out what the fuss was all about.

The twins told Daniel they were going to light out for the North and asked their half-brother, who taught them all about farming and probably even how to read and write (their father Henry Elliott had died 10 years ago), to join them. Daniel, their older brother, (probably about 24 or 25 years old at the time) trembled visibly, telling them that capture of an escaped slave meant torture and sometimes death. Despite encouragement from the twins, he said he was too afraid to go with them. By now he was physically trembling and shaking. And his slave mother was becoming nervous when she noticed the trembling and slowed down on her topping and suckering work on the tobacco plants.

Henry Elliott had promised to free his black son Daniel but instead wrote in his will “and if Daniel my black man should become dissatisfied and not willing to stay on the premises and help raise the children my will is that my executors hire out sell or swap him to any person and the money so arising from sale or hire of said Negro to give to the use of my children...” He gave all this attention to Daniel alone mentioning only that his other unnamed slaves be divided up equally with his children. The will was dated Aug. 15, 1845, and the twins weren’t even born until the following year.



Escaped Slave Being Pursued



Tobacco
Harvesting

(Pictures Courtesy of New York Public Library)



Escaped Slave Hiding

(Photo Courtesy of Download-Free-Pictures. Com)

Jesse and William then led their horses back to the main house, stopping at the stables to put up their saddles and unbridle and rub down their horses. And they joked with each other a bit, mainly about girls. William especially liked to joke a lot.

As they walked into the parlor in their modest plantation home, they passed by the Henry Elliot Family Bible laying on a table there. The Bible states Henry was married twice. On Sept. 20, 1827, he married Nancy Moore, daughter of James Moore and Nancy Bradley who were married on Oct. 27, 1801. James Moore was born Jan. 15, 1772, and Nancy Bradley Moore was born July 9, 1781. Henry Elliott and Nancy Moore Elliott had no children. She died on Dec. 28, 1839.

Henry married second to Mary Souther, Oct. 1, 1840. She was the daughter of Jesse Souther who was born June 6, 1774, died July 8, 1858, McDowell County, and Joan (Jane, Jean) Combs, born Dec. 25, 1782, died before 1858. Mary was born Nov. 27, 1805 and died Aug. 30, 1884. Henry Elliott was born on March 8, 1788, and died March 6 (a second entry says March 26), 1851. Henry was the son of William Elliott, born 1763 in Augusta County, Virginia, and died 1832 in McDowell County. William married Linda Middleton in 1780. William was a son of Archibald Elliott, born 1726 in Ulster, Northern Ireland, and died after 1790, Chester County, South Carolina. Archibald married in February, 1748, in Augusta County, Virginia, Sarah Clark. She was born 1729 in Augusta County, the daughter of James B. Clark, born 1704, Jamestown,

Virginia, died Aug. 20, 1778, Augusta County. James married 1725 in Augusta County Elizabeth Summers, born 1705, Augusta County, died Oct. 8, 1778, Virginia. It is from James B. Clark that the Elliotts derive their connections eventually to all the royal houses of Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Henry Elliott and Mary Souther had four children: a son Seeburn Elliott, born April 4, 1842; a daughter Martha Jane, born June 7, 1843; and the twin sons, Jesse William and William Jesse, born April 20, 1846, and named after their two grandfathers, William Elliott and Jesse Souther.



Glazed Stoneware Inkwell
And Goose Quill Pen



The Holy Bible

As William Jesse passed by the Bible, he was still in a jocular mood from the laughs in the stable with his brother. There was a newly sharpened goose quill and an inkwell on the table next to the Bible. William Jesse smiled mischievously, picked up the quill, dipped the nib in the inkwell, and irreverently wrote in the Good Book, below his birth date, “William J. Elliott is my name and to merry sum purty girl is my ame (aim). When this you see remember me. (Signed) W.J. Elliott.” Jesse William is evidently the eldest of the twins since his name appears first in the Bible followed by William. William is also called “Willi” once in the Bible so that was probably his family nickname.

Their mother, Mary Souther Elliott, was sitting in the sewing room stitching a quilt, while their sister Martha Jane was preparing dinner (luncheon) in the kitchen at the back of the house since all the slaves were off working in the fields. Now, their older brother Seeburn came in the door. He had been visiting his cousins at late Uncle Jesse Souther’s plantation all morning and stopped off briefly at Uncle Noah Souther’s place. The boys all washed up for dinner in the lavatory bowl off the kitchen. Soon, all the family sat down to eat—smoked ham, hominy grits, snapped green beans, collard greens, topped off with peach cobbler.

It was not long before the twins announced their intention of heading north, which stirred up quite a ruckus at the dining table. Their older brother Seeburn was probably loudest in opposition to their plans. And he probably advised them to talk over their plans with their Uncle Noah. We do not know when the twins headed north but it was probably sometime in the winter of 1864-1865. They were probably delayed three years or so by family pressure but they were more determined as the switch to worthless Confederate money for their farm products and the ever-growing lists of the young war dead were posted on the walls of Old Fort and, especially, around the courthouse in Marion, the McDowell County seat, which reached more than 500 before the end of 1864. In addition, they had to fend off derision and insults from hard-core Confederate citizens because they refused to join the rebel forces who would soon draft them into uniform.

Bur their day of flight did come. They had a big breakfast, said goodbye to their family, including their black brother Daniel. And they packed up some cornbread and biscuits, bacon, and apples stored in the cellar, some changes of clothes, bedrolls, blankets, a hatchet, rifles, and buck and hunting knives and mounted their horses before dawn and rode down Sugar Hill for the last time to the road to Asheville. Then,

they rode over the Great Smokey Mountains into Tennessee, paying a ferryman to take them across half-frozen French Broad Creek. They forded numerous creeks and small rivers. Once William Jesse's horse stepped in a watery hole and threw him in an icy creek. Jesse William had to fish him out and a farmer let them sit by the fireplace in his nearby cabin to dry out. They both got a good laugh out of that. They always liked to joke with one another.

Rebel pickets stopped them numerous times along the roads and byways as they headed to Kentucky. The farther north they rode, the more menacing became the rebel soldiers who sometimes accused them of being spies. They could be hauled in to any rebel encampment at any time, summarily tried and executed for spying as so often happened during the Civil War. The twins now became very afraid whenever they spotted a rebel soldier. So, they started hiding and sleeping in broken-down shacks and hand-built lean-tos in forests where they spread their bedrolls and blankets in the daytime and traveled only at night. It was bitter cold and they were freezing to death. It was snowing much of the time. They ferried again across the mostly iced-over Clinch River, crossed the Clinch Mountains and made their way to Kentucky, which was half rebel half Union. Now, they were halted by both rebel and Union soldiers, telling compelling stories each time to keep themselves free and out of jail. But many times it was a close call, so they spent much of their time in hiding from both armies.



White-tailed deer buck for dinner.

They had run out of food by now and like Indians and pioneers before them they took to hunting for wild game. Both twins were crack shots having hunted since they were boys. Once, in the moonlight, they were lucky and spotted a deer buck with an eight-point rack munching away on a moss-laden tree trunk to refill his tank after a strenuous rutting season. It was a super trophy he would have loved to have taken back in the hills and woods of McDowell County. With a wintry breeze in his face, Jessie struggled for a place to mount his rifle in the woods. A snow-laden tree branch was too unsteady and a stump in the wrong place. So, he spread flat on the snowy ground and aimed his rifle. He dropped the buck with one shot. The twins carved the deer up with their ivory-handled buck knives and hunting knives. The fresh venison kept their bellies full for several days.

Other times, they shot marsh rabbits and a possum or two. Another time, they bagged two wild Muscovy ducks. They found a clutch of sarsaparilla and boiled them some drinks. Otherwise, they drank straight out of the creeks and ponds they passed or chomped on snow.

Their destination was Springfield, Illinois, the hometown of their hero Abraham Lincoln. Their love, awe, and attraction for Lincoln might be compared to modern day youth's worship of such rock stars as John

Lennon or Elvis Presley.



The Lawyer Lincoln



President Abraham Lincoln



Lincoln in His Office

The twins crossed the Ohio River from Kentucky into Illinois probably at Flynn's Ferry, Crittenden County, Kentucky. The ferry, along the historic Saline Trace at Weston carved over centuries by bison, deer, elk and other animals on their way to the salt licks in Illinois. This route was vital to the free movement of Union troops north to south and was hotly contested by Confederate raiding parties and Union occupation troops until the end of the war. The ferry was operated by George Flynn, who turned the former animal trace on the north-south way to the salt licks into a wagon road. It was at the intersection of two main roads of the day, Weston to Princeton and Caseyville to Marion.

The area was also infested with Rebel guerillas who burned the county courthouse at Marion in January, 1865, as well as seven other courthouses. The twins were in constant danger in this area of Kentucky and there must have been times when their hair stood on end. So, they had now to finally cross through probably the most dangerous part of their journey and probably where they heard their last gunfire and cannon fire in the war during frequent skirmishes near the ferry.

Once across the Ohio, the twins rode as fast as they could to Springfield. They heard somewhere along the way that the war had ended with Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, to Union General Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865. They were overjoyed but, in Springfield, they learned their beloved

Lincoln had been assassinated at Ford's Theatre on April 14, by John Wilkes Booth, the eminent actor and Southern sympathizer. The twins were in shock and disbelief. An American president had never before been assassinated.

The entire North was gripped in deep mourning and Lincoln's lifeless body began a long railway journey home, with stops in Baltimore, New York, Buffalo, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, and several other cities. But he was on the way home for a gigantic outpouring of grief and affection.

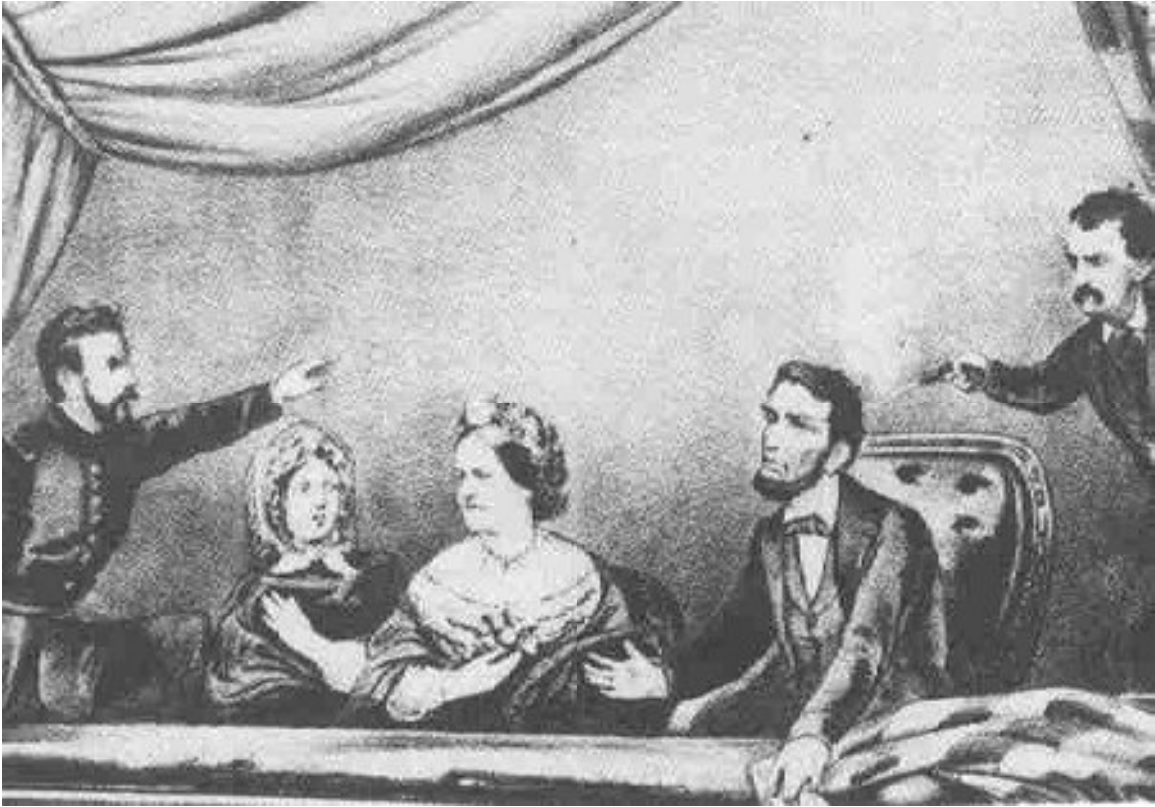
The twins visited his Springfield home now decorated in black crepe for mourning and went to see Lincoln's horse Old Bob, sometimes called Robin, who was being decked out for the funeral procession, an honored spot just behind the funeral chariot or hearse. The chariot was a gold, silver and crystal hearse loaned by the city of St. Louis. The boys then went to the railroad depot for the arrival of Lincoln's body, jostling with crowds of weeping but eerily silent mourners. The twins felt themselves crying as Lincoln's casket was taken from the train and put in the chariot with great ceremony and fanfare. But they didn't care who saw them because so many others were also weeping.

Then, they headed for the Public Square where they pushed their way through the crowds for an up-close view of the solemn, yet exciting, funeral ceremonies, even viewing Lincoln's body, and the procession from the Old State Capitol to the borrowed sepulcher in Oak Ridge Cemetery where Lincoln was to be interred in more solemn and mournful ceremonies. At the square, they paused a moment as Jesse pointed his finger at Lincoln's law offices on the second floor of a black crepe-draped building. The Sugar Hill boys, who had left their horses at the livery stables, ran alongside the chariot all the way from the Public Square to the cemetery, eyeing numerous dignitaries who were in the procession and listening to the mournful dirge of the marching funeral band.

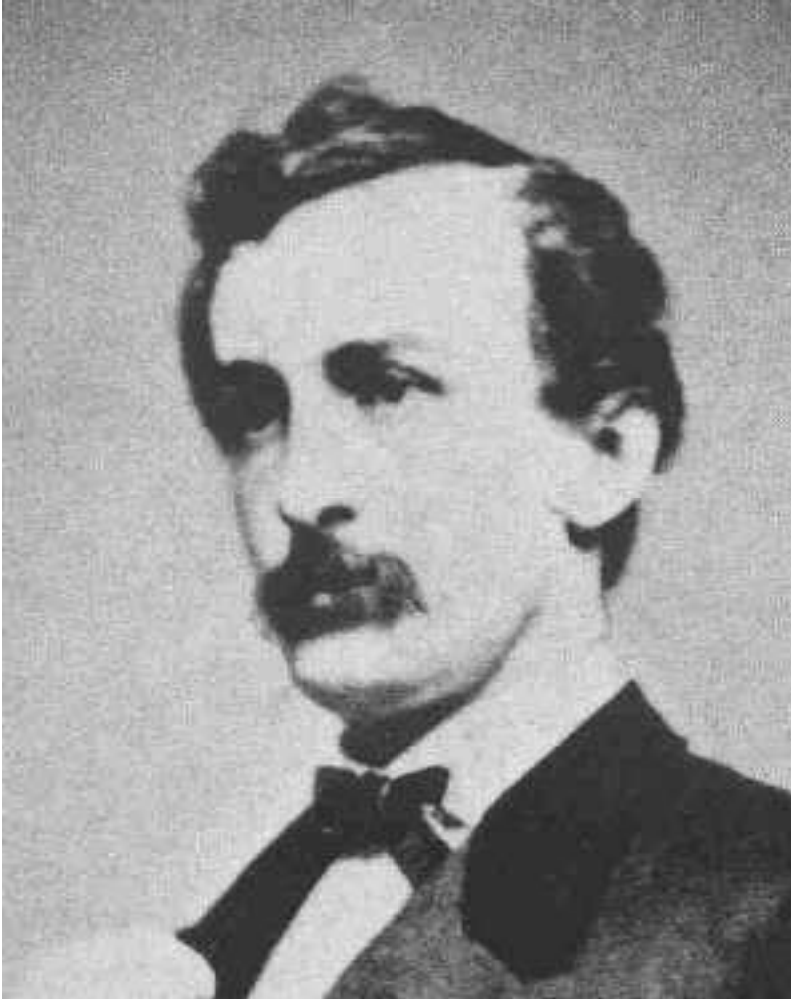
They jockeyed for a front place position before the sepulcher to get the best view of the mournful goings-on. There was the deathly looking widow Mary Todd Lincoln and her surviving children, governors, senators, congressmen, local bureaucrats and soldiers guarding the casket. There were the final eulogies and prayers and the casket was placed inside the tomb and the stone doors shut with armed guards posted outside. Hundreds upon hundreds of mourners stood atop the hill overlooking the sepulcher, to the left and right of the sacred place and in the very front where the Sugar Hill boys managed to squeeze their way.

This was the most momentous event the twins would experience in their lifetime and it was mentioned numerous times in newspaper articles and in the obituary for Jesse William seven decades later in Quay County, New Mexico. "It was the biggest event that ever happened in my life," he said many times and at his huge 90th birthday celebration at his Quay County ranch. As the mourners faded away, Jesse and William were slow to leave. They wanted to touch the tomb doors but the guards kept chasing them back. But they stayed so long and persisted so much the guards finally let them come close and touch the tomb, say a little prayer and then leave. The guards were glad at last to get rid of the nuisance.

Now, the twins had to decide what to do for their future. They looked around for work and were offered jobs as freighters and this they worked at together for the next two decades of their lives. These jobs were in great contrast to the relative ease they had back on the Sugar Hill plantation. But they were driven by a keen lust for adventure and a desire to see new sights and meet new people.



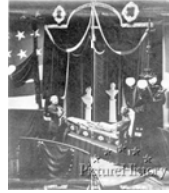
The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln
(Courtesy Library of Congress)



John Wilkes Booth, the Assassin of Lincoln
(Courtesy Library of Congress)



Ford's Theater,
Washington, where
Lincoln Assassinated



Lincoln in Death



Lincoln Funeral Train



Lincoln Home,
Springfield,
In Mourning



Lincoln Funeral,
Springfield,
Public Square



Lincoln's Gold, Silver
And Crystal Funeral
Chariot



Funeral Procession
Springfield



Lincoln's Horse
Old Bob, sometimes
Called Robin, which
Followed the Hearse



Lincoln and Herndon
Law Offices
(The author has a brick
taken from the window.)

(I wish to thank Picture History for use of their pictures in this chapter.)



Lincoln's Original Tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery on the day of his Burial in Springfield. The twins Jesse William and William Jesse Are Among the Crowd of Mourners, a Few Can Be Seen Atop the Hill.
(Courtesy of Picture History)



Lincoln's Modern Tomb

The twins freighted early from the train station at Sedalia, Missouri, and later from near Fayetteville, Arkansas, hauling merchandise of all kinds to small towns and villages without transportation connections. Most times their covered wagons were pulled by six oxen over deep ruts made by settlers over the years. Each of their wagons could hold six tons of merchandise. Mostly they walked alongside their oxen or wagons. Other roads were merely old Indian paths. They ferried across larger rivers and streams and forded narrower creeks. They slept in their wagons or in the open air. They met pioneers on their way west along the way and sometimes a friendly Indian or rested at an entire Indian encampment or farming village. They bathed in the creeks and rivers they crossed, always keeping a bar of strong soap at hand.



Oxen Pulling Wagon

Jesse married his first wife, an unknown woman, during his travels in Arkansas. They moved to Texas in 1869. They had a son named William (Willie) Lee, born 1873, Denton, Texas, died 1951. Jesse and his brother William came home one day to find his wife gone, the baby son alone and crying and a note nearby saying, “You’ll never beat me with your ten-dollar boot again you sunuvabitch.” Jesse searched for her over many months but she had completely disappeared. My granduncle Willie, that baby son, searched for her most of his life but never found a clue to her whereabouts. The twins loaded baby Willie in a freight wagon and continued their freighting in Texas.

One day while unloading freight in Hallettsville, La Vaca County, in South Texas, Jesse spied a beautiful young girl who had come to town from her cotton plantation nearby. He couldn’t take his eyes off of her and got up the nerve to talk to her. It was love at first sight. William had finished unloading the freight and watching over the boy Willie Lee. Ellen Caroline Perry was swept off her feet by everything—the twin brother, the cute little boy without a mother to care for him, the romance of freighting and the adventurous tales told by the twins. Jesse and Ellen decided to elope and were married as quickly as the law allowed.

At the great house on the plantation, Ellen’s mother, Sarah Ann Perry, was appalled. Her daughter was giving up her life of ease on the plantation with many servants and farmhands, some her former slaves, for a life with this poor, dust-covered freighter living out of a covered wagon. Sarah Ann (maiden name Sallie Hallett, and the county seat named perhaps after her father but this hypothesis has serious genealogical problems), a native of Kentucky, had been widowed twice. Her first husband was David Ives, who received a land patent in Texas in 1846, ten years after the siege of the Alamo. They had a daughter David Ann. She married second on Nov. 13, 1853, to George T. Perry, born 1804 in Tennessee. Their children were a son Columbus (Lum) and the daughter Ellen Caroline. Ellen Caroline was born Feb. 4, 1860, on the plantation in La Vaca County, Texas, and died Aug. 31, 1935, on the ranch in Quay County, New Mexico.



Downtown Hallettsville, 1845-2004



Hallettsville, Texas, Courthouse

Sarah Ann Perry was so outraged with this marriage, especially to a southern turncoat and now a Yankee, that she disowned her then and there and never spoke to her again as long as they both were alive. When Ellen Caroline visited her brother and sister in later years, mother and daughter passed one another in the hallways of the great house in complete and stoney silence.



Quanah Parker, Last Chief of the Comanches



Quanah Parker, Chief
Kwahadi Band, Comanches



Shaman-Chief Geronimo
Of the Chiracahua Apaches



Apache Warriors

Probably for the next decade—no one knows for sure—Jesse, William, baby Willie and Ellen freighted across Texas, sometimes dodging Comanche Indians in the north which the Texas Rangers and the U.S. Cavalry were fighting to put on reservations. Sometimes, when they drew closer to El Paso, they dodged Apache Indians. Sometimes, they had to outrun and outgun marauding bandits on their way. Freighting was not an easy life and Ellen grew tired of this gypsy and often dangerous life and wanted to settle down.

For years, she had cooked out of doors on good days, gathered drinking water from creeks, rivers and ponds when their water barrels ran dry, and relied on Jesse and his twin William to shoot game for most of their meals—mainly deer, elk, buffalo, jackrabbits and birds such as ducks, geese, quail, and prairie chickens. She had bathed in those same waters and washed clothes in them. Such staples as coffee, cornmeal, wheat flour, sugar and salt were purchased in larger towns and carried in their wagons. So were needles, thread, cloth for making clothes, and blankets. Their sons Walter and Earl, the latter a cowboy-soldier who died at the Second Battle of the Marne in World War I, were born in the freight wagons.



© Francis Livingston

Covered and freight wagons on the trail.

So, in 1889, the Elliotts joined in the great Sooner land rush into the Oklahoma Indian Territory. Jesse always said he had been a Sooner. Today, many consider a Sooner one of the land-rush pioneers into the opening up of the Indian Territory to white settlers, but which in that era were illegal immigrants who jumped the gun and grabbed the land before the homesteaders even entered at the legal time. Many of those illegal land grabbers were lawmen, their relatives and even government land agents. When the settlers rushed in, they found these cheaters had already claimed most of the best farming land and town sites. And the territory was loaded with outlaws of every description that had flooded the territory.

At any rate, the federal government had decreed that the newly opened land would be granted on a first-come, first-claimed basis. The government opened up two million acres to homesteaders. The government set the time for entering the new territory and staking out claims at high noon, April 22, 1889.

The Elliotts joined the throngs estimated at 50,000 people lined up along the predetermined entrance points and poised to jump at full speed into Oklahoma to stake out their claim. They had come a long and rugged way to get there—over rocks and brush and mountains, through gullies and gulches, and across creeks and rivers. They were true hardscrabble pioneers now probably facing the Red River demarcating the Texas-Oklahoma border on the north.

The land run began with a cannon blast, bugle calls, and faint sounds of gunshots fired by soldiers farther away down the immense line of homesteaders. The ground shook with the thunder of hoof beats of lightning-fast stallions, the creaking of wooden wheels on covered wagons, footfalls of those running, splashing of those swimming, the screams of whips as men and women lashed the horses pulling their buggies, and even the whirring of bicycles by bikers. There were also the screams of the dying as people overturned in the rivers and creeks and drowned and those fording the streams caught in quicksand and sinking to their deaths. Few of the frenzied land rushers stopped to give them aid.

The Elliotts probably crossed over in two wagons: one with Jesse William, Ellen, and their children, and the other with William Jesse, who had his horse tethered to his wagon, and little Willie, now 16 years old.

They were both experienced freighters and knew how to maneuver and outmaneuver their many rivals, many of whom beat them with their whips as they sought to surge ahead. It was truly a frenzied day in infamy.



Land Rush into Oklahoma, 1889

The Elliotts soon found themselves outside a small crossroads with a saloon that had already been built by the real and crooked Sooners. No one today knows where the saloon was located and no one probably ever will. Suffice it to say, the saloon was loaded with outlaws.

The Ramson-Murray Saloon at Ingalls was a favorite hideout of the Doolin-Dalton gang led by Bill Doolin, king of the Oklahoma outlaws. Others in the gang, also called the Wild Bunch, included “Tulsa Jack” Blake, “Little Dick” West, Charles “Dynamite Dick” Clifton, and George “Red Buck” Waightman. They were all cold-blooded killers and the most notorious outlaws and bandits in Oklahoma. To stand up against them meant certain death and did many, many times.



The Ramson-Murray Saloon, Ingalls, Oklahoma



Bill Doolin, King of the Outlaws



Bill Doolin riddled with bullets



"Little Dick" West dead.



Sheriff's Deputies Bring in "Tulsa Jack" Blake, Dead not Alive

William Jesse Elliott somehow entangled himself in this unknown saloon in an unknown crossroads with an unknown outlaw gang member after a poker game. William Jesse from Sugar Hill was decked out in his chaps, purple sash wrapped around his midriff, red bandana around his neck, boots, spurs, and cowboy hat. He had mounted his horse and faced off in a shootout in front of the saloon with the swaggering, young and brash outlaw with his nickel-plated pistol and his clanging silver spurs. One shot and the boy from Sugar Hill dropped from his horse dead. He was 43 years old. It was an unequal shootout since William Jesse was mounted on his horse while the outlaw stood ground in front of the saloon. Jesse William, seeing his beloved twin drenched in blood, gunned down his killer but took a shot in his right leg that left him a gimp the rest of his life.

What little is known about the shootout comes from Ima Elliott, a first cousin of my mother Arzetta Slane, both grand-daughters of Jesse William and Ellen Caroline Elliott. Ima, a famous woman rodeo star who was married many times, said she got this part of the story from her grandmother Ellen Caroline. And she said the cause of the shootout was probably an argument over gambling. Somebody cheated somebody. And, she said, the killer was a member of an outlaw gang. But she could not remember any more. Other members of the Elliott family refused to discuss the matter.

She said that Jesse William was so fearful of the gang's reprisal for him killing their buddy, he grabbed the body of William Jesse, leaving William's wagon and horses behind, except his riding horse which he tethered to his own wagon, and stampeded all the way back into Texas in their covered wagon as fast as their six horses could run. Ellen Caroline was also terribly upset, having watched the shootout, two killings and the wounding of her husband with her own eyes. But she was of tough pioneer stock and managed to dress Jesse William's wound as he raced along, trying to comfort him as best she could as well as Willie Lee, now 16 years old but scared out of his wits. Willie soon took his turn at driving the horses while his stepmother tended his father on the wooden floor of the wagon and several of the Elliott children also hunkered down on the floor. All the while the wagon bounced up and down, up and down, tilted side to side, side to side as it forded the Red River and crossed over rocks, ditches and hills in North Texas. His mouth was parched from the horror he had just watched—his friend and uncle after whom he was named was lying dead in the wagon--and by the constant dirt and dust kicked up by the racing horses. And his stepmother, from time to time, filled the tin cup she used to give her husband water and held it to Willie's lips so he could slake his parched mouth and throat.

Nevertheless, it was a mournful, painful, and lonely return. Jesse William had never been without the fun-loving William Jesse his entire life. William Jesse had not been only his twin brother and look alike but his best friend, constant work companion, confidant, and helper. And he was still in a state of shock, bleeding from his own wound, when he, Ellen and the shaken Willie Lee buried William Jesse on an open prairie in Texas somewhere north of Fort Worth. Jesse William always told the story about how he used to go rabbit hunting in what later became downtown Fort Worth and one wonders if he sometimes visited his twin's lonely grave not far away on that lonesome prairie. He never spoke of the gunfight himself.

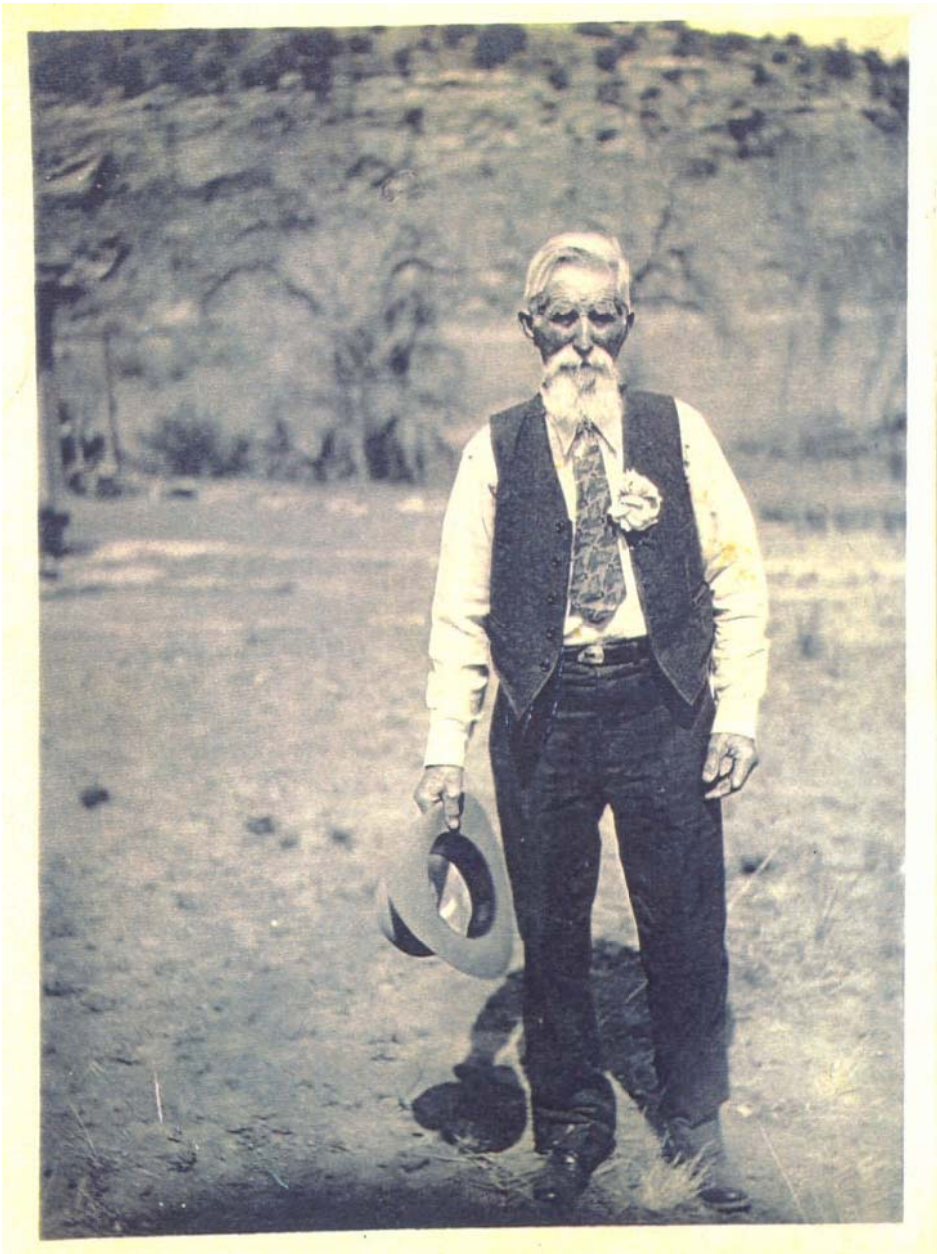
Jesse William and his family settled west of Fort Worth in Floyd County where they were pioneers just after the Comanche massacres of settlers. He said that he saw fresh graves everywhere of pioneers killed by Indians. He continued freighting from the nearest railroad station at Hereford, Texas. He freighted mainly now into New Mexico, and later five-day trips out of Las Vegas, N.M., and still later from Logan, N.M., in Quay County when the railroad reached that town. He moved permanently to the territory of New Mexico in 1899, 13 years before it became a state.

In New Mexico, he crossed newly opened wagon roads and old Indian trails, mainly across waterless desert filled with yucca and cane cactus, mesquite and bunch grass or over lands nearer water with plush grasslands, pinyon pines, shinnery oak and scrub juniper. And there were neat groves of cottonwoods lining the creeks and rivers.

Oft-times, he ran into groups of rustlers herding their stolen cattle with cleverly changed brands to ready buyers in Texas. The Comanches used to rustle these cattle and sell to crooked cattlemen for a few trinkets or a quart of whiskey. The Comanches always came out on the short end of the stick.

My grandfather, Amos Franklin Slane, said his father Samuel Joy Slane bought the Patrillo Ranch along Pajarito Creek near Santa Rosa, in the Pecos Valley of New Mexico, from Jesse Elliott. Santa Rosa is the county seat of Guadalupe County, adjacent to Quay County. So, Jesse Elliott's first ranch in New Mexico was apparently located there. The courthouse there shows no record of such a sale.

Jesse would have laughed as the cowboys told and sang stories of Pecos Bill. One famous story was of the Perpetual Motion Ranch about a dude from England, his stuffy wife, and their daughter Bluefoot Sue. The Englishman had just bought a ranch and insisted on counting every steer, cow and calf to make sure the seller's contract was correct. The cattle were rounded up around a conical mountain where cattle grazed in winter at the bottom and in summer high up in the hills. The cowboys herding the cattle for the Englishman's count kept driving them round and round the mountain. On the twelfth trip around, the Englishman asked about a white-faced steer, the most expensive in the herd, and the cowboys told him there were many of them, which pleased the dude very much. Later, when Pecos Bill heard of this trickery, he rounded up as many head of cattle he could find and added them to the dude's herd.



Jesse William Elliott



Ellen Caroline Elliott in Her Garden



Ellen Caroline Elliott on Steps
To Ranch House



Ellen Caroline Elliott Before a Tall Yucca Plant

On his travels, Jesse Elliott often drove his wagons through Quay County along Pajarito Creek. And when that former Comanche and later Apache land was opened up for homesteading, he filed for land there on January 15, 1907 and moved his family there west of Tucumcari Mountain and along the creek about eight miles west of Tucumcari, the Quay County seat. He owned a 28,000-acre ranching empire, one of the largest spreads in that area of New Mexico. It was a ranch with grey and sandy-colored hills and mountains, tawny-yellow and red mesas, bluffs, wild flowers, including buttercups (the author wrote his first poem about these buttercups at age 6), and grasses that gave off livid hues of red, purple, and green. Sundowns and sunups were painted in almost every color and huge cumulus clouds hung heavily everywhere. It was in the staked plains region called El Llano Estacado by the ancient Spanish explorers. It was called the staked plains probably for the almost endless stands of pole-like yucca cactus growing everywhere and a place where water was sparse almost everywhere.



Yucca



Buttercups



Field of Buttercups

Jesse and Ellen had eight children, four sons and four daughters: Guy Elliott, who died in California near Sacramento; Gordon Elliott, died near Los Angeles, California; Earl Elliott, born March 10, 1887, died in the Battle of the Marne, France, World War I, July 19, 1918; Walter Elliott, died in New Mexico; Dora Flora Elliott, born Sept. 18, 1891, Texas, died Jan. 16, 1931, on her brother Gordon's ranch, Tucumcari, New Mexico; Callie Elliott, died July 1991, Los Angeles; Jesse Elliott; and Ida Elliott, died in California.



Deer Were Not Hard To Find on the Elliott Ranch



Horned Toads Were Common on the Elliott Ranch and the
Author Found Them Very Friendly and Played with Them Often



Jackrabbit



Another "Horny" Toad



Quail



Wild Turkeys Were Abundant on the Elliott Ranch

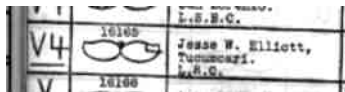


Rattlesnakes Were Common Throughout the Elliott Ranch



Coyotes Even Invaded the Yard Around the Ranch House Looking for Chickens

Jesse was an avid hunter and his ranch contained many white-tailed deer, cottontails, black-tailed jackrabbits, foxes, raccoons, pocket gophers, squirrels, horned Texas and sand dune lizards, prairie chickens, doves, quail, turkey, hawks, and owls. There was also an abundance of coyotes, roadrunners, prairie dogs, and rattlesnakes. He continued to hunt even when he was 92 years old, killing venison for his supper table. It was a habit springing from his Sugar Hill days and nourished on his numerous freighting journeys across four states--Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, and New Mexico.



Jesse Elliott's Brand, the V4,
Spectacles with Cracked Left Lens

(Courtesy of Harold Kilmer, Clovis, New Mexico
NMGenWeb Coordinator for Curry, De Baca,
Guadalupe, Lea, Roosevelt & Quay Counties, N.M.)



Tucumcari Mountain Was in Sight of the Elliott Ranch

The Elliots had heard the legend of Tucumcari Mountain, first a lookout for the Comanches and later for the Apaches, soon after they procured their ranch only a few miles away. Following is a synopsis of the legend by the Tucumcari/Quay County Chamber of Commerce:

“Apache Chief Wautonomah was nearing the end of his time on earth and was troubled by the question of who would succeed him as ruler of the tribe. In a classic portrait of love and competition, his two finest braves, Tonopah and Tocom, were not only rivals but sworn enemies of one another, but were both vying for the hand of Kari...the chief’s daughter,” who was in love with Tocom.

The chief told the two braves, “Tonight you must take your long knives and meet in combat to settle the matter between you. He who survives shall be the chief and have for his squaw Kari...”

The two met with knives outstretched while Kari watched in hiding nearby. Tonopah stabbed Tocom in the heart and Kari dashed from her hiding place and killed Tonopah and then herself. When Chief Wautonomah was shown the tragic scene, he took Kari’s knife and plunged it into his own heart. He cried out, “Tocom-Kari.” So, the mountain stands as a “stark reminder of unfulfilled love.”

“Some credit the folk tale to the Apache Chief Geronimo but others believe Tucumcari is derived from the Comanche word *tukanukaru*, which means to be in wait for something.” And the mountain was known as a Comanche lookout many years ago.



The Elliott Ranch from the Mountaintop



The Elliott Ranch House



The Elliott Ranch House Showing the Porch and Veranda



The Back Side of the Ranch House With Fence

He remained a tough cowboy all his life. Despite his leg wound, which made him limp, he rode horseback with the best of his cowboys on roundups and cattle drives. Once while rounding up cattle for branding, he caught a lasso on his left index finger, which pulled the upper part the finger off. Everyone said he took his bandana, tied it around the stub and kept right on rounding up his cattle never saying a word or showing a grimace of pain.



A Small Herd of Jesse Elliott's Cattle

Earlier in New Mexico, his descendants said he used to jump his horse over Billy the Kid's grave near Fort Sumner, which had become a ritual for cowpokes of those times.



Billy the Kid's Grave,
Outside Fort Sumner Military Cemetery



Billy the Kid

Several times, the notorious Mexican bandit Pancho Villa and his gang invaded his ranch at nighttime and stole all his horses, leaving his tired steeds behind. Then, Villa would return from a raid into Colorado, return his horses, and ride back into Mexico on his own stallions. On those raids on the Elliott ranch, my mother, Arzetta Slane, said the Elliott household and their cowhands huddled with their rifles and pistols in his fortress-like stone ranch house fearful of being killed—Villa had killed many people before. But, she said, only a few shots were fired as some macho Mexican screamed a few curses, fired off his rifle, and galloped toward the house in a mock attack, only to turn back at the last minute when he saw and heard the bursts and flames of gunfire from the defenders. “Everybody was really scared,” she said.

It reminded Jesse of the old freighting days when he sometimes had to dodge bandits.



A Few of Jesse Elliott's Horses



Pancho Villa
On the Move
At Siete Leguas



Generalissimo Pancho Villa



Pancho Villa's Bandits Execute a Landowner



Pancho Villa Before a Raid



The Notorious Mexican Bandit Pancho Villa



Pancho Villa
Bandit Machismo

Jesse Elliott built a schoolhouse on his ranch for his grandchildren and his hired hands' children, including his Mexican vaqueros or cowboys who were often decked out in their embroidered vests and trousers embedded with shining copper and silver studs and ruby beads, and colorful sombreros on their heads. The state of New Mexico paid the teacher while Jesse Elliott gave her room and board. The school was open to children off the ranch as well and many Mexican-Americans attended classes there. My mother, who lived with her grandparents on the ranch several years and attended the school, said that she could count in Spanish long before she could in English. But Jesse preferred black people over Mexicans and frequently flayed Mexican men with his bullwhip, calling them lazy and cursing them in Spanish when they crossed him. After all, his beloved half-brother Daniel who had taught him so much was a former black slave.

Jesse also allowed archaeologists to dig for fossils on his ranch. Some say many of the dinosaur fossils excavated there were turned over to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.



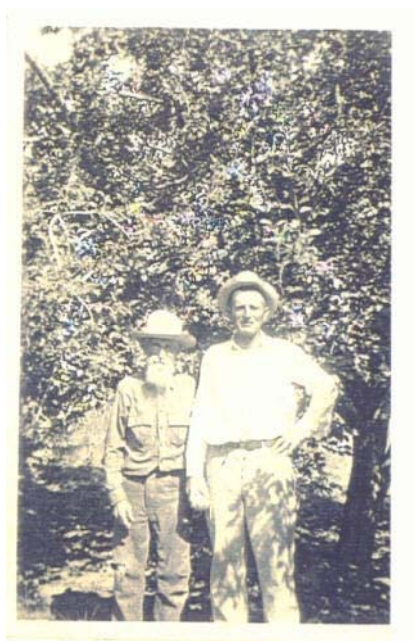
Seven of Jesse Elliott's Cowboys

Jesse never owned a car. People craned their necks to gawk at him in Tucumcari, the seat of Quay County, traveling in his hack or riding on horseback, his beard white as snow and his posture straight and elegant as a duke. He disdained machines. There was no refrigeration on his ranch and the icehouse, dug below ground, was kept cold by putting the winter's ice there. He did not build a windmill and there was never any electricity on the ranch. Light came from kerosene lamps or candles. He did dig a well, however, so that Ellen didn't have to carry water up from the river.

He always had fresh vegetables and fruit handy. Ellen Caroline kept a garden down from the ranch house near the Pajarito Creek and canned many vegetables, fruits, jellies, and jams for the winter. Jesse cultivated the garden himself in the old-fashioned way by horse and hand plough. And Jesse, remembering his orchard on the Sugar Hill plantation, planted many apple trees and other fruits in his orchard near the river. He also kept chickens, ducks, geese, and hogs. He made his own southern-style sausage using the hog guts to hold the meat and smoked his own southern ham. He forbade any fish on his table after nearly choking to death on a fishbone from his catch in the river. So, there was no fish fry with hush puppies ever again.



Jesse and Ellen in Their Orchard

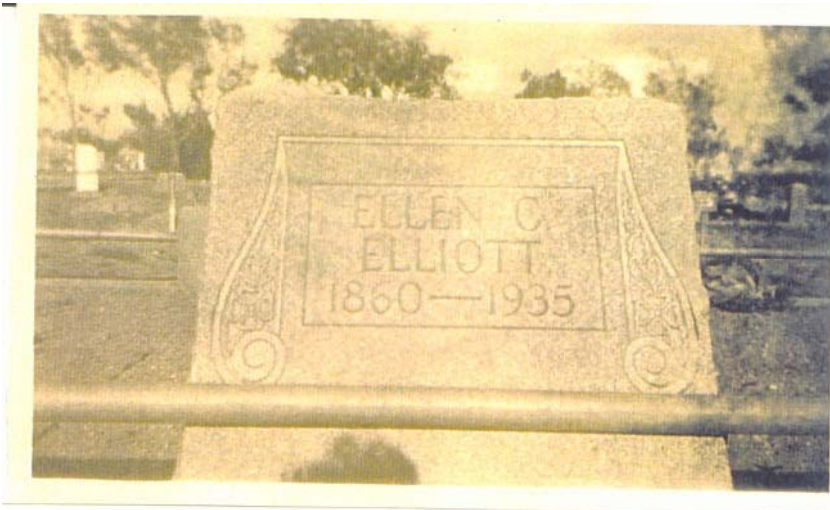


Jesse and Youngest Son Gordon
Holding Hands
In the Orchard



Jesse and Ellen Elliott
With my Grandmother Dora Flora
In the Orchard
On the Elliott Ranch

Jesse's love for his Ellen Caroline never wavered. He threw a surprise party for her on her sixty-ninth birthday on February 4, 1929, and invited relatives, friends, ranchers, and old timers to the party, which served turkey killed on the hunt. She received many wonderful presents and never suspected anything was afoot until the cars started pulling up near the ranch house. Jesse was 14 years older than Ellen. He lost the love of his life on Aug. 31, 1935, and lived only three years after she died.

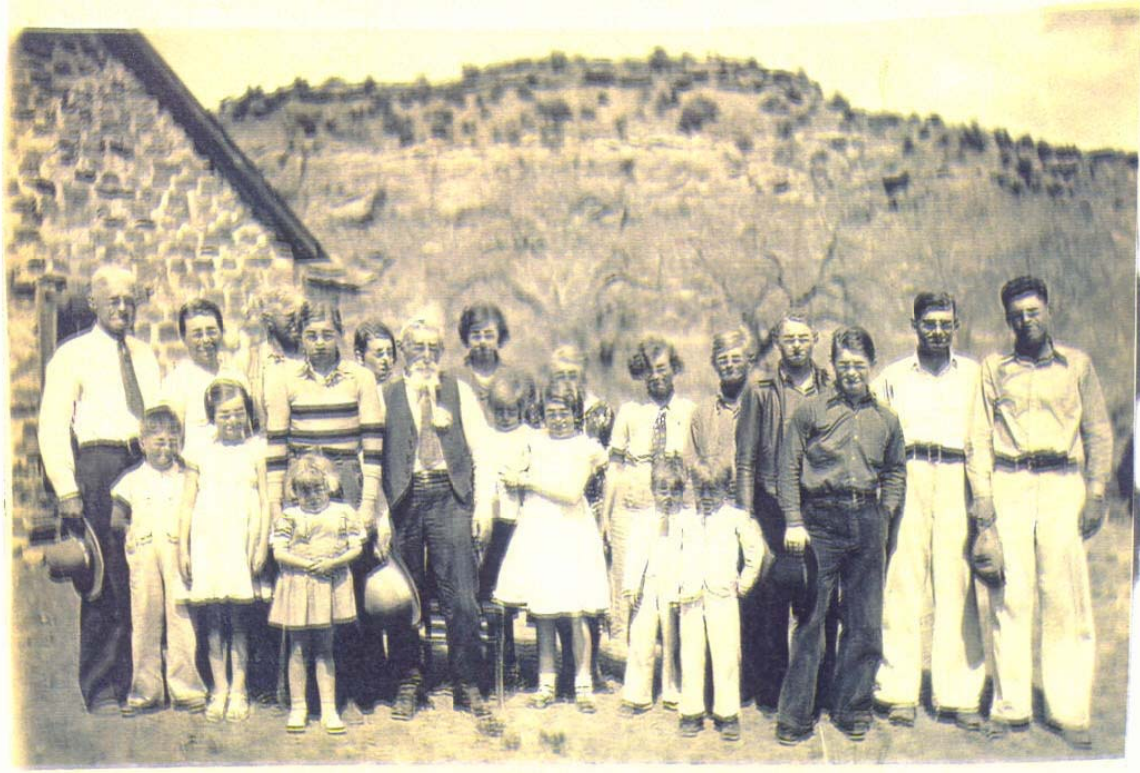


Ellen's Gravestone Beside Jesse's in Tucumcari City Cemetery

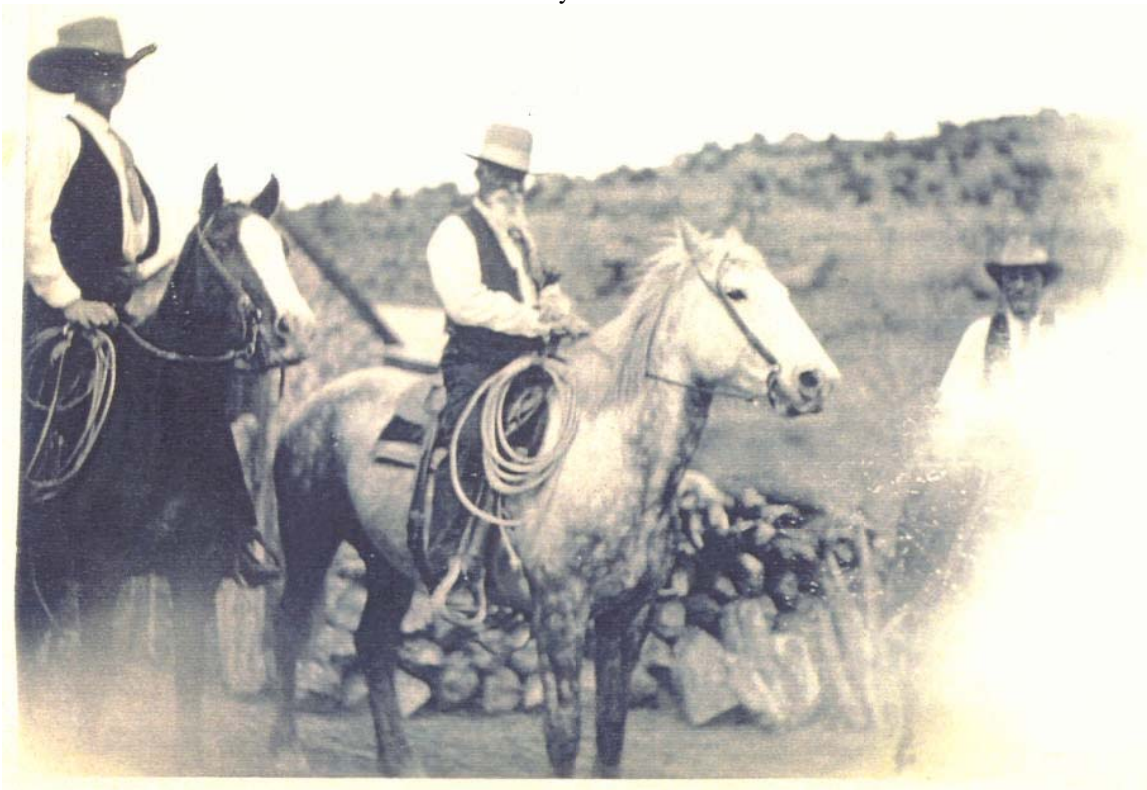


Jesse William Elliott's Grave in Tucumcari City Cemetery

His friends, cowboys, vaqueros, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren threw a spectacular birthday party for him on his 90th birthday on his ranch. I remember him holding me tightly on his knee, hugging me and me putting my arms around his neck and diddling with his beautiful white beard while he giggled playfully. I was six years old. His sons and cowboys rode in on their horses and Jesse mounted his own white stallion. They showed us a spectacular parade prancing about the ranch house, porch and veranda, while everyone shouted and sang happy birthday to him.



Some of the Children, Grandchildren, and Great Grandchildren at Jesse's 90th Birthday Party.
The Author Is the Second Little Boy at Left in Front Row in White Suit.



Jesse Elliott on Horseback With Two of His Cowboys on His 90th Birthday



Friends and Relatives at the Birthday Party



Two of Jesse's Daughters
My Grandaunt Callie and My Grandmother Dora Flora
Playing at a Shootout in the Orchard



Jesse's Daughter Dora Flora, My Grandmother



My Grandaunt Callie Riding Her White Stallion



Jesse's Son Guy Elliott and Guy's Youngest Son Rex

He remained a staunch Republican all his life and his hero was **always** Abraham Lincoln. He once

threatened to shoot the Democrat sheriff who came to his ranch to solicit his vote if he ever stepped foot on his land again. The sheriff never returned.



Abraham Lincoln

Jesse William Elliott fell ill for two weeks in the winter of 1938. News reports attributed his illness to heart trouble following overwork. One evening at the ranch house, he went to the giant fireplace and vomited. He struggled back to bed where he fell dead at 6:30 p.m. on January 16, 1938. He was 92 years old. He had been strong enough only a month earlier to go hunting in the hills and woods on his ranch. He bagged a white-tailed deer. It was his last hunt. He was also building a road on his ranch in the area to be irrigated by the new Conchas Dam. His first son, Willie Lee, was there to care for him.

A great adventure and an era had ended. Jesse joined his beloved Ellen Caroline, his twin William Jesse, and his black brother Daniel in heaven and he could visit his sister Martha and his brother Seeborn. Now, he could talk also with his beloved Lincoln, the reason for his being his entire life. I'm certain the conversation was fascinating.

What was said at the death of Lincoln could also be said of Jesse's death. "He now belongs to the ages."

(All the Elliott Family Pictures Used in This Chapter Are Courtesy of Joseph V. Phillips.)