

A Whiskachitta Community tragedy: Henry Hill Cryer and Ima Jane Jones

I am constantly impressed with the way life brings things together when one makes an effort to collect fragments here and there over time.

I have no memory of the first time I heard a vague reference to a shooting of a man by his wife. The reference did not give many details, no location and only one name. I usually tend to forget such comments. However, the name Hill Cryer stuck with me. I did not know anything about Hill Cryer.

Much later while researching the huge Cryer family I ran across a Henry Hill Cryer (1912-1933). I asked a few questions of family and nobody could tell me anything. I found Ima Jane Jones (1907-1992) listed as his wife another time but I was off on another trail and had no knowledge of her background. One day I located the record of his father, William Dae Cryer, a grandson of William Riley Cryer (1818-1902). This W. R. Cryer moved into Vernon Parish west of now 171 in the general Neame area about 1840. He and his wife Prudence Miller Cryer lived in the Bevil Precinct, Jasper Co, Texas in 1835 but were in Louisiana in the 1840 Census. Daniel Cryer, Sr., my g-great grandfather, and William Riley's uncle was in the area about the same time. William Riley (1818) is my grandfather's name sake—William Riley Cryer (1862-1944).

Henry Hill Cryer is a brother to Archie Dae Cryer (1906-1955) who has been identified as one of the early preachers at the Mill Creek Church. Henry is buried in the Miller Cemetery, Vernon Ph, and Ima is buried in the Pine Island Cemetery, Vernon Ph, LA.

Becoming involved with the Fort Polk Heritage Project changed my focus from family to community. I became aware of the Jones family, a Heritage Family from the Whiskachitta Community. The Wiley L. Jones (married to Nancy Hunt) family named their children in an unique system of each name starting with an 'I'; Ida M (married James Hall)., Ima Jane (married Henry Hill Cryer), Ina Alice (married John Gill LeBleu), Illa Willie, Ira Irene (married Homer Craft, s/o John and Mary Ella Cryer Craft), Iza Ray (died as a youth), Ipa, Iba L. (married Levie M. Jones), and Ita Vae (married James Shackelford)..

The bits and pieces began to come together without my awareness, October 08, 2010. On that day Garsie James was taken to Whiskachitta for a tour with a focus on Whiskachitta schools, church, and homestead of Fate Smith. The importance of this day to this story was that Garsie, 93 years old and born on Whiskachitta in the James Community, had not visited this area in almost 70 years

and his being there started him thinking and recalling happenings in the community during his time on the range until 1942.

On October 12, 2010, a photo of a log home with about a dozen people lined up in front of it was given to Harold Johnson and I by Delton Bailey. Delton was being interviewed as a source for pictures of the Whiskachitta Community area. After leaving Mr. Bailey's home we were passing through Rosepine and saw Garsie James. We hailed Garsie to say hello. While talking to him in a parking lot we showed him the photo Delton had just given us. He immediately said that is where the shooting took place.

The photo was of the Daniel Hubbard James homestead. His grandson, Maurice James, had told the story of how the accidental shooting occurred in a previous interview without naming the individuals. With this information, the bits and pieces fell into place and the puzzle became a story, a tragic one, of a moment in the history of life on Whiskachitta Creek. Henry Hill Cryer died at the old Daniel Hubbard James home site, April 09, 1932, where he and his wife Ima Jane were living as newlyweds married, December 10, 1931. Ima Jane taught school at the Whiskachitta School.

All this mayhem was created by the unexpected presence of a squirrel. As Tressie Craft Chitty said, It was rare to see a squirrel but when one showed there was a scramble to kill it--food on the table. Food was hard to come by during the Great Depression. Wild game was hunted tenaciously.

The actual story of the tragic shooting is captured in the first Newsletter of 2011 reprinted from an earlier interview of Maurice Kenneth James, a son of C. C. James and a grandson of Daniel Hubbard James.

Records show the couple had been married in the office of the Leesville Leader. What terrible news was printed in that office five months later. Ima Jane (1907-1992) then married Foy J. Mason and continued her life in Vernon Parish.