

CHAPTER V

CHILDREN OF DAVID SHANNON AND NANCY CAROLINA (FOUNTAIN) ROBINSON

JAMES HIRAM ROBINSON

James Hiram Robinson was the first child of David Shannon and Nancy Carolina (Fountain) Robinson and was born on July 11, 1855 at Cat Creek, near Valdosta, Lowndes County, Georgia. He was named after his mother's brother, Hiram Ray, and he went by the name "Hiram." He grew up working on his daddy's farm at Cat Creek.

Hiram was the first of the children to marry. At the age of 19, he married Eliza Bennett on November 22, 1874 (See Exhibit 5-1 for photograph and Exhibit 5-2 for Marriage License). Eliza was born on February 12, 1851 at the old William Asbury Bennett homestead located near Cat Creek on lot #279 of Berrien County, Georgia, which was 3.5 miles south of Nashville on the Old Coffee Road. Her parents were William Bennett and Elizabeth Strickland. Eliza's nickname was "Scott" and she was also called "Lizza."

James Hiram Robinson and Eliza (Bennett) Robinson



Exhibit 5-1

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State of Georgia, Berrien County:

To any Judge, Justice of the Inferior Court,
Justice of the Peace, or Minister of the Gospel:

You are hereby Authorized to Join

Jas H. Robinson & Eliza Bennett

Int the holy state of MATRIMONY, according to the Constitution and Laws
of this State; and for so doing this shall be your sufficient License.

Given under my hand and seal, This 18th day of
Nov 1874

W. E. Connell Ordinary.

GEORGIA, Berrien County:

I Certify, That Jas H. Robinson and
Eliza Bennett were duly joined in Matrimony
by me, this 22nd day of Nov 1874

Ansel Parrish M. G.

(For information on Eliza's family, see Chapter V, "David Melton Robinson," who married Eliza's sister, Malissa).

Eliza and Hiram lived in the Cat Creek area for three years after their marriage, however the exact location is unknown. They may have lived with his parents, her parents, or a place of their own. Hiram and Eliza adopted three children: Sarah Benafield (born 1871), Charles Newton Benafield (born 1873), and Mary Crompton (born _____). The exact year of adoption is unknown, but it was prior to 1879.

In 1877, Hiram and Eliza (and their children, if they were adopted by this time) moved with David Shannon, Nancy Carolina, and their other five children and his brother David Melton, wife, Malissa, and their two children to Oakey Grove in Berrien County, between Tifton and Nashville, Georgia. Hiram and Eliza's home was located near his father's homestead at Oakey Grove, where he continued to farm. Hiram helped his father run the livery stable and blacksmith shop. He was also the fireman at the cotton gin operated by a steam boiler. This cotton gin which was operated by Hiram, the fireman, John Richard, the master mechanic, and Joseph Daniel, the ginner. The 1880 Census Records show Hiram, age 26, as a "farmer," Eliza, age 29, as "keeps house," and their adopted son, Charles Benafield, age 7 (See Exhibit 5-3 for Family Group Record #3) (1880 Census Records, Entry 307-309).

In 1905, Hiram moved to Lenox and from 1905 to 1906 he operated a meat market (located next to the Bank of Lenox). James Hiram also ran the very large, local livery stable in Lenox and maintained facilities for approximately 35 to 40 horses and several buggies. In addition, Hiram served as the arresting officer (policeman) in Lenox for 2 to 3 years in approximately 1905 and 1906. In May 1983, Arlie Snyder Robinson recalled the story of Hiram arresting a black man. The man said something was biting him, so he started scratching his leg and pulled a pistol from the top of his shoe; he escaped from Hiram.

In the fall of 1907, Hiram and Eliza moved to White Springs, Florida. They stayed only a year and in 1908, Hiram and Eliza

12 MAR 1994

Husband: JAMES HIRAM ROBINSON 1*-3

Born: 11 JUL 1855 Place: CAT CREEK, NEAR VALDOSTA, LOWNDES CO, GEORGIA
 Chr.: Place:
 Marr: 22 NOV 1874 Place: CAT CREEK, NASHVILLE, BERRIEN CO, GEORGIA
 Died: APT 1923 Place: TROUBLE CREEK, FLORIDA
 Bur.: Place: WHITE SPRINGS, HAMILTON CO, FLORIDA
 Father: DAVID SHANNON ROBINSON 0*-1 Mother: NANCY CAROLINA FOUNTAIN 0*-2 Parents' MRIN: 1
 Other wives:

Wife: ELIZA (SCOTT) BENNETT 1*-12

Born: 12 FEB 1851 Place: CAT CREEK, NEAR NASHVILLE, LOWNDES CO, GEORGIA
 Chr.: Place:
 Died: 23 AUG 1918 Place: NEAR OAKY GROVE, TIFTON, BERRIEN CO, GEORGIA
 Bur.: Place: OAKY GROVE, TIFT-NASH HWY, BERRIEN CO, GEORGIA
 Father: WILLIAM ASBURY BENNETT *REF 3*-1514 Mother: ELIZABETH STRICKLAND *REF 3*-1515 Parents' MRIN: 530
 Other husbands:

Sex Children

1. Name: SARAH BRNAFIELD 1-1*-13 Spouse:
 --- Born: 20 DEC 1871 Place:
 F Chr.: Place:
 Marr: Place:
 Died: 2 MAR 1879 Place:

2. Name: CHARLES NEWTON BENAFIELD 1-2*-14 Spouse:
 --- Born: 1873 Place:
 M Chr.: Place:
 Marr: Place:
 Died: Place:

3. Name: MARY CROMPTON 1-3*-15 Spouse:
 --- Born: Place:
 F Chr.: Place:
 Marr: Place:
 Died: Place:

4. Name: Spouse:
 --- Born: Place:
 Chr.: Place:
 Marr: Place:
 Died: Place:

5. Name: Spouse:
 --- Born: Place:
 Chr.: Place:
 Marr: Place:
 Died: Place:

Name and address of submitter:
 JOHN SNYDER ROBINSON
 3531 KEYSTONE ROAD Phone: 813-937-2719
 TARPON SPRINGS, FL
 34689-9498

moved back to the crossroads of Oakey Grove. They had a little house beside David Shannon's and Hiram farmed with his father.

David Ralph Robinson of Lenox, the nephew of Hiram and Eliza, remembers Eliza as a very kind and warm person. She had long hair and Ralph remembers that it touched the floor when she sat in a chair. He said she loved him and his brother, Ernest, very much. She looked after the two of them when their parents, Joseph Daniel Robinson and Mary Blake James, were divorced and until the time Joseph Daniel married Virginia Ann Henderson. At the time, Hiram and Eliza lived in the old Robert's house near the railroad in Lenox. Dr. Hendricks had lived in this house prior to Hiram. Joseph Daniel, Virginia, David Ralph, and Ernest stayed at Hiram's house until their new house was completed in 1907.

As the story was told by David Ralph Robinson, in August of 1974, his Uncle Hiram and Aunt Eliza were living next to David Shannon at Oakey Grove in 1908, when Hiram skipped bail and left home without telling anyone. His reason for leaving was because of testimony he had given a couple of years earlier, involving a murder case. His testimony allowed his friend, Nelson Congo (the son of Shade Congo), to be set free. Nelson had been accused of shooting and killing a man at "Fad Station" near Old Crossland, between Tifton and Omega. Hiram swore before the grand jury, under oath, that Nelson Congo had shot the man in self-defense. However, there was some confusion when Hiram was testifying. He made a mistake, because Nelson Congo only had one arm and in Hiram's testimony, he had Congo pulling the trigger with the hand that had been amputated. This conflict in the testimony may have been questioned by the people serving on the grand jury, thus clouding Hiram's entire testimony.

Another part of this story's mystery developed two years later, when Preacher Clark of Lakeview Church near Lenox, swore before the grand jury under oath, that Hiram was at church the day of the murder. This testimony generated doubts about Hiram's presence at the murder scene. If Preacher Clark was telling the

truth, Hiram was definitely lying. However, it was rumored as to why it took two years for evidence to surface that created a conflict with Hiram's original testimony.

Hiram was indicted because of the conflicting testimony and charged with lying to the Grand Jury. He was arrested and his bond was set at \$4,000 or \$5,000 (some said it was \$4,000, however most said it was \$5,000). He was released from jail after having his father, David Shannon Robinson, stand good for his bond. A thousand dollars cash was supplied by each of the following: David Shannon, and his sons, David Melton, George Americus, John Richard, and Joseph Daniel.

Several weeks later, Hiram disappeared, without even telling his wife, Eliza. Hiram was in a bad situation and only Hiram and Preacher Clark knew the truth. Hiram made his decision to flee and it will never be known if he left because he wasn't telling the truth or if he felt that his word would have less credibility than Preacher Clark's, even if it did take two years to surface.

A few weeks after his disappearance, a friend of Hiram's, Henry Grimes of Berrien County, a man well-known for drinking and gambling visited Eliza. While having dinner, he told Eliza how Hiram had taken all the money out of his bank account and that he and Hiram then caught the 4 P.M. train out of Tifton, Georgia to White Springs, Florida. He said the last time he saw Hiram was on a boat, going down the Suwannee River, leaving out of White Springs, Florida. Then he told her that Hiram's empty place at the table would never be filled again. (Editor's Comment: It was never determined what the basis was for Henry's statement about Hiram's empty place at the table).

In an attempt to locate Hiram, David Shannon and David Melton sent a telegram to the sheriff of White Springs, Florida, requesting information about Hiram. The sheriff verified that Hiram had last been seen with Henry Grimes going down the Suwannee River out of White Springs. Hiram also liked to drink and gamble, so foul play was suspected, but never proven. It was

remembered that the Suwannee River was going to be dragged for Hiram's body.

However, George Americus had reason to believe that Hiram was alive and attempted to locate Hiram by visiting White Springs himself. He never made contact with Hiram, however he heard that Hiram was living on an island on the Suwannee River, accessible only by ferry boat. The boat was out of commission while he was there, so he was unable to visit the island.

Being that Hiram had disappeared, the bond money was forfeited, costing the ones standing good for his bond to lose their money. In later years, when Hiram's father, David Shannon, died, he made no provisions for Hiram in his will. This was because Hiram's part of the estate had been used a few years earlier to pay back the debt to his brothers incurred by him for skipping bail. David Shannon repaid \$1000 to each of the four sons who helped in posting the bond.

A few years later, it was rumored that Hiram had recently visited his brother, Joseph Daniel, in Lenox, Georgia. It has been told that all of the window shades were pulled down so no one would know Hiram was there and that Hiram did not go out of the house.

In 1990, William Penn Robinson found some additional information pertaining to Hiram's disappearance by talking with a lifetime resident of Lenox, Georgia, Mrs. Betty (Spradley) Clanton. John Snyder Robinson visited Betty in 1989 and she recalled the following story. Betty had just recently married J. W. (Buddy) Clanton. Buddy's father was Joe Clanton from Staunton, which is next to Lenox. Joe Clanton knew Joseph Daniel real well because he worked at Gray's Hardware Store (owned by Walt Gray) and it was located next to the Bank of Lenox, where Joseph Daniel was head cashier. There were chairs in front of the bank underneath a China berry tree. Often times, Joe Clanton and Joseph Daniel were seen carrying on a conversation while sitting on these chairs.

In 1932, Joe Clanton, his wife, and daughter-in-law, Betty, planned a trip to Florida to visit their children. Their daughter, Gertrude (Clanton) Gray, lived in Zolfo Springs and their son, _____ Clanton, lived in Arcadia. When Joseph Daniel Robinson, Hiram's brother, found out that Joe Clanton was traveling to Zolfo Springs, Florida, he discreetly asked Joe if he would check on Hiram and see how he was doing. He was secretive because of Hiram's disappearance and the fact that no one knew where he was. Joe Clanton had been friends with Hiram when he lived in Lenox, so he was aware of the situation.

They arrived on December 25, 1932 at the home of Tom and Myra Gray, where Gertrude (Clanton) Gray was living in Zolfo Springs. Tom Gray was from Lenox and he also knew Hiram. Betty heard Joe Clanton talking to Tom Gray about Hiram and his troubles and about the map showing where Hiram lived. Two days later, on December 27, 1932, they all got up early and started on their trip to visit Hiram. They started in Zolfo Springs and backtracked some of the road they had come in on the day before. They turned and went west because Betty remembers the rising sun being behind them when going and the setting sun being behind them on their return. They rode quite a distance and it was way out in the country with absolutely nothing around except prairie grass and trees. They ended up at a place called Trouble Creek, which is 4.5 miles west of Wachula. Betty remembers Hiram's house as being an old, unpainted farmhouse in the middle of the country. When they arrived, Joe Clanton recognized Hiram and they sat on his front porch and talked for an hour or more about the news from Lenox. Betty recalls a woman and another man also being there. She remembers the woman as being very nice and clean and thinks it may have been Hiram's wife. She did not see any children at Hiram's house. Hiram was an elderly man (in 1932 he was 77 years old); he was about 5 feet 10 inches, had pretty white hair and a long, white beard and mustache. While in Florida, the Clantons only visited their daughter and Hiram.

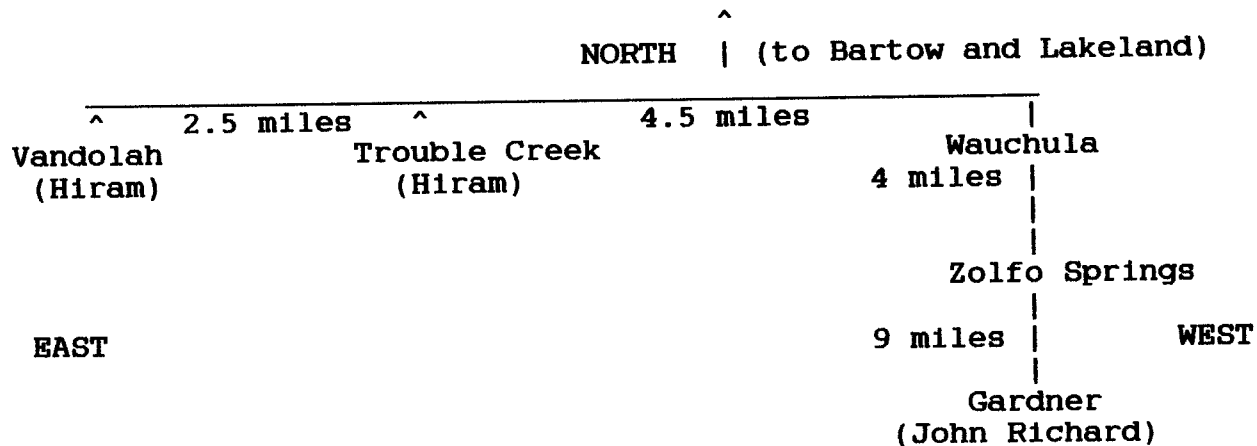
When Joe Clanton returned from his trip, he told Joseph Daniel about his visit. Joe Clanton never talked publicly about Hiram's problems, because he really liked Hiram and all the other Robinsons.

Arlie Snyder Robinson recalls a conversation he had with a man from Bowling Green, Florida (six miles north of Wachula), who claimed to have known James Hiram Robinson. The man said Hiram used to live out from Bowling Green on an island with a family. He did not know what ever happened to him. When Jessie and Snyder Robinson talked to Aaron Asbury Robinson, nephew of James Hiram, who in his later years resided at the Bowling Green Hotel, he said he had heard about Hiram living on an island. Rumors about James Hiram's whereabouts always related to an island. With the information known now, the original stories of Hiram living on an island could be true. He could have lived on an island near Trouble Creek before he bought the lot of land in the town of Vandolah.

Based on Betty's recollection, John Snyder Robinson went to the Wachula court house located in what is now Hardee County, but previously part of De Soto County. Based on the information provided, I was able to locate the Trouble Creek area on the map, which matched Betty's recollection of where Hiram lived. I found the deed for Hiram's purchase of land in the settlement of Vandolah in De Soto County, which is 2.5 miles west of Trouble Creek. The land he purchased, on April 3, 1917, was in Lot 3, Block 33 of Vandolah. Few people ever settled in Vandolah and today nothing exists there except acres and acres of grazing grass for cows.

In reviewing all of the deeds, I found it was required for each party to give his or her place of origin. The deed referenced above, pertaining to Hiram shows that he was from the state of Kansas (See Exhibit 5-4 for court document). Another deed shows a land transaction between James Hiram's brother, John Richard Robinson, and King Lumber and Manufacturing Company. John Richard and his family were living about 20 miles away from

Hiram, in Gardner, Florida. The following map shows the relation of the communities mentioned above.



At this point, I have concluded that Hiram was forced with the decision to either flee or face the possibility of going to prison. Fleeing to another state in those days put a person out of reach from the law of other states. Hiram may or may not have told his wife, Eliza, where he was going. At some point, Hiram devised a plan that made it appear that he went to White Springs, Florida and had died a mysterious death going down the Suwannee River. He may have chosen to leave Tifton with his friend Henry, so information would come back to Georgia about his disappearance on the Suwannee River. At this point, his wife, father, and siblings may or may not have known of his whereabouts. When Henry came back, he told Eliza either the complete truth or a story of deception to make her believe Hiram was dead. It appears that the rumor of Hiram visiting Joseph Daniel's house in later years must have had some basis because Joseph Daniel discreetly asked the Clanton's to contact his brother when in Florida in 1932. Also, this may explain why Hiram's brother, John Richard, went to Gardner, Florida to live. This part of the state was all wilderness and was very desolate, however it

contained large tree forests, making it a haven for lumber harvesting.

The stories about Hiram's disappearance, passed down from the elder Robinsons, always referred to Hiram going to White Springs, Florida. It was rumored that he lived on an island near White Springs, with another woman and children, whom may or may not have been his wife and children. I researched this area for many, many years and was never able to find any clues to support this story of Hiram residing or living in or around White Springs. However, the well-kept, dark secret of Hiram's disappearance was revealed by information provided by Betty (Spradley) Clanton, which put all the rumors in perspective. It is now known that these stories were all part of Hiram's plan to deceive the law of his whereabouts. It is believed that he went down the Suwannee River as was told in the stories, however this was just the start of his journey to go further into the interior of Florida and find a place of safe haven from the law. When he reached the Trouble Creek area in central Florida, he had found a place of real desolation and isolation. At this time, the law of the land in this area was definitely enforced by a pistol in the holster on your hip.

Hiram's plan of deception worked. It is unknown at what time his immediate family became part of the deception to keep his location a secret. It is believed that all of his brothers, his father, and maybe his wife knew where he was. However, none of them ever revealed the secret, even to their own children. William Penn Robinson remembers when he was about the age of 15 (1929), his father told him that he often wondered what ever happened to his brother, Hiram. Joseph Daniel felt that Hiram, being the type of person he was, had caused someone to probably kill him. He also said he had never heard from Hiram. It is believed that Hiram lived all of his remaining days in central Florida. However, the date and place of his death is unknown. Additional research needs to be done in this area.

Eliza continued living at Oakey Grove, next to her father-in-law, David Shannon, until her death on August 23, 1918. She is buried next to her sisters at Oakey Grove Cemetery. A tombstone was placed on her grave by her adopted son, Charles Newton Benafield. It should be noted that the spelling of her last name was incorrectly inscribed as "Robertson" instead of "Robinson."

Children

Sarah Benafield was born on December 20, 1871. She was adopted by James Hiram and Eliza. She died at the age of seven years and two months on March 2, 1879. Amy Welch, of Lenox, Georgia, recalled in July 1984, the death of Sarah. She recalled that Sarah was working in the field helping to burn corn stalks. Her dress accidentally caught fire and caused serious burns to her. Sarah died the next day from her burns. Sarah was the first person to be buried at Oakey Grove, thus starting the Oakey Grove Cemetery (See section on Oakey Grove Church for additional details).

Charles Newton Benafield was born in 1873. He had five children and they were all girls. Their names are Willie (who married George Baker), Nellie, Neffie, Beckie, and Bessie (the youngest). It is believed that he resided in Berrien County, near Ty-Ty, Georgia, for the remainder of his life. His date of death is unknown.

Mary Crompton was also a child raised by James Hiram and Eliza. No information is known about her.