

CLAVIS ROBERTS (#858)

Source: Heritage of Putnam County Tennessee – 2008 by Putnam County Heritage Book Committee and County Heritage Inc.

Pgs. 309 & 310: Clavis Kinnard Roberts was born at Boma, Putnam County, Tennessee on 8 October 1911. He is the son of William Daily Roberts and Pearl Dona (Kinnard) Roberts.



In 1929 Clavis reached the age of 18. Living on the family farm of Roberts Switch, the stock market crash and resulting depression had little impact on the family. However, when he began to look for a non-farming job, there were none available in that area. He rode the trains as a “hobo” for a few years, picking strawberries in Florida, cotton in Oklahoma, and factory jobs in Michigan. While in Michigan, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. He served in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan for one year, 1933-1934. Returning home in the spring of 1935, he was riding the train through Boma and noticed a young (18) girl on the porch of Mark and Pearl Brown’s house. He didn’t know who she was, but he set his mind to find out as any “new” girl in the area was an event, and this one was very pretty. He discovered that this was Mark Brown’s sister-in-law, Etta Frances Phillips. She and her disabled father were living with Mark and Pearl. Long story short, they were married on 20 December 1935. They rode in a horse and wagon to a Justice of the Peace (JP) “down past Cherry Hill” in DeKalb County. They never dismounted from the wagon, but the JP walked from his house

out to the road and married them as they sat in the wagon. Frances is the daughter of Jehu and Etta (Stewart) Phillips. She was born in Watertown, Tennessee on 17 August 1917.

(Pictured: Clavis & his wife Etta Frances (Phillips) Roberts.)

After their marriage Clavis worked primarily as a construction worker on TVA projects. He worked on the Center Hill, Old Hickory, and Wolf Creek dams. He also worked as a cook at the Oak Ridge Facility for some period of time during WWII. He served in the army for a short period in 1944. Clavis had no education and only learned to sign his name after his wife taught him. However, he had a strong work ethic and was always willing to go where the jobs were and do what was necessary to provide for his family.

Clavis and Frances lived all their married lives on Roberts Road in the Roberts Switch Community. They originally lived in a house built by Harmon Young Lee, son of William Browder Lee and Marinda (Roberts) Lee and owned by Clavis’ father, William Daily Roberts. The “Harmon House”, named for its builder, is over 100 years old having been built in the late 1800s. It was a small three room house where their first three children were born. Frances’ father, who lived with them since their marriage, passed away in this house on 17 January 1943. In March 1943 Clavis and Frances purchased a different farm from Clavis’ father. This farm, with a small two-room log cabin, was also on Roberts Road. Their fourth child was born in this log home. In the spring of 1946, they built a new barn. They lived in the barn while they tore the old log-house down and built a new house on that site. They moved into the new house in the fall of 1946 and lived there until their deaths. Their fifth child was born in this house which is now called the “Clavis House”. The Clavis House, the Harmon House, and the barn are still in the family.

Their five children, from oldest to youngest, were: Avery Philip (b. 31 May 1937), Mable Geraldine “Gerry” (b. 3 April 1939), Barbara Ann “Bobby” (b. 3 May 1941), Brenda Faye “Bren” (b. 1 March 1944), and Tommy Allen (b. 9 March 1947).

Frances never worked outside the home, but she certainly worked hard as a homemaker. She cooked three meals each day on a wood stove, washed clothes the old fashioned way, carried water from the spring,

worked the garden, canned and preserved all manner of produce, rendered lard in the iron pot in the yard, etc, etc. She often helped out with “men’s work”, milking the cow, feeding, and chopping wood. She never complained of the hard life she experienced and had quite a sense of humor. To this day, everyone praises the good name of Frances. Both Clavis and Frances taught their kids to be honest and hard working.

At the young age of 46, Frances died of brain cancer on 13 December 1963. Clavis had several successive strokes and died 29 November 1991. They are buried in the Smellage Cemetery at Boma. Thirteen years after Frances died Clavis married Clannie (Herd) Williams on 10 September 1976. Clannie died on 24 December 1985. They had no children.

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Clavis Roberts Family 1943: Clavis, Frances, Avery, Geraldine, and Barbara.

Picture courtesy of Tommy R. Roberts & Ryan Clavis Roberts.