

### **MCGINNESS FAMILY - F543**

Smith County History, sponsored by  
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Story by Kenneth Robinson

The McGinness family came to Carthage from Buffalo Valley, Putnam County in 1896. Felix P. McGinness, his wife, Victoria Jared, and their seven children sold their Buffalo Valley farm and bought another which was located between Highway 70 and the west bank of the Cumberland, just northwest of Carthage. The forbears of Felix and Victoria had lived in Buffalo Valley since the very early part of the nineteenth century, having come from Virginia to settle on land grants in the new state of Tennessee. Felix McGinness, who was essentially a self-educated man, had a fervent interest in education and was desirous that all his children could attend good schools. He moved his family to Carthage primarily so that all the children could attend the Joseph W. Allen College, from which all seven were graduated. The children crossed the river on the old lower ferry on daily walks to and from school.

Felix McGinness, in partnership with Mr. Monroe Malone, built and established the Riverside Hotel in 1901. It was located at the site of the present post office in Carthage. The McGinness family moved into the hotel after selling their farm across the river and operated it until about 1910 at which time it was sold. In 1914 Mr. John Chapman acquired the hotel and together with his family operated it as the well known Chapman Hotel for many years.

The McGinness children were Ollie, Houston Bradley, Mary Josephine, Roscoe, Virgil Lee, Allie May, and Dewitt. Virgil died in 1907 at age 21. Dewitt left Carthage as a young man and made his home in San Francisco where he entered the real estate business. He married Martha Peterson who died in 1972. Dewitt died in 1973 at age 83. The others all lived long lives in Carthage. Their productive lives and good deeds will be long remembered.

Felix built his house, circa 1910, on the present site of the Mid-South Bank. He was the Carthage postmaster from 1913-1921. He was a member of the city council and taught the men's Bible class at the Methodist Church for 35 years. Clergymen were always astounded at his profound knowledge of the Bible. His zeal for reading, in general, was unlimited and he tried to instill this enthusiasm into his children and his friends. He died in 1935 at the age of 87.

Victoria Jared came from a large family, and as a young wife and mother she practiced all the necessary skills of homemaking which were required in those pioneer days. Her ever-cheerful and lovable disposition earned her a multitude of lifelong friends. Just before she died in 1953 at age 97, she was said to be the only living Tennessean whose grandfather was a Revolutionary War soldier.

Ollie McGinness married Dr. W. S. Farmer in 1935. She had been a school teacher as a young lady and contributed immensely to the young lady and contributed immensely to

the raising of this fine family. She was active in many social and church groups. She died in 1963 at age 86.

Houston Bradley McGinness practiced law in Carthage for approximately 60 years. He succeeded his father as teacher of the Methodist Church Men's Bible Class and taught it for 27 years. His activities and interests were many. During his 60 years of law practice he never ceased being a keen law student. For many years he served as legal advisor, law partner, and confidant to Secretary of State Cordell Hull. He died in 1969 at age 89. His wife, Johnnie Odum, died in 1953. She had been a music and voice teacher and was very active in the Carthage Gardens Club. Their son, William Houston, died in 1929, at age 4.

Josephine McGinness married Guy Drake who became a well known tobacco warehouseman and businessman in Carthage farms, and especially the Cumberland River. She taught many young persons to share their poetic love of nature, and were concerned about conservation long before it became a popular cause. She died in 1962 at age 81.

Roscoe McGinness married Sydney Bilbrey of Livingston in 1909. He had been a station agent at several places along the Tennessee Central Railroad. Subsequently he was in the wagon spoke manufacturing business for approximately 20 years, being one of the officers of the "Carthage Spoke Company" located in South Carthage. In 1930 he joined the staff of the Smith County Bank and was assistant cashier of that bank until his retirement in 1960. He was a member of the Carthage Christian Church and served as its Sunday School superintendent for many years. His extraordinary understanding and compassion brought solace and encouragement to this many friends from all walks of life. He was a freemason as was his father. He died in 1971 at age 87. Sydney Bilbrey McGinness, who survives at age 99, has been an active member of the Christian Church for approximately 85 years. She has devoted her life to her family, her children, her friends, and her flowers. Their children are Kathyne Gore, who died in 1975, Houston Dewitt McGinness, and Frances S. Robinson.

Allie May McGinness (Miss Allie May lived with her parents and helped make it a home where all were welcome. Notwithstanding her frail health, she taught the Methodist Sunday School Class for small children for many years. The number of children whom she helped guide into the Christian life is very great indeed. The rapport which she had with them was almost magical. She died in 1967 at age 79.

## **HISTORY OF FELIX PATTERSON MCGINNESS**

by Mary Josephine M. Drake

In compiling the history and story of the Jared family, it was inevitable that we would come in contact with other personalities who were closely and intimately associated with this family, some of whose lives, activities and very being were so interwoven, that they, in truth appeared to be "OF" the Jared family.

One such personality was Felix P. McGinness, of Buffalo Valley, Tennessee, husband of Victoria Jared. The lives of this couple covered the period dating from July 5, 1849 to the death of Victoria Jared McGinness on May 15, 1953. The intervening years were years of toil and deprivation---years of conquest of poverty---years of happiness and pride at "raising" a large family and years of peace and tranquility in the sunset.

Felix Patterson was born at Laurel Hill on 5 Jul 1849. His father died when he was two years old and his mother later married Robert Alcorn, a dour, stern and exacting Scotsman, whose rigid discipline and teaching of self-reliance were to serve young McGinness well in the rugged years ahead. At this time the gold rush was on in California, and Horace Greeley was advising young men to "go west". Slavery and secession were tugging at the bonds of union and within a few short years the guns at Ft. Sumter would thunder with such violence that they still reverberate over the southland to this day.

Too young to become a participant of this struggle, too old not to understand its fury and tragedies, young McGinness spent his early youth within this no man's land of fratricidal strife where brother was arrayed against brother, neighbor against neighbor. There was seared into his soul the knowledge and understanding of hate, and violence, murder and valor, sacrifice and devotion. Out of such a crucible, there emerged a man and personality with element of greatness. He feared no man or coming events. Loyal and devoted his country, his family, his neighbors and his Creator, he moved boldly into the stream and currents of life while carving for himself a reputation for integrity, honesty, charity and love for this fellowmen.

One of his sons said of him, "The only man I have ever been privileged to know who lived on this earth as Christ might have willed".

From his union with Victoria Jared, seven children were born. In Jul 1899, Felix McGinness brought his family to Carthage, Tennessee, to better educate the children and to provide for their economic advancement and welfare.

These were the fruitful years. Within this small community of an exceptionally high order of citizenship, Felix McGinness lived and worked for his family, his community and for his church. He kept "boarders" for out-of-town students who attended the school then located at Carthage. He built and operated the Riverside Hotel, whose balconies and wide porches afford convenient assemblage for gossip, conversations and political discussions. He engaged in the mercantile business and became a director of the First National Bank. Woodrow Wilson made him his postmaster at Carthage.

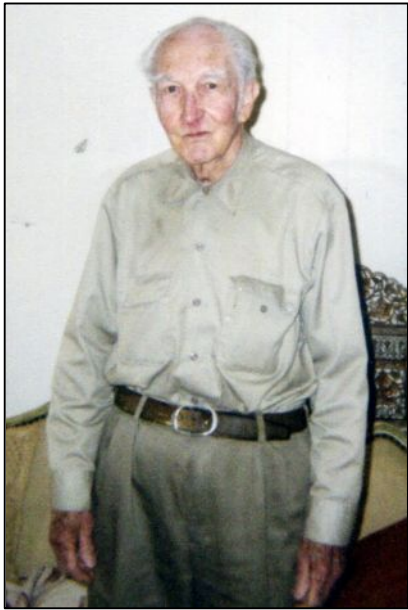
When he ended his active business career and began to mellow, satisfying and serene years when he could devote his time to the study of his Bible and to teaching his beloved Sunday School class, he taught Sunday School for more than 30 years. A member of his class once said, "When he talked about Biblical character, he spoke of them as if he knew them personally".

Houston Bradley McGinness

Occupation: Lawyer in Smith County, Tennessee with offices near his home at Carthage. He was associated with the Hon. Cordell Hull for fifty-six years. They enjoyed a most intimate and confident friendship. Mr. Hull chose Bradley for his private secretary when he was a member of the United States Congress in 1907. Bradley acted as Executor of the will of Mr. Hull and was also named as one of the Legatees.

*Houston Bradley McGinness, s/o Felix Patterson McGinness & Victoria Jared.*

<http://www.ajlambert.com>

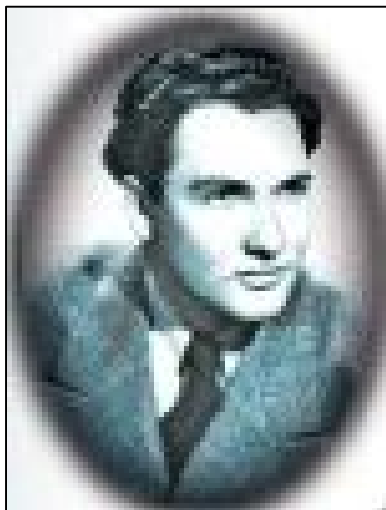


Houston Dewitt McGinness, 86 yrs. old, Carthage, TN.



Four Generations

Pictured seated is Victoria (Jared) McGinness, behind her is her son Roscoe McGinness, next to him is his daughter, Kathyne (McGinness) Gore with her daughter, Frances Jane Gore.



Houston Bradley McGinness  
(1879-1969)



Cordell Hull  
(1871-1955)

## FROM MODEL PLANES TO JET PROPULSION

By Tressa Bush, writer, Courier

Courier Feature: Visions of Smith County, TN – 9 Sept. 2009



I have to give credit where credit is due – I did not find Houston McGinness on my own. I attended the wedding ceremony of Rachel Fisher and it was there that her grandmother, Ruby T. Fisher, told me her friend Houston McGinness had an interesting career as an aeronautical engineer. Have you ever heard of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory or the wind tunnel at Cal tech? If not, you'll know a little bit about them by reading my story.

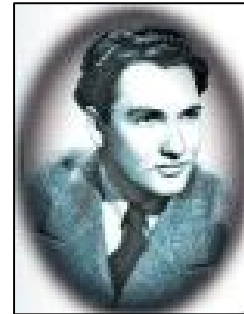
Houston was born in 1919 in South Carthage. His parents were Roscoe and Sydney Bilbrey McGinness. He had two sisters – both are now deceased – Francis Sue McGinness Robinson and Katherine McGinness Gore.



(Pictured left: Houston Dewitt McGinness)

Houston's uncle, Houston Bradley "H.B." McGinness, was a prominent attorney in Carthage for many years. H. B.'s longtime partner was Cordell Hull. When Hull became U. S. Senator, H. B. followed him to Washington D. C. as his secretary. That lasted three years. Houston told me H. B. just did not like politics that much.

Houston's mother, Sydney, originally from Livingston, worked in the home raising the children and Roscoe was a businessman. He was the manager of the Carthage Spoke Company which was located on what is now the Mixon-Nollner Oil Company in South Carthage. Yes, by the name you guessed it – they made spokes for wagon wheels. Course that did not last too many years, thanks to the auto industry. "I do remember going to the factory. I was fascinated by the steam engine that ran all the machines. I'll never forget seeing the piles of wood chips and sawdust they used in the fire to run the steam engines," Houston recalled.



(Pictured left: Houston Bradley "H.B." McGinness)

Let's go back a bit to Houston's grandfather, Felix McGinness. He, too, was a businessman. Have you ever heard or seen pictures of the Riverside Hotel? It used to be where the Carthage Post Office stands today. The first time I saw a picture of it, I nearly died with sadness. It was a magnificent building – standing three stories high. Felix, along with Monroe Malone, built the hotel back in 1901. "After about a year or so, my grandfather bought out Mr. Malone. My grandfather ran it for about 10 years after that and that's where they lived. Later, he sold it to the Chapman family who ran it, I think until 1937 or so. They built the hotel to accommodate the folds who were on their way to the spas in Red Boiling Springs. They would come up the river on the steam boats and need a place to stay the night before riding in a horse drawn carriage to Red Boiling. I remember the hotel. It was a very nice hotel and, to me as a young boy, it was very big." Houston said.

Since Houston's father and grandfather were businessmen you might think he would have followed in their footsteps. He did not. Houston had his sights set on something bigger...the wild blue yonder!

Houston says he always had a great interest in machinery and airplanes. The interest with machinery came from his father's days at the spoke company – and the interest with planes came from one of his uncles. "That uncle passed away when I was six, but I do remember him very well. He loved planes and electronics. The first radio I ever listened to was built by him. He also built and flew model airplanes and I had many of those airplanes that were powered by rubber bands." Houston added.

The love of planes and electronics stayed with Houston all through school. He graduated from Carthage High School in 1937 and, in the fall of that year, entered Parks College in St. Louis, Missouri. At the time,

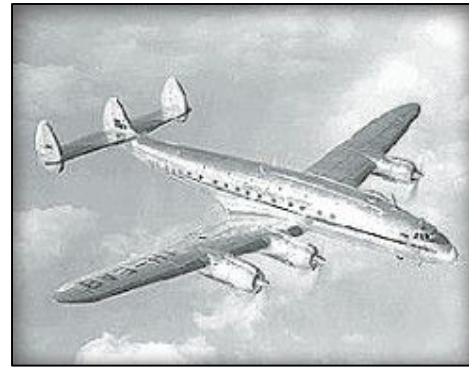
it was the closest school with aeronautical degrees. Houston graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in three years, because they went year round.

In the fall of 1940, he packed his bags and set out for sunny California. He accepted an engineering position with Lockheed Aircraft. The first thing Houston got to work on was a WWII fighter plane, dubbed the P-38 Lightning. It was used for dive bombing, level bombing and photo reconnaissance missions. The P-38 had a very unique style. Take a look at the picture on this page and you'll see there were two fuelages and one compartment in the middle for the cockpit. Since the plane had already been built, Houston was involved in many of the modifications that needed to be done on it. He worked on that for about two years.



Once that was over, Houston began the design and construction of another plane called the Constellation. This plane was just as unique as the P-38. Take a look at the picture of it – notice the “triple tail design.” Cool, eh? This was a US military transport plane and, get this, it was the aircraft for then president Dwight D. Eisenhower!

“I really liked that project. I was part of the mechanism’s group. We designed the controls, the landing gear, the doors to the landing gear and we checked the forces of stresses that would act on these various parts. All this had to be done to ensure it was a safe plane,” Houston commented.



Houston’s days of Lockheed ended in January of 1947, but he immediately found another position at the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tec for short). The school provided the employees who ran the Southern California Cooperative wind tunnel. So what is a wind tunnel? Glad you asked I’m sure you’ve heard the words before – but have you ever really thought about it and why one was created? Me either...so I looked it up.

Think about it. Planes have to be tested before they are flown, so one way to do that is to put a model of the plane inside a specially made room (tunnel) – create massive amounts of wind inside the room (tunnel) – recreating what would happen in the sky so that various things about it can be tested. So what would one test? Glad you asked. Houston told me one of the things he worked on was the bending stress between cone shaped parts of the tunnel which joined cylindrical parts. “My calculations indicated the bending stresses near the juncture were too high. Actual stresses were obtained with strain gauges which were glued to the structure and they closely matched my calculation values. This was quite satisfying,” Houston said.

I started thinking about all the mathematical calculations that were necessary for such an endeavor, so I asked Houston to tell me about the computers he used. “We did not have computers back then! We used slide rules! I do recall we had calculating machines, but it was pencil and paper all the way.” Okay – that makes what he did even more impressive, doesn’t it?



In 1960, things slowed down on the wind tunnel to the point the facility closed. Cal Tech found another position for Houston in their Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL for short). Houston’s job there was to help design and construct very, very large antennas for the space industry. “These antennas were 60-70 meters in diameter (197 to 230 feet). They were used to received and transmit information from space craft - space craft that went to planets like Mars and Uranus. We built three of these that were placed in California, Spain and Australia. Huge wheels had to be built to move these antennas and I remember there was one of

them in Germany. Our job at JPL was to find out why the wheels of theirs were wearing out. We discovered the problem and fixed it without ever going to Germany.

How cool is that?

Houston was a full-time employee at JPL, for 25 years. He retired in 1985, but was called back regularly for consulting until 1992 when he and his wife, Palvee, decided to leave California. Palvee didn't get to enjoy Smith County very much. She was in poor health and suffered from glaucoma. She passed away in 1995. The couple did not have any children.

Even though Houston has been retired for many years, don't think for a second his name is not mentioned out there in California. He still gets several phone calls a year – from some young engineer whose research uncovered Houston's name on an internal report! Folks out there still know who Houston McGinness is – and what he and his many colleagues accomplished in the aeronautical field.

And now ... you know, too!

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