

Charlotte Bond Bradley - Texas Pioneer

by Jim Morriss

Just five years ago, in April 2007, a 95 year old lady named Ethel Bradley Calvert died and was buried next to her husband in the Chinn Chapel Cemetery. In her lifetime, she witnessed and had vivid memories of many remarkable changes in this area. Ethel was the youngest of eight children who were born and grew up in the Cross Timbers. Ethel left us with a compelling legacy that she inherited from her mother, Lottie Bond Bradley. Lottie was an early pioneer of this area and another example of the durable, perseverant people who once lived here. It would be a good thing if we all knew more about the lives of people like the Bond, Bradley and Calvert families.

At the close of the Civil War, a young Union Soldier named Napoleon Bonaparte Bradley returned to his home in De Kalb, Tennessee. He married a girl named Patsy Driver and started a farm. Patsy had three children but died in childbirth in the mid 1870's. Napoleon married again, this time to a girl named Perlina Butler. Who gave birth to two more children. Jim Bradley, the oldest of the Bradley kids, was born in 1869. He remained in Tennessee until he was about 30 years old when decided to go to Texas. While working in south west Collin County Jim met a girl named Charlotta Bond. The two married in 1894.

Charlotta was usually called Lottie. Her father Lewallan Bond, also fought for the Union and returned safe from the Civil War. He married Elizabeth Duncan in his home town of Wayne, Kentucky. There were eight children in the Bond family and after their father died, at least half of them joined their mother on their journey to Texas. One of Lottie's brothers was Bonaparte Bond, who married and started farming around Lewisville. He must have learned, as many others were learning, that life was a bit better in towns like Lewisville that were located on a rail road line. Things were usually cheaper to buy and you could more easily sell what ever you had grown

after harvest time. At any rate, many of the Bond family moved closer to Lewisville. Jim and Lottie Bradley moved just a few miles west to the Chinn's Chapel area.

The two had very little money but Jim started tenant farming. He grew crops on someone else's land, then split his profit with the land owner. Lottie kept house and soon had seven children to care for: Sarah Luverna (b:1897), Viola Jane (b: 1899), Mattie Ellen (b: 1900), Bonaparte David (b: 1902), Ruby Jewel (b: 1904), Anne Murtle (b: 1906), and Mae Lawrence (b: 1908). Farmers of that time often preferred to have sons to help with the physical labor of plowing, planting and harvesting. Jim and Lottie had six girls and just one boy; it was a happy family. Jim Bradley was a capable farmer, he managed to feed his large family and in 1904 he even saved enough money to buy an 80 acre farm just south of Hickory Creek. Two years later he sold that property to his brother-in-law. The Bradley's continued to farm on leased land, They went to church in the new chapel and the children attended school in the old cabin school house. The family enjoyed the fellowship of the many church activities and Jim Bradley joined a group of men in the community called the Woodmen of the World. Then in the spring of 1911, Lottie informed him that he would soon be the father of his eighth child.

The Bradley's were typical of many people living in the Cross Timbers. They did not have much but neither did most of their friends and neighbors. They were resourceful and capable and above all, the Bradley clan was well-adjusted and happy. But then in May of 1911, at the age of just 41, Jim Bradley, the son of a Civil War Soldier got pneumonia and died. Thus Lottie was very suddenly a 32 year old farmer's widow with a crop in the field, seven children to feed and another one on the way. This would seem like a daunting burden for a young pregnant mother in the early 1900's. Often a woman in Lottie's

situation would have no choice but to send some of her children to live with some other family or perhaps to an orphanage. But Lottie Bradley was made of sterner stuff than that. She was determined to keep her daughters and son together if it was at all possible.

In 1911 there were no federal relief programs or safety nets to help widows or orphans. But farming communities could be very supportive. Neighbors pitched in to help with the crop that Jim Bradley had planted. Lottie's 69 year old mother, who had herself been a widow for over 30 years, moved in to help. Of course the older children did all that they could. On August 7, 1911 Ethel Bradley, the seventh daughter was born. Fellow members of the Chinn Chapel were a constant source of help and encouragement to the Bradley family but in 1912 the social club known as the Woodmen of the World performed an act of kindness that today seems amazing.

In the early 1900's the Woodmen of the World were a fraternal organization similar to the Masons or Odd Fellows. One feature of membership in this group was a simple death benefit. If a member died the club would see to it that a decent burial and a proper tombstone were provided. And they fulfilled that requirement for many members. James Eugene Bradley was laid to rest in the Old Hall Cemetery and to this day you can go and see the marker that was placed there by the Woodmen. But this was a group that chose to not just help their needy neighbors; they gave them the means to make their own living. On February 8, 1912 the Woodmen of the World actually bought a 45 acre farm and deeded it to Charlotta Bradley.

This would be a good time to close this story and just say that they all lived happily ever after. But, in 1912 Lottie's life was not even half over. The next years of her life were very difficult but she more than survived. Lottie was a wonderful example of the kind of hard scrabble, capable people who lived in the Cross Timbers. She displayed astounding amounts of faith, strength, courage, fortitude, and love. Astounding to us

now, but not so unusual to the early settlers of our area. She was willing to gratefully accept help from her neighbors but would not take anything that she or her family could provide for themselves.

Lottie and her children moved into their new home. It was a rough-hewn three room house, probably with nothing more than a stone fireplace to provide heat and a place to cook. Of course there was no electricity or inside plumbing. Whatever bedding they had must have been meager. But improving the little farmhouse had to be a secondary priority. Lottie first concentrated on what they could do to grow food and generate cash. She cleared and plowed up as much land as she could to set out a garden. She fenced in an area that would be suitable to raise chickens, pigs and calves. She also started planting peach trees and berry vines. In the garden they must have planted corn, squash, sweet potatoes, beans, peas, watermelons and anything else that they could eat, sell or barter. The kids helped all that they could but Lottie insisted that their schooling should take a high priority. Lottie had a horse and a farm wagon and she still had acquaintances back in Collin County where a lot of cotton was grown. In the late summers the family packed up and drove back to the area around Frisco where they camped out and worked in the fields picking cotton.

The Chinn Chapel Church remained a vital part of their lives. The Bradley children would all recall in their later years how this small close-knit community created such strong bonds of companionship that are rarely heard of today. People had to work hard to keep food on their own tables but they also did what they could for their neighbors. In her later years, Ethel the youngest girl had vivid memories about her childhood. Whenever she could, Lottie would gather several of her own and her neighbors children, pack them in the wagon and drive over to Lewisville, Alton, Argyle or perhaps Shiloh to attend revival meetings. Of course they would bring a few water melons and lunches so they could enjoy a picnic on the way back. After

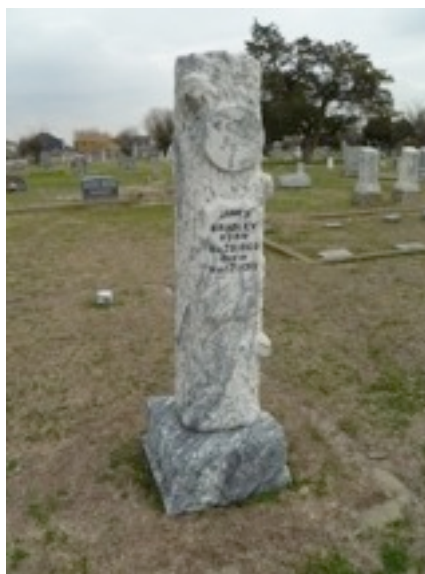
harvest times and after butchering a calf or hog, there was plenty to eat. These were some of her most cherished memories but not all of her recollections were fond ones. She could also remember times when they just didn't have enough food. Once when Ethel was about six she overheard her mother, who was on her knees in front of the old fireplace praying. Lottie said, "Now Father, I can't feed my children. I'm out of food. And would You show me a way, because they're Your children as well as mine. And I can't stand to see them go hungry." The next afternoon Lottie received a letter from her brother and he sent her five dollars. It was a complete surprise and in those days five dollars was a huge amount.

Lottie was able to keep her family together and keep them fed and in school. As they got older, all seven of her daughters and her only son got married and settled into successful lives with families of their own. Lottie remained close to her children no matter how far away they relocated. Late in 1925 she married a widower named Haggai Harrison Roberts. In 1945, when she was 67, they sold their farm and moved to Bridgeport to be closer to Lottie's son, Boney Bradley. In April of 1958, at the age of 79, Lottie died. The family brought her back to her beloved Chinn Chapel for a funeral service and laid her to rest next to James Bradley in the Old Hall Cemetery. Some time later one of the daughters

was looking over some of the family heirlooms and found a poem that Lottie had written. It is a beautiful reminder of all that this great Texas lady was:

Yes, the children and I homesteaded
This land when they were young.
Though none thought we'd hang to it...
Still, somehow we clung.
We cleared it and we tilled it,
Set out several trees.
On each square foot of soil there is
A lot of them and me.
Work was work, those early days,
With ten sweet mouths to feed...
But them and I, we managed,
Folks do when there is need.
I love it dearly, this little house off the road
And forty acres, with its load
Of tangled brush and rocks and hills,
Of violets and whipporwills.
Then of a sudden, strangely, the children were all
grown.
Then I was middle-aged, then I was alone.
Left alone to manage all the field and ranch,
My youth plowed in each branch.
Now I know how my mother cried after I went
away,
Now I know how my mother cried
After I went away

James Bradley was laid to rest in the Old Hall Cemetery in 1911. The marker that was placed there by the Woodmen of the World is still there after more than 100 years.





Here is the Bradley family in the late fall of 1911. The baby in Lottie's lap is Ethyl. Around her in a clockwise direction are Annie, Mattie, Viola, Verna, Ruby, and Mae. The boy on the right is Bonaparte.



Ethel Bradley Calvert was born in 1911 about three months after the death of her father.



This picture of Lottie was probably taken sometime in the 1920's.