

John Calvin Crawford

John Calvin Crawford was born Jan. 12, 1878 in Brooklyn, Mississippi. His parents were John T. Crawford and Delily (Ellie) Killian Crawford. In the 1880 census, he was living with his parents and a brother, Charles, in Tunica, MS. While living in Tunica, his mother died in 1890, when John was 12 years old. After the death of his mother, John's father didn't think he could take care of John and his brother, Charles. Being out on his own at the age of twelve years was hard. John earned his way working on farms in Mississippi and Arkansas. He had an older sister, Laura, who was married to Robert Henry Hazen. The Hazen family lived at that time in a neighboring county in Mississippi. John stayed close to his older sister's family in Mississippi for a few years and worked as a farm hand. He never got to go to school after his mother died. He moved to Arkansas after his sister died about 1896. He was working for William McClaren, on the McClaren family farm, north of Forrest City, Arkansas on the old New Castle road when he met Bennie Mae McClaren, his future wife. John was a self-taught person. He read and studied everything he could find including Arkansas Law. He was the New Castle School Director in 1910 and later held positions in St. Francis County that required having a knowledge of law.

John Calvin Crawford married Bennie Mae McClaren March 12, 1901, in St. Francis County, Arkansas. She was the daughter of William McClaren and Linnie A. Dillion McClaren. John and Bennie became the parents of three children, William B. (Bill) Crawford, Mary Myrtle Crawford, and Johnnie Mae Crawford. They lived on the farm with the McClarens for a few years. It was during that time their son Bill was born. The Crawford family moved to Madison, Arkansas, close to the St. Francis River, sometime around 1911 or 1912 and lived there until 1919. They operated a deli like store and café during that time. It was while they lived in Madison their second child, Mary, was born.

Mr. Crawford and his family were living on Washington Street in Forrest City, Arkansas at the time of the Jan. 6, 1920 census. It was during the time they lived there that Johnnie Mae was born and died 11 months later. She is buried in Hughes Cemetery next to her father's grave.

The John Crawford family moved to a large house across town where they were living at the time of the 1930 census. Mrs. Crawford ran a boarding house in their home while John was employed by the state as Constable of St. Francis County. During the time that he was Constable, he was shot the night of August 10, 1930, when he went to arrest a 40 yr. old man, William M. Black, (nicknamed Blackie), for disorderly conduct. Blackie was intoxicated and entertaining himself shooting at people and making them dance. Blackie had a record of going on a drunken spree about twice a year and shooting at people. Mr. Crawford had arrested him many times and locked him up until he was sober. Blackie had never shot anyone or been a threat to Mr. Crawford. All Mr. Crawford had to do was put a hand on Blackie's shoulder and say, "Blackie, let's go", and he would go peacefully to jail, until that

fateful Sunday night. That night Blackie turned on John, shot him in the leg, and would not stop firing the gun. John shot back and hit Blackie. They were both taken to Methodist Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee where John's leg was amputated and Mr. Black died on Wednesday, August 13, 1930.

Mr. Black and his wife Blanch were very close friends of the Crawfords. The Black's only child was named John. When Mr. Black died, Blanch went to John's hospital room and told Mrs. Crawford that Blackie was dead. She said that Blackie's last words were, "I guess I killed my best friend", thinking he had killed Mr. Crawford. Mr. Black's body was taken back to Steven's Funeral Home in Forrest City, Arkansas and Mr. Hinkle prepared the body to be shipped to Mr. Black's hometown, Mt. Pleasant, Texas, where he was buried. Mr. Black's wife Blanch was born about 1902 in DesArc Township, White County, Arkansas. She left Forrest City, after the death of Blackie, and the Crawfords never heard from her again.

When John could no longer function as Constable he bought a gas station in St. Francis County, near Forrest City, on the road to Marianna, in an area called Bonair. It was at that place the Crawford's first grandchild was born. The Crawford family continued to live in Bonair about eight months before moving to 11 West Front Street in Forrest City, Arkansas.

While living on West Front Street, John held several county offices. He ran for County Judge against Judge Rowe, served the county as Justice of Peace, and for many years served as County Coroner. He was Coroner in 1936 when a plane crashed on the night of Jan.14, in St. Francis County, in marshland near Goodwin, Arkansas. There were seventeen victims killed in that crash and no survivors. The victims were 12 men, 4 women, and 1 child. It was reported, "that was one of the strangest inquests ever held as it was conducted at the side of the splintered aircraft buried 5 feet in mud and water, by J.C. Crawford, an aged, crippled coroner, who was torturously carried on a stretcher through the swamps to the scene and then held aloft on the stretcher by four men, standing waist-deep in water until past dawn, as Crawford examined bits of bodies, piece by piece, and made notes in his book by lantern light." While holding the inquest that night, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called and talked with Mr. Crawford on a field phone that had been set up. President Roosevelt wanted to know all the details of the plane crash as that was the worst plane crash incident in the USA up until that time.

John had been sick in bed for about three weeks when on the night of Oct.1, 1943, the Crawford family was awakened in the middle of the night by a very bright glow. The Downey Hotel, which was across the road from the Crawford's home, was on fire. The Crawford family knew many of the people that perished in that fire and had known some of them for years. John's wife had pushed his chair to the front porch and the rest of the family stood in the yard watching, as people were jumping from windows and off roofs.

The Crawford's grand daughter was worried about a younger friend, Louise England, who lived in the hotel with her sister and their mother. Louise had ridden to school many mornings on the back of the grand daughter's bike. Louise only had a light sweater to wear in the winter, so the older girl would get her to school where it was warm as quickly as possible. Later it was learned that Louise, too, had perished in that fire.

Even though John was very sick he got out of bed to perform his last official act for the county holding the inquest over the victims of the Downey Hotel fire. A few days later, on Oct. 4, 1943, John died at home of pneumonia. Being out in the cold air conducting the inquest was too much for his weakened body and he was not able to recover. Funeral Services were held at the Stevens Funeral Home, Wednesday afternoon at 3 P.M. The minister of the Graham Memorial Presbyterian Church, James Cobb, and the minister of the Methodist Church, Paul Galloway, conducted the services. Three of the pall bearers were A.D. McDaniel, Mr. Fleming, and W.G. Oswald. John was buried in Hughes Cemetery, next to his daughter, Johnnie Mae Crawford.

Bennie Mae McClaren Crawford was born Sept.17, 1881 in Savannah, Hardin County, TN. and died at the Stuttgart, Arkansas hospital on June 18, 1973. She was buried next to John in the Hughes Cemetery, north of Forrest City, in St. Francis County, Arkansas.

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