



Lay of the Land

Lay Family Genealogical Association Inc.
Dedicated to encouraging and preserving research on the history and
genealogy of all Lay, Ley, Loy, Leigh, Leh, etc. Families

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Michael (Big Foot Mike) Lay

By Gerald Lay

LFGA Line #7



Gerald Lay, LFGA Second Vice President, is a founding member of the Association, and has contributed to it's welfare in many ways through the years. He has served as an officer, on the Board, as Publicity Chairman, and has contributed several excellent research articles to the *Lay of the Land*. He has special skills in interviewing locals, obtaining valuable

family and local history. His interesting articles include details of the lives of his ancestors unavailable elsewhere.

Michael (Big Foot Mike) Lay

Michael (Big Foot Mike) Lay was born in a log home, December 16 1842,¹ in Elk Valley, Tennessee. The eighth child of William L. (Preacher Billy L.) Lay and Elizabeth Ellison Lay, Mike, (as most called him) grew up to learn the farm life as did all other boys of the region and time. His daughter Mayme remembered him saying that as a child, he played in the cave that was near his home.² The hard farm life, working from before dawn until sometimes near dark, seemed to toughen young men for the adult life ahead. Being of above average stature and build, Michael Lay matured into manhood early. He married Elizabeth Lay³ (born October 13, 1841, died February 1, 1896) at the age of sixteen. Michael and Elizabeth were married 13 January 1859.⁴ Arlie Lay stated in his notes that Michael and Elizabeth were second cousins, quoting from an interview with Michael's second wife Emily, in 1948.⁵ Elizabeth was the daughter of Spencer and Lucinda Perkins Lay.⁶ Michael and Elizabeth are listed in the 1860 Campbell County Tennessee Census along with son Spencer, living next door to Lewis and Martha Lay. Lewis was Michael's brother and Martha was Elizabeth's sister. Michael and Elizabeth probably lived in Elk Valley for five or six years after their marriage.

The Children:

Spencer F. Lay, Mike and Elizabeth's first child was born 14 January 1860.⁷ Spencer was an unmarried schoolteacher at the time of his death in 1884, only 24 years old. He died of

pneumonia.⁹ Spencer's obituary appeared in the 1884 minutes of the West Union Association of United Baptists. It reads as follows:

"S.F. Lay, son of Elder M. Lay, was born in Campbell County, Tenn., Jan. the 14th, 1860; and died in Scott County, April the 11th, 1884. He was a member of Pleasant Grove Church about eight years; baptized by Elder G. C. Duncaine. His remarks were "Father and Mother you need not grieve for me; if I get well it is all right, if I die it is all right. I feel my way clear, I am going to heaven. I am satisfied to you all but Brother Louis; I fear he is not prepared, and it grieves my poor heart. I want to talk but my lungs are weak and my body is weak; but I am strong in spirit, I love the Lord; I feel his love burning in my heart. Mother, that is a good feeling to have on a dying bed. He shouted and praised the Lord, and at last he kissed father and mother and said farewell."¹⁰

Lucinda Lay was born 7 June 1861. She married John Woods, a farmer and merchant of Marsh Creek. After the death of John Wood, Lucinda then married a Mr. Stephens and had one daughter, Nonie Lela Stephens. Lucinda died 6 March 1917.¹¹

Lewis P. Lay was born 17 January 1866. He was a farmer, teacher, bookkeeper, businessman, county-judge and bank president. Lewis P. married Permelia E. Richardson in 1896.

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D. Mitchel, (Mitchel as he was called), was born 9 April 1878 and died 25 April 1936. He first married Susie Criscillis. She died 7 December 1898 at the age of 25 years 1mo. 3 weeks and 4 days.¹² He then married Mary E. Trammel, (3 November 1874-4 January 1946). D. Mitchel was a prosperous and very successful farmer.¹³ Mayme Lay Boles said that when she was a child Mitchel lived on the adjoining farm to them. He later owned a farm in Garrard County, near Lancaster, Kentucky.¹⁴

Dora Belle was Spencer Lay's daughter but Mike and Elizabeth (Betsy) raised her. Dora Belle was born 13 March 1881¹⁵ and died 2 July 1902.¹⁴ Mayme Lay Boles said that "Dora Belle was a beautiful lady, but she took TB (tuberculosis) and died young. My sister always told me I was about 6 months old when she died."

After the death of his first wife Elizabeth (Betty), Mike married Emily Lay Braden. Emily was the daughter of Elder Michael Lay and Lydia Baird Lay. Emily first married Warren Braden. After the death of Warren, she married Michael (Big Foot Mike) Lay. Emily and Mike were both widowed for a few years before their marriage in about 1900. Mike and Emily had one daughter, Elva Mayme. Mayme was born December 10, 1901.¹⁶ Mayme attended Cumberland College at an early age. She married Lafayette Lay in 1918. Lafayette was the stepson of Thomas Lay, but was no blood relation to Mayme. A post card that Mayme sent her mother while attending college, dated February 10, 1915, advises that she had been exposed to measles and wanted Emily to send for her as she would likely "take them". Another post card sent to Mayme from Lafayette dated December 6, 1917 was addressed to Mayme at Johnson Hall at the college.

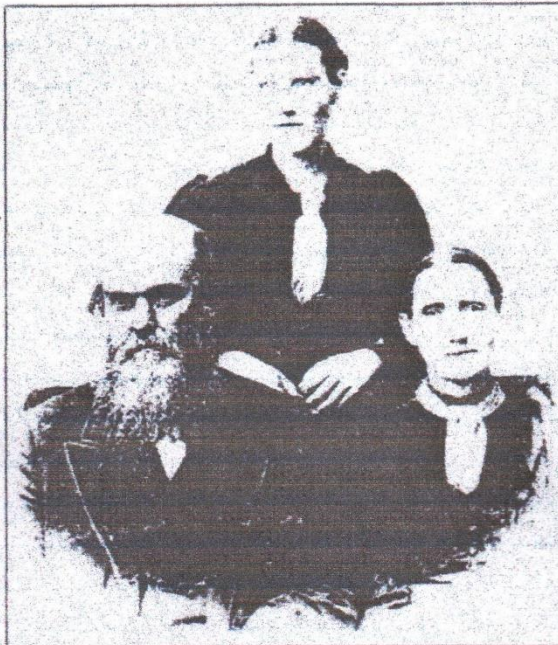
The Call. Michael (Big Foot Mike) Lay was taught to 'fear and serve the Lord.' His father William L. (Billy) Lay was called by the Lord into his service as a Minister of the Gospel early in his life. Michael felt the calling of the Lord when he was about 15 years old, and preached his first sermon near his sixteenth birthday on the first Sunday in December 1858.¹⁷ Since Michael and his family lived in Elk Valley, Tennessee, no doubt this sermon was preached at the Elk Fork United Baptist Church, considering Elk Fork was the only church for 10 or more miles around. Elk Fork church was organized as a church body, 6 June 1836,¹⁸ around the time Michael's father came to Elk Valley. As Michael began to preach, he also began to gain the respect and confidence usually reserved for much older preachers. In those days churches had meetings every Sunday if a preacher was available, and it seemed that preachers were plentiful in this area. Churches had their business meetings once a month. At this time, it was not uncommon for the church people, and especially preachers, to travel by horseback 10-15 miles outside their communities to attend a business session of a church. The visitors would stay with relatives or as guests of the church members and attend the services. Many churches held their business meetings on

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Saturday, during the day. These visitors undoubtedly took reports back to their respective communities concerning the condition and progress of the attended church.

When a man "announced"¹⁹ his calling to preach he was observed, and the doctrine he preached was carefully scrutinized by the Deacons and Elders of the church. This was to make sure he was preaching the beliefs of the church and walking and talking 'uprightly' before the Lord. It was not uncommon for the church to watch a preacher for several years, before setting him aside²⁰ to be ordained unto the full ministry of the Gospel. It was 9 years before Michael Lay would be "ordained and set apart as a minister of the Gospel possessing all the rights, power and privileges of a minister of United Baptist faith and order."²¹ Michael was ordained 15 December 1867 at the Zion Church in Scott County, Tennessee.

When Michael and Elizabeth married, they had no money and virtually no possessions. They did however possess the important skills and knowledge to survive, sustain themselves and the ability and willingness to work hard. Mayme said that when Michael married he "borrowed a dollar and a pair of Brogan shoes."²² Michael probably felt blessed to have a friend around with a pair of size 13 brogan shoes. Michael and Elizabeth lived in Elk Valley for a few years after their marriage. It was here that their first two children were born. According to the 1860 Campbell County Tennessee Census; Michael and Elizabeth lived in the next dwelling to Lewis and Martha Lay. Lewis was Michael's brother and Martha was Elizabeth's sister. Spencer F. was a few months old at the time of this census. Lucinda was born the following year.



Rev. Michael Lay, wife Elizabeth, and daughter Lucinda.

Michael and Elizabeth continued to live in Elk Valley until 1865, when he obtained a land grant from the state of Kentucky in Scott County, Tennessee. Michael received this Kentucky Land grant for 100 acres of land on the Gum Fork of Jellico Creek, being dated 15 August 1865.²³ The following year Michael and Elizabeth's second child, Lewis P. was born. Michael worked his farm and cleared land for new fields, while still finding time to devote to the work of the Lord. It was just a short time later at the Zion Church, a few miles from his new farm, that he was ordained as a minister of the Gospel. Michael probably bought other land in the area, for on 27 August 1874, he sold 150 acres to his brother John L. Lay, on

26 July 1876.

Michael was one of three school directors for the 7th Civil District of Scott County, which was probably an elected position. He served along with his brother John L. Lay and Daniel Blankenship of the Capuchine area of Scott County. These three signed their name to the contract hiring James Lay as teacher for school number two in the Seventh District of said Scott County.²⁴ While interviewing a lady at a nursing home in Jellico, Tennessee in the early 1990's, I struck a conversation with another elderly resident. Upon learning she was a retired teacher who once lived at Pleasant View, Ky., I asked if she knew Mayme Boles Lay and her father Michael, who once lived there. She said she had and proceeded to tell me some things about them. She related that Michael, Mayme's father "hired teachers," telling of one incident where he gave a speech at the school at Pleasant View. It would seem that Michael continued this public service throughout most of his life.

EVANGELIST/PASTOR.

At the West Union Association meeting held at Bethel United Baptist Church in Pine Knot, Kentucky in 1882 Michael was moderator. He would serve at least five more times as moderator by 1892, but not in successive order.²⁵ By the early 1880's, Rev. Michael Lay was being referred to as Elder Michael Lay, having gained the respect of his church members. When a death occurred during these times, two or three would prepare the body for burial. If the deceased were a male, a couple of the men would wash and prepare the body. If the deceased were a female, the women would assume this task. If possible, the body was buried within three days, for no embalming was done. Sometimes a memorial service was held later. Elder C. C. Jones died 2 January 1883, "as a last respect the funeral service

was attended on Oct 14th, 1883 by Elders Michael Lay, C. C. Terry and Goldman Kennedy." In addition, when Elder Spencer Lay died Oct 29 1884 James, Jesse, and Michael Lay attended his funeral service on August 19, 1885.²⁶

In 1946 Verna Denham, assisted by Hattie M. Sullivan, wrote a sketch of Whitley County, Kentucky history. An excerpt was published in a Whitley County newspaper in 1959. It in part states that Rev. Horace Meadows, Rev. M. Lay and Rev. J. M. Burnett continued the religious work with the Union Church, preaching in the public school building at Williamsburg until

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Rev. A. A. Myers returned in the late fall of 1881. Work on a church building was begun in the early part of 1882; also plans to start the academy in 1882 were completed.²⁷ The academy mentioned is now Cumberland College.

Throughout the next several years, Michael would continue to work on the farm and fulfill his obligation to the Lord in preaching and ministering God's word to the people of the area. In 1889, Michael would move from Scott County in Tennessee to Marsh Creek, Whitley County Kentucky.²⁸ Mayme said, "I think one reason that daddy came there, was because this farm (Ryan's Farm) that he bought, was so much better than any thing he had ever had. The way I was reared was far better than any of our neighbors. He had a little store, he had this big farm, and he had workers that worked for him all of the time and he paid all he could in the store." Uncle Mike, as Michael was being referred to by this time, undoubtedly took leading interest in the needs of the community. As pastor, of whatever church he was pastoring at the time, it was his duty to 'watch over the flock', along with the deacons or elders of the church. If someone in the community was in need their neighbors would most surely band together to help. This sense of unity included the whole community not just members of a particular church. Mayme said she went to an "all days singing and dinner on the ground at a place down below Williamsburg, called Pleasant Hill". When the pastor got up to preach he had Mayme stand up, and recognized her as the daughter of Rev. Mike Lay. The pastor indicated that Mike had given his family a job on the farm, evidently when their family was in need of work. He seemed to be highly grateful for Mike Lay's help.

On February 1, 1896 tragedy again struck the Michael Lay home for that was when his wife of 37 years passed from this life. Michael would remain a widower for 4 years. In 1900 he married Emily Lay Braden, born: 31 July 1857, died 17 August 1955, the widow of Warren Braden. Warren and Emily had eight children. The Braden children respectfully called Michael "Father Lay" as evidenced by a Christmas card from Joseph Braden and family.

At a "Special Term 14 December 1897, Whitley County Court, M. Lay having produced to said Court satisfactory evidence that he is a Minister of the Gospel, in regular Communion with the United Baptist Church is therefore licensed to solemnize the rites of matrimony in this state between all persons legally authorized to write in marriage."²⁹ This license made no doubt of Rev. Mike Lay's right to solemnize marriages. He married many a couple. Pinned to the inside cover of one of his church manuals, (printed in 1903), are the basics outlining the marriage ceremony.

Two notes dated March 24 1904 indicate that C. S. Lay and W. W. Trammell indebted themselves to Mike on the same day. They are worded just alike except for the name of the debtor

and the amount. One reads: "One day after date I promist (sic) to pay to M. Lay ___ dollars for value received this the 24 March 1904. Then each debtor signed the note. On the back of one reads: \$6.00 credit the within note six dollars March the 15 1908." Rev. Mike Lay pastored about twelve churches during his life. Among those that he was known to have pastored at this time are Upper Marsh Creek Baptist³⁰ and Jellico Creek Baptist.³¹ Michael was a United Baptist preacher and always held true to that doctrine, although he was sympathetic to the Missionary Baptist cause. This caused a misunderstanding in one of the churches he pastored. Michael went to preach one day and the doors were locked, so he preached on the steps of the church and had Church service anyway. Evidently this misunderstanding was quickly resolved. (This incident was previously reported in the article, "He Fought the Good Fight. He Kept the Faith." by Gerald Lay and Don Lay, in *Lay of the Land* March 1998. At that time, it was reported that it was Michael's father Rev. William L. Lay who preached on the steps of the church. Since then overwhelming evidence has been found to prove that it was the Rev. Michael Lay.)³²

At the December 1906 meeting of the Jellico Creek Church, the church ordered "that James & Tomis Higginbotham look-out a pastor against next meeting." At the January 1907 meeting held on the 3rd Saturday, (All business meetings were held on the 3rd Sat. of the month), the minutes reads: By M&C, (motion and second), we elect Pastor and clerk by privit (sic) Ballot that procceded (sic) in the election of M. Lay pastor, James C. West c.c.(Church Clerk) for next year. At the February 1907 meeting, Michael was evidently absent at the church business meeting on the 3rd Saturday, for James Higginbotham was moderator. The title Moderator was many times substituted for Pastor. Michael's absence most probably was due to the death of his father Rev. William L. Lay, who died January 30, 1907.

Among some of the old papers that were saved and handed down over the years, are a few handwritten songs. They were written and or hand copied by Michael Lay. One such song seems to be in his own hand writing. It is entitled, "Christian Song Ballad", the first words are as follows:

"Come Christians join with me to praise the lamb of calvary
Who shed his blood upon the cross
So free for you and me

And by the virtue of the slain to heaven I hope to fly
And their praise redeeming love with angels around the sky"
At the bottom Michael wrote, "M. Lays Favorite Song"
Another is entitled "A Mother Song ballad for Emily Lay" In part it reads:

"I was young but I remember well, the night my mother died,
for I was watching her Spirit fade till she called me to her side,
Saying darling I must leave you, Angels Voice guides me on
Pray that we may meet in Heaven when your mothers dead and gone"
At the end of this song it is noted: "Written by M. Lay one of his favorite songs Aug 29 1911"

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William L. Lay (Mike Lay's father) deeded Mike a parcel of property,³³ which began at a White Oak on the West side of the Williamsburg and Huntsville Road. 06 March 1907. William L. Lay deeded this land to Mike "to enable me to have some one paid to care for me during my natural life." William L. Lay reserved a homestead for his second wife Betty Lay during her natural life. This property was on Marsh Creek. The Kentucky State Legislature passed an act creating McCreary County out of Pulaski, Wayne, and Whitley Counties, 12 March 1912. Mike Lay's farm, formerly in Whitley County, now fell just inside McCreary County. An original tax receipt dated 9 November 1912, shows that Mike Lay paid \$50.28 tax on \$4228.00 in valued property, which included a \$1.00 Dog Tax. In 1915 the tax due was calculated in a slightly different manner. The calculated tax included tax not only on real estate owned, but money, notes and personal possessions.³⁴ 135 Acres were valued at \$2000.00.

In 1918, Mike and Emily's daughter Mayme married Lafayette C. Lay. They soon made Pleasant View Kentucky their home. In a letter postmarked and dated March 6, 1920, Mayme writes to her parents on Hospital stationery, (Riverside Hospital, now Baptist Hospital Knoxville Tennessee), encouraging them to come and live with her and Lafayette at Pleasant View. Lafayette had been in the hospital for an ailment. In the letter Mayme goes on to say "Brother Lewis and Dillard came up to see Fayette Wednesday." Of course Lewis was Mike's son. Dillard was Mike's nephew and son of Jesse C. Lay (Cobbie Jess) Mike's brother. The letter further states "We are so anxious for you to come and live with us. Oh I will be so happy when I get you to live with us. I guess Jimmie, (James Braden, Maymes half brother), would be the best man you could get to take care of the farm. But I had rather you wouldn't sell my old home place, unless you needed to. I hate to see it go. I don't care about living there, but I love the place."

The 1920 federal census for McCreary County Kentucky lists Michael age 77 and Emily age 62. This indicates that they were still on their farm in early summer 1920. Sometime during the summer or fall of 1920 they moved to Pleasant View Kentucky.³⁵ In 1921 Mike owned one town lot valued at

\$1000.00 in Pleasant View, Ky.³⁶ An old letter sent to Mike from his sister Rachel Lay Peace and dated 1922 asks him to come for a visit. Rachel, who with her husband Joseph Peace lived near Carpenter Kentucky, says that Mike and family could come to Gatliff, Kentucky on the train, and that they would send the wagon for them. Rachel said that she wanted to hear Mike preach "one more time before I die." She said that she wanted him to come and hold a revival for "it's badly needed."³⁷



This photo is believed to be of Rev. William L. (Billy) Lay 1809-1907, standing in the water during a baptism. Gerald Lay traced down this photo after interviewing an elderly resident of the area. Notice the finery of the ladies. The photo was badly torn, and background restoration was done.

A copy of an unfinished, undated will that M. Lay apparently began and never finished was sent to this author by Thelma Lay Rice, great granddaughter of Mike Lay. Another finished handwritten will is dated May 1, 1920. This will was witnessed by J. P. Baily, Bessie Booth, and J. B. Cox. Comparing Mike Lay's handwriting in these wills from his earlier writings his steady hand seems to be wavering, being 78 years old in 1920. His true last will and testament was typewritten and dated August 6, 1927, witnessed by John Phillips, Mrs John Philips, Mrs. E. L. Lambdin, and Grant Davis. It seemed that Mike was seriously arranging his affairs to provide for his and Emily's future care.

In the 20 September 1928 issue of the Western Recorder, a Kentucky Baptist publication, his ministerial service is outlined. In part it reads "He has been both evangelist and pastor. During the many years he has held revival services in practically all the Baptist churches in Whitley and McCreary Counties in Kentucky, and several in Scott and Campbell counties in Tennessee. Hundreds have professed faith in Christ, and have taken up the cross and are following him. He has served about twelve (12) churches as pastor and the number converted under his preaching is not known as he never

kept any record of his ministerial labors. He says he is confident he has not received over \$100 for his services."

Mike bought property from his son-in-law Lafayette C. Lay May 23, 1931. This being a town lot in Pleasant View, Kentucky. No doubt this was the house and lot where Mike and Emily lived with Mayme and Lafayette. On November 12, 1931, Michael Lay laid down his labors and passed from this life. The word of God that he taught and preached is still being sounded in the hills and valleys of the region where he lived.

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He touched hundreds maybe thousands of lives during his religious labors. While most people that knew him are gone, most of the churches that he pastored and held revival meetings in, still stand. They serve as a guiding light just as Reverend Michael Lay served as a guiding light when he labored on this earth. It would have been a great blessing to have witnessed the Spirit of God with this obedient servant of God. Michael's funeral supplies cost \$350.00.³⁸ Ellison Funeral Home of Williamsburg, Kentucky was responsible for the body. Mike was buried in the Pleasant View Cemetery. The descendants of Reverend Michael Lay can be proud of the legacy that he left behind, the morals that he taught and the life that he lived. Rev. Michael Lay was this author's great-great uncle, and I am most proud to say so!

I wish to thank the following people for their contribution to this article: The late Marshal Meadors and his family, Thelma Rice, Jan McIntire, Carol Hasty, Bonnie and Don Murphy, and Gloria Perkins.

Endnotes:

¹Sept 1928 issue Western Recorder published by the Kentucky Board of Missions

²Personal Interview July 7, 1987.

³Tombstone inscription at Upper Marsh Creek Church Cem., Marsh Creek, Ky

⁴Lay Family Bible.

⁵Lay Family History by Arlie M. Lay, published by the Scott Co. Historical Society 1984.

⁶History of Kentucky Page 232, Judge Charles Kerr author.

⁷Mike Lay Bible, in possession of Mayme Lay Boles in 1987.

⁸History of Kentucky, page 233-Kendall and Kerr.

⁹Interview with Mayme Lay Boles 7/7/1987.

¹⁰West Union Association of United Baptists minutes in possession of Gloria Perkins, Pine Knot Ky. Sent by electronic mail.

¹¹Death Certificate in possession of Don and Bonnie Murphy- Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹²Information from an old Lay Family Bible.

¹³History of Kentucky, page 233-Kendall and Kerr.

¹⁴History of Kentucky, page 233-Kendall and Kerr.

¹⁵Mike Lay Bible, in possession of Mayme Lay Boles in 1987.

¹⁶Information from an old Lay Family Bible.

¹⁷Mike Lay Bible, in possession of Mayme Lay Boles in 1987.

¹⁸Sept 1928 issue Western Recorder published by the Kentucky Board of Missions.

¹⁹Deed dated June 4, 1836, recorded in book G page 208, Campbell County TN. ²⁰Proclaimed or simply told the church that he was called by the Lord to preach his Gospel.

²¹When the church set a date and appointed a presbytery to examine the candidate for ordination. This must be done by order of the church while in session.

²²Copy of Michael Lay's ordination as a minister of the Gospel, issued by the Church at Zion, Scott County Tennessee dated December 15 1867.

²³Interview with Mayme Lay Boles 7/7/1987.

²⁴Land Grant dated 15 August, 1865, recorded in book 7 page 497 (South of Walkers Line).

²⁵School Contract dated 26 July 1876.

²⁶West Union Association Minutes in possession of Gerald Lay.

²⁷West Union Association of United Baptists minutes in possession of Gloria Perkins, Pine Knot Ky. Sent by electronic mail.

²⁸Newspaper article "Raveling" by John L. Crawford, published in a Whitley County newspaper in 1959.

²⁹History of Kentucky, page 232-Kendall and Kerr.

³⁰Ministers license issued by The Whitley County Kentucky Fiscal Court to Michael Lay, 1897.

Memorial

Our sympathy to LFGA President, Loyal Lay, on the death of his mother, Mrs. Eula Dunivin Lay. Mrs. Lay passed away October 21, 2000, and was buried 25 October 2000 in Ozark Cemetery, Houston, Texas County, Mo.

Memorial

Our sympathy to member Jewell McKinney on the death of her father, Ted McKinney. Mr. McKinney passed away 24 October 2000 and was buried 27 October 2000 in Ozark Cemetery, Houston, Mo. Mr. McKinney was born 8 February, 1908, in Solo, Missouri, a GGGGrandson of Jesse and Katherine Bradley Lay, LFGA Line #4.

LFGA News

Gordon Sloan is still accepting suggestions for the site of the LFGA 2002 meeting. Kentucky and Tennessee are the leading contenders, but that can change. Make your vote count. (See Page two for his address)

Steve Stamm has completed the selection process on the index for the new issue of the J. Gilbert Lay book. The committee is considering hiring help to do this last word processing.



Happy Holidays