

Clarence & Donna Woolley

Clarence Woolley was born on April 9, 1926, at the family home in Blackwell, Oklahoma, to Elmer and Elsie (Dishen) Woolley. Clarence was the second of five children. He had three brothers and one sister, with only one brother surviving. His dad worked at the zinc smelter in Blackwell. Clarence moved from Blackwell while still a baby, but he remembers hearing it told that his dad, who worked on and with the machinery at the smelter, actually worked on the Corliss steam engine now displayed at the antique tractor and engine showground at Pawnee, Oklahoma.

The family's next home was on the large Stewart Ranch east of Follett, Texas, in Lipscomb County in the extreme northeast edge of the Texas Panhandle. While Clarence was still too young to remember details of his dad's work, he knows it continued to be involvement with machinery. On one occasion, he remembered going to town where his dad purchased a large hit and miss engine. While returning to the ranch with the engine, a wheel came off the cart and passed them on the road. Clarence showed his interest in engines by spending a lot of time in the ranch shop. On one occasion he moved a large flywheel on a bench, and it fell hitting his foot. The wound was serious because he said it smashed his foot flat to the point a person could see through it where the flywheel hit. It's a wonder that the event didn't discourage him, but he never lost his fascination with machinery.

Clarence began his education at the county, one-room school called the North Star School. A memory there was that he and a brother rode a Shetland pony about four or five miles to school. (Donna found a photo of Clarence and two of his brothers seated on the pony.) He said they carried their lunches to school in a feed sack hanging from the horse's neck. They ate well since the ranch provided good food. He received his first brush with 1930s discipline when he, while playing Santa in a school play, refused to go down the chimney. His teacher gave him a swat and told him to move it. He wouldn't say if this was the only spanking he received in school.

When he was in about the third or fourth grade, his family moved to Follett from the ranch. At this school, he, after being heard attempting to sing in class, was advised by a teacher, "Don't ever try to sing." This ended any hope he had of every becoming a performer. At Follett, his dad had a business hauling food commodities. He would purchase all types of produce in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas and bring them to Follett for resale.

In Follett, while Clarence was still a small child, a barnstorming, biplane pilot flew into the town. He was offering rides, but Clarence refused. He remembers thinking he would be smashed in the cockpit as the plane became smaller as it ascended, an assumption he had since the airplane appeared smaller as it flew higher. He was so young at the time he doesn't remember if he actually flew on this occasion or not.

The family next moved to Siloam Springs, Arkansas, for about a year. They lived in a big, two-story, brick home a short distance out on the east side of town, but Clarence's attempts to locate the home have proven futile. This home was on a farm where his dad raised sweet potatoes for market.

The next move was back to Follett where Clarence's dad worked for a John Deere

dealership. Clarence has good recollection of trips he took with his dad to Amarillo, Texas, to pick up combines for the John Deere agency. These units had to be assembled after delivery to Follett. Mr. Woolley continued hauling produce, which he displayed and sold in the main showroom at the dealership. Clarence continued with his fascination of machinery by spending much of his time at the dealership shop.

Follett was in the center of the area affected by the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. It was probably April 13, 1935, when Clarence and his family experienced perhaps the worst dust storm of the era. Clarence and his siblings rode that day with their mother in her new Chevrolet to tend the cows in their pasture. When the wall of the dust storm hit them, they survived by placing towels over their faces to breathe. A total darkness ensued when the storm hit and lasted for perhaps two hours. Clarence's dad had just returned to Follett from a trip to Colorado to purchase potatoes when the storm hit (see photo below). He parked against a town building with his lights on, but they would not illuminate the wall of the building from a foot away. And too, a double disaster of the same period was the experience of the Great Depression. Clarence said there was no food available to feed the livestock. Government agents bought cows for a dollar and killed them to keep them from a slow starvation. These were tough times for a young boy and his family.

Because of the dust storms, the Woolleys moved to Cherokee City, Arkansas. At that time, the town was pretty large with lots of homes, several stores, a hotel, and the remains of a recently closed cannery. Mr. Woolley bought a fifty acre farm immediately on the south edge of town and grew tomatoes for market. Clarence attended the seventh grade at Cherokee City. He had a paper route and earned money to buy a calf, which he soon traded for a bicycle to make his paper delivery easier.

After the dust storms ended in Texas and Oklahoma, Clarence and Edgar Woolley, a cousin who lived with Clarence's family, moved with the Woolleys cattle herd to a farm near Slapout, Oklahoma. Slapout, in the eastern edge of the Oklahoma Panhandle, was only about ten miles as the crow flies from where the Woolleys had lived in Follett, Texas. Fortunately, the family of Curtis Anderson, another cousin, had a truck and cattle trailer for the move. For a while, before his folks sold the property in Arkansas and arrived at Slapout, the only transportation Clarence and Edgar had was the bicycle Clarence had traded for earlier. They regularly rode it the three or four miles to town for groceries.

By the time Clarence attended the eighth grade at a country school called Glendale Elementary, he had a horse to ride. When he entered high school at Laverne, Oklahoma, which was about ten or twelve miles from the farm, he had the luxury of riding a bus. In school, he was interested in shop classes and mechanics, which helped feed his growing interest in machinery and airplane models, an interest which would serve him well in his adult life. He also built a generator using heavy magnets to produce electricity to replace the kerosene lanterns his family used for lighting. Another project was a crystal radio he built with a copper antenna which extended for a half mile along a fence. He could receive radio transmissions from as far away as overseas on the device. Even though the family sold the Slapout farm long ago, they kept the mineral rights, and Clarence and his family continue to receive royalties from five gas wells on that property. An important artifact from that period is the farm's windmill, which Clarence still owns.

Very importantly, during the eighth grade, Clarence met a young girl named Lela Faye Lovell at church. She was very active in the church and sang in the choir. Lela, her sister, and her mother ran a farm nearby. Clarence said he had certainly found something more

important than school. When he went to see Lela to ask her out on their first date, he had to find her in the fields where she was operating a John Deere A tractor. On April 7, 1944, just two days before his eighteenth birthday, and a month before graduation from high school, he dropped out of school and married Lela. He had to have his mother's permission and presence at the wedding to marry at such a young age. He moved to the Lovell farm and worked there until he was drafted into the army in 1945. The war had ended, and he didn't think it proper to be drafted at that point. One can only imagine the value he was to those three ladies during the time he was able to help.

Clarence was sent to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, to be inducted into the army. He was then sent to Camp Roberts in central California for basic training. He was assigned to the Tank Destroyer Battalion, but by that time, Camp Roberts was being closed down, so it became his job to help with the dismantling of the camp. Years later, he and Lela visited Camp Roberts when an open-house tour of the historical camp was being held. He greatly enjoyed showing Lela where he was located in his absence from her. Recently, he was showing a friend a photograph of himself while in the army. The friend asked, "Isn't that Camp Roberts?" His friend had also been based at the camp during the war, and he recognized the barracks in the background of the picture. It's a small world after all. Since the war had ended and since he and Lela were expecting their first child, he was quickly released from the army.

While he was in the army, Lela's family bought a home at Gage, Oklahoma, in the western part of the state, and this time, while not quite in the panhandle, it was not far from either Follett or Slapout. In a short time, Clarence bought a lot in Gage and built a home for his growing family. Tragically, Clarence and Lela's first child died in infancy.

In Gage, Clarence worked for a lumber yard for the next five years. He was interested in the activities at the nearby office of the Civil Aeronautics Agency (CAA), which is now the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA). Once again, he was attracted to aviation. This time he was impressed by the fact that a neighbor, who worked for the CAA, spent more time tending his lawn and washing his car than working. He thought aviation might not be a bad career to pursue. He didn't really want to work for the government since he still harbored some hard feelings at being drafted. His opportunity in aviation would come first from another direction.

In 1950, Clarence heard of a start-up aviation company called Central Airlines which was organizing at Meacham Field in Fort Worth, Texas. He applied for employment and was hired as a section manager, a position similar to a ticket agent. His early employment in the company soon gave him seniority. He moved his family to Pampa, Texas, but this would be only the first of several relocations with Central. His position with the airline sent him later to Woodard, Oklahoma, then back to Pampa, and finally to Ponca City, Oklahoma. Incidentally, the company began with four-place Beechcraft Bonanza planes but soon added the twenty-one passenger DC-3s.

In 1955 while at Pampa, Clarence earned his private pilot's license and completed certification in meteorology. Just how involved he was in aviation by this time is marked by the fact that he soon bought his first airplane, a three-seat, Stinson 10-A, which was a fun to fly, high-wing plane. He later owned a second Stinson and an Aeronca L-3.

When asked if he ever had to make an emergency landing in one of his planes, Clarence laughed and said he had been in every field and pasture out there. He wasn't joking very

much. He told of one occasion when he was flying from Gage to Sayre, Oklahoma, his cockpit filled with smoke, and he made an emergency landing in a field near the Canadian River. A valve had broken and damaged a piston. He walked to the nearest telephone and called Lela to come and get him. He took his boat off his trailer and went to retrieve his airplane. He loaded it backwards with the rear wheels on the trailer and the front wheels on the highway, and pulled his plane ten miles or so back to Gage. He said he took up the whole highway, but he made the trip safely. Lela would always ask him when he went out to fly, "Which way are you going so I'll know where to come get you."

In 1956, the family had just moved to Ponca City, Oklahoma, with Central Airlines when Clarence became interested in working for the FAA as an air traffic controller. In the early 50s, the FAA became concerned about the growing number of aircraft in the skies and the danger of crashes and ruled that airports would have to employ air traffic controllers. Clarence applied, and he noted that even without a high school diploma but with the fact that he was a veteran, was a pilot, and had worked in aviation for five years, he was quickly hired by the FAA. He had just built a home in Ponca City, but he was on the move again. Incidentally, for a while Clarence and his cousin Edgar Woolley in their "spare time" built homes for sale in Ponca City.

In his new job, he first went to Amarillo, Texas, for a while and then to FAA school in Oklahoma City for certification. After completing certification, he was assigned as air traffic controller back in Gage, Oklahoma. While in Gage, Clarence also owned a pontoon boat building business for the nearby lakes. He also maintained the Oklahoma State Police boats on the area lake. This sideline for him began his interest in collecting antique boat motors, a part of his interests and collections to this day. In the early sixties, while Clarence was building a cabin cruiser from plans in a Popular Mechanics magazine, Edgar was doing the same. About 1962, they and their families enjoyed a two-week vacation on their boats on Grand Lake in Oklahoma. Clarence later traded the boat for one of his airplanes.

In 1965, Clarence learned of a controller job at Drake Field at Fayetteville, Arkansas. He bid on the job and got it. Finally, he and his family were able to settle down after so much moving about. He bought a home in Springdale to get away from the icy hills of Fayetteville in the winter times. In 1972, he and Lela bought a lot for a home on Parsons Road east of Springdale. Clarence drew the plans and submitted them to a loan agency. The plans were approved, and Clarence built his current home. When asked when he quit flying regularly and why, he said it was a very expensive hobby; so he quit by about 1968.

Another episode in his life involved motorcycles. In 1970, a cousin gave him a small motorcycle. He thought this would be good transportation to work. He only made three or four trips when he realized the bike was too small for the busy highways in Northwest Arkansas. He bought a bigger bike, a Honda 400, and later and even larger Honda. In 1975 he bought a two-seat Honda Gold Wing, and he and Lela began touring the country for a couple of years. With a trailer Clarence built, they made several trips that took them many places from the east coast to New Mexico. In 1977, a drunken driver pulled out in front of him and wrecked his bike. His right leg was broken in four places causing him to be off work for four months. He quit riding bikes.

In 1986, after thirty years of service with the FAA, Clarence retired. He could now pursue his interests in collecting and restoring antique engines, tractors, and artifacts of all types. The biggest involvement he had in restoration was his help on a project to restore a

very rare H-21 Shawnee helicopter belonging to a friend named Max Hall. Along with the four years of actual work on the copter, the effort required many trips across the country and even to Alaska. Clarence, Lynn Barnica, and Max made a trip there for parts. As soon as the copter was ready, the crew, with Bill Garrison as pilot, made a trip to the famous Oshkosh, Wisconsin, Fly-In. In September 1997, the H-21 landed at the Tired Iron show at Rose of Sharon. Then in 2005, the copter made a fly-over of the show. Clarence also contributed to the Drake Field Arkansas Air Museum exhibit entitled "The Flight Service Station, 1949-1993." This exhibit shows "how it was" in earlier flight control before GPS devices, etc. When visiting the great museum, look for Clarence's name on the dedication plaque.

Another pursuit for Clarence is SCUBA diving. About fifteen years ago, he took lessons from his nephew, who is a licensed diving instructor. Clarence earned certification as a diver and began enjoying diving in Tablerock Lake and Beaver Lake.

A sad part of Clarence's life came when Lela became ill, which required special care for her for an extended period of time. Those around Clarence during this time saw how devoted he was to her. He took her twice weekly for treatment and was constantly nearby for her. Clarence wouldn't leave Lela for very long; so his friends in Tired Iron came to his shop at his home for many weekly work sessions. Lela passed away in 2004 just three days before their sixtieth wedding anniversary. And too, of their four children, their daughter Connie Winters is the only survivor.

It is obvious that Clarence had a great marriage because after months of grieving, he began looking for someone to share his interests, especially in traveling. He met several nice ladies, but when his children put his information on Yahoo Personal, he met, online, a girl by the name of Donna (Lillie) Lovelady from a little community called Solgohachia near Morrilton, Arkansas. Donna's husband had passed away after fifty years of marriage. Her children, she has four, had placed her information on Yahoo also. After chatting back and forth for a while, it was decided they would meet at the Cracker Barrel restaurant in Russellville, Arkansas. When the time to meet came, Clarence altered the plans by asking if she would like to come to Springdale to take a boat outing on Beaver Lake with him, his cousin, and his cousin's wife. She said, "Sure, what the heck." Later, it wasn't a first date as with Lela, but the first time he went to Solgohachia to see Donna; he found her bush hogging a field on her eighty-acre farm on a John Deere 930. Boy! Clarence knows what is important to look for in a woman. In April 2005 they were married. Donna would prove to fit in with Clarence's interest in collecting, Tired Iron, and traveling. For one thing, each December, they take their spacious, fifth-wheel, Holiday Rambler RV to Holliday Beach at Copano Bay on the Gulf Coast near Port Aransas, Texas, for three months.

It would be impossible to try to list all of the items in Clarence's collections. They do include three or four thousand toys, which include many nice trucks, tractors, implements, and very nice airplanes, and Donna's dolls. A few years ago, he sold off many toys, but as is evident, his collection is still extensive. He has eight Cushman units, including a rare, 1970 Trackster with tracks rather than wheels. His large tractors include a Ford, a John Deere, a Case, and a Massey-Harris. Smaller tractors include two home-built replicas of larger tractors, some International Cub Cadets, and an unusual rice binder, and many other riding and walk-behind units. He has about twenty outboard motors, including three from the World War II era. His sheds are full of these and other items. The shop where he and his friends worked is fully equipped with lathes, milling machines, saws, welders, presses, and

all related tools.

Perhaps most importantly to Tired Iron, he, as a charter member of the club, has been a tremendous support with his displays, time, and financial input. From the beginning of Tired Iron of the Ozarks in 1992, he worked tirelessly to provide needed items. He built or provided such items as an announcer's stand and sets of speakers: the bleachers, which he fabricated at home and transported early on to the show grounds at Rose of Sharon; the flag poles and flags which flew over Rose of Sharon; a kiddie pulling tractor; the kiddie train, which has gone under different ownerships but is still a part of our shows; and last but not least, he and Donna built and operated the clubhouse concession stand. He arranged for and transported much of the used tin we use for our sheds. He arranged for and helped transport three large engines from western Oklahoma to the club grounds. He also arranged for the donation of the club's Case LA and its Allis Chalmers WD-45 tractors from friends in Slapout, Oklahoma. He also transported them to Arkansas. The list could go on and on. By the way, Donna mentioned that, while club members are reading this biography in January, she and Clarence will be basking in the sun in South Texas. What a way to spend the winter.

The final statement is, "Thanks to Clarence and Donna."