

Janet Miller Cantrell, Member #1200

George Vail

b. 10 Jul 1891 South Coffeyville, Indian Territory

d. 05 Oct 1977, Vinita, Craig Co., OK

“Out on Big Creek”

“Smith and Wesson, make my day.” A well-known quote from Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry. My great grandfather, George Vail, carried his Smith and Wesson inside of the front of his dungarees as he drove his wagon full of crops passing through South Coffeyville, Oklahoma to Coffeyville, Kansas. He was born and raised in Indian Territory. Life was tough when you had famous out-laws as The Daltons and The Spencer Brothers that once freely roamed the ground as you tilled the soil. (I have that Smith and Wesson in my possession today. It was given to me by my grandfather, Donald Vail in 1978)

In the year 1946, George Vail was able to purchase his own farm on Big Creek. He harvested corn, raised hogs, milked cows and had a very large vegetable garden. I experienced most of those chores while visiting, since I was born in 1955. My mom, Elizabeth Louise Vail Miller, a NSDOAF’s member, also, lived with her parents, Donald and Mary Vail, and was raised on this farm. She rode her horse, Blackie, to school. I can say, I have saddled and ridden ole’ Blackie before he went on to greener pastures. A skill once learned that you know how to do for the rest of your life.

Our family had come to conclusions that if a tornado was about to drop out of the sky, the safest place to take cover would be the big red barn. It was built prior to George purchasing the farm by Mr. Lee, the previous owner, with the sturdiest of wood. The barn was divided into a couple of granaries, milk stalls, horse stalls, and a large hay loft. All the walls were thick. I know this for fact, because I played hide and seek in that barn many a hot summer day. In 1998, long after anybody lived on the farm, a tornado came through, moving the house off its foundation, and completely taking the barn down to a height of 18 inches, scattering those sturdy boards that were together for 70 years, over 100 acres of farmland. Each of my siblings have 2 feet of red board from the barn hanging in our homes. Our family members still have the farm in their possession.

My great grandpa’s corn crops were planted in the dark, black, rich soil along Big Creek. A good corn crop meant a good corn liquor, too. George’s younger brother, Jesse, lived across the creek and made moonshine to sell. Yes, he made moonshine clear up into the 1970’s. Yes, the Feds would shoot up the still. But Jesse kept making the moonshine until he was arrested and his still was confiscated by the Feds. His only plea to the judge when released was, “May I have my still back?” My great grandpa never made moonshine, but I am pretty sure he was paid for his corn.

Many of you have read Laura Ingalls Wilder’s book, “Little House on the Prairie.” Her farm setting included Big Creek in SE Kansas on the prairies.....my same Big Creek in NE Oklahoma!

George Vail was born in Indian Territory. He was ten years old when his family moved to Paw Paw Creek in what is now Craig County, Oklahoma. His father, Albert Timothy Vail, drove a freight wagon most of his life. George Vail and June Acel Kimball were married 21 OCT 1912. It is through my great grandmother’s ancestral line that I am a member of NSDAR, Colonial Dames of the XVII Century and Descendants of the Mayflower Society.