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WILLIAM EDWARD BAILEY: GEORGIA PLANTER AND EAST TEXAS FARMER

JOHN N. CRAVENS

William Edward Bailey II, the subject of this study, was born in Wilkinson County, Georgia, on January 11, 1814. His grandfather was born in Ireland; his father, also named William Edward Bailey, was born in North Carolina and moved to South Carolina and later to Georgia; and his mother was born in Georgia. The younger William Edward Bailey’s parents must have lived a very simple life as shown by the fact they refused to ride in the seats of the surrey their son had purchased because of a fear of falling out and getting hurt. During the remainder of their lives the couple sat on the floor when riding in the surrey.

Several of his descendants say that W. E. Bailey, who had received little formal education, could hardly sign his name but depended on his wife in later years to read the Calhoun County, Georgia, newspaper to him. He was extremely good in arithmetic, particularly concerning his own finances. The United States Tenth Census of 1880 states that Bailey could neither read nor write.

Bailey was married three times. In 1839, he married Miss Sarah Sutton of Calhoun County, Georgia, where he then lived. His wife died shortly after their child was born. In 1849, he married Miss Elizabeth Hutto who lived near his home and one child was born to them. After his second wife died, Bailey married Mrs. Indiana Cherry Moore who lived at Bainbridge, Decatur, County, Georgia. Her parents were both born in North Carolina. Indiana Cherry was born October 21 or 22, 1830. Ten children were born to this couple: John L. Bailey was born August 7, 1854; William E. Bailey, III, August 25, 1856; and Henry Bailey, September 25, 1858; Bryant Omar Bailey was born January 22, 1860; Mary Emma Bailey Lane, July 31, 1861; Benany Bailey was born November 20, 1863; Charley D. Bailey, June 29, 1865; Eli Bailey was born March 14, 1867; Lot Bailey, July 30, 1869; and Luke Bailey, November 11, 1871.

In 1860, W. E. Bailey owned a 250-acre plantation, worth $5000 at Morgan, Calhoun County, Georgia. There he made a good living through the use of slaves by growing cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, peas, beans, and raising horses, mules, hogs, and sheep. The Eighth Census of 1860 showed Bailey owning 150 acres of improved land, 100 acres of unimproved land, $100 worth of farm implements, one horse, four jacks and mules, twenty head of milch-cows and fifty head of other cattle, fifty sheep and thirty-five hogs. The total value of his livestock was $1500. In the year ending June 1, 1860, Bailey had raised 1200 bushels of corn and ginned twenty-eight bales of cotton. Also he had produced one hundred pounds of wool, twenty bushels of peas and beans, thirty bushels of sweet potatoes, and two hundred pounds of butter and had slaughtered $750 worth of farm animals.
W. E. Bailey believed in maintaining the family unit among his slaves. Each family was allowed a separate house and the members of a household were responsible for its maintenance. He made it a practice to check the living quarters of his slaves each Sunday morning and to see to it that each family had cleaned the house, had bathed, and put on clean clothes. The story is told that one Sunday morning he found one family not following his regulations. Immediately he personally took part in the bathing of several of the slave children. He did not ration the food to his slaves but maintained a central kitchen with cooks and fed all the enslaved together. As usual his slave quarters were located around the home of the master.

Bailey employed an overseer to carry on the work of his Georgia plantation. Another story is told that shortly before the Civil War began, he sent his overseer with several of the slaves to town to purchase some supplies. When they arrived in town, the overseer became drunk and killed Bailey's favorite slave. Several of the slaves reached home before the overseer and told their master about the murder. Bailey and his wife Indiana stayed up until the overseer, who boarded with the family, returned home. After the murderer went to bed, Bailey and his wife went into the room occupied by the overseer to find out the particulars. The overseer jumped out of bed and attempted to get his gun out of a crevice in the loghouse wall. Mrs. Bailey beat the man to his gun and held it on him until the officers came. Soon the Civil War came and the overseer was sent to serve in the Confederate Army.

Bailey and his family were residing at Morgan, Calhoun County, Georgia, when the Civil War started in 1861. During this conflict he moved farther south in Georgia because he felt that his property in slaves and other valuables would be safer there. Bailey was forty-seven years of age in 1861 and eventually became eligible for Confederate conscription. The law of the Confederate States of America, like that of the United States, allowed draftees to hire a substitute or send a son or other relative in his place. His oldest son, John L. Bailey, who was only eleven years of age, went to the service in his father's place. Since the boy was too young to bear arms and serve as a regular soldier, he was assigned to work for a commission firm that held a contract to furnish the Confederates with fresh meat. The son's job was to drive cattle to feed the Confederate Army.

W. E. Bailey lost heavily from the emancipation of the slaves by the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. A grandson said that Bailey had to free between eighty and ninety slaves. This loss which hurt him financially was, to a great extent, the reason for his decision to come to Texas. Bailey's wife Indiana grieved until the end of her life about this great financial loss in slaves. Bailey himself was quite philosophical about the loss of a slave, horse, or cow. When informed of a loss, he would reply, "Only those who have may lose." The Bailey family was not quite broke as a result of the Civil War for Indiana, for a number of years, carried around her waist an undergarment money belt filled with gold. The weight of the money was believed by Mrs. Bailey to have caused her to be crippled for the remainder of her life.
Shortage of a labor supply caused farm lands in the Old South to drop in value. In 1869, Bailey sold his lands in Georgia and moved in wagons to eastern Texas. Prior to making his final decision to locate in East Texas, he visited in the northern, central, and western parts of the state. He rode horseback from near present day Wells to Dallas and found that good land could be purchased for two dollars an acre but he did not like the gyp water and the shortage of timber there. Dallas at that time had a few small wooden store buildings. While trying to make a final decision about the permanent location of a home, Bailey and his entire family camped for six months to a year on a site on or near the present home of Anna Bailey Cochran near Wells. He decided that East Texas was the most desirable Texas location because of the abundance of timber with which to build houses and rail fences, and Wiley Hester, a neighbor and relative, says he bought land from Jim Bowman in the Crossroads community for ten cents an acre. Bailey also purchased land in Nacogdoches and Trinity counties, but built his loghouse home two or three miles north of present day Wells in the Crossroads community. In East Texas Bailey was a successful farmer and stockman. Although cotton was his staple crop, he planted a large acreage of corn for feeding his livestock. Bailey raised cattle, hogs, horses, and mules. He was noted for keeping the finest breeding jacks, even better than his oldest son John kept later. There is a story that once a jenny from the Bill Bonner plantation in Angelina County was on the loose and came up into the Crossroads community and was bred by Bailey's fine jack. The offspring developed into one of the finest jacks that had ever been seen in that part of the county. In 1870, at the age of 57, he was still active in carrying on farm work, and his oldest son, sixteen-year-old John L., helped him in the field that year. The younger children, William E., III, age fourteen, Henry, age twelve, Bryant Omar, age ten, and Mary Emma, age nine, worked on the farm but also attended school and each learned to read but not write. The other two children living at the time were Eli, age four, and Lot, age one. At this time Bailey valued his estate at $2000 and the estate of his wife at $1000.

Ten years later, in 1880, Bailey, then 66, was still living on his Crossroads farm. His son, John L., had married and was living on an adjoining farm with his wife, Alma Lane, age twenty-two, and daughter Mary Emma, less than a year old. William E. Bailey, III, age twenty-three, was married to Sophia Hellenkamp, age eighteen. This son was living on a farm in the northern part of Angelina County. C. Sidney Lane, later a dry goods merchant at Wells and a brother of Alma Lane, was married to Mary Emma Bailey, age eighteen. Henry and B. Omar, Eli and Lot, still single and living at home, worked as field hands on their father's place.

In 1880 on his Crossroads property W. E. Bailey built a gin, which he moved to Forrest in 1885; and the gin continued to serve the Wells and the southern Cherokee County cotton farmers for many years. Most of the labor necessary for the operation of the gin was done by Bailey's sons. The gin was propelled by three pair of oxen. Each pair was tied together with ropes and simply walked forward on a treadmill of an endless belt partly underground which caused the master wheel to turn the machinery.
of the gin. The gin did a good day's work if two bales of cotton were ginned and baled. The pressing of the cotton was done by the feet of the workers. At that time cotton seeds were considered valueless and farmers did not even carry them home. This resulted in huge piles of seeds being left around the gin. So slow was the ginning that at times it was necessary for cotton growers to store their seed cotton in stalls at the gin. In 1883 Wiley Hester had his first bale of cotton of the season stored there waiting to be ginned when fire partially destroyed the gin along with all the stored cotton.

W. E. Bailey became known as Judge Bailey. How he earned this title is in dispute. Perhaps the most feasible reason for the title was because he served for a time as justice of the peace; however, Wiley Hester believes that Bailey received the title of judge because of his skill in judging horses. On the other hand Eugene Bailey, a grandson, says that his grandfather received the title of judge because he would sit under a tree in his yard and listen to his neighbors who had grievances against each other. The disputes were often settled by Judge Bailey even though he had no commission to serve in that capacity. Another instance which shows his concern with the problems of the people of the Wells and the Crossroads communities, involved a Negro living in the community who was sent to the penitentiary for beating one of his children to death. The wife of the convicted man gave her other children to various people in the community to rear because she had no way to support them. Bailey took three of the children, Neill, Tone and Het Moore, to rear. Bailey told Neill that if he would stay with him until grown that he would give him a home and an acre of land. Moore stayed with Bailey and received the property as promised, and owned the place for many years. The Moore children played with the Bailey children and with Wiley Hester and other white children of the neighborhood when they visited the Bailey home. Neill became a large man of yellow complexion. He worked at Bailey's gin as well as in the field with the Bailey boys and with other workers, Tone and Het remained on the Bailey farm and worked for Bailey after they grew up. The Moore children were fed at the same table as the rest of the Bailey family but after the whites had finished eating. Neill visited Omar Bailey's home many times afterwards, and he was always welcomed by Bailey. Later, when Moore moved to Tyler to live, Kemp Davidson, a local merchant foreclosed on the Moore property.

W. E. Bailey kept a horse saddled in front of his house all the daylight hours of every day, for he did not know where he might need to check on his stock. In the Angelina River bottom in Cherokee and Nacogdoches counties, he owned many cattle which required attention. He would give two dollars a head to a son who would bring a wild cow to a corral.

Especially after Bailey began to get old, he would sit on his front porch and invite people to come in to talk and trade horses. He obtained as much information as possible from the conversationalist but revealed nothing about his own business. A story is told of a boy from Jasper County who came by Bailey's house riding a fine looking horse. Bailey traded him another horse which would take the heaves after some exercise. Nothing was said about the ailment of the horse and the boy also paid Bailey seven dollars boot. The boy rode the newly acquired horse a few miles and had
reached Bill Cherry's home before the horse was stricken with an attack of the heaves. The boy began to cry about his bad bargain. Cherry, in sympathy with the boy, asked Bailey to trade back with the boy. Bailey finally agreed to trade back but kept the seven dollars.

When Bailey and his wife became old, they made arrangements with their son Henry [Chin] to take care of them. Chin remained a bachelor until he was about fifty years old when he married Miss Callie Bailey who was not closely related. Chin was to take care of his parents and receive their home and more than five hundred acres of land at their death. Bailey also gave a similar-valued acreage to each of his other nine children. The amount of land given to each child varied because of the difference in the value of the land and not to favoritism. He also gave each child five hundred dollars in gold when he and Indiana broke up housekeeping. Later his widow, Indiana, gave each of the children an additional five hundred dollars in gold.

In the latter part of his life Bailey thought much about religion and joined the Baptist Church at Forest. He was baptized in the Larrison Creek near the old water-mill north and west of the present town of Forest. The Reverend Jeff Rhodes, the pastor of the Forest Baptist Church, officiated. Bailey's baptism must have drawn a large crowd, and the neighbors came in their wagons and buggies, with the dogs of each family coming along. Wiley Hester tells the story that shortly after the baptizing was over and the new convert was changing into dry clothing in a tent, a dogfight took place, and the dogfight vied with the baptism in the conversation of the community; and in fact Hester is of the opinion that many people remembered the dogfight better than they did the baptism. Bailey was provoked that his dressing prevented him from seeing and enjoying the entire fight.

The last three years of W. E. Bailey's life were marked by failing health. Before this time, he had never had a physician to see him professionally and it was said that he had never complained except to murmur "Thy will be done." Several weeks before his death he contracted grippe which developed into pneumonia. He died at his Wells home on February 21, 1899, at the age of 85 years.

The winter of 1898-1899 was one of the coldest winters of the century and creeks froze over in East Texas. Because of bad weather the funeral, conducted by a Baptist minister, was held at his home but a Masonic burial service was held at the Mount Hope Cemetery near Wells by the members of the Terrell Lodge, Number 83. Indiana Cherry Bailey, died on November 6, 1916, and was buried beside her husband. The tombstone inscriptions are very unusual. That of W. E. Bailey reads:

"His words were kindness
His deeds were love
His spirits humble
He rests above."

That of Indiana Bailey:
"Dear friends as you pass by, as you are now I also have been as you are now—So should you be prepared for death and follow me."

Some years after W. E. Bailey had died and his son Henry [Chin] and family were living at the father's home, a former slave or a Negro, evidently befriended by the father, wrote that he wanted to visit his old friend's home once again. Chin and family, not knowing that the friend was a Negro, invited him to have dinner with them. When the Negro appeared, the Bailey family had him sit with them and eat the dinner even though the custom of the community was for the colored people to eat separately.

Some of the present day descendants of W. E. Bailey at Wells are: Eugene Bailey, former president and now chairman of the board of the First State Bank; Allen Bailey, owner of the Bailey Chevrolet Company; Ben Bailey, former county commissioner, gin owner, and farmer; Henry Bailey, Jr., Texas Highway Department worker and farmer; Gladys Bailey Sneed, Emma Bailey Cravens, and Anna Bailey Cochran; and John N. Cravens, author of this article and Professor of History at Midwestern University, Wichita Falls, Texas.

NOTES

1Family Bible and "Obituary" clipping owned by Anna Bailey Cochran, a grand-daughter; "Obituary," in the East Texas Reformer, IV, no. 31, Jacksonville, Cherokee County, Texas, Thursday, February 23, 1899.


3Interview with Emma Bailey Cravens, a great-grand-daughter, Wells, Texas, October 1, 1966.

4Emma Bailey Cravens to John N. Cravens, October 17, 1966, U. S. Tenth Census cited above.

5"Obituary" previously cited and another clipping of an obituary of W. E. Bailey owned by Anna Bailey Cochran, a granddaughter.

6U. S. Tenth Census, 1880.

7Tombstone in Mount Hope Cemetery near Wells, Cherokee County, Texas.

8Family Bible owned by Anna Bailey Cochran.

9U. S. Eighth Census, 1860 (MSS, Returns of Schedule No. 4, Productions of Agriculture in 11th District of the County of Calhoun in the post office Morgan, Georgia, Microfilm, University of Texas Library).
"Emma Bailey Cravens to John N. Cravens, October 17, 1966.

"Interview with Emma Bailey Cravens, a grand-daughter, Wells, Texas, November 27, 1966.

"Ibid.; The author of this article heard John L. Bailey, his grandfather, say many times when asked if he was a Confederate veteran that he was not and then would give the particulars as related above. John L. Bailey died August 30, 1925, and is buried in the Mount Hope Cemetery near Wells, Cherokee County, Texas.

"Interview with Eugene Bailey, a grandson, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Wiley Hester, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Emma Bailey Cravens, October 1, 1966.

"Interview with John Cherry, a grand-nephew of Indiana Cherry Bailey, Wells, Texas, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Eugene Bailey, a grandson, Wells, Texas, December 27, 1966. Wells was established in 1885.

"Interview with Wiley Hester, December 27, 1966.

"Ibid.

"U. S. Ninth Census, 1870 (MSS, Free Inhabitants of all counties of Texas, Microfilm, Midwestern University Library.)

"U. S. Tenth Census, 1880 (MSS, Returns of Schedule No. 1, Free Inhabitants of all Counties of Texas, Microfilm, Midwestern University Library.)

"Interview with Wiley Hester, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Eugene Bailey, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Wiley Hester, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Emma Bailey Cravens, October 1, 1966.

"Interview with Wiley Hester, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Eugene Bailey, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Emma Bailey Cravens, Wells, Texas, November 27, 1966.

"Interview with Wiley Hester, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Eugene Bailey, December 27, 1966.

"Interview with Emma Bailey Cravens, Wells, Texas, November 27, 1966.

"Interview with Eugene Bailey, December 27, 1966.

"Ibid.

"Interview with Wiley Hester, December 27, 1966.
"Obituaries of W. E. Bailey previously cited; Interview with Emma Bailey Cravens, September 1, 1966; Interview with Wiley Hester, December 27, 1966.

Interview with Gladys Bailey Sneed, a grand-daughter, and Eugene Bailey, a grandson, September 1, 1966; Obituaries previously cited.

The inscription evidently overlooked his horse trade with the boy.

Interview with Anna Bailey Cochran, Wells, Texas, September 1, 1966.