

HISTORY & FOLKLORE



A Treasure Trove of Information on the Nicholas Bell Sr. Family

We ran this photo without names in the October 14 issue of the Gazette without much hope that we would get any information on such an old photo. Fortunately, we were proven wrong and Catherine Bell Boutte, now 85 and a descendant of these fine folks, was able to produce a trove of information, both names and anecdotes. The original photo is from the 1920s, taken in “downtown” Ames. The occasion of this photo of four generations on a Sunday afternoon was the visit of grandmother Sterling-Bell from Louisiana.

Nicholas Bell Sr. is Catherine Boutte’s grandfather; Nicholas Bell Jr. is her dad. Nicholas Sr. originally had a sawmill in the Atchafalaya Basin in Louisiana. In the early years of the 20th century he sold that enterprise, headed this way, and bought land at Willie Cove, south of Devers, paid for in part with gold. That land remains in the family to this day. Nicholas Sr. ended up with a general store in Ames, named Bell’s General Store, near where the Hwy. 90 light is now. The structure in the back-

ground of the photo is that store. Family members would hunt on the land at Willie Cove and the pelts and meat resulting from those hunts would be sold at the general store. Nicholas Sr. had eleven children so the woods around here are full of his descendants.

Leona Semien Bell, Miss Catherine’s grandmother, was a combination of Creole and Haitian. She was musically inclined and encouraged this in her children. Catherine’s dad played both piano and accordion, while his brother played guitar, both taught by their mom Leona. The family formed a band which raised funds for the construction of Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

Catherine Boutte’s dad, Nicholas Jr., farmed rice for Raymond Randel on 180 acres back in Willie Cove for many, many years. When Raymond got ready to retire, he and Nicholas closed down the farm since they were both up in years.

Catherine shared that the whole family’s integrity and good character was rooted in their strong faith in God.

The photo above has been numbered for ease of

identification. Seven names remain unknown at this time, but we’ll list what Miss Catherine was able to come up with. #13, #15, and #18 show Catherine’s relationship to those folks (those names in bold). All of the others’ relationships indicate how they are related to Nicholas Bell Sr.

Names are as follows:

1. Unknown

2. Mary Bell, daughter
3. David Fontenot, friend
4. Unknown
5. Frances Bell, daughter
6. Unknown
7. Elia Bell-Fontenot, daughter
8. Wallace “Blue” Fontenot, grandson
9. Napoleon Vilrey, son-in-law
10. Nicholas Bell Jr., son (with a broken foot, age about 14 years)

11. Marcellia Bell Vilrey, daughter
12. Unknown
13. **Great-Grandmother Sterling-Bell**
14. Leona Bell, daughter
15. **Nicholas Bell Sr., grandpa**
16. Unknown
17. Unknown
18. **Leona Semien Bell, grandma**
19. Jesse Bell, son
20. Bertrand Bell, son

21. Hazel Bell (Richards), grand daughter
22. Unknown
23. Lydia Fontenot-Bell, daughter-in-law
24. Murphy Bell, grandson
25. Olivia Pradia-Bell, daughter-in-law
26. Theresa Bell, granddaughter (Uncle Burt Lee’s)
27. Burt Lee Bell, son



From Illustrated Press of Liberty County, Thursday, November 26, 1970 – The communion between animals and small boys is apparent in this shot we made a few years ago at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bill Griffiths in Dayton, where they always had everything boys love – sheep, horses, goats, calves – you name it. Kids who don’t get to play with animals while they are growing up are cheated of something very soul-satisfying.



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