

## *Early Morning Tragedy*

*from; THE PROMISED LAND - A HISTORY OF BROWN COUNTY, TEXAS*

*by James C. White*



RECORDS of the exact dates when some of the first citizens of Brown County moved here with their families are lamentably incomplete. It is very well established, however, that Israel Clements and his family became the second household to establish themselves in the county. The arrival of this family is dated on the day following the arrival of the Chandler family, in July, 1856. Israel Clements was born near Fayetteville, Georgia. He came into Texas as a youth, and stopped for a time in what is now Cass County.

He married Harriet Anderson, a daughter of Moses Anderson, in Panola County, near the present site of the town of Carthage. Moses Anderson, himself became one of the pioneers of this county, and was the first county clerk, having been elected to that office in the first three elections held here. The Anderson home was established in the Salt Creek community, where he built a log house for his family.

Israel Clements made scouting trips into this section before moving his household here, and established his first home on a tract of land south of Brownwood. The family lived there until 1869, when Clements moved to a point on the old road between Camp Colorado and Comanche, on the east side Salt Creek. Piles of rock marking where the corners of the cabin stood were still visible in very recent years.

Very soon after this move had been made and the new home established, tragedy stalked into the Clements home and took the husband and father away. The children were small, Jim, the oldest, being nine years old and a native of this county. A hired man named George Isaacs lived with and worked for the Clements family. In order to give protection against raids by Indians, who were seen often in the Salt Creek neighborhood, Clements had built a corral of stout poles in such way that the opening was directly against one corner of the residence. At night, because of the Indian menace, the horses were placed inside this corral and the gate was securely fastened. The kitchen was in a separate building about thirty feet from the other cabin, and both structures had rock chimneys.

The cooking and eating was in the kitchen, and here the industrious Mrs. Clements also had her loom for weaving cloth because there was no room for it in the other cabin.

The story is told that one night the family suspected the presence of Indians in the neighborhood, and one or two of the older boys and the men pushed a wagon in front of the corral gate, chaining a rear wheel to a post at the side of the opening so that the Indians could not quickly get the gate open and make way with the horses without making so much noise the family would awaken. A watchful dog was also kept on the place.

During the night a rain came up, and those who had planned to sleep in the wagon were driven into the house. Indians immediately sneaked up and in the noise made by the rain moved the wagon and drove the horses and mules out of the corral. Clements however, heard the stealthy savages and at once gave the alarm, calling on all hands to seize guns and pursue the Indians, who were leaving the yard when he discovered them. Everybody except George Isaacs, the hired man, responded with alacrity, Isaacs remaining in bed while Clements and his boys recovered their stolen animals.

Tragedy came next morning. During breakfast Clements upbraided Isaacs severely for his refusal to assist in recovering the stolen animals, declaring that if the hired man had helped none of the horses would have been lost. Isaacs was infuriated but said little. After finishing his meal Clements went to the fireplace where he stood with his hands spread out to the fire, warming them. His back was turned toward Isaacs, who was still at the table. Saying not a word, Isaacs went to the loom from which there was hanging a gun belt with a pistol and a large knife in it. He grasped the knife, stepped up behind Clements and seizing him by the waist began plunging the long knife into his body.

Clements struggled to free himself, but not until after he had been stabbed eight times was he able to wrench the knife from Isaacs' grasp. Then he knocked Isaacs to the floor. The hired man fell near the breakfast table, and here Clements literally cut him into ribbons. Too weak to plunge the knife into the man again, Clements struggled up to his feet. Isaacs likewise, managing to get up and walk to the door. Then he staggered into the yard leaned on a stump on which a wash pan usually was placed, and died quickly with blood spurting from his body.

Clements also managed to walk out the door, and started toward the other cabin. When asked by one of the boys whether a doctor should be called, he replied, "No, a doctor would do no good now." He asked whether Isaacs had died and when answered in the affirmative sank to the ground and was dead within a few minutes. This early morning tragedy occurred October 23, 1869, and was witnessed by Mrs. Clements and her children who stood helplessly during the fight.

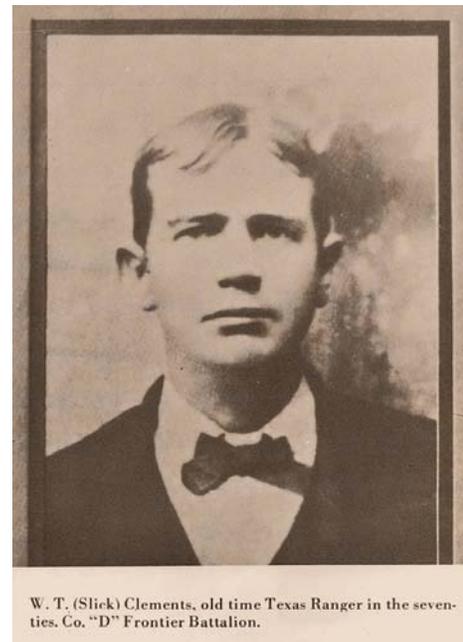
There is no explanation of Isaacs' behavior. His name occurs several times in the history of the first two or three years of the county, sometimes spelled "Isaaks." He was one of the taxpayers enrolled in the first assessment for 1859, and engaged in a fight with the Indians in 1858, the first such encounter recorded in the new settlement. At that time he and others, including the Coggin brothers, Sutton Harriss, A. E. Adams, Israel Clements and Welcome Chandler, were at the latter's home when Indians were discovered

rounding up horses near the Chandler house. The white men gave chase but were unable to beat the Indians because of poor arms. The Indians got away from them, and a little later also defeated and ran away from another party of whites headed by Captain Conner.

Isaacs was also one of the Rangers enrolled under command of Brooks W. Lee in 1858, under Legislative authority, and stationed for a time at a camp on Pecan Bayou. These men had many brushes with the savages. There is no indication in the meagre records of the day that Isaacs was other than a brave and courageous man.

A few days after the tragedy, the routine of the home life of the Clements family was reorganized, and Mrs. Clements and her children went forward with the usual burdens and responsibilities of the day. In 1872 the widowed mother moved her family to the south side of Salt Creek, and built a large sturdy double house in the field, not far from the present residence of Jim Clements and his sister, Miss Eliza. The new house was a double log affair with two huge chimneys, and was the largest and most substantial home in the Salt Creek community. It was one and a half stories high, and in later years was weather boarded with heart-lumber which made it both substantial and comfortable. In one of the upper rooms Jim Clements did his studying at night, and helped work out the problems confronting his mother as she carried on the task of looking after her family.

Of such families was the foundation laid for the future development of Brown County.



W. T. (Slick) Clements, old time Texas Ranger in the seventies. Co. "D" Frontier Battalion.

Julia Clements, youngest child of Israel and Harriet Clements and William the oldest.