

## Frontier Circuit Preacher

By Carl Langford

*Hugh Martin Childress* born 13 Dec 1800 Davidson Co., TN., died 29 Jul 1884 Coleman Co., Tx. Married Miss Susannah Watters on 5 Dec 1823 in Perry Ala., born 29 Dec 1809 TN. and died 18 Feb 1882 Coleman Co., Tx. Children: (1) Lemuel born 1825 died 1836 (11) Alamo Mission, San Antonio accidental death before the siege, (2) Elisha born 1 Oct 1832, died 24 Jan 1884 (46), (3) Hugh M. Jr. "Mart" born 24 May 1835, died 24 Sep 1897 (62) Grant Co., NM.

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In 1832 the family migrated from Alabama to Bastrop County where, he served as a militiaman and ranger there and later fought at the battle of Salado Creek. In 1850 Census Burleson Co., Tx., Hugh M. Sr.(Cildeer)(49) misspelled name, living in Burleson Co., Burleson, Tx. w/wife Sarah (41). Children: Hugh M. Jr (15), Elisha (12). By 1856 the family had settled near Camp Colorado in Coleman County and by this time **Hugh Jr.** was well into the cattle business. To make it short, he did well from 1867 to 1870 but due to the Indians and market for beef prices dropping, leaving him broke and when the Indians burned his headquarters in Coleman County. He left the trail, by mid '70's settled on a small ranch in Throckmorton County and married Huda Ann Cox in Bell County in 1853. They had four children and in 1888 left Texas, settled in Grant Co. NM.

There **Hugh Jr.** was accused of killing rancher Ed Moss. He fled into the Gila Wilderness and was killed by the sheriff's posse on the White House Ranch near Cliff, NM. on 23 Sept 1897. On the bank of the ditch the gun of the deceased was found without any cartridge in the chamber and a piece of gunny sack stuck in the muzzle. If the deputies called at the man three times he evidently meant to make no resistance or he would have thrown the cartridge into the chamber of his gun, had he heard the challenge. But one ball struck the deceased entering the right breast and taking a diagonally down-ward course coming out on the left side on the small of the back. The course of the bullet show that the man was walking with his head down picking his way in the semi-darkness. Any animal as well as man will involuntarily throw the head up when suddenly surprised with the sound of a human voice and the posture of CHILDERS body when struck by the bullet as shown by the course of the ball demonstrates the fact that the man heard no such challenge or command to halt. That CHILDERS was one of the two men implicated in the murder of Ed MOSS, circumstances seem to point with little doubt but he had never been proven guilty, had never been legally accused. That seven men could not arrest one man without shooting him first is incomprehensible.

Especially, this is true where there is no indications that the deceased had made an attempt at resistance by loading his gun. An inquest was held by Justice GIVENS of this city who went to the scene of the killing for that purpose only.

In the late 1860's, the pursuit and near banishment of these Indian tribes, (first the Kickapoo, later Comanche) by the military and others This led to the settlers, ranchers and farmers entering the area in the early 1870's. One of Atoka settlers, perhaps the earliest, was the *Rev. Hugh Martin Childress and family*. He was the *first official Circuit Riding Preacher in the Atoka area*, Also, known in the Comanche County region as the Bear Hunter Preacher. He came down from the Camp Colorado area. He was a very versatile man who was a Republic of Texas Ranger before the ousting of Mexico. He was a rancher, farmer, and his son Elisha Childress was Coleman County's first Sheriff. (As indicted on a Historical Marker).

*SA Archives of 1924, The History of the Old Frontier Schoolhouse of Brown Co., Tx.* A letter was received from William Slaughter Sr. that fifty years ago he attended a log school house in Brown County that stood on the hill at mouth of Hog Creek and states that, "the teacher of the school and the larger boys brought their rifles and pistols as well as their books" to school. The guns were set in the corner of the room, but the pistols were hung on wooden pegs in the logs.

Mr. Slaughter mentions as old circuit riding preacher known as Grandpa Childress (Childers), who would ride to the log school house on Sunday, put his gun in the corner. Standing at the pulpit in his boots and preach to the people in an old fashion way. (fire & brimstones). He says, Grandpa Childress is sleeping in a cemetery in Coleman, County (Atoka Cemetery near Novice, Tx.). The old school at the mouth of Hog Creek was destroyed by fire. It should of stood for a century as a land mark of those trying days in Texas.

Mr. Slaughter remembers long ago the old log school house, being with 16x16 ft with puncheon floor, split logs for benches and was known then as the Windham Schoolhouse built in about 1872. It was used for church services and old Grandpa Childress, "Hugh M. Childress" organized a Methodist Church there soon after it was built. Mr. Slaughter and wife joined the church in 1874, fifty years ago.

Grandpa Childress (Childers) was a Methodist Circuit rider and preached on the Texas frontier from the early 1850's from Bastrop to Coleman, as long as there was any frontier. At this time he lived in Comanche, and had two sons, "Mart" Jr. and Elisha Childers.

Slaughter states, "My family has a picture of Grandpa Childers on his big gray horse "Jack," with his Henry rifle, 18 shots, and six shooter and was always prepared "to fight or run," when he met the Indians.

He was a short heavy-set man built like a battleship, a typical frontiersman and frontier Methodist circuit rider and preached at Camp Colorado, long before the town of Coleman was founded. He knew the Scriptures, but could not carry a tune to save his life. The church members sing to help the old soldier of the cross in his meetings.

There was a big brush arbor built near the old school house, where the Methodist held some of the greatest camp meeting ever held in Brown County. The old schoolhouse gone, so has the old camp meetings have vanished, and many of the rising generations have never attended one. After, Fifty years and nearly all the men who helped build the schoolhouse are dead.