

Early Songs of the Autumn Chirpers

“A Visit with Cal Dean Hargis”

Written by Jackie Layne Partin

As I stood atop the old abandoned mines of yesteryear amidst the quiet, lonely, open woods that had grown to cover them, I wondered what prompted the man buried there to choose this spot as his final resting place. On this day, July 20, 2010, the only sounds were those of singing crickets and the male katydids; they seemed to be playing their “autumn songs” early this year. “Hey, Mr. Cal, what does that mean? Is frost coming early?” I silently asked.

Who was this man, and where had all his loved ones who had left this earth before and after him been interred? To me, there is something mystical about a lone gravesite. It isn’t supposed to be that way, especially if the one in the grave had family. It seemed, but for the occasional animal wandering by, he was all alone. Someone *cared* though, for at his head stood a large granite stone with this inscription:



Cal Deese Hargis (1866–1943)

His plot is surrounded by a low, poured, concrete wall, sections of which have randomly fallen flat. I looked diligently for signs of another grave, but seeing that old Cal was seemingly buried in the center of the little plot, I assumed he was the master of an empty kingdom. The soil on either side had not given way to any sinking, a sure sign of interment, sometimes caused from a rotting burial casket or wooden box.

The land on which Cal was laid to rest was once part of the thousands of acres that Benjamin Wooten sold to the Sewanee Mining Company in 1857. The coal company changed names down through the years until it was finally bought by the Tennessee Consolidated Coal Company. Prior to Cal’s interment, coal mines meandered underneath the whole

area—so much so that the flat land below the mine hills was called “Black Bottom” from all the dirty, black, hideous, slush that pooled from the coal washer and the coke ovens above. The railroad ran over the nearby creek, and when young Norma Sitz, (born 1915), and her mother walked the railroad tracks to town, Norma always made a scene at Black Bottom for fear of falling into the water. After the coal companies had raped the land and left it for the local people to inhabit, Cal Deese Hargis bought his own piece of the tortured earth. Since he was a coal miner, he probably knew every inch of what lay beneath his farm. He built his home down toward the foot of the hills just above Black Bottom.

Inquisitively, I searched for the ancestry of this man. I found that Cal’s grandparents were Thomas Hargis (1804-1871) and Mary Polly (Gunter) Hargis (1804-1895) who are buried at Pigeon Springs Cemetery in Marion County. The Hargis family hailed from Hargis Cove near Battle Creek. Their son, James G. Hargis (1831-1900) married Sarah Ann Birdwell daughter of Charles Duncan Birdwell (1816-1882) and Allie Mary (Gaines) Birdwell (1815-1882). One can pretty well figure that if the local surname is “Hargis,” then the Hargis heritage is relative to Hargis Cove or the Pigeon Springs areas in Marion County, Tennessee.

James and Sarah named their only son Cal Deese Hargis if one accepts the *inscription on the gravestone*. When he was three, the Census taker wrote his name as Cal Dean Hargis. Later he was listed as Caldine Hargis, and then finally the Census takers gave themselves over to calling him Cal D. Hargis. One would assume that he and his loved ones knew his real name and thus put it on his stone as Cal Deese Hargis, but his descendants, some of whom are still around the Tracy City area, emphatically call him Cal Dean Hargis—so *that*, it will be, at least for this story. One descendant remarked that the name “Deese” on the stone was an admitted mistake on the part of Cal’s youngest child.

Cal’s first wife was Martha B. Roberts (Dec. 13, 1866—Sept. 01, 1899) who was born in Georgia to James A. Roberts and Naomi “Oma” Catherine (Nichols) Roberts. Two of Martha’s brothers were *Amos W. Roberts* and *Adolphus L. Roberts* who became namesakes for two of Martha’s sons. The Roberts family had moved from Walker County, GA, to Hamilton County, TN around 1858, and then eventually to Marion County, TN, where they were living in the same area as the older Hargises. This move made it possible for Cal and Martha to meet, fall in love and marry although as yet, I have found no marriage record for them.

The young couple became parents to two sons, James Amos Hargis (Jan. 19, 1893—Feb. 22, 1927) and Marion Dolph Hargis (1894—Sept. 15, 1918); they were named after two of their Roberts uncles. A daughter, Sarah Lee Hargis (Oct. 12, 1897—July 17, 1898), lived less than a year and was buried at the Oak Grove Cemetery in Marion County, TN. This was the beginning of several funeral marches in Cal Hargis’ life that always ended at that cemetery. Soon Martha was pregnant with her fourth child, but sadly on Sept. 01, 1899, she and the child passed away. All too soon, Cal made another journey to the Oak Grove Cemetery to

place his wife and lost child beside his baby daughter. Sad and lonely, Cal found himself with six and seven-year-old sons to rear without a mother. Young James Amos and Marion Dolph went to live for a while with their maternal grandparents, James and Oma Roberts.

Since the practice of using convict labor in the Tracy City mines had come to a dramatic halt just a few years earlier, Cal had been able to obtain a job working in the coalmines. Soon after his wife's death, he lived in the Joseph Seigler home as a boarder; his good friend Joseph Speegle was also a boarder. His parents and siblings were living nearby, and in 1900, just down the road in the same neighborhood lived young William Sartain, (born 1879), his sister, Maud Sartain, (Oct. 08, 1881), and his youngest brother, Frank Sartain, (born 1888); they were children of John L. Sartain. Since they were living alone, we can assume that both parents had died. Cal was familiar with the Sartain children since an older sibling, Thomas Sartain, had married Haley Hargis (Dec. 20, 1877-Sept. 17, 1902), one of Cal's cousins. There was also an older Sartain sister by the name of Ella Ada who married James Seahorn. On March 30, 1901, in Grundy County, Cal Dean Hargis married that young neighbor girl, Maud Sartain. He was thirty-five and Maudie, as she was called, was twenty when they married.

Maudie accepted Cal's young sons, James Amos and Marion Dolph as her own and helped rear them. Young Marion Dolph registered for the WWI Draft while working in Maricopa County, Arizona. He was not married and soon was drafted and sent off to fight the Germans in France. Sadly, as though a cloud hung over Cal's head and opened up once again to soak his very being with sadness, he received word in 1918 that his second born child was killed on foreign soil—oh, so far from home! His son's body was shipped back to Tracy City, and the Oak Grove Cemetery placed another claim on aging Cal's life. The wagon was loaded and the journey was made. Young Marion Dolph Hargis was placed in line with those who had gone before him—his sister, his mother with child, his faithful stepmother and other family members. Each loss hardened Cal.

Twenty-three years into Cal's marriage with Maud (Sartain) Hargis, she died of cancer on January 27, **1924**, according to her death certificate. The year **1923** is written on her stone. Her death came only six years after the loss of her stepson, Marion Dolph. Again, the mournful trek was made to the Oak Grove Cemetery where Cal buried the woman that he loved and cherished. Again, the house was empty of the laughter and love of a woman. James Amos Hargis was Cal's only surviving child in 1924.

On February 17, 1926, once again Cal found himself saying, "I do!" This time he "robbed the cradle" slightly when he took Ida Jane "Janie" Shrum for a wife. Janie was the daughter of Francis and Nancy Shrum who lived in Pryor Ridge in Marion County. Cal was sixty years of age, and Janie was twenty-four. Cal and Janie Hargis became the parents of a daughter, Maudie Marion, who was born in 1926. When Cal gave up mining, or mining gave him up, he began to farm in a big way. Folks remember his cattle lazily roaming the hillsides

over the abandoned mines. Sally (Dyer) Sanders, mother of Hallie (Sanders) Dykes, went to Cal's farm to "pick goose feathers" for her mattresses and pillows, and Desmer Church bought his garden seeds from Cal.

**Cal Dean Hargis and his daughter Maudie
Marion Hargis ca. 1930**



By working hard and being frugal, Cal was able to build a nice house for his family. In his mind, he had no intention of ever leaving the farm that he had worked so hard to make productive enough to sustain his family.

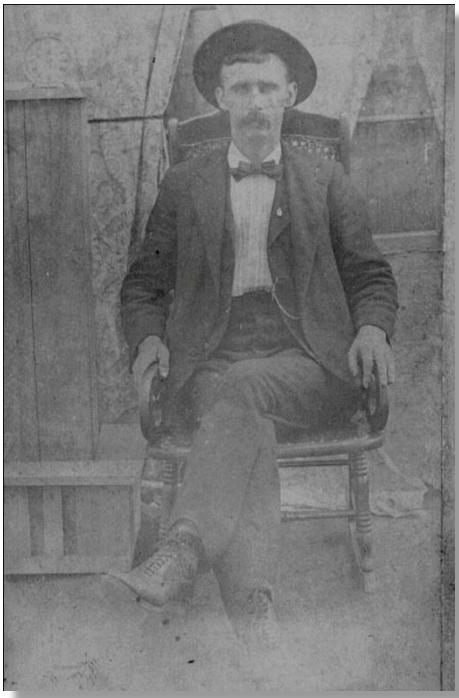


Ida "Janie" (Shrum) (Hargis) Jordan



Maudie Marion Hargis

Cal's son, James Amos Hargis, registered for the WWI draft on June 05, 1917, at Henley's Store in Tracy City. Just two months earlier on April 07, 1917, in Grundy County, he had married Sarah Knight, daughter of Sterling and Mahala Emeline (O'Rear) Knight. Sarah grew up in and around the rugged Savage Gulf area. (*Read more about the Knights on www.grundycountyhistory.org in a story called ["Can These Bones Live?"](#)) James Amos followed his father's lead by working in the coalmines. He worked in Kentucky where he was injured in the mines as seen in a following picture. He also worked the mines in Grundy County, Tennessee. Children born into that marriage were James Edwin, William Adolphus "Dolph", Emily Juanita, Carl Hobart, and Howard Kenneth. In 1927, four years after the death of his stepmother, James Amos Hargis passed away. Once again, Cal made a heart-wrenching trip to Oak Grove Cemetery. His son should have survived – "children shouldn't die before their parents." After all, thirty-four-year-old James Amos had a large family who needed him. It wasn't time for him to leave this earth.*



Cal Dean Hargis
(1866-1943)



James Amos Hargis
(1893-1927)



Marion Dolph Hargis
(1894-1918)

What made Cal Dean Hargis keep moving on toward the future? Two of his three wives and four of his five children had already left this earth too early; for years he had labored underground, pick and shovel in hand, in the coalmines around Tracy City; he farmed in the coldest of winters and the hottest of summers, and bowed his tired body low to the ground to work the unforgiving soil left over from the mining projects. Some said he was a hard, contrary old man, who was not the best husband to his wives, especially Janie, but his grandson William Dolph Hargis disputed that notion and had nothing but adoration for him. Maybe life hardened Cal; I think we can safely say that he endured mountains of trials and

tribulations. Some of us are blessed with endurance during troublesome times while others fold and are weakened or hardened when life becomes too harsh.

Old timers remember watching Cal walk his fields, caring for his animals, with his hat pulled down to shield his eyes from the sun. There was no doubt that Cal loved the land, but the words of his personal will may show another possible reason for his desire to stay put even after death:

"I, C. D. Hargis of Tracy City, Tenn., Grundy County, Tenn., do make and publish this as my last will and testament, hereby revoking any and all wills by me heretofore made. I hereby give to Sarah Hargis and heirs a piece of land in the 5th Civil District of Grundy County, known as part of the Allmond land beginning on the South Side of the Old Reid Hill railroad running north with enter of big ditch contains about 8 acres (eight) more or less. The rest of my real estate and personal property, together with what money I may have, I give to my daughter Maudie Hargis. I hereby appoint my wife, Jane Hargis executrix to serve without bond. I hereby appoint my wife Jane Hargis to be guardian over my child if she is a minor at the time of my death, and to serve without bond. I, hereby desire that none of my wife's people shall receive any of my property or benefits of same. If my daughter dies without a heir, I desire that what property shall be left by her shall go to Hargis kin. I also appoint the Worshipful Master Senior Warden and Junior Warden of Sewanee Lodge 405, F & AM of Tracy City whoever they may be, to see that my will is carried out as above stated."

Cal's will was dated March 27, 1936 and witnessed by B. S. Roddy, Rev. A. C. Adams and J. W. Arbuckle. Strangely enough, old Cal sold the eight acres meant for his daughter-in-law, Sarah (Knight) Hargis, to a Myers family some time before he passed away. However, according to a descendant, Cal helped Sarah and her children get through the hardest of times which we call the "Great Depression" period.

After Cal's death in 1943, Ida Jane later married again. When her second husband died, she went North to live with her daughter Maudie. Hargis descendants remember that when Janie or any of Maudie's family came down South to visit, they generally stayed with Hargis relatives indicating that the family bonds remained strong.

On this day, July 20, 2010, I wondered how long Cal had known that Oak Grove Cemetery would be cheated of his burial – that he would make no more contributions to that soil. You, dear readers, know that he isn't *really* on that hill; you know that he "moved on," but his "statement" still lingers and will continue to do so as long as someone respects and cares for his choice. No one should question his desire to be near the land that he loved so well. Maybe it was too painful for him to visit the Oak Grove Cemetery which was a reminder of all he had loved and lost. In the book of Job 14:22, one can read, "...his flesh upon him shall have

pain, and his soul within him shall mourn." Could this describe the inner spirit of old Cal? Or just maybe he thought he could still maintain control of his third wife and his estate by watching from the hill above. What is known is that his estate was later sold and his wife and daughter moved on. When Janie did pass away, she chose to be buried at the Burns Cemetery on down the road from Oak Grove Cemetery. By doing so, she was afforded the opportunity to make a statement also. She did not want to be interred beside old Cal, nor alongside his other two wives. She had the final word in all those burial matters.

As the quietness on that hot July day was interrupted with a sudden shower and the sound of water hitting the thirsty leaves and needles of the trees around the little kingdom, I silently ended my visit with this thought, "Here you lie, Cal Dean Hargis. You are not alone. Do you hear those 'Autumn Songs'?"

Note: For corrections, comments or additions email me at jackiepartin@blomand.net .