

Dandified farmer 'kidnapped'

girl he married

In 1939, W.W. Dixon, one of the interviewers for the Federal Writers' Project, found Sam T. Clowney, 77, living with his son George in a Winnsboro mill village.

Dixon described Clowney as 6-foot-2, 186 pounds, with a head resembling a "two-yolked hen egg."

Lively and aggressive, Sam Clowney promised the interviewer that "while my right hand has lost its cunning, my tongue will not cling to the roof of my mouth this morning."

Clowney talked of being born at Buckhead near the Means' Settle-

ment. He said his family owned "only" 318 acres of land and a few slaves.

He said this was nothing compared with the great plantations of such gentry as Gov. John Hugh Means, Dr. James Furman, Chancellor Harper, Congressman Trette and Preston S. Brooks. (Brooks was the congressman who used his cane to cripple Sen. Charles Sumner on the floor of the Senate, a pre-Civil War event immortalized in history books as the "Brooks-Sumner Affair.")

In Clowney's family, everyone worked. He thought that left them better prepared than the formerly wealthy families for the emancipation of the slaves.

When he was 18, his father gave him 50 acres and a horse and said, "See what you can do for your-

self." Clowney was on his own as a one-horse dirt farmer. In three years, by buying poor cows and calves in the winter and fattening them for the spring market, he was able to purchase an additional 175 acres and buy more equipment.

Clowney was young and admittedly foolish. He said he fancied himself a fop and a dandy. He had a Winnsboro tailor make his clothes and a cobbler make him \$16 calfskin boots.

"The year of Grover Cleveland's first election, I wore a Cleveland white beaver hat. And tied around my neck was an Allan G. Truman red silk handkerchief. . . . Thus equipped, and arrayed like Solomon in all his glory, I drove up one day to the home of an influential

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and prominent citizen, kidnapped one of his girls, and drove off and got married — much to the amazement of everybody and the consternation of the prominent citizen, my father-in-law."

Three sons and four daughters were the outcome of his impetuous elopement. He planned to send the boys to Clemson and the girls to Winthrop.

In 1910, Clowney owned 596 acres, fenced pastures and a cotton gin. He decided to move the family to town, where the children could attend Mount Zion Institute.

In town, Clowney found himself trying to get ahead in society but also lounging around pool halls and taking his friends to baseball games. He soon found himself

spending more than his income. What's more, he had put up 25 bales of cotton as collateral on loans a bank had made to his father-in-law and brother-in-law.

Clowney once had owned as much as 1,278 acres, but his endorsements of relatives' loans and the failure of two banks did him in.

Clowney then got a job as bailiff of the Fairfield County Court of General Sessions. Along the way, he got interested in politics. In 1915, he was elected to the S.C. House of Representatives.

S.C. politics at that time was rough and tumble. The first night after he was sworn in, he was invited to the hotel room of a Charleston representative.

There he found a half-dozen

more representatives, two barrels of beer (one Schlitz and one Budweiser), along with several quarts of liquor. Clowney listened and learned some of the tricks of politics.

After one session, Clowney retired from the House with no regrets.

When interviewed by Dixon, Clowney said he spent his time breeding rat terriers. "But I'm going into the chicken-raising business. I'd like to sell eggs and fryers to all the mill operatives. I think there is money in the business."

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