

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JOHN M. KARNES

*Presented by Mrs. Jeannette Culp Lanier*

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Born October 15, 1864, in the neighborhood which was then known and is now known as "Cow Skin", Pemiscot County, Missouri. I was the youngest child of the family. I had three sisters and two brothers. Mary was the oldest sister; Betty next, and Sally was the youngest sister. My oldest brother was Adam S. Karnes. My next oldest brother was James T. Karnes, and my name is John Moses Karnes. I was named Moses, I suppose, because I was born and raised in the wilderness.



*Jeannette Culp Lanier*

all my young associates were wild cats, bears, wolves and panthers. I still have that feeling of wilderness in my make-up.

We moved to Dunklin County. My father bought forty acres of land, north of where Hollywood now is, from Bob Shultz. He was a merchant at Hornersville at that time. My father did business with him for years. The house was built of hewed cypress logs about two feet wide and six inches in thickness. We lived neighbors to the first white child that was born in Dunklin County, Missouri. His name was Tom Neel. Wild animals would come through the lane by our house. I remember very distinctly that my mother threw an axe at a deer that was running through the lane by our house, but did not kill it.

My boyhood days were spent at this place. I immensely enjoyed my boyhood days, as I was the youngest one of the family, and was the pet of my father and mother and the whole family. I had an uncle, who married my father's sister, who lived near us. All his children were older than I and they, of course, humored me in every possible way, which almost made me believe I was the dictator of the entire neighborhood. His name was Richard Tucker. Of course, I always called him Uncle Dick. He had several sons and daughters. The oldest son was named John Moses; the next son was George, and his next was Marion. He has several descendants around Hollywood at this time.

My school days were very limited. I went to school to Dr. W. G. Hughes. He taught school before he was married; taught at Coldwater. I walked from my home north of Hollywood. At that time Buffalo Creek, the way the road ran, was almost a mile wide. I walked footlogs part of the way. I carried my dinner every day, which was corn bread and hog meat, in a tin bucket.

My brother, J. T. Karnes, and my cousin, George Tucker, were also students at this school. They had gone to school prior to this time at Hornersville. When we started to school to Dr. Hughes, he put me and George and Jim and Mary Smith in a class together, in Ray's third arithmetic. In about 30 days, Mary and I left them behind. We went through the arithmetic during this school. I was about 14 years old and Mary was about 16. I really thought lots of Mary, and wanted to be her little lamb, but she would not let me. Billy Davis married her. This was the only school I went to except one month at Ravenden Springs. What little education I have, if any, I got by reading and spelling and arithmetic at home—mostly at night.

Our first lamp was a grease lamp with a rag wick. The next lamp was a brass oil lamp with a round wick. I really thought I was climbing the hill. The next was a glass lamp with a glass chimney. I was so glorified and happy I thought I had reached the summit.

In about the year 1880, there was a settlement near, and north of Hollywood. Some of their names were Zack Browning, Tom Smith, Dick Tucker, William Karnes, my father's brother, Tom Neel, Ab Wilkins and Mr. Baugus. There was also a settlement near where Lum Hall now lives. In that settlement lived Clark Pruett, Mr. Brewer, who was Dud Brewer's father, Jim Bolin, my brother-in-law, Troy Johnson, whose daughter I married in later years.

The two settlements agreed to build a school and church house about midway between the two settlements, out in the swamps and green woods. They built a small cypress box house with strips over the cracks. I have heard Henry Walls' father, Riley Walls, preached in this building. When I was about 18 years old, the school directors wanted me to teach the summer term, which was three months. Mr. R. M. Finney was School Commissioner for Dunklin County at that time. To get a certificate to teach school at that time, you had to take an examination before the County School Commissioner. I went to R. M. Finney and took an examination, and I always thought, through the kindness of his heart and the great sympathy he had for me, he gave me a certificate. The term was for 3 months. I taught the three months and got \$100. Was I happy? Yes! So much so that there are no words or phrases in the English language strong enough to express to the public in general the extreme happiness I enjoyed during this school. I had several students older than I. Marion Tucker

was one; Sarah Baugus, whom I thought so much of, but Buddy Shultz was the best bidder. I remember lots of people's names who were dear to me in my younger days—Dolph Ezell, Will Delph, Vince Brannum, George Tucker, Marion Tucker, and numerous others, all of whom have traveled Nature's road through life. John Hall was another dear friend of my younger days.

When I was about 18 years old my father had a little grocery store at Lulu. I believe that Rube Bradley was the first mail carrier. His sons, John and Jim were his helpers and my brother, Adam, built a store house at Senath before it was ever a town. He intended for me to go into business with him but he died a few months later. Joe Cancer and I were going into a partnership business, and I built and moved into the house known as the Doctor Chaney house. My wife had died; my mother and I moved into this house about 52 years ago. I was partner with Joe Cancer in the mercantile business. I took rheumatism and was in bed for several months. Dr. W. F. Landreth was my doctor. I finally got able to walk on crutches. I sold my interest in the store to Joe Cancer and moved back to Lulu, my boyhood home. I walked on crutches for almost two years—finally got able to walk without them.

John Tucker and I built a store house at Lulu and were partners for about five years. My uncle, Dick Tucker, had a gin and saw mill at this place. John Tucker and I bought the gin and mill. My friend, Solon Davis, worked for us in the store at Lulu. He has continued to be my friend through the many years.

We built another store house at Lulu. The old store was our credit store, and the new store was strictly a cash store. We made some money at Lulu. We had customers from what was then known as Big Lake Island, where Manila now is. Dave Whitlock was our customer; Ulyssis Derryberry hauled us some cotton and I will never forget dear Mollie Pierce. She was our customer and the hardest working woman in Dunklin County. I did the most of the work in the store. John Tucker would haul the cotton to Malden, Missouri. The cotton seed, what the cows did not eat, was burned in the furnace of the engine. The cotton was unloaded into a basket and pulled up into the gin with a rope; was then carried and put into a stall; was pulled along on the gin house floor to the gin which was fed by hand. The press was first run with levers and pulled by mules or horses. Later, it was run with a tread wheel with steers walking on a floor that was built with a slant and all the walking the steers did, they got nowhere, but stayed in the same position.

I made a deal with John Tucker and came back to Senath and went into the mercantile business with Joe Cancer, I presume about the year 1900. About the year 1903, Cancer and I divided our stock and Cancer moved into the brick building where Sando's Drug Store now is. It took me two years to get out of debt. Then I organized the John M. Karnes Store Company. Jim Douglass

was one of the stockholders; Green Haislip, Will Reynolds, and more. We were capitalized for \$25,000. A few years later we doubled our capital stock, raising it from \$25,000 to \$50,000 without paying any more money. In other words, we watered it. We sold quite a lot of the new stock to new men that had no interest in the store, which caused us to get quite a lot of new customers. James Douglass and I guaranteed to those who bought stock at that time that their money would be well invested and they would get 8 per cent, whether the company made that much or not. In 1908, when we were capitalized at \$25,000, we made \$14,377.66, which was 57.49 per cent of the capital stock. We put \$5,000 in the surplus account, making this account \$10,000; \$4,000 credited to reserve, which made this account \$9,000. This is the reason we divided our capital stock without paying any more money.

In the year 1898 I married Miss Bertha Sando. The public in general is wrong in thinking 13 an unlucky number—I was married on June 13th. My wife is as good a woman as I am a man. According to my way of thinking this is eulogizing her very much, and placing her on a high pinnacle, but the public in general do not think so. They believe she is as good a feminine gender as exists in this country, but they think I am a verry sorry masculine gender.

I have never believed in but one kind of religion, and a lady, when I was about 15 years old, taught me what I yet believe to be the best and only kind of religion that accomplishes very much good, and that is to do right. This lady said to the congregation and to the whole world, "If you will do right you will feel right", which was and is the best advice ever given to the human race. The next best advice ever given to the human race, was given by David Crockett, who said to all the people, "Be sure you are right, then go ahead". In the year 1913, I built Hotel Bertha in Senath. It was named Hotel Bertha, for my "better-half."

After I quit the mercantile business I bought 880 acres of land from Henry Briggance; the land lies between Arbyrd and Cardwell. Henry owed me over \$12,000. He told me I would have to buy it and assume the loan on it, or lose what he owed me. I took it over at \$50 per acre. A large part of it had never been cleared and only a few cypress box houses built on it. None was ceiled or weather boarded. Later, I bought 300 acres from T. J. Douglass; paid him \$15,000 for it. He owed me \$15,000 that I paid by going on his notes. I had to give this price for the land or lose the \$15,000. I decided it would be about the same as the land. I thought it was worth \$30,000, or \$100 per acre. I paid \$150 per acre and in that way collected what he owed me.

I got 80 acres of land below Geneva, in Mississippi County, Arkansas, by having a second deed of trust. I got 120 acres of land below Cardwell the same way. Nearly all the land I now own I got by having second deeds of trust. I never foreclosed a deed of trust in my life. I begged all these parties to keep the land as the loan companies were not pushing them, and I was not, but they

would not do it.

The dearest friends I have ever had during my 78 years of life, outside my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters, and my little grandson, John Paul Karnes, have traveled Nature's road through life. Tom Ely was a real friend; Frank Shelton was a real friend; Sam Walker, circuit court judge for 21 years, was my real, true and unfaltering friend; Will Haislip, in later years, was as true a friend as I ever had. And numerous others whom I will never forget through this life and if memory survives after death, I will continue to think of all these friends that were so near and dear to me through life.

I would like to live long enough to see some economy used in government affairs, including Salem Township, Dunklin County, the State of Missouri, the Federal Government, all Levee boards and all public institutions, but I have no faith, and hope without faith is null and void.

I would like to live to see all useless and nonessential governmental cost nullified and eliminated, but I have no expectation of ever seeing it done. I always believed with all the sincerity of my heart if I had the authority to use public money that was paid by the taxpayers, I would be more careful and economical with it than I would with my own money. If all human efforts were based on the foundation of love and friendship, humanity would soar in the heights of glee. If the laws of our land and country were reasonable, sensible and understandable, and founded upon right and justice, and people obeyed and lived in harmony with the laws of our land and country, when they travel Nature's road through life they should at once go through the Pearly Gates on to the Golden Street and into the land of milk and honey, if there be such a place. I think the best thing for the human race to do is to do right. My prayers to the powers that be is to have right to prevail everywhere, including all worlds, all space, and all peoples. According to what I think is right, it does not prevail at home or abroad, on the land, or on the seas.

Whether or not we again live after death,  
Whether or not there is a heaven,  
Whether or not there is a pearly gate,  
Whether or not there is a hell—  
Whether or not there is a lake of fire and brimstone  
We, the people living on this mundane sphere  
Would get so much more pleasure;  
So much more joy and live a continuous,  
A happier, and a more glorious life  
By doing right.

I am a product of Nature. I have traveled Nature's road from the time I was born until now, and will continue to travel Nature's road through life. Then what? I do not know. I learn more in silent communication with the great, noble and wonderful powers of Nature than I do from all other sources.