



# Family : roots, ties, and trails

by [Sturgeon, Mary C](#)

Publication date [1991](#)

Topics [Sturgeon family](#), [Mailand family](#), [Nixon family](#)

Publisher [S.I.] : [River Road Press](#)

Collection [printdisabled](#); [inlibrary](#); [bostonpubliclibrary](#); [americana](#)

Digitizing sponsor [Boston Public Library](#)

Contributor [Boston Public Library](#)

Language [English](#)

Errata slip inserted

Includes bibliographical references

Bookplateleaf [0004](#)

Call number [39999063767063](#)

Camera [Canon 5D](#)

City [[Little Rock, Ark.](#)]

Identifier [familyrootstiest00stur](#)

Identifier-ark [ark:/13960/t87h2qg9d](#)

Isbn [0944609147](#)

Lccn [91062050](#)

Ocr [ABBYY FineReader 8.0](#)

Openlibrary\_edition [OL25302067M](#)

Openlibrary\_work [OL16620782W](#)

Page-progression [lr](#)

Pages [374](#)

Ppi [500](#)

Republisher\_date [20120514135959](#)

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Full catalog record [MARCXML](#)



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## 1991 Sturgeon Memoir Anecdotal Information on Experiences of Family of Chief Engineer of "Lake Bennett" project

1 message

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Wendy Plotkin <wplotkin66@gmail.com>

Wed, Apr 11, 2018 at 6:57 AM

To: Lynita Langley-Ware <fcm@conwaycorp.net>, Duncan McKinnon <dmckinnon@uca.edu>

See attached two page excerpt from Mary Sturgeon, FAMILY: ROOTS, TIES, AND TRAILS

This is a 1991 genealogical and narrative history of the Sturgeon family, which includes residence in Conway in 1935 when Ralph Sturgeon served as "Chief Engineer" of the "Lake Bennett" project, with a couple of paragraphs about working on the project.

Lynita, if we don't have the book, I can try to copy it (although it is only available digitally<sup>6</sup> on loan, and I have to do that by printing the screen of each page). There are other references to Conway and nearby areas in genealogy and narrative, I believe.

May also be available in paper.

I'll upload this under Camp Halsey, Secondary, Books, soon.

Thanks,

Wendy

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 **1934-35 Sturgeons Memoir.pdf**  
382K

Family:  
Roots,  
Ties,  
and Trails

Mary C. Sturgeon

*Mary C. Sturgeon*



CS71  
.S88  
1991x

RL

Sturgeon, Mary C.

Family: Roots, Ties, and Trails/Mary C. Sturgeon

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-944609-14-7

1. Sturgeon Family. 2. Milam Family. 3. Nixon

family. I. Title

CS71.S88

929.2

91-062050

For Kay Karle and Mary Jacklyn

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR: It is suggested that the reader begin with the narrative section, Part II, Family Ties, using the descendants charts in Part I for reference only.

ERRATA:

Part II, Chapter 3, p19, line 12: Mary Emma Townsend Nixon died in Faulkner County. William Henry Clay Nixon then moved to Jacksonville where his daughter Willie Nixon Stanphill helped him raise his sons.

Part II, Chapter 5, p28, line 18: "children were fed at the same time..."

Part III, Chapter 12, p125, line 18: "Mother and Buddy's father Coy were first cousins."

Part IV, p173: Kay and escort, Tommy Mebane.

When Jack asked questions later, he found that the subject was taboo. He never forgot, however, and years later he was to pursue the mystery further.

From Harrison the family moved to Cairo, Illinois. Jack's 7th grade report card shows him to have been present in school there for only fifty-three days. Ralph's position at the time was with the Illinois Highway Department.

In 1932 the Sturgeons moved to Helena, Arkansas, where Ralph worked on a flood-control project along the Mississippi River. Jack was confirmed at Saint John's, the oldest Episcopal church in Arkansas. He served as an acolyte with a youngster named Jack Allen, who was to become Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States. The principal of the junior high school Jack attended was Mr. Charles Partee, whom he was to encounter again some twenty years later.

In the summer of 1934 the Sturgeons moved to Conway, Arkansas. Ralph was with the Soil Conservation Service and the chief engineer on the Lake Bennett project, now called Woolly Hollow Park. Located near Greenbrier, this was a 40-acre man-made body of water, the first in the country, to be used as a pilot study of a specific watershed, to investigate water run-off, silt and soil erosion.

Lake Bennett was named for Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett, the first chief of the Soil Conservation Service, who battled for fifty years against the mishandling of the country's soil and water resources.

Dr. Bennett's plan called for the formation of a fresh-water lake by impounding run-off water and spring water behind an earthen dam. Labor was furnished by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps), a part of President Franklin Roosevelt's WPA (Works Projects Administration). The WPA was one of the agencies in Roosevelt's New Deal, which helped get the country out of the Great Depression.

Jack worked with his father on the project when he was not in school and happened to be on hand the day the project was finished. The workers gathered by the dam for a group picture.

"Strip off your clothes, Son, and jump in there and see how the water feels." It was a rather cool day, and I guess Ralph didn't think Jack would do it; but he did. So Jack was the first person to swim in Lake Bennett.

To this day when I encounter the old timers around Greenbrier, I hear again the story about the day "the Colonel" didn't make the curve on the way to Wooster, for in those days that was the way the highway went.

It seems that he was going back to Conway after work on the lake one afternoon in his pick-up and failing to make the curve went into the ditch. Some fellows who were also working on the project came along and helped get the truck back up on the highway.

"Hell, I've made that curve a hundred times going sixty miles an hour," said Ralph, and as the men stood watching open-mouthed, he turned the truck around, went back up the highway a ways and in a moment came tearing around the curve at sixty miles an hour. The men caught a glimpse of him as he streaked by, his floppy hat pulled down over his ears and a big grin on his face.

There may be those who think that this story is apocryphal, but I believe it. For one thing, I have heard it from several of the men who witnessed it; for another, I have ridden with Ralph and can testify that he drove like a bat out of hell.

The year was 1935. My diary shows that I double-dated with Jack and had a class with him in high school. I saw him at parties and at the swimming pool. I thought he was cute; in fact, I had a crush on him, but he never knew it. When the Sturgeons left Conway in January of 1936, I was heart-broken. I even wrote him a letter, which I never mailed.

They moved to Huron, South Dakota, where Ralph had a job with the CCC. Ethel and Ralph enrolled Jack in St. Mary High School, a Catholic boarding school in Salem, South Dakota, in hopes that "those nuns would straighten that young man out."

Jack was Humor Editor of the school paper, The Maryan, and a member of the Border Legion, the school's honor society. [Ten years later, when he was overseas during WW II, he received a crucifix card from his favorite teacher, Sister Mary John. On the back of the card is a note: "Dear Jack, Keep close to Christ and watch your ideals. Devotedly, Sister Mary John."]

In the November, 1936, issue of The Maryan, the following article is featured: