

# GEORGE CAUSEY - BUFFALO HUNTER

The following article was written by Linda Garrett and I appreciate her passing on this information regarding her Whitlock connection to us.

My indirect ancestor, Thomas Leander "George" Causey (1849-1903) was a buffalo hunter. George was the nephew of my gg-grandmother, Rhoda(Causey) Powell. According to a booklet done on him by JoAnn Johnson.

Historians generally recognize George Causey as one of the most famous buffalo hunters in that great slaughter in the late 19th century. However, his other efforts to demonstrate that the Llano Estacado of eastern New Mexico and northwest Texas was suitable for cattleproduction are probably more magnificent from an historical perspective.

Causey's nephew, Vivian H. Whitlock, wrote a book called *Cowboy Life on the Llano Estacado*, (1970), in which he sets forth much information about Causey's life. Gil Hinshaw of Hobbs used Whitlock's book and other sources to draw some important conclusions about Causey in his history of Lea County, *Lea, New Mexico's Last Frontier* (1976). These and other sources in the archives of the Historical Center for Southeast New Mexico provide some indication of Causey's role in settling the region as well as the tragic end of his life. Thomas L. 'George' Causey was born in Springfield, Illinois. How he acquired the nick name of George is not clear, perhaps after his father. His parents George W. Causey and Mary Adeline Crowder had five children. <according to my genealogy they had 10 children> At the end of the Civil War, young George got a job driving mule teams to haul supplies to Army forts and trading posts along the west-bound trails in western Kansas. This livelihood began to vanish before his eyes as the railroads pushed farther and farther west to each new cowtown, so Causey decided to change occupations. George "Jeff" Jefferson, former Army scout, and Causey entered into a partnership and commenced hide hunting around Dodge City and Hays. They followed the herds wherever the hunting was good, slowly moving south over the next few years, first to the south side of the Arkansas, then to the Cimarron area of Indian Territory. According to an article in Frontier Times (May 1941) by Don Biggers, Causey was one of a number of hunters who 'ventured into Texas buffalo range' in 1874. Biggers maintains that Causey became 'one of the most noted men on the buffalo range and had perhaps the biggest outfit of the kind that ever operated in the United States.' In 1877, Causey and his outfit moved into the vicinity of Yellow House Canyon, or Las Casas Amarillas, near the present Littlefield, Texas. By that time, Causey employed other workers, including his brothers, Bob and John. They built an adobe house at the spring in the Yellow House, from which they operated for the next three or four years. Their quarry was the southern herd of bison who ranged over the huge Llano Estacado of northwest Texas and southeast New Mexico. Also in 1877, Causey came close to losing his arm because of the constant battering of his shoulder by his .50 caliber Sharp's rifle. The huge, heavy buffalo guns had a five-mile range and played a significant part in killing off the buffalo herds in the 1870s and 1880s. According to Hinshaw, Causey killed 40,000 buffaloes in thirteen years. His partner, George Jefferson, claimed 'Causey killed more buffalo in one winter on the Yellow House than Buffalo Bill Cody killed in his entire lifetime, but Causey didn't have Ned Buntline for a publicity agent.!' The Causeys were not as wasteful as were some other buffalo hunters. Hinshaw said they not only sold 11,000 hides from the 1877 kill, but they also sold 45,000 pounds of dried and salted meat. Sometimes they also gathered the bones and sold them for making fertilizer. Bull hides brought anywhere from \$2 to \$4 each, depending on where they were sold; cowhides brought less. During the peak years of buffalo hunting on the Llano Estacado - 1876 to 1879 - there were as many as 1,500 hunters at work. Causey's outfit killed 7,800 buffalo in the 1878 to 79 winter season, with George himself as the principal shooter. They hauled much

of the meat to Las Vegas, New Mexico where workers were laying the tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad (AT&SF). They also sold both meat and hides at Midland, Colorado City, Fort Griffin and other markets in Texas. According to J. Evetts Haley in '*George W. Littlefield, Texas*' (1943), the Causeys killed 400 buffaloes at Four Lakes (northwest of the present Tatum) in the winter of 1878 and took the hides to sell at Fort Griffin. Haley also describes how the hunters were able to cross the waterless plains. They hauled water halfway to the next waterhole, dug a hole and lined it with a bullhide and filled it with water. They then went back to get their equipment and hides; on the way out they had a watering place. The buffalo hunters hunted themselves out of work by the early 1880s. According to Whitlock, the Causeys killed their last buffaloes at Cedar Lake (near present-day Seminole, Texas), in 1882. Various others reported killing stray buffaloes as late as 1884 or 1885. Hinshaw summarized the influence of the buffalo hunters: 'Their business was smelly, even disgusting and macabre. Their singular contribution to the Llano was to pave the final and last path for the inrush of American culture. They destroyed the buffalo, thus drying up forever the source of energy which made existence possible for the Indian culture.'

I also have the book by George Causey's nephew, Vivian Whitlock. It was published posthumously in 1970, three years after he died at the age of eighty. Whitlock devotes much of the book to the life and work of his uncle, George Causey. Reading it is much like watching Lonesome Dove and I wonder if Larry McMurtry had occasion to read Whitlock's book. The tragic end referred to earlier was preceded by an accident Causey sustained in 1900. He was on a round-up of mustangs on the Llano when a stallion tried to reclaim his mares. Causey pushed his mount to try to turn the mares when his horse stepped in a badger hole and broke its foreleg. For two days Causey lay under the merciless sun unconscious. He was found by ranch hands and taken back to Causey Headquarters. It was a week or ten days before he came to and he was never the same. He'd suffered a severe injury to his spinal column. Although trying more than one sanitarium, Causey was never able to feel he was the same man he'd been. Although the bright spot was meeting Johann Jewson, his nurse who he married on April 8, 1903, just a little more than a month later on May 18, 1903, George Causey shot himself with a six-shooter.

Our records show that Vivian Whitlock was part of the WHITLOCK09 chart, The Whitlocks of Connecticut. He was born Hiram Vivian Whitlock, May 12, 1887 in Iowa and died August 1967 in San Fernando, California. His parents were Hiram O. Whitlock and Nellie Grant Causey. Our thanks to Linda Garrett for this information.

Sources: X4490