

MRS. MARY OWENS

Mary Evelyn (Holmes) Owens
Project Consultant – Finney County

*All photographs provided by
JUDI OWENS BELKNAP
(Daughter of Claude and Mary Owens)*



CLAUDE & MARY (HOLMES) OWENS

MARY EVELYN (HOLMES) OWENS, daughter of William E. Holmes (1870-1946) and Lena Jane Connelly (1871-1952) was born on 12 Jan 1906 in Garden City, Finney County, Kansas. She graduated from Garden City High School in 1925 and attended Garden City's Community College from 1925-1926.

Mary was married to **CLAUDE DARRELL OWENS**, son of James Lafayette Owens (1859-1931), and Jennie Lottie Burris (1874-1969) on 27 Jun 1926 in Garden City. Claude was born on 12 Aug 1905, also in Garden City. Four children were born in their marriage: MARY JEANETTE, CLAUDE WILLIAM, JUDI, and JANICE.

Mary Owens was the manager of the "world's largest free outdoor municipal concrete swimming pool" in Garden City for 16 years. Claude retired after 38 years as the Lee Richardson Zoo superintendent of Finnup Park in Garden City. When he first began in 1939, there were only a dozen or so animals in the zoo. At the time of his retirement, there were over 600 birds and animals. Claude always said, "*The Lee*

Richardson Zoo hired a man who cared.” Popular zoos offered him jobs in larger cities over the years, but he remained loyal to the Richardson Zoo in Garden City. It was a well-known fact that Claude and Mary had a lot of love and concern when it came to the zoo animals. Their home was a nursery for 13 tiny cubs. They played mid-wife to many animals, and some became famous. One was Tommy, the lion cub, who was a star in an educational movie in 1951. The film premiered in Garden City classrooms and shown all over the United States and even in foreign countries. Life Magazine also photographed Tommy. The Lee Richardson Zoo was the spotlight for many stories throughout the years.



Janice & Judi Owens with Tommy, the Lion Cub, and the family dog, Bootsie
1951

Mary taught Bible School for 59 years at the First Christian Church in Garden City.

Their daughter, Judi, told about them opening the “Golden Horse Shoe” antique store in Garden City, after their retirement. Both lived their whole lives in Garden City and died there.

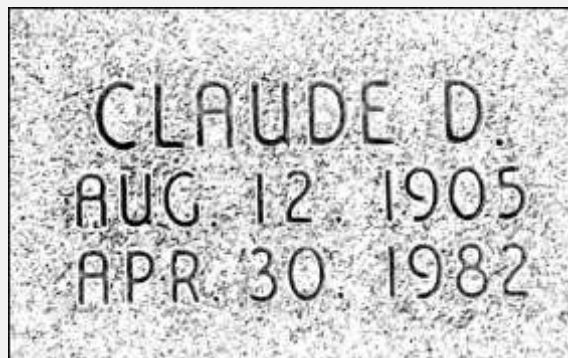
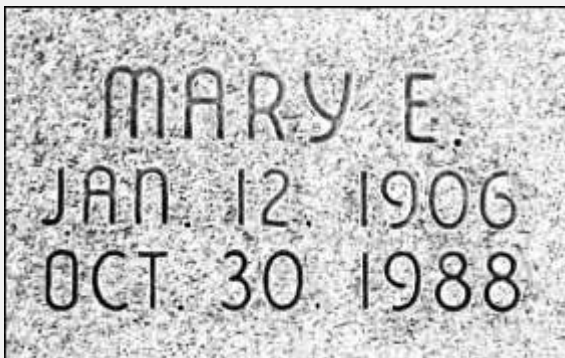
Claude passed away on 30 Apr 1982, and Mary on 30 Oct 1988. Both buried at the Valley View Cemetery in Garden City.

Cemetery Headstone

MARY EVELYN (HOLMES) OWENS & CLAUDE DARRELL OWENS



VALLEY VIEW CEMETERY
Garden City, Finney County, Kansas



The following is information on Claude and Mary's four children:

MARY "JEANETTE" OWENS was born on 4 Feb 1929 in Garden City, Kansas. There she married Frank A. Kreie, Jr. on 4 April 1948. They spent several years in Hobbs, Lea County, New Mexico and Rye, Pueblo County, Colorado, before returning to Southwest Kansas, making their home in Scott City, Kansas. Frank passed away on 22 May 2012 in Scott City and Jeanette died there on 7 Sep 2021.

CLAUDE WILLIAM "BILL" OWENS was born on 29 Jun 1931 in Garden City, Kansas. He was the owner of Chemical Weed Control in South Texas for over 30 years. His

first marriage was to Jean Spencer, and they had four children: Twins, Victoria and Valerie, plus Susie and Christine. They divorced, and Bill married again to Peggy "Lou" R. Gossett in 1970. They divorced on 9 Sep 1983, and Bill's third marriage was to Deloris M. Barber on 12 Jun 1985 in Nueces, Texas. Bill passed away on 3 Oct 2009 in Pearsall, Frio County, Texas. He donated his body for medical research at the University of Texas Health and Science Center.

JANICE OWENS married Robert Logan, and they made their home in Midland, Michigan. Unforgettable childhood memories for Janice were of Simba, the 7th cub raised in the Owens home. Janice would often walk Simba up and down the streets of Garden City on a leash. Simba was a star when visiting many different schools in the area, and when starring in a Mickey House Club Television Show, filmed in Garden City.

JUDI OWENS was born and raised in Garden City, Kansas. She was married to Gerald Belknap. Judi had beautiful memories of her childhood. One particular memory is of Tommy, the Lion cub, and having the cub share the dinner table with the family and share a special place in the living room. Life Magazine had a unique article about Tommy in their December 1951 issue. She remembers the whole family caring for many of the newborns at the zoo. Judi also remembers Claude and Mary both retiring in 1970. After retiring, they opened an antique shop called the "Golden Horse Shoe" with collectibles, and Claude restored and refinished antique furniture.